# International Institute of Social Studies

_Erasmus_

## REDEFINING THE INVISIBLE VICTIMS OF INCARCERATION: SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF YOUNG GIRLS OF INCARCERATED MOTHERS IN GHANA

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## Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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# Contents

# List of Maps

# List of Appendices

# List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ASP | Assistant Superintendent of Prisons |
| CHH | Child Headed Households |
| CRI | Care Reform Initiative |
| DSW | Department of Social Welfare |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GoG | Government of Ghana |
| GSS | Ghana Statistical Service |
| ISS | Institute of Social Studies |
| KII | Key Informant Interviews |
| LEAP | Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty |
| MoGCSP | Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| OVC | Orphan and Vulnerable Children |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| YHH | Youth Headed Households |

# Acknowledgement

**I DEDICATE THIS PAPER TO MY DAUGHTER.**

# Abstract

The number of incarcerated mothers in Ghana has increased in the last few years, with the vulnerabilities of their children also increasing. Though much research has been carried out on children whose mothers have been incarcerated, their voices are often missing. Girls develop interpersonal relationships with their mothers when they start menstruating in order to learn more about their sexuality and how to perform adult roles in their homes and communities. The absence of mothers therefore causes emotional instabilities and engenders a number of risks in the lives of young girls. During maternal incarceration, most girls live with relatives or alone without any family support. Some family members abandon the children of their relatives who have been incarcerated due to the shame, stigma and legal issues surrounding incarceration.

The child protection policy in Ghana does not address the needs of children whose mothers have been incarcerated. In the face of family and policy neglect, young girls depend on their creativities, friends and spiritual affiliations for survival. In this paper, I refer to these girls as 'invisible victims' because of their non-recognition by government policies and programmes such as the child and family welfare policy and the LEAP programme.

Findings from this research revealed that these invisible victims become silent, stigmatized and suffer during maternal incarceration. Maternal incarceration has led to the truncation of some of these girls education and some have become single mothers in the process of fighting to leverage their vulnerabilities. Intergenerational poverty and child parenting are some cyclical deleterious effects of maternal incarceration thus it is recommended that policy makers and organisations should appreciate and recognize the struggles and vulnerabilities of these invisible victims and provide support such as extension of the current social protection programme (LEAP) to address their specific needs as right holders.

## Relevance to Development Studies

Development discourses on vulnerability have revealed that children who are termed "vulnerable" are seen as objects of development and humanitarian interventions without the recognition of their citizenship rights. These notions and social constructions have therefore hidden and impeded the voices of children on issues that concern their lives.

This study amidst its discussions on the challenges and vulnerabilities of young girls show that children are resourceful, competent and capable of handling issues that concern their lives. They also have agencies which must be recognised.

The study draws the attention of governments to make transformative social policies which will address structural inequalities which perpetuate the discrimination and social exclusion of children.

Finally the study has contributed to discourses on children as "beings, becoming and belonging" whose problems, capabilities and needs must be addressed as citizens who know their rights and not framed as objects of interventions.

**Keywords: Young girls, vulnerability, incarceration, mothers, invisible victims, survival**

# 1. The Invisible Victims of Maternal Incarceration: Young Girls

"Madam, nobody cares about me and life has become hard after the incarceration of my mother" (Doris, Accra, May 2016).

## Background

This statement of a young girl of age fifteen kept me thinking about three major issues: the penal system in Ghana meted out to women with children; the place of children of incarcerated women in Ghana's family and child welfare policy; and the role of family relations and society in supporting children whose mothers are in prison. I therefore took the opportunity to conduct a research into the lives of young girls whose mothers have been incarcerated in Ghana. As described earlier I had three issues to look at based on the statement of this young girl. However with the brevity of time for this research, I focused on the place of young girls of incarcerated mothers in Ghana's child protection policy and the role of family relations in supporting them.

In December, 2016, I took the opportunity of my vacation to interact with two young people (a male and a female) whose parents have been incarcerated before. Peter who gave his age as twenty two years happened to live with his mother and step-father and never knew about his biological father's incarceration. Though he started facing financial difficulties in school at the time when his step-father was no longer willing to take care of him, he never saw hardship when growing up with his biological mother. Vivian a nineteen years girl on the other hand disclosed that her mother's incarceration made her a mother in the home as she sought for ways of taking care of herself and younger brother. Probing further, she reiterated that her parents never married and she has been living with her mother and younger brother in the city where her maternal aunties visited regularly.

> My aunties used to come around but they stopped coming when my mother was arrested and incarcerated due to narcotic offense. I think they feel ashamed and disappointed in her and we are facing the consequences of their neglect as well (Vivian, Accra, December 2016).

What are these ways of taking care of herself and her sibling? Do her relatives know that she and her brother have become victims of their mother's incarceration through their neglect? Do other stakeholders such as neighbours, government, NGOs and donor agencies recognize this and other girls in such situations and provide their required needs?

Unlike orphans, disabled and other children classified as vulnerable in Ghana's Child protection policy, I found out through this study that children whose mothers have been incarcerated are not recognised and do not receive any interventions from the government. Again most family members neglect them due to the shame, stigma and legal issues surrounding their mothers' incarceration. In the face of this neglect from both government and families, young girls of incarcerated mothers depend on their creativities and hard work, friendships and spiritual affiliations to survive and leverage their vulnerabilities.

In this paper, I bring to the attention of the reader the sufferings, silences and stigma attached to these girls which depict their vulnerabilities. I call them "the three agonising 'S's of maternal incarceration". I also draw the attention of the reader to the fact that though these girls suffer from their mothers' imprisonment, they are resourceful, competent and able to devise various means to survive. I use resilience and agency as concepts to describe the girls' survival strategies. I go further to reveal that intergenerational poverty and child parenting are some cyclical deleterious effects of maternal incarceration thus these girls should be considered in policies of government and other organisations and not be left at the fringes of agony.

I refer to these young girls as "invisible victims" because of their non-recognition by government policies in Ghana. This is a qualitative study in which I used methods such as Life history narratives, key informant interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and observations for data collection.

## Understanding the problem of the Invisible victims

Young girls whose mothers have been incarcerated, whether living alone or with caregivers are exposed to multiple and intersecting risks and vulnerabilities spanning from material, relational and other subjective vulnerabilities. These profoundly affect their growth and development. These vulnerabilities mostly emerge as a result of their livelihood sources, care giving arrangements, social policies, and the societies in which they live. Considering the effects which accrue to young girls in the absence of their mothers, I allude to Woodard and Copp's assertion that though maternal incarceration occurs less than paternal incarceration, maternal incarceration is more dangerous to the lives of children than paternal incarceration (Woodard and Copp 2016).

The highest parental incarceration rate in the world can be found in United States of America. According to the bureau of Justice Statistics in the U.S.A, the rate of increase in incarceration

rose from 500,000 in the 1980s to 1.5 million in 1990 and further to 1.9 million in 2000. This figure rose to 2.8 million as at mid-year in 2009. Children whose parents were in prison rose from 600,000 in 1986 to 1.3 million in 1997. This further aggravated to 1.7 million children in 2007 (Johnson &Easterling 2012).

The effects of maternal incarceration on children according to Dallaire et al (2015) are greater than the effects of paternal incarceration. This is because mothers before their incarceration provided primary care for their children more than their fathers (Mumola 2000). This care work provided by mothers produce the labour power of both children and their fathers. In the absence of mothers, studies have shown that fathers stay home for a maximum of four years to take care of their children but leave the home later when their wives' incarceration prolongs (Dallaire et al 2015).

Incarcerated mothers' children face current and future negative outcomes. They show high levels of anxiety, depression and aggressive behaviours.  The tendency of incarceration of adult children of incarcerated women according to incarcerated mothers report is 2.5 times more than adult children of incarcerated fathers and 3 times more than children whose mothers have never been incarcerated (Dallaire et al 2015:110).

Maternal incarceration is both a risk maker and a risk mechanism (Johnson &Easterling 2012). As a risk maker, it leads to risk experiences such as low income and low education to the child and family. Children whose mothers are with the criminal justice system face socio-demographic and caregiving risk factors such as poverty and living in a large family. They are also exposed to maltreatment from family members and inadequate parental supervision (Dallaire et al 2015). As a risk mechanism, it causes specific risks such as emotional and psychological risks on the child especially where the child witnesses the arrest of his/her mother (ibid).

Most mothers who are incarcerated have minor children who resided with them before incarceration. Some are also single mothers who resided with their children alone, with their children and nonrelatives or with their children and relatives before incarceration (Engstrom 2008). These living arrangements in most cases determine the living condition and well-being of the child during maternal incarceration.

Maternal incarceration makes some children vulnerable to poverty. The shift from measuring poverty in terms of income has led to the identification of multi-faceted nature of poverty. These include basic needs, human capabilities and vulnerability (Moser et al 1997). Vulnerability is a dynamic concept which refers to how individuals, households and communities' well-being are affected negatively mostly resulting from environmental changes such as social, ecological, economic and political (ibid). Whereas people move in and out of poverty, vulnerability reveals complex aspects of "livelihood security" which are linked to survival, security, self-respect and the way people see their poverty (Chambers et al 1981:1). Though poor people are seen to be part of the most vulnerable, not all vulnerable people are poor (Moser et al 1997).

Vulnerability in Ghana ranges from "neglect, abuse, unregistered births, malnutrition, mental and physical handicaps, poverty, precarious family situations and other classified high-risks that may involve material, social and emotional" (Deters et al 2008:4). Vulnerability in terms of life chances and emotional care is also seen when

> Children face withdrawal from school, discrimination and stigma, emotional need and grief over illness or death of parent(s), increase of poverty, loss of property and inheritance rights, loss of shelter, inadequate health care, vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse, become youth headed households (YHH), child headed households (CHH) or engaged in child labour (Deters et al 2008:4).

These definitions show that vulnerability goes beyond only orphans and includes even other children living in homes where there are orphans. World Vision encapsulates this as

> When a household absorbs orphans, existing household resources must be spread more thinly among all children in the household. It is more difficult to quantify vulnerable children, however, it is estimated that the number of vulnerable children is at least two to three times the number of children who are orphaned (Deters et al 2008:5).

Ghana as a country subscribes to the adage "it takes a village to raise a child" thus traditional communal living and kinship care are mostly the indigenous care options for children in the absence of their parents though other care options such as adoption exist (Deters et al 2008). It is also because these indigenous systems are considered as conducive places for child's personal identity and social integration (Frimpong-Manso 2014). This led the Government of Ghana (GoG) together with UNICEF to begin a five year Care Reform Initiative (CRI) in 2006 to change the institutional child care system into a range of family and community-based system (ibid). Most of these children lived in homes with a higher fraction of elderly members with less well-educated heads (Case et al 2002:10). However in recent years due to Ghana's increasingly young population, these households headed by elderly are fading out (Deters et al 2008). Again

urbanisation and modernisation has weakened "Ubuntu"[1] in Ghana and has disintegrated the extended family system as most people move from rural areas to urban areas and prefer to keep to the nuclear family system. The resource burden of taking care of other children together with it being done involuntarily described as "crisis fostering" (Madhaven 2004:1444) have all contributed to the neglect, discrimination, deprivation and exploitation of children by the extended family system in Ghana.

The incarceration of mothers has led most children to develop resilience in coping with financial, emotional and psychological strains. In dealing with these strains, they sometimes become alcoholics, delinquent and aggressive (Woodard and Copp 2016). These factors are seen as both causes and effects of their vulnerabilities. The incarceration of mothers also resort to stigmatization of children and this mostly leads to girls falling prey to men who pretend to show them care but abuse them physically and sexually leading to pregnancies and the contraction of diseases such as HIV/AIDs (Patel et al 2012).

The effects of parents' incarceration on young children depends on the extent of attachment and dependence between the child and his/her parents before incarceration. A child's sense of security and trust is affected negatively during parental incarceration. This effect is however seen intensive in maternal incarceration than paternal incarceration (Hanlon et al 2007). Hanlon and his cohorts compare the effects of maternal incarceration on children to the parenting skills of the mother before incarceration and the level and quality of care young children receive from caregivers during maternal incarceration (ibid).

A study organized in the United States on children of incarcerated parents showed that most children become homeless and highly mobile in the event of parental incarceration (Casey et al 2015). Incarceration of parents and homelessness has negative effects on the development of children. Whereas parental incarceration poses internalizing and externalizing symptoms such as difficulties in school, delinquency and criminal offenses in adulthood, homelessness raises internalizing and externalizing problems as well as poor academic performance in children (Casey et al 2015).

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[1] It describes African humanism through which people are interconnected

Young girls face more effects during maternal incarceration because of the developmental tasks that are assigned to them in the homes (Cho 2010). Gilligan (2003) also showed that depression in girls is twice more than boys thus young girls get more depressed during their mothers' incarceration than boys.

## Research Objective and Questions

The main objective of the study was to assess the survival strategies of young girls in Ghana whose mothers have been incarcerated in the face of non-recognition by government policies and family neglect. My major question to achieve this objective was **"How has maternal incarceration rendered young girls vulnerable and what strategies are adopted by these girls for survival in Ghana?"** Due to the broad nature of this question, I narrowed down to the following sub-questions:

1. What are the specific challenges of young girls whose mothers have been incarcerated in Ghana?
2. How do young girls whose mothers have been incarcerated survive in the absence of government and family support?
3. What are the effects of maternal incarceration on young girls and the society at large?

## Structure of this paper

This paper has five chapters. This first chapter describes young girls of incarcerated women in Ghana and engages literature on their problem as invisible victims. It also walks the reader through the content of the entire paper. It is then followed by a vivid description of the methodology which was used in this research. Chapters three and four present the major concepts used. These concepts are interwoven with key findings gleaned from the study. Whereas chapter three brings out the vulnerabilities and challenges of the young girls, chapter four discusses their survival strategies. The last chapter throws more light on the effects of maternal incarceration on children and the society and the way forward to mitigate these effects.

# 2. Trekking with the Invisible Victims-Field Data Gathering

"Lives, loves, and tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data" (Stacey, 1988).

"Starting something without the involvement of children is the beginning of failure" (Yoruba proverb)

## Introduction

I dwelt on this proverb above to focus and privilege the voices of the invisible victims in this study. This enabled me to get first-hand information and appreciated the struggles and vulnerabilities of these girls. This research is premised on qualitative research methodology. I collected secondary data through desk review of relevant reports, journals, government policies, regional and international child protection instruments and grey materials on maternal incarceration and its effects on children. I also collected primary data using Key Informant Interviews (KII), life history narratives, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and direct observation. All these data sources were triangulated to ensure consistency and rich data which was useful in answering the research questions.

This chapter delves deep into the study context, research participants, methods used in gathering the data as well as the ethical dilemmas which were followed to gather the data. The limitations and the challenges which were encountered during the process of data collection will also be brought to fore in this chapter.

## Greater Accra as a contextual scope

The study was conducted in the Greater Accra Region which is the capital of Ghana. In terms of land size, it occupies 3,245 square kilometres of the total land area in Ghana-the smallest among the ten (10) administrative regions. However, it is the second most populated region after Ashanti Region occupying 15.4% of Ghana's total population (Government of Ghana, n.d.). Its rate of urbanization and metropolitan status cannot be overemphasized without the mention of crime, violence and other social vices. According to the 2007 OSAC Report, crime is acute in the Greater Accra region because crime perpetuators often carry out crimes of opportunities on city streets, crowded areas and vehicles in traffic. Armed robbery is also high in expatriate residential

areas (Ebbe 2011).  The Accra Metropolitan Area as one of the six metropolitan areas in Ghana has the characteristics of all the factors that attract crime. A household survey organized on most feared crimes in communities within Accra showed that both men and women engage in crimes such as robbery, stealing, burglary, drug peddling, rape, assault, fraud and murder. Out of these crimes, majority of females constituting 40.7% of the total crime perpetuators engage in stealing whilst the least percentage of 1.2 is in fraud and murder (Appiahene-Gyamfi 2003). The engagement of most women in these crimes is as a result of poverty. My choice of women from this region is due to its high incidence of crime.

Most children find themselves in kinship care arrangements in the absence of their mothers (Young and Smith 2000). In Ghana living with family members in the absence of parents is the most preferred option. The Convention on the Rights of the child spells out in Article 9 that the child has the right to live with a family who cares for him/her. (UNICEF 1989)  But in most cases, children as well as caregivers face a number of social and economic challenges such as financial burdens and stigmatization. Engstrom (2008) alludes to the fact that most children reside with their grandmothers during their mothers' incarceration. These grandmothers face a number of strains that go beyond their caregiving experiences. These strains include stress from incarceration of their daughters, biopsychosocial needs of their grandchildren and poverty (ibid). These and many other challenges consequently render the children vulnerable and sometimes drop out of school to engage in economic activities which will subsidize the family's income (Cho 2010).

**Map 1: Map of Accra showing the residential locations of the invisible victims**
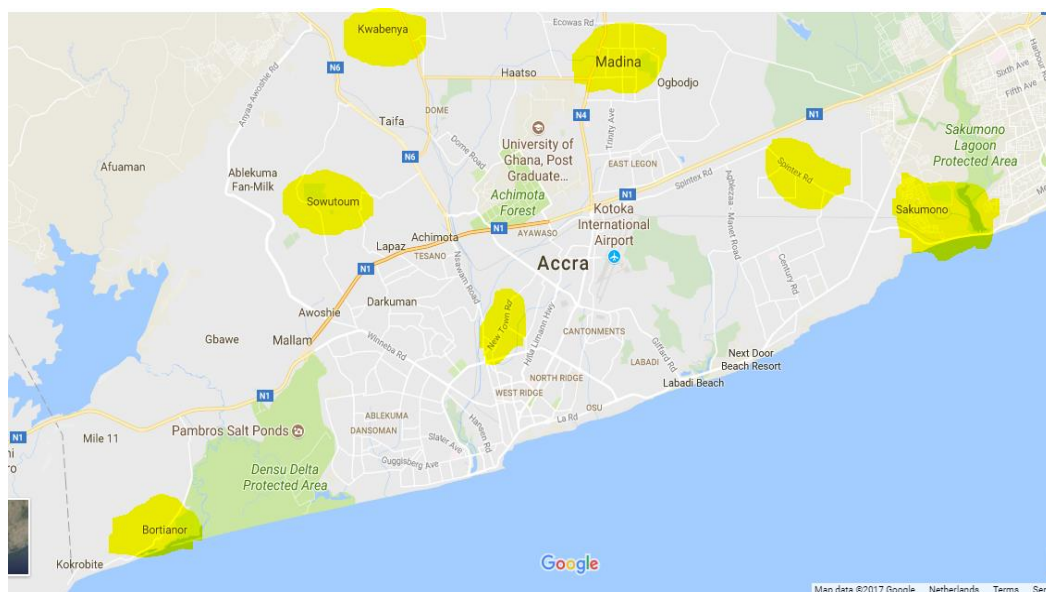


*Source: Author's construct*

## Research participants

The participants for this study were ten young girls between 15 to 19 years whose mothers have been incarcerated. I used the purposive sampling technique in selecting these participants. In order to get access to these invisible victims, I used snowballing to interview ten female prisoners at the Nsawam Medium Security Prisons. Snowballing or chain referral according to Bernard (2011:192) is used for studying hard-to-find population thus the use of this technique was to help me find women who have young girls within the scope of my research

Using ten young girls as a sample size is small and can lead to possible biases in information gathered, I intend to generalize my findings to represent the entire population of young girls of incarcerated women in the case study area. The use of purposive sampling or snowballing as techniques as described above help to identify hard-to-find as well as stigmatized and reclusive populations (Bernard 2011:192). Thus my intention to use this small sample size to generalize findings from the study is as a result of the sensitive nature of my topic and difficulties in reaching these invisible victims due to fear of stigmatization.

I interviewed six caregivers who took care of six of the girls in the absence of their mothers. One of these girls though had a caretaker, she fended for herself. Four girls had no caregivers and were fending for themselves. Though the maximum age limit set in my research proposal was nineteen years, I gave room for flexibility to incorporate girls who had gone beyond the age limit due to the possibility of long incarceration of mothers. Thus some young girls who were above nineteen years at the time of the research but below this age at the time of their mothers arrest were also interviewed. This was meant to know how the incarceration of mothers has affected young girls in both short and long terms.

Due to security reasons, the interviews were conducted at the office of a senior prison officer. I felt a bit jittery about her decision to conduct the interview in her office and also in her presence as a means to monitor our interactions-an action she describes as part of protocol. Though she was helpful in explaining my intentions and questions in different dialects to some of the inmates who did not understand the English language, her involvement in the snowballing process influenced the selection of respondents. The prisoners who were interviewed provided the addresses and contact details of their young girls and caregivers.

My decision to focus on young girls of incarcerated mothers in Ghana was not premised on definitions of bilateral and multilateral or government organizations on young girls but the interest I developed in Vivian's story as compared to Peter's during my pilot study in December 2016 . In Ghana, upbringing of children is the responsibility of mothers and maturity in girls is considered to begin when they start menstruating thus most girls rely on their mothers for this transition. The Ghanaian society on the other hand sees girls who have menstruated as capable of taking care of themselves even in the absence of their mothers. My focus on young girls in this study is therefore to analyse how the perceptions of people on young girls' ability to take care of themselves have contributed to their struggles in the period of their mothers' incarceration.

## Reflexivity and Positionality

 I never had any familiarity or personal experience of my mother being incarcerated. Thus I set out as a researcher to explore and get first-hand information about women in prison and their young girls. My position as a student researcher from abroad though enabled me to get quick attention and support from prison officers as well as officers in the various institutions I visited, it also drained me financially as I had to offer gift items to some of these officers.

Reflexivity according to Berger (2015) is when a researcher personally assesses his/her position and acknowledges that his position can affect the research process and outcome.  Being a researcher from abroad though a Ghanaian gave an impression to the prison officers and some of the young girls who knew about my position that I had come to offer support to them. I was not much surprised when the senior prison officer (Madam Esinam) kept re-echoing after my interview with the inmates that I should try my best and help the young girls whose mothers are in prison.

## Methods

I adopted more interactive than extractive methods as described by Okwany et al (2011) in conducting this research as I had never had any interaction with both mothers in prison and their young girls. Throughout my review of literature, I also did not encounter any research of young girls of incarcerated mothers conducted in Ghana. Thus I would allude to the fact that there were no "data plantations" or "information mines" (ibid) on this topic in the study context.

## Reconnaissance (Pilot) Study

In December 2016, I took the opportunity of my vacation to interact with two young children (one male and a female) whose parents are ex-convicts. Getting access to these children was tedious but with my interaction with the former chairman of the prisons council (Reverend Wengham), I used snowballing to identify these ex-convicts and their children. Pilot study is conducted before a larger or the actual study. It helps to come up with research instruments and provide baseline for a larger study (Bernard 2011:190). The challenges I encountered during this pilot survey was not different from the challenges I encountered during my major research process. The pilot survey was meant to test the feasibility of my topic for this research.

My constant interaction with the officers I established contact with during the pilot study enabled me to carry out official documentations with respect to undertaking this research at the prison. Through the help of the Prisons' Council Secretary (ASP James) permission to carry out this research was granted from the Prisons Head Quarters one month before the actual research process begun.

## Key Informant Interviews

I conducted key informant interviews with individual stakeholders within organizations to ascertain their views on maternal incarceration and young children left at home as well as interventions for these children especially the young girls. Good key informants are "people whom you can talk to easily, who understand the information you need, and who are glad to give it to you or get it for you" (Bernard 2011:196). Ten female prisoners, six caregivers, key personnel at the prisons council, Department of Children, Department of Gender and Department of Social Welfare were interviewed. The Chief Executive Officer of Orphaned Kids Missions International which is an NGO was also contacted about their support activities and interventions for female prisoners and their children. In all the key informant interviews helped to acquire information on the topic under study and served as a supplement to the data acquired from the young girls. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to conduct all the key informant interviews.

Interview with the caregivers took place in their homes and on phone whilst interview with the prisoners took place in the office of one of the senior prison officers. Interview with the officials at the various institutions took place in their respective offices. The venues for the interview with the caregivers were chosen in consultation with them and I conducted these interviews at their own convenience taking into consideration their livelihood activities.

Preparations for these interviews such as verbal and written communication were done two months before the commencement of the research thus bureaucratic processes were minimized. However due to security reasons, there were difficulties in recording or taking pictures with the inmates at the female prisons.

## *Life History Narratives*

Life histories of ten young girls were conducted to ascertain a comprehensive understanding on their experiences and coping mechanisms in the absence of their mothers. Life stories are defined as "a conversation/narration technique and are involved in reconstructing processes of development or learning, based on the use of narrative, orality, or writing" (Suarez-Ortega 2013: 191). Brinkmann also defines life histories as "retrospective narration by the person who is the main character of the story, based on a part of the experience or approaching it as a whole" (2014).

Most of the narratives were conducted in the homes of these girls because my intention as a researcher was to observe their living arrangements and the kind of areas they lived. Only one of the participants was interviewed on the phone because she had visited her aunty in the Central Region at the time the research was being conducted. During my interaction with the young girls, I stayed silent after my introductory questions and allowed them to talk about their life stories. I only interrupted when there was the need for probing.

Though the life history narratives took place in their homes, the ebb and flow of conversation with these girls was only possible in the absence of their caregivers. One of the characteristics of life history narratives is to give a voice to the participants especially those that are socially excluded (Suarez-Ortega 2013). As such permission was sought from caregivers before interacting with the girls. In as much as some of these girls were willing to participate in the research, they did not want to be photographed or recorded due to security reasons. Photographs and recordings were taken of only those who granted permission.

I presented gifts in the form of food items such as milk, milo and biscuits as well as money to all the girls I interacted with except the girl I spoke to on phone as a token of my appreciation for their participation in the research.

### Direct Observations

"You can observe a lot by just watching" This is a phrase by Yogi Berra (1998) which shows how direct observation plays a role in gathering field data. According to Bernard (2011), watching people and recording their behaviour on the spot helps the researcher to know what people actually do or the physical traces their behaviours leave behind. Using direct observation through seeing, hearing and feeling the environment (O'Leary 2009:209) provided me with a rich understanding of what actually happens on the ground with respect to these invisible victims.

Direct observation was carried out throughout all the stages of the study. The state of the women in prison and their body postures, the living conditions of the young girls, their attitudes and body languages, the neighbourhoods in which the girls reside, their livelihood activities and the behaviours of their caregivers were all observed and recorded. I adopted the unobtrusive strategy of direct observation as described by Bernard (2011) where I studied the behaviours of my participants, their surroundings and livelihood activities without their knowledge.

My observation during most of the telephone conversations was that some of the young girls especially those living with caregivers could not talk well due to the presence of their caregivers. Thus I sought permission from the caregivers and interviewed the young girls separately from them-an action which I realized brought much relief to the girls. Though I did not disclose my staying abroad to some of these girls, I received maximum support and cooperation from all of them. One observation I made with most of the caregivers was that their responses contradicted the stories from the young girls. The young girls also preferred not to stay around during my interactions with their caregivers.

### Focus Group Discussion

During this research, I conducted one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in a classroom at the Deoke Foundation School in Ablekuma, a suburb in Accra. I selected this venue in consultation with all the girls as it was considered to be easily accessible and central to the various locations of the participants. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a group of six to ten people who converge to deliberate on an issue which a researcher brings up for discussion (Krueger &Casey 2014). FGD is mostly led by a facilitator and it last for a maximum of two hours (ibid). FGD in this study was useful as it helped to create synergy among the participants and acquire in-depth information from them within a short time. Six girls participated in this meeting. The purpose of the FGD was to build rapport with each other in order to reduce any 'power hierarchy' (Gilbert

2008) these girls envisaged between me and them. It was also meant to find out similar issues which are related to all of them. The "Before and After" concept was adopted in this meeting. This concept makes use of the human body especially the female body to find out the experiences of girls before and after the perpetuation of their vulnerabilities.

I drew the female body on a white board and divided it into two halves with the inscription "Before" and "After" on each half. After explaining this concept to the girls, I grouped them into two with each group comprising three members. Each group was therefore tasked to discuss their experiences before and after their mothers' incarceration with the help of the various female body parts. As Morgan (1997) describes moderation during FGD, I adopted the low level moderation style where I only assisted participants to group themselves into two and explained the task of the day to them. I withdrew afterwards to allow the young girls to deliberate on the topic and later presented their findings. The discourses that transpired helped to create social bonds and identities among the participants as described by (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 158). I served them with water and snacks and gave each girl twenty Ghana Cedis (equivalent to four Euros) as a subsidy for their transportation. The meeting ended with exchange of contacts and addresses among participants.

## Data Cleaning and Analysis

Responses from all the participants were cleaned. This was done through sorting and sifting materials to group similar phrases, relations and common consequences. Patterns, processes, commonalities and differences were also grouped before the commencement of analysis. Most of the participants were called intermittently to clarify issues which were difficult to comprehend during the data cleaning process. This was meant to improve the quality of responses.

Analysis of the findings begun with translation of interviews which were conducted and recorded from Twi language to English language and thereafter transcription of the data. Most of the responses were written in my field notebook but where I was permitted, I recorded with my mobile phone. Through the use of Atlas.ti, I grouped all the information and assigned them with codes such as spirituality and hope and chain of handshakes-surviving through friends.

## Capturing participants consent

Informed consent, confidentiality, consequences in the form of benefits and risks to the participants as well as the role of the researcher are key ethical issues I could not overlook in this re-

search. Ethical issues exceed live interviews and must be embedded at every level in the research process. Failure to adhere to ethical issues create problems because most studies which involve the private lives of people are publicized without due consents of the participants (Miller et al 2012).

In this research, permission was sought from authorities and the research participants themselves. This was meant to oblige by transparency and meaningful participation principles. Seeking the consent of the participants especially the girls was also meant to recognize their agencies and appreciate their struggles and vulnerabilities. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe informed consent as a means of obtaining permission from the participants of a research to be willingly involved in a research and also informing them of their rights to withdraw whenever they want to do so. Here research participants also have the right to know the purpose of the research, risks as well as benefits that will accrue to them in the process of participation.

The participants were promised of confidentiality and anonymity and their decisions concerning participation were also adhered to. This was done to avoid coerced involvement. Confidentiality implies that information given to the researcher by the participants will not be made public unless there is due consent from the participant (ibid).

Participants were informed about the consequences of this research as an ethical requirement in qualitative research.

> From a utilitarian ethical perspective, the sum of potential benefits to a participant and the importance of the knowledge gained should outweigh the risk of harm to the participant and thus warrant a decision to carry out the study (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

Thus in this research, participants especially the young girls were informed that their participation can engender changes in government policies which can address their specific needs as children of incarcerated mothers in Ghana. Being a researcher on this topic and considering its sensitive nature I sought permission from caregivers in order to interview the girls separately from them. This was to ensure that girls were able to air their views without fear and intimidation and also to avoid any possible risk the girls may face from their caregivers after the research. This action I took is encapsulated by Holland et al (2010: 362) as they describe the existence of power asymmetries between a researcher and study participants based on their socio-cultural contexts. "Rather than ignoring or blurring power positions, the researcher must be aware and use ethical practices to address them" (ibid).

Meeting the incarcerated women was not done empty handed. Just as I did for their daughters, I carried gift items such as milo, milk, bread, biscuits and drinks as a token of appreciation for their participation in the research. I realized this gave me the opportunity to speak with them and seek for further clarity on issues from the young girls after my visit to them .The addresses and contact numbers provided by these women enabled me to identify their families. Though ten women were interviewed at the prisons, I followed up on the young girls of only eight of them because the young girls of the remaining two women were no more residing in Accra as at the time of the research. Two of the women also had two young girls each who fell within the conceptual scope of the research thus ten young girls were interviewed in all.

Interaction with the young girls begun with telephone conversations in order to introduce myself, seek their consent and book an appointment for meetings with them. I carried out this process with the caregivers as well. One of the girls had gone on vacation to the Central Region so my interaction with her was solely done on the phone. I visited each of the girls once in their homes due to distance and inadequate resources. However I had follow up conversations with them intermittently on the telephone.  I carried out both telephone conversation and face-to face interviews at different times of the day depending on the availability and livelihood activities of these young girls. Fortunately, schools had vacated so I met those who were students and not working at home whilst I visited the work sites (mostly by the street) of those who engaged in selling and other activities.

## Challenges in trekking with the invisible victims

Locating the addresses of these girls was a bit challenging in this study. Though less than five years ago, Ghana had embarked on street naming and house addressing exercise, most of these women, their young girls and caregivers could not give the right street names and house addresses to me. Thus I encountered challenges especially where landmarks which were not noticeable or had been evacuated were given to me.

Though a copy of the letter permitting me to conduct the research was presented to the Nsawam Female prison, I was thoroughly searched and delayed before meeting the incarcerated women for interaction. Without much persistence and pleading, I would not have been allowed to write responses from these women in my field notebook. These strict security measures made it difficult to record and photograph responses and images of inmates respectively.

Some of the young girls also did not give their consent to recording their responses and taking photographs of them even after my introduction as a student researcher and the promise of confidentiality to them. Their verbal expressions and body languages portrayed that they were afraid of any action that can lead to their incarceration like their mothers. Problems with telephone networks also made it difficult to interact with these young girls at certain times of the day.

Finally I realized that there are a lot to be learned about the lives of these girls but due to limited time, inadequate financial resources and defined scope of this research, detailed studies could not be made into the lives of these invisible victims.

# 3. The Three (3) Agonising "S's" of Maternal Incarceration

"I cry every day because I don't know the whereabouts of my mum and nobody seems to tell me anything" (Dicta, Accra, August 2017).

"Silence too is a legitimate discourse on pain –if it is acknowledged" (Fiona Ross 2001:272)

## Introduction

This chapter discusses the vulnerabilities of some of the young girls through three major concepts I term as the "Three agonizing 'S's' of maternal incarceration": stigma, silence and suffering. The stories of these young girls show how they struggle on daily basis due to the absence of their mothers and support from their families. Even those who have caregivers and those living with their fathers face a number of challenges spanning from financial difficulties to inadequate care. LeVine and LeVine (1981:40) bring out the undesirability and unworthiness of some fostered children with an African proverb among the Gusii (Kenya) which states that "another woman's child is like cold mucus" which means "something most unattractive which clings". Kinship care provided to some of these girls is seen by most caregivers as an imposition and a no-choice acceptance.

In the ensuing sub topics, I discuss how some of these invisible victims suffer in the hands of their caregivers and how they cope in the face of their challenges. Their silences, labelling, discrimination as well as living conditions will also be brought to fore in this chapter. In the midst of their challenges, I also discuss the nuances I encountered during my interview with the invisible victims. The nuances I discuss in this chapter are not meant to negate their struggles or question their vulnerabilities but to bring to the readers' attention that some of these girls have caregivers who have showed much care and assisted them to pursue their goals in life. The nuances are also to enlighten the reader about how some of these girls are embittered and do not really care about their mothers' incarceration though they struggle as victims.

## Stigma

The stigma attached to the invisible victims due to the incarceration of their mothers make them defenceless in most cases and reduces their opportunities to earn livelihoods. Lisa for example

posited how the stigma attached to her mother's incarceration affected the charcoal business she engaged in with her mother.

> There was no way I could even go for bags of charcoal to sell in our area again because everyone associated our business with narcotics thus some neighbours were scared buying from me (Lisa, Accra, July 2017).

The term stigma according to Khan and Loewenson was first used to describe slaves and criminals as outcasts in ancient Greece (2005:3). Stigma can be internal (self-stigma) or external (discrimination) (ibid). In the words of DeFleur, stigma is "the possession of some attributes which causes the individual to be classified within a 'discredited' social category" (1964:127). According to him, this social categorization is often coined by people who see themselves as "normal". Hooks reinforces DeFleur's assertion, by explaining stigma as "those at the dominant 'centre' defining those at the margins based on the latter's definition of what defines them-their 'defective differentness' (1995). In most cases, stigmatized people are excluded from spaces that would allow for encounters or give them opportunities to survive (Goffman 1975). Chamber opines that there are two sides of vulnerability: external which is exposed to shocks, stress and risk, and internal which is exposed to defencelessness-lack of means to cope without damaging loss (1995:189).

Findings from this study revealed that there are no government and social structures to address the needs of these girls like other vulnerable children. Those that are living with caregivers are abused and forced to keep the incarceration of their mothers a secret in order to avoid stigmatization of the entire family. Parker and Aggleton see stigma to be more functional when there are social and structural inequalities. According to them "stigma is deployed by concrete and identifiable social actors seeking to legitimize their own dominant status within existing structures of social inequality" (2003:18). The Human Rights Watch (1999) allude to the fact that many children of today are vulnerable because they are    invisible, undefended, and unprotected  by the society because of the personal interests of some members as opposed to the welfare of children.

> For millions of children, the main cause of their vulnerabilities is due to violations of their human rights. These violations are encapsulated in issues of invisibility due to family secrecy and abuse, poor government oversight, protections that are poor or non-existent, inadequate or absent laws, policies, supports and undefendedness (Johnson et al 2013).

Stigma comes with labelling, categorization and discrimination. I realized from the research that some of the young girls have gone through a lot of struggles over their parents' properties with some family members because of the positions of these family members and how they have la-

belled the children in relation to their mothers' offenses. Fauzia for example explained how her father's family members ejected them from their parents' five-bedroom house because of their perception that they (the children) connived with their mother to kill their father. Thus in the sight of these family members, the children were also murderers and must not inherit their fathers property.

> We left the house because my father's family members kept threatening us. Though the court has ruled in our favour, we will not go there again because they see us as murderers and may avenge their brother's death (Fauzia, Accra, August 2017).

In the construction of identities, categorization and labelling are seen as central themes which bring a dichotomy between "Us" and "Them" (Moncrieff 2006). According to Bourdieu (1980), this distinction can result in symbolic, social and cultural struggles as people may gain or lose depending on how they are categorized. Categorization and labelling can serve as the basis for making claims or spaces for contestation (ibid).

Categorization and labelling can lead to both inclusion and exclusion in the development discourse and can affect the way a group of people, countries and even a region are treated. Escobar (2000) draws our attention to the fact that the treatment given to countries which are defined as "Third World" or "underdeveloped" for example is due to how they have been labelled by the "First World". It is imperative to note that the biases, preferences and prejudices of people affect the way in which they categorize and label others in the society.

The well-being of these girls can be said to have reduced in the period of their mothers' incarceration because they fall behind the positive aspect of categorization which serve as the basis for making claims. The World Bank Report (2001) defines vulnerability as reduction in well-being.. The findings from this research show that these girls are invisible in Ghana's child protection policy and they do not have a voice to make claims for themselves.

The internal and external stigma which result from maternal incarceration in Ghana irrespective of the offense have led some of these girls to move from their original homes to new vicinities in order to be free from accusations, ostracism and self-pity.

> I moved out from our old area because our neighbours were talking too much about my mother's offense. At a point in time I couldn't go out because I hear people talk about me even in church and I felt I was no more accepted in that area. Now I am in a new church and a new area where nobody knows about my mother's incarceration (Lisa, Accra, July 2017).

## Silence

Being able to give a voice to difference or being able to articulate one's views is a form of empowerment to people. Gilligan (2003) showed that depression in girls is twice that of boys and during the period of depression, girls mostly lose connection with themselves and others. They prefer to brood more on their problems than to discuss with people. In terms of relational resilience (Goldstein and Brooks 2012), silence is seen as a hindrance to resilience because it does not enable one to go back to connections that enhance their growth in times of stress. On the contrary, in terms of internal locus of control (the ability to exercise restraints in times of stress), Peters et al see girls who keep silent over their problems as exhibiting signs of resilience (2005).

There is a deliberate culture of silence on incarceration in Ghana by family relations depending on the level of offense. Family members find it difficult to contain the shame that comes with the incarceration of their relatives. I found out that offenses such as robbery, fraud and murder come with a high level of criticisms, shame and stigma thus most perpetuators of these crimes as well as their family relations do their best to keep a "stiff upper lip" about them.

Alluding to Goldstein and Brooks description of silence, the growth-fostering relationships of most of these girls have been hindered due to their mothers' incarceration because they prefer to keep to themselves and ponder over their challenges than interact with people who may keep questioning the whereabouts of their mothers. Some of these young girls who knew about the incarceration of their mothers and their offenses preferred not to disclose them to their friends and other members of their societies in order to avoid undesirable castigations.

> Nobody knows about my mother's incarceration. My friends keep asking why my mother has not been visiting me in school but I keep telling them stories (Dede, Accra, July 2017).

The silences of these young girls though with pain in most cases are to protect the integrities of their mothers and not to merely keep secrets. Though Peters and his cohorts (2005) consider the silences of these girls as an exhibit of their internal locus of control as described above, I see it as an exhibit of their resilience with pain. According to Moyer, silence can be both detrimental and advantageous and silence is not always the same as keeping secrets. Rather it is an agreement which is honoured because of others (2012).

Just as some of these girls keep telling different stories about the absence of their mothers, so do some caregivers tell stories to some of these young girls about the absence of their mothers. Dic-

ta and Eugenia for example only know that their mother is missing but their step-father, uncle and pastor tell different stories of her actual location. I was not surprised when I made a promise to the mother of these two girls during my interview with her at the prison that I would not disclose her present location to her children when I visit them.

Annie G. Rogers et al (1999:86-87) state:

> The tension between what is known and what lies beneath the surface of conscious knowing, or what is spoken and what is known but not spoken produces a phenomenon of double meaning that is common in our lives. We experience this doubling in a variety of ways, including living with contradictions, 'being of two minds' about something, and the internal dialogues that accompany ambivalence. These dialogues may be less conscious but are nevertheless evident in children's thinking.

Telling these young girls different stories about their missing mother had been imprinted on their minds but they sometimes doubt these stories. As a researcher it was difficult looking at the physical disorientation and the emotional stress these girls were going through and still lie about their mother's location but as ethics demand, I had to fulfil my promise to their mother. Eugenia at a point through the interview process was bold to ask if her mother is dead.

> Madam, do you think my mother is alive? They should tell us if she is dead. We will be able to bear with it than the stories we hear when we enquire about our mother (Eugenia, Accra, August 2017).

With this statement I realized that the perception of parents, family members and other people in the society about these girls as "young" and not matured enough to handle difficult issues is not always true. Also the assumption that children are protected from trauma when there is silence because they cannot stand the burden of knowing (Cheney 2017:111) is false. Just as most young people in development policies are seen as 'object' of development (Ansell 2016) and not consulted in decisions that affect their lives so do adults perceive some of these girls as too young to know about the incarceration of their mothers.

## Suffering

Some of these young girls revealed a lot of pain and unhappiness in the hands of their caregivers as a result of their mothers' incarceration. The Oxford Advanced Learned Dictionary defines suffering as "the feeling of pain and unhappiness". This pain in most cases is not inflicted by the people who are going through it themselves but other people, natural occurrences, inappropriate or lack of policies and interventions and situations beyond their control (Cheney 2017:108). The presence of these invisible victims in the homes of their caregivers brings additional financial burdens to their caregivers. Thus after some period of proper caregiving, some caregivers tend to

maltreat some of these girls and deny them of their needs as a strategy to release their financial burdens and to force them to fend for themselves. The traditional obligation to care for kin's children irrespective of the financial challenges a kinsman faces is what Madhaven terms as 'crisis fostering' (2004:1445).

> My step father used to wake his biological children up at dawn and give them money when they were living with us. We will wake up in the morning and meet his absence without any money for us. Sometimes we help our next door neighbour in some chores and she gives us food in return (Eugenia, Accra, August 2017).

The girls' suffering is also evident in their struggle for space to sleep at night. Some of these girls during the interview posited that they are not happy about their current accommodation after the incarceration of their mothers. Some have moved from neatly arranged residential areas where they occupied spacious rooms to slums and mosquito breeding areas where they sleep on the floors of their caregivers' rooms. In the case of Dzigbordzi who sleeps in a detached kitchen after cooking, her unhappiness is not only from the pungent smell but her fear of gas explosion and midnight attack from unscrupulous people. The sufferings of Naa is not exceptional as she lamented over how she shares a single room in her father's family house with her step brother who sometimes steals the little money she makes from friends and helping people. The sufferings of the invisible victims who have become single mothers were also revealed in how their altruistic nature sometimes lead them to sacrifice money and food for their siblings and children due to little or no care from the fathers of these children.


Shame is seen as a component of these girls' sufferings. The shame associated with maternal incarceration cause some of these invisible victims to suffer in the hands of people in their communities. "Shame is the experience of feeling unworthy of love, of feeling outside the human community" (Goldstein and Brooks 2012). Shame makes a person feel deficient and doubt the presence of people to show empathy. According to Tomkins (1987), shame can be a hindrance to resilience because it can cause a person to be silent and isolate herself. Isolation is also considered as the major channel for pain and suffering (Goldstein and Brooks 2012). Apart from being stigmatized and ostracized, it becomes difficult for some of these girls to approach people in their communities for assistance. The best they do is to seek for help from friends who understand their plights or do not know about their mothers' incarceration. Though Goldstein and Brooks describe isolation as the major channel for pain and suffering (2012), some of these young girls prefer to endure this pain "patiently and willingly" (Cheney 2017:108) than to open up to people who will castigate them in the long run.

# Presenting the Janus face of young girls' vulnerabilities and struggles

This section describes some nuances on the vulnerabilities and struggles some of these girls go through in the absence of their mothers. It gives a different view of how the vulnerabilities of these girls were perpetuated through the incarceration of their mothers. It also gives a divergent view of the sufferings of these girls in the hands of their caregivers but reveals how the lives of some of these invisible victims have become better with caregivers in the period of their mothers incarceration.

### The "I don't care" personality

It was quite interesting to find out during the study that not all these young girls who know about the incarceration of their mothers were worried about it or considered their vulnerabilities perpetuated after the incarceration of their mothers. Vulnerability comes with exposure to risk which may lead to the realization of adverse outcome (Johnson et al 2013). Truddy thinks her mother's decision for her to help a woman at the drinking bar to sell "Akpeteshie"[2] at the detriment of her education at a very tender age exposed her to a number of risks even before her mother's incarceration. Since her mother was not willing to take care of her because she declined her request, Truddy left the house to squat with friends and sell items along the street. According to her, her vulnerability started even before the incarceration of her mother as she had to demonstrate resilience and find ways of taking care of herself.

Though Truddy's decision to leave the house was an exercise of her agency, her resilience in fending for herself through selling on the street also exposed her to danger and even led to her pregnancy. Werner claims that there is the tendency for vulnerability to be embedded in resilience (1982). However Truddy thinks that if her mother had shown some care, she wouldn't have gone to the street at all and would have had a better life now. Truddy's hoarse tone and frowned face during my interaction with her showed that she is bitter about her mother.

> I don't really care about her incarceration and I don't talk about it too. If she had taken me to school, I think I would have had a better life than this. Though I work now as a hairdresser to take care of myself and my child, this is not the kind of life I envisaged (Truddy, Accra, August 2017).

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[2] A local dry gin made from the palm tree

I was not surprised at Truddy's statement and reactions about her mother as her mother revealed during my interaction with her at the prison that Truddy visited her only in her first year of her incarceration and has not showed up again. *"I have a daughter but she has visited me only once since I came here. I have spent six years and have four more years to go"* (Truddy's mother, Nsawam prisons, July 2017).

### *Better and not bitter: In the arms of a caring caregiver*

Truddy's story above shows how some of these girls are embittered about their caregivers and sometimes about their own mothers' actions and decisions. But do these girls always fall into the hands of non-caring caregivers? Though there are a number of perceptions about the risk of children who are fostered or taken care of by other people apart from their biological parents, other studies conducted in Africa allude to the proper care given to these children. Some fostered children have access to educational, material and emotional resources which hitherto were not present in their birth homes (Gilborn et al 2001). A study conducted in Burkina Faso by Richard Akresh (2004) showed that children who are fostered are more likely to attend school than their siblings who stay with their parents.

Some caregivers provide quality care for children in the absence of their mothers and allow these children to exercise their agencies. Individuals can have positive agency or negative agency. Whereas it is positive when an individual is able to define and pursue his/her goals even during opposition, it is negative when an individual's goals and actions are overpowered by others through violence and threats (Kabeer 1999:438). The case of Dede who has been able to pursue her education to the university level even in the period of her mother's incarceration is an example of a young girl who has been able to exercise her positive agency. Her story also gives a nuance perception on men who abandon their children during the incarceration of their wives.

> My father quitted his job in the Central Region and moved to stay with us in Accra to manage my mother's business during her incarceration. He has been very supportive and took care of the house chores when I was in the boarding house. He has been providing our needs and does not make us feel the absence of our mother though I sometimes see him struggling financially (Dede, Accra, July 2017).

The story of Betty also shows how some caregivers provide support and stand with children when they are going through challenges such as incarceration of their mothers. Unlike some caregivers who only provide roofs over the heads of these young girls but do not care about their other needs, Betty describes how she confides in her aunty and receives advice from her in the

absence of her mother. Her aunty whom she visits when she is on vacation provides her with provisions and money whenever she leaves her premises for school.

> Though I miss my mother sometimes, my aunty always provides listening ears to my worries and things I cannot share with my brothers. I enjoy visiting her on vacations as I am sure of money and provisions when school resumes (Betty, Cape Coast, August 2017).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed into details the challenges of the invisible victims using the three agonizing "S's" of maternal incarceration. It has been revealed that some young girls suffer in the hands of their caregivers due to financial difficulties these caregivers face with their presence in their homes. Others suffer because of caregivers' deliberate action to only provide roof on the heads of these girls but care little about their other needs. These actions of caregivers cause some of the girls to find ways of taking care of themselves which in most cases perpetuate their vulnerabilities.

Silence is mostly adopted by young girls either willingly or under compulsion from family members in order to protect the integrities of their mothers or save the family names from being drag into the mud. However these silences which are cultivated by the girls in the period of their mothers' incarceration are endured with pain. This mostly affects their relationship with others as they prefer to keep to themselves than to mingle with people who may castigate them due to their mothers' imprisonment.

In this chapter, I brought to the attention of the reader that non-categorization of these invisible victims in Ghana's child protection policy perpetuates their vulnerabilities and reduces their well-being as they are not able to make claims for themselves. The stigma and labels attached to them due to their mothers' incarceration also reduces their opportunities to make livelihoods in their societies thus most of these girls become poor and struggle for survival in the period of their mothers' incarceration.

After discussing the vulnerabilities of these young girls through the three agonizing "S's" of maternal incarceration, I also brought out in this chapter some nuances I gleaned from the research on how the vulnerabilities of the girls are perpetuated and the care they receive in the absence of their mothers. These nuances are not meant to question the vulnerabilities of these invisible victims but to bring to fore that not all the girls are worried about their mothers' incarceration and not all these girls suffer in the hands of their caregivers. Some saw themselves vulnerable to

risks and dangers even before their mothers were incarcerated. Some caregivers also provide both emotional and material support to these invisible victims in order for them to achieve their goals in life.

# 4. Life without Mummy- Survival Strategies of Invisible Victims

"In common sense as in scientific discourse, to survive means-one supposes-to undergo suffering. Both terms are important: "to undergo" implies passivity; "suffering" has a negative connotation. In this sense, surviving is a passion. Breaking with this approach consists on the contrary in saying that "survival is not only what remains, it is living the most intensely". (Didier Fassin 2007).

"Though I sleep in a room with five other girls, I don't mind so far as I get a place to lay down my head and my friends help me to get food every day" (Saida, Accra, August 2017).

## Introduction

The invisible victims' stories described in the previous chapter depict some challenges they face in the absence of their mothers. Kendrick and Kakuru's "funds of Knowledge" reveal that though these young girls are exposed to a number of risks due to the absence of their mothers, they devise various means of survival which leverage their vulnerabilities. There is the need to have a different view of these young girls as "resourceful, competent, and knowledgeable, highlighting their ability to build on, utilize and acquire new funds of knowledge while simultaneously recognizing their conditions of extreme poverty and adversity"(Kendrick and Kakuru 2012:398).

This chapter is a continuation of my findings through interaction with the young girls. Unlike the preceding chapter where the vulnerabilities of the girls were discussed, this chapter brings out their survival strategies in the face of their underlying risks and vulnerabilities. I have structured this chapter into themes which relate to agency and resilience as major concepts in this paper. Discussions of these concepts are interwoven with the findings I gleaned from the research on the survival strategies of these girls. The findings are cross cutting issues of care giving, social and economic conditions as well as the coping mechanisms of the invisible victims.

## When the girl in need of care becomes the caregiver

One of my observations during the study was that these young girls once they have younger siblings whether they live alone or with caregivers become the primary or secondary caregivers to their siblings and sometimes the children of their caregivers. They manage to bounce back from their worries and fears due to the incarceration of their mothers to face the life ahead of them and support their siblings. This ability of the young girls to withstand the negative effects of

risks and to cope with traumatic experiences is what Fergus and his cohorts term as resilience (Fergus and Zimmerman 2005). Benard also defines resilience as "the ability to bounce back from adversity, to manage stress effectively and to withstand physical or psychological pressures without showing major debilitation or dysfunction" (2004). People who have internal locus of control are said to be resilient thus children are said to have internal locus of control when they are able to withstand challenges and take responsibility of their successes and failures in the period of adversity (Peters et al 2005).

Taking care of themselves and their siblings as revealed by some of these girls does not entail only the house chores such as cooking, washing dishes and performing laundry but also the various ways of getting money to pay for rent, provide food on daily basis and sometimes pay for their siblings education. In fact most of these girls who were living with their siblings without caregivers opined that performing house chores and taking oversight responsibilities of their younger siblings are not their major problems as they used to perform these roles even when their mothers were around.

The majority of girls I interacted with have shown their resilience by sacrificing their education to seek menial jobs through which they can fend for themselves and their younger siblings in the absence of their mothers.

> Though my bachelor's degree programme was truncated because there was no money to pay my fees after the arrest of my mother, I used my diploma certificate to look for a job. I was able to take care of my younger sister through high school and rent a single room for myself and two younger siblings (Fauzia, Accra, August 2017).

Lisa also described how she had to assume responsibilities for the upkeep of her youngest sister who was only three years when her mother was incarcerated.

> My sister was too young when my mother was arrested and could not have been left alone in the house. I therefore took her including my son to my fiancé's house. I have been taking care of her daily upkeep as well as her education (Lisa, Accra, July 2017).

But for the interventions of these older sisters, most of the younger siblings would not survive the harsh conditions which come with the incarceration of their mothers. As in Amatyr Sen's bargaining models (1990), most of these young girls together with their siblings cooperate within the household to share available resources though in most cases some outcomes are favourable to one party(usually the younger ones) than others.

The sacrifices and toils of some of these young girls who during the time of the study had become heads of their households have helped to keep themselves and their siblings thriving in the face of their adversities. According to Garmezy (1991), when children are confronted with adversities, there are three major factors which can serve as protection for them: the characteristics the child exhibits as an individual; the care adults/ family provides; and the external support they receive due to their presence in a school, community or church. Among these three protective factors, Masten et al (1990) alluded to the care provided by adults and family members as the most important factor which reduces stress in children thus its absence can delay recovery from psychosocial traumas.

## The chain of handshakes: Friendship as a strategy for survival

The survival of these young girls depended on the friends they have both before and after their mothers' incarceration. Surviving through friends as gleaned from the study is related to how the young girls exercise their agencies.

Agency according to Kabeer is the 'ability to define one's goals and act towards them' (1999:438). In the Marxist or romantic traditions, agency is seen as individual actions and resistance of heroes. In the 1980s and 1990s, young people's agencies were also conceptualized by anthropological and sociological literature as the ability of youth to bring out their individual opinions differently from what the adults think (Durham 2008). Current children and youth studies however place emphasis on the social nature of young people's agency. They allude to the fact that young people join hands with other young people and sometimes older adults to face hardships, recreate structures and resist oppression. "Young people in many contexts equate agency with the cultivation of interdependencies rather than individual action and autonomy" (Jeffrey 2012).

My interaction with most of these girls both those living with care givers and those living alone reinforces Jeffrey's claim of the interdependencies these girls have with their young and old friends in facing hardships. Through some friends in school and within their communities they are able to get food and sometimes money for their daily upkeep. Dede for example said

> My mother used to buy provisions for my friends anytime she visited me in school so my friends also started sharing their provisions with me when they realized mummy was not visiting any longer (Dede, Accra, July 2017).

With a little probing on the ages of their friends, I was told by some of the girls that most of their friends are young girls of their age who share similar stories with them and whom they trust and confide in. According to these young girls, they prefer to be friends with their age mates who understand them than older people who will see them as children, not accept their opinions and even exploit them sometimes. Fauzia however had a different story on the age for friendship.

> I have two elderly female friends who sell along the street. They are the people I rely on whenever I need money for myself and my baby. I also confide in them sometimes. They have been very helpful since I moved into this community (Fauzia, Accra, August 2017).

Naa who was only nine years when her mother was arrested gave credit to her friend's mother who has been supporting her sometimes with money since she completed high school.

> It became difficult for me to seek for help from my father's friend who took care of my education after my mother's incarceration because of his sexual advances. However the mother of a friend I met in school sometimes gives me the opportunity to take care of her shop and provides me with some allowances (Naa, Accra, July 2017).

## Creativity and hard work

> My fiancé was caring even after my mother's incarceration but he stopped giving me money at a point in time. I therefore used the little money I saved from my fiancé and selling charcoal with my mother before her incarceration to purchase a refrigerator. That is what I use to sell 'pure water'3 in this area. I am able to make some money to take care of myself, my youngest sister and my child (Lisa, Accra, July 2017).

This statement from Lisa shows how these young girls fight hard to make ends meet on daily basis. Instead of considering themselves vulnerable in the face of their adversities, they rather exhibit resilience and find ways of mobilizing money for business or learning a trade which can earn them money. Resilience as a concept is relative and subject to change based on situations children find themselves (Lothe et al 2003). Rutter (1985) placed resilience and vulnerability at the extreme ends of a continuum to strengthen Lothe's assertion that children can exhibit both resilience and vulnerability at different times depending on situations they find themselves in. In the case of Dzigbordzi, she opted to live with a female prison officer at the Nsawam prisons where her mother has been incarcerated to learn sewing as a trade than living in the village. According to her, though where she sleeps is not the best, she is prepared to cope with it as long as the prison officer helps her to learn this trade for her future.

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3 Drinking water in small sachets which is consumed by majority of Ghanaians outside and within their homes

> I sleep in the kitchen every evening but I know it will not be forever. It is better to stay here with this prison officer who will help me to learn a trade for my future than to stay in my mother's village and rot (Dzigbordzi, Prisons staff quarters, July 2017).

The resourcefulness of these young girls in the period of their mothers' incarceration also demonstrates their agencies. Jeffrey opined that the agency of young people is not only demonstrated in their resistance rather their resourcefulness (2012). He also alludes to the fact that resourcefulness in young people is seen in their ability to survive in the absence or shortage of other opportunities (ibid). Young people in California for example according to Aitken et al (2006) work part-time in supermarkets in order to gain new skills, social connections and a certain know-how when they have no other opportunities for survival. Analyzing the agency of young people from the angle of resourcefulness can therefore be said that young people's agencies are temporal and seen as immediate responses to the changing circumstances of events in their lives rather than planned strategies to result in change (Jeffrey 2012:248).

> I stopped schooling when my mother got arrested due to her accused murder of my father because there was nobody to pay my school fees. Because I am the eldest child and a prime witness to the incidence, I begun looking for a lawyer for my mother and attending court proceedings. After the incarceration of my mother, I looked for a job in order to take care of myself and my siblings (Fauzia, Accra, August 2017).

Truddy also opined that she learned hairdressing through her friends when her mother refused to help her continue her education. *"It is good I learnt this trade because it helps me to take care of myself and my child"* (Truddy). Though these young girls were faced with inability to continue their formal education, in the face of this taunting challenge, they were able to seek for alternatives to help them cope with life. Their cases are not different from Saida who has learnt to prepare and sell 'Hausa Koko'[4] on daily basis for her livelihood.

The resourcefulness of the invisible victims as a component of their agency is also demonstrated in how they fit themselves in places and spaces where they feel secured. This helps them to establish informal work which serves as beginning for wealth accumulation. These secured places and spaces are mostly low profile areas where they find other young people of their social status (Jeffrey 2012). Saida, the younger sister of Fauzia moved out of their grandmother's house due to the maltreatment and insults which were continuously rained on her by her grandmother as a result of the wrong perceptions she had about her.

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[4] Special porridge prepared by the Hausa's and mostly sold in the Moslem communities in Ghana.

> I moved to Accra New town to squat with some friends because I needed peace and freedom from the 'claws' of my grandmother. She doesn't see anything good in me and accuses me of even things I haven't done. Now together with my friends, I am able to make money from our daily sales (Saida).

Fauzia and her two younger siblings also moved out of their parents five bedroom house in a well-structured residential area into a 'Zongo'[5] because of the torture they experienced from their father's siblings.

## Spirituality and Hope

Most of these girls were found to belong to either the Christian or Islam religions and trusted the Almighty God to deliver their mothers from the prison or help them to overcome their challenges. Though some of these girls have changed the churches and mosques they used to attend with their mothers because of their relocation to live with caregivers or other vicinities, their original religions were intact.

As described by Garmezy, the external supports which children receive during times of adversity due to their presence in a school, community or church reinforces their resilience and serve as protection for them (1991). According to Sommers (2010), youth in most cases create new identities for themselves and reinvent themselves in order to survive in the city. The male youth for example adopt nicknames and join football clubs where they get a sense of belonging and daily livelihoods. Some urban youth involve themselves deeply in religious activities and in a way get a sense of belonging and support for survival from these religious bodies. Some of these young girls described the support they received from leaders and other people within their religious affiliations during their mothers' incarceration.

> My church leaders organized some money for my upkeep and my pastor used to check on me frequently during the court trial of my mother but that ceased at a point in her incarceration. I have joined a new church where I serve as a member of the youth committee. We organize programmes regularly where 'item 13'[6] is always assured. That is my source of food sometimes (Naa, Accra, July 2017).

Betty who has both parents in prison due to fraud on the other hand talked about how their church pastor has been consistently supportive to them and has temporary adopted and taking care of her younger brother.

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[5] The name given to a Moslem community in Ghana which is mostly crowded or not properly laid out.
[6] The colloquial name given to snacks and other food items mostly served as refreshment during programmes organized in Ghana.

> I thank God for the lives of my pastor and his wife who have been supporting us with provisions and money ever since my parents were incarcerated. My younger brother is now schooling and living with them in Kumasi (Betty, Cape Coast, August 2017).

Though living with people one shares 'commons' with in the period of adversity can result in security and protection, it can also cause a person to be vulnerable and stigmatized. Werner (1982) brings out the tendency for vulnerability to be embedded in resilience. According to them a resilient child can exhibit signs of vulnerability but the ability of that child to suppress the vulnerability traits determines the level of his or her resilience.

> I got impregnated by a Moslem friend I met in the mosque who offered me and my siblings an accommodation in his father's house at the time when I couldn't afford rent anymore. Though he has denied responsibility for this child, I try my best to take care of him (Fauzia, Accra, August 2017).

This statement of Fauzia shows how her action to salvage their homelessness perpetuated her vulnerability. Notwithstanding she shows signs of resilience in taking care of her child in the face of paternal denial.

## Conclusion

This chapter just like the preceding chapter brought out findings from the research. However unlike the previous chapter which talked about the vulnerabilities of these invisible victims, this chapter presented the various mechanisms which the invisible victims adopt to survive and leverage their vulnerabilities in the period of their mothers' imprisonment. I drew on the Kendrick and Kakuru's funds of knowledge to discuss the resourcefulness and competence of these young girls. Agency and resilience were key concepts I adopted in this chapter to describe their survival strategies.

It has been discussed in this chapter that some of these young girls have become heads of their households and providing care to their younger siblings and their own children. Some young girls make sacrifices at their own detriment in order to take care of their siblings. The friends these invisible victims make provide a lot of support in the period of maternal incarceration. Though some of these friends are young, they provide emotional and material support to some of these invisible victims for their survival.

As the adage goes "necessity is the mother of invention", some of these girls during the study were found to have learnt new skills in trade which they never knew before their mothers' incar-

ceration. Some have also learnt the act of saving money to engage in trade which will earn them extra income for their upkeep.

This chapter has also brought out the dependence of some of these young girls on their spiritual affiliations. The support provided by some church members and spiritual leaders to these girls and sometimes their mothers in prison have helped some of them to continue their education as well as sustain their daily up keep.

# 5. Effects of Maternal Incarceration and the Way Forward

## Introduction

This chapter brings to the attention of the reader some effects which have occurred and are bound to occur in the period of maternal incarceration. These effects have been seen to be cyclical as they have the propensity to cause young girls and all children of mothers who are in prison to go through similar challenges which their mothers went through and consequently result in mishaps and undesired future circumstances. In the face of these effects, I also discuss some measures which must be adopted by individuals, government, local and international organizations and donors to support children whose mothers have been incarcerated.

## Effects of maternal incarceration on children

The effects of maternal incarceration aside being cyclical are also seen to be heterogeneous as children experience it in various ways. Parental absence, emotional trauma, caregiver instability and stigma which occur during maternal incarceration are detrimental to children (Turney and Wildeman 2015). In as much as maternal incarceration may be inconsequential or even beneficial to some children, caregivers and family (ibid), I allude to the fact that its deleterious effects on children are high in Ghana than the other effects. I therefore discuss some of these deleterious effects in the ensuing paragraphs.

### Child parenting

Giving birth to children show that these young girls became sexually active either before or after their mothers incarceration. Taking care of their children is one aspect of parenting which was identified among these young girls. It was also realized that these young girls perform parental roles to their younger siblings as well. In both instances, transition into sexual activities can be seen as both a cause and an effect of child parenting. Engaging in sexual activity in the period of maternal incarceration according to some of these girls is a means to get money and food to feed themselves, their siblings and their children. Teenagers who get pregnant before nineteen years in Mexico for example, are mostly indigenous, more likely to be members of less educated and less wealthy families (Azevedo et al 2012:8). "They are also less likely to live with their fathers. They begin sexual activity and form unions at significantly earlier ages" (ibid).

Many studies conducted on teenage pregnancy have also revealed that young mothers are products of less-advantage social environments, poor families and experience pre-existing disadvantages that results from poorer economic circumstances (Kirby 2001 and Woodard et al. 2001). In as much as this statement of Kirby holds for some of these girls, it is also not the case in the lives of others. Fauzia for example described how she lived with her parents without any financial struggles until her mother's incarceration. According to her she couldn't have lived in a man's house if her mother was not in prison but in the bid to secure an accommodation for herself and siblings, she got pregnant and has now become a single parent.

The living conditions of some of these girls also make it easier for them to transit into sexual activities. Girls who are living in slum neighbourhoods are more vulnerable to risky sexual behaviour and pregnancy. The movement of most of these girls to such areas in the period of their mothers' imprisonment due to financial difficulties causes them to adapt to the lifestyles of people in these areas. Inadequate access to sufficient information and support about their reproductive health rights to make informed decisions regarding reproductive matters and other important aspects of their lives also put them at risk of getting pregnant.

The deteriorating residential area with many people living in one room, insanitary infrastructure, high poverty rates, tavern and small alcoholic drinking spots which characterizes slum areas deter most young girls from staying in school to engage in sexual activities which consequently cause their pregnancies(Kearney and Levine 2007, Stern 2005).

### Intergenerational Poverty

My interaction with the women at the prison revealed that financial difficulties caused some of them to engage in activities such as drug peddling, fraud and robbery which go contrary to the laws of Ghana. Some also have been imprisoned due to debt default. That notwithstanding, their incarceration has inflicted poverty on their children and caregivers. The effect of parental incarceration has been seen as intergenerational and causes poverty and a number of vulnerabilities such as development of deviant behaviour among children (Hanlon et al 2007). Children whose mothers are incarcerated due to offenses they committed out of poverty have slimmer chances of breaking through poverty.

Poverty is defined as "the inability to have the necessary means to satisfy basic needs such as food, housing, access to basic education,  health and sanitation services" (Stern 2005:5).  Some

caregivers (mostly females) opined that the presence of these young girls and their siblings has added extra financial burdens to them. Chronically poor and female-headed households are most vulnerable if members of the household are incapacitated (capacity deprivation) since they have no alternative source of income (Rahman et al. 2013:150). The grandmother of Fauzia who operated a small provision shop in front of her house for example opined that she had no choice but to accept Fauzia and her siblings into her home when they called on her. However, their presence stressed her financially since she single-handedly took care of them with the meagre proceeds from her shop.

The absence of mothers to provide the needed care for their children does not only generate income poverty but also material and intangible poverty. Poverty is multidimensional and a complex issue to define. Poverty can be understood from the monetary approach, capability approach, social exclusion approach and participatory approach (Laderchi et al. 2003: 244). Poverty is a great barrier to human development and impedes the potential of people to flourish (ibid).

Becoming a single parent implies that children born to these young girls in the midst of their vulnerabilities will in effect become poor and forfeit certain life opportunities just like their mothers. "Teenage pregnancy is seen as the cause of lower social and economic achievement for mothers and their children and as the potential determinant of intergenerational poverty traps" (Azevedo et al 2012:2). According to Aldaz-Carroll and Moran (2001), maternal incarceration can lead to a repetition of the poverty cycle as young girls begin a lifelong course of poverty by abandoning school, getting pregnant and engaging in poor jobs. "Teenage mothers are more likely to depend on social welfare and remain poor, less likely to graduate from high school, or less likely to ever attain post-secondary education" (Azevedo et al 2012:4). Depending on social welfare as described by Azevedo will cause financial burden on the government and hinder the growth of the Ghanaian economy.

## Way forward to reduce the vulnerabilities of the invisible victims

### Policy consideration of the invisible victims

The children of incarcerated parents are not visible in the child protection policy of Ghana. Though my interactions with some officials at the MoGCSP showed that all these children are considered as vulnerable, there are no specific programmes to address their needs like other vulnerable children.

The child and family welfare policy is a comprehensive legal framework for child protection which was established based on the constitution of Ghana and the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560). It aims at formulating child and family welfare programmes and activities which will prevent and protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation (Kuyini et al 2009). Based on this policy, programmes such as the National Health Insurance Scheme, the capitation grant for public schools, school-feeding programme and the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme were implemented to provide the needs of children especially those that are vulnerable. Though this policy together with its implemented programmes is geared towards assisting vulnerable children, they do not address the specific needs of children whose mothers have been incarcerated.

Again the categorical approach used by LEAP to identify beneficiaries of cash grants means that not all children in households which are vulnerable to poverty receive support. LEAP specifically targets only OVCs and not all poor children (Jones, Ahadzie, & Doh, 2009). Some scholars like (Abebe, 2009) argued that "prioritizing and focusing only on OVCs living in extremely poor household excludes other poor children from support and aggravates their susceptibility to streetism and other childhood risks".

The lives of these young girls are at the fringes of danger due to their mothers offenses. In Ghana most people who are imprisoned are seen as outcasts and the burdens of their incarceration are transferred unto their children by the society. This makes them more vulnerable. Though state resources may be scarce and can affect distribution to encompass children whose parents are in prison, I argue that intergenerational poverty can only be broken through social policy if vulnerable children such as those of incarcerated parents are supported more than the aged. "The relationship of suffering to meaning-making must be worked through if interventions are to be adequate to the complexity of human problems and not romanticize or trivialize human conditions" (Kleinman et al 1997, xvi). The "Leave no one behind concept" of most government policies must be enforced adequately to consider these invisible victims of incarceration.

I recommend that the support provided for these children must be seen as their citizenship rights and not charity. Transformative social protection programs that will look beyond the vulnerabilities of these children and address the structural inequalities that perpetuate their discrimination and social exclusion must be provided for them. Again the state together with the donor community must see these young children as "beings, becoming and belonging" and must pay

attention to their problems and capabilities and address their needs as citizens who know their rights and not framed as objects of interventions.

### *Support to Family and Community-based care*

The financial assistance given to families with orphan and vulnerable children under the LEAP in Ghana amidst its challenges has been able to cushion most of these families financially and strengthen the commitment of caregivers to continue providing oversight responsibilities to these children. I recommend that there should be frequent disbursement of the cash grant given to families taking care of children without parental care as part of the reform strategies for the child welfare system.

The support that families provide bring massive difference especially when it serves as a fall back for the mother in terms of resources and emotional support. (Grant and Hallman 2008). Though traditionally the movement of children to maternal or paternal aunts or grandmothers and distant related kin is determined by kinship obligations (Madhavan 2004:1445), lack of funds and the fear of not being able to afford additional responsibilities have dis-incentivized most kinsmen to provide care to the children of their relatives. However in the midst of this 'crisis fostering', Abebe and Aase allude to the fact that a household (the extended family system) has a capacity to provide both emotional and socio-cultural support (2007). It is therefore imperative that families and individuals in the society who have taken in the children of incarcerated women especially the young girls be enrolled as part of the carers under the reform and provided with the necessary support to provide proper care to these children.

In the case of the young girls of incarcerated women who have become young mothers, it is recommended that caregiving assistance should be provided for them and their children by the state and individuals to enable them continue their education.

> Individuals and household characteristics play a role in shaping the likelihood of continuous education by young mothers. In most cases, the availability of financial resources and caregiving assistance which are provided to young mothers enable them to go back to school (Grant and Hallman 2008).

## Making the Invisible visible

I set out at the beginning of this paper to explore how young girls whose mothers have been imprisoned suffer the effects of incarceration and the strategies they adopt to survive in the face of family and policy neglect. By presenting these challenges of young girls and their survival strategies in the foregoing chapters, I posit that maternal incarceration is both a risk maker and a risk mechanism (Johnson &Easterling 2012). Young girls face a number of risks in the absence of their mothers and in the bid to leverage their vulnerabilities they fall prey to other risks. I referred to these young girls in this paper as "invisible victims" because of their non-recognition by government policies on social protection and the neglect they face from some family members during the incarceration of their mothers. I conclude this paper by recapping my main research question and how findings from this question together with its sub-questions have informed the production of this paper.

Young girls whose mothers have been incarcerated suffer stigma from people in their communities. This stigma attached to them causes them to loose certain life opportunities and render them vulnerable in their societies. Power hierarchy and structural inequalities which emanate as people who see themselves as the dominant category but defines these girls within a 'discredited social category (DeFleur 1964:127) disenable the young girls to make claims on their rights. Stigmatization has caused some of these invisible victims to move from their original areas of abode to new vicinities where opportunities are sometimes scanty.

Maternal incarceration has rendered some invisible victims homeless whilst some have abandoned their education due to financial challenges. Whereas some of these young girls do not have knowledge about the incarceration of their mothers, others have kept 'stiff upper lips' about them either willingly or as instructed by family members due to the fear of castigations and stigmatization by the society. Though the silences of these invisible victims save them from pointing fingers, it has been revealed in this paper that these silences are endured with pain.

In analysing the concept of vulnerability, it has been brought to fore that though the challenges of these invisible victims which are encapsulated as the three agonising "S's" of maternal incarceration in this paper perpetuate their vulnerabilities and engender specific risks in their lives, these girls however adopt various strategies such as friendships, spiritual affiliations and their creativities to survive. Their resourcefulness, competence and capabilities which are demonstrated through their resilience and agencies must not be overlooked but must give different percep-

tions on how children in development discourses are viewed as "objects" of government and humanitarian interventions.

Maternal incarceration has heterogeneous effects on children. Whereas other studies allude to inconsequential and beneficial effects of maternal incarceration on some children, this research has revealed that the deleterious effects of maternal incarceration are higher than other effects on children in Ghana. Young girls suffer from emotional, physical and psychological traumas in the absence of their mothers. The altruistic nature of some of these invisible victims causes them to sacrifice personal gains for their younger siblings. In the bid to leverage their vulnerabilities, some invisible victims have become single mothers and heads of households fending for themselves, children and younger siblings.

Intergenerational poverty and child parenting are some cyclical effects of maternal incarceration on children and the society at large. As described by (Laderchi et al. 2003: 244) as a great barrier to human development, poverty which causes most women to commit crimes and get imprisoned also cause their children especially young girls to get pregnant and in most cases forfeit their education. Children born to these young girls are likely not to be educated and go through the same channels of losing life opportunities like their mothers.

This study has also revealed that there is a narrow description of vulnerable children in the child protection policy of Ghana. As described by Cheney (2010) the concept of OVC which was created at the height of African AIDS epidemic to describe children who are at risk because of the disease has caused most governments, humanitarian and development donors to channel support to OVCs at the detriment of others. Thus I recommend that the scope of the LEAP programme together with other safety nets for children in Ghana should be expanded to incorporate other categories of vulnerabilities such as children whose parents have been incarcerated.

The stigma attached to these invisible victims due to their mothers' incarceration depicts how society constructs children in the face of their challenges. Instead of receiving love and support from families and other people in the society, they are rather labelled and discriminated due to the offenses of their mothers which they are mostly ignorant of. Again the sufferings of these girls in the hands of their caregivers and the decisions some adults make for them show how children are seen to be "young" and not capable of taking decisions and expressing their views on issues that concern them in the Ghanaian society.

In all, this paper joins growing efforts in redefining children and youth vulnerabilities. It has served as an eye opener to the fact that the voices of most children are not heard and considered in policies of governments. It has also brought to fore that though children may face certain risk factors due to the absence of their mothers, their agencies, capabilities, competence and resourcefulness are not considered in development interventions. There is therefore the need to view them as "beings, becoming and belonging" whose voices must be heard and involved in interventions that concern them and not seen as "objects" of government and humanitarian interventions. Again interventions provided for them must be seen as their citizenship rights and not charity.

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# Appendices

**Appendix 1: Table showing the background of young girls and their families**

| No | Name[7] | Age | Living Area | Living arrangements | No of Siblings | Age at the time mother was incarcerated | Number of children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Dede | 19 | Spintex | Lives with father and siblings | 2 | 17 | None |
| 2 | Lisa | 24 | Sakumono | Heads her household | 2 | 18 | One |
| 3 | Naa | 19 | Sowutuom | Lives alone and takes care of herself | 3 | 9 | None |
| 4 | Fauzia | 25 | Madina | Lives in grandmother's house but takes care of herself | 2 | 19 | One |
| 5 | Saida | 18 | Accra New Town | Lives with her friends but takes care of herself | 2 | 12 | None |
| 6 | Betty | 17 | Bortianor | Lives with her uncle | 2 | 14 | None |
| 7 | Eugenia | 17 | Kwabenya | Lives with step father | 4 | 16 | None |

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[7] The real names of these girls have been replaced with these fictitious names due to security reasons

| 8 | Dicta | 14 | Kwabenya | Lives with step father | 4 | 14 | None |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Dzigbordzi | 16 | Prisons staff quarters | Lives with a prison officer | 2 | 11 | None |
| 10 | Truddy | 23 | Sakumono | Lives alone and takes care of herself | None | 17 | One |

*Source: Author's construct*

**Appendix 2: Questionnaires for Interviews**

## QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INTERACTIONS WITH INCARCERATED WOMEN AT THE NSAWAM FEMALE PRISON

1) Name (if possible)……………………………………………………………………
2) Age……………………………………………………………………………………
3) Address………………………………………………………………………………
4) Occupation before incarceration…………………………………………………………………………..
5) Period of sentence………………………………………………………………………………….
6) Crime……………………………………………………………………………………
7) No. of children……………………………………………………………………………..
   (i)Males………………………………………….
   (ii)Females…………………………………………
8) Age of children……………………………………………………………………………
9) Address of children or people taking care of children………………………………………………………………………………..
10) Were you taking care of your children yourself before incarceration?    (i) Yes     (ii) No
11) If No, who took care of your children before your incarceration…………………………..
12) Are your children taken care of by anybody in your absence   (i)  Yes      (ii) No
13) If Yes, who……………………………………………………………………………………
……
14) If No, where do they stay.......................................................................
15) How often do your children visit you in prison.................................................................
16) Do your children (especially girls) tell you their problems when they visit?    (i) Yes    (ii) No
17) If Yes list some of the problems they talk about……………………………………………………………
18) If No, why do you think they don't talk to you about their problems…………………

19) Do you know any organization that provides support to your children in your absence?
 (i) Yes    (ii) No

20) If Yes mention the organization and the kind of support it provides to your children…………………………………………………………………………………………

# QUESTIONS FOR FAMILIES AND CARETAKERS OF YOUNG GIRLS OF FEMALE PRISONERS

1. Name (if possible)…………………………………..
2. Age (if possible)…………………………………….
3. Occupation………………………………………………
4. No. of children……………………………………
5. Is there any female prisoner's child living with you?   (i) Yes      (ii)No
6. If Yes, how many? ……………………………………….
7. How many people live in this household including children of female prisoners
8. Do you face any challenges taking care of the children of the female prisoners?
9. Are the children of the female prisoners schooling?
10. If yes, who bears the cost of their education?
11. If No, why are they not in school?
12. Do the children of prisoners living with you complain of any challenges from the public or colleagues at school?
13. What have you done about their complains if there are any?
14. Do you allow the children to visit their parents at the prisons?   (i) Yes    (ii) No
15. If yes, how often?
16. If no, why?
17. Do the children of the female prisoners feel traumatized sometimes? Give reasons for your answer.