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**Caring for non-relative foster children in South Africa:  
Voices of female foster parents**

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## **Abstract**

An increasing number of children require alternative placement for their care and protection in South Africa. The overwhelming socio-economic factors negatively impact on the capacity of the extended family to continue to serve as an effective safety net which has inevitably led to the emergence of non-relative foster parents. Anecdotal evidence suggests a sense of apathy and suspicion regarding the non-relative foster parents especially with regards to motivation for fostering. This paper, therefore, seeks to explore and describe the motivation of non-relative foster parents. Findings come from a broader doctoral study which explored the experiences of twenty non-relative foster parents in De Deur, South Africa. Semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion were used to collect data. The findings show that the foster parents were motivated by altruistic and intrinsic factors such as fostering as a calling; personal life experiences; and a desire to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children. The study concludes that the motives expressed are likely to be associated with positive outcomes for foster children and result in placement stability. This paper therefore, recommends that the selection and assessment criteria for non-relative foster parents should be based on the examination of their motivations to ensure foster care placement success and retention.

**Keywords:** *Decision, Care, Non-Relative, Foster Children, Female Foster Parents*

## **Introduction**

The care and protection of vulnerable populations such as children, women, the elderly and people living with disabilities occupy a central position in all societies globally (Abebe, 2014:1). Particularly, South African children and families are fraught with a series of vulnerabilities which are historical, social, economic, cultural, political and demographic in nature (Liebenberg, 2010:229). Vulnerability is generally regarded as a much broader term that is difficult to conceptualize and define with unambiguous clarity (Martin, 2010:3). Aligning with and deriving from regional definition of vulnerability adopted by Southern African Development Community, Department of Social Development provides a national definition of a vulnerable person as referring to a child or person whose “survival, care, protection or development may be compromised due to a particular condition, situation or circumstance

that prevents fulfilment of his or her rights” (Department of Social Development, 2012).

South African studies on child protection and the plight of children and families and policy on child care and family welfare identify some of the circumstances that promote children and family vulnerability in the country. In this regard, Bower (2014:106), Department of Social Development (2009:2), Mathambo and Gibbs (2009:22), Strydom (2010:192) and the White Paper for Social Welfare 1997 (Republic of South Africa, 1997) identify poverty and inequality, crime, high levels of violence in general and particularly family and domestic violence against children and women. It further includes drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, lack of basic social services, parental irresponsibility, absence, illness and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. These circumstances may pose negatively on the safety, care and health, growth and development and wellbeing of children (Martin, 2010:1). This is because they place a child at risk of abuse, neglect, abandonment and orphaning. Particularly, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, parental irresponsibility, absence, illness and the HIV and AIDS epidemic contribute towards parental incapacity and family dysfunction leading to a situation where parents and families are not able to adequately care and protect their children (Bower, 2014:113).

In South Africa, the foster care system, which is a form of familial care and a major component of the child protection system, is the state’s response to child abuse and maltreatment and the orphan crisis (Mampane and Ross, 2017:107). It is regulated by the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 as amended. The Children’s Act 38/2005 is aligned with national and international laws prescribing and promoting the rights of children and services to children and families such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African Union on the Right of the Child (1990). The foster care system in South Africa epitomises the main definition provided by the United Nations (UN, 2009 Article 28) in terms of content, form and structure. The United Nations Guidelines on the Alternative Care of Children (UN, 2009 Article 28) views foster care as

Situations where children are placed by a competent authority for the purpose of alternative care in the domestic environment of a family other than the children's own family that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care (para.29).

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 incorporates this definition mentioned above, however with an adaptation to the South African context. This is in the sense that Section 180(1) (a)(b) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 defines foster care as

the placement of a child in the care of a person who is not the parent or guardian of the child as a result of an order of a children's court or a transfer in terms of section 171 of the Children's Act 38/2005.

It excludes the placement of a child in temporary safe care or a child and youth care centres in terms of sub-section (2) (a) and (b) of the Act. In terms of sub-section (3)(a)(b)(c), the Act recognises and makes provision for the legal placement of children in the care of a person who is not a family member of the child or a person who is a family member and in a registered cluster foster care scheme.

The foster care programme is an essential component of the South African child protection system. It is crafted with due consideration accorded to a combination of factors. This is expressed in the reality of the vast number of children in need of care and protection, the unique South African social welfare context marked by diverse racial and cultural components and the weakening and attenuation of the extended family social safety net. The result is the provision for and allowances of, in terms of Section 180(3) of the Children's Act 38/2005, the placement of children in the care of suitable non-relative foster parents in order to elasticise the safety nets in view of ground-level realities in this light.

In traditional South African societies, as was the case with other sub-Saharan societies, the extended family system was the prominent and predominant social safety net for the care and protection of orphaned and vulnerable and other categories of at-risk children (Abebe, 2014:3). The availability of social networks embedded in kinship systems represented by the extended family dictated various social, economic, and religious obligations along family lineage during periods of crisis such as the death of a kin or parental incapacity. This provided the much-needed social capital that ensured that children's basic safety and welfare needs

continued to be met and guaranteed. This was even though the child had lost his/her biological parents or in the event of their being incapacitated for whatever reason.

However, the capacity of the extended family to continue to care for abused and orphaned and other categories of vulnerable children in need is being questioned (Tanga, 2013:6). This is particularly in the face of the enormous pressure and strain it has been observed to be subjected to. This is with regards to the contemporary context of widespread poverty, endemic crime and the HIV and AIDS epidemic and its concomitant proliferation of orphan and other category of vulnerable population and loss of family income earners and young energetic carers (Hlabiyago and Ogunbanjo, 2009:506; Mathambo and Gibbs, 2009:22; Patel, 2012:603; Richter and Naicker, 2013:6; Tanga, 2013:175; van Deventer and Wright, 2017:1). The overwhelming impact of these social forces on the capacity of the extended family to continue to serve as an effective safety net has inevitably led to the emergence of non-relative foster parents and caregivers and amplifies their importance as a care continuum in the child protection system (Breen, 2015:1; Children's Institute, 2015:1; Kangethe and Kausi, 2014:557; Snyder, 2012:26).

Despite the awareness and acknowledgement of the importance of non-relative child fostering in the care continuum in South Africa, little attention has been paid by researchers, child protection experts and policymakers to this care arrangement. This is especially with regards to exploring the factors that influence foster parents' decision to foster non-relative foster children. Understanding what motivates non-relative foster parents to choose to provide care is crucial in the light of its association with placement outcome for children's well-being and welfare and foster parents retention and recruitment (Canali et al., 2016:2). In the South African welfare context where cultural expectations forbid cross-cultural and cross-family/lineage care and where ancestral and family roots and lineage are encouraged and emphasised (Blackie, 2014:6; Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela, 2013:4), this knowledge is an essential first step in ensuring the recruitment of suitable and right caregivers by child protection organisations and experts.

Further, insights into what motivates foster parents to choose to care for non-relative foster children in this prevailing context are important. This is in consideration of the fact that violation of the cultural expectation of adhering to familial ties in care arrangement is perceived

to attract ancestral wrath (Blackie, 2014:6). This knowledge could point to and reveal altruistic motives. This could be useful in understanding foster parents' resilience and what assist them in coping and adjusting and mitigating care challenge. These altruistic motives have been shown to promote and constitute invaluable influences on foster parents' behaviour and attitudes which have a profound impact on children's needs and care (Canali et al., 2016:2). In the face of general apathy and suspicion regarding non- relative placements in terms of its effectiveness, intentions and motives (Kangethe and Kausi, 2014:554), knowledge of foster parents motives could reveal powerful truths that could show the reason why children may not receive adequate and quality care. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore and describe the motivations for caring for non- relative foster children as articulated by carers themselves in their personal accounts. This is in order to fill the gap identified with regards to a dearth of information and research on the factors that influence the decisions of foster parents to provide care for non-relative foster parents in South Africa. This would promote the building of a well-grounded knowledge base and theoretical explanation on non-relative fostering in South Africa.

## **Literature Review**

Research efforts have been geared towards studying the care and protection of children who are in need due to orphan-hood, abuse, neglect, abandonment and other structural and social vulnerabilities in South Africa and in other countries across the globe. Abebe (2014:1) posit that globally, the major champions of child care and protection throughout history to date have been the state, the family, charitable/faith-based organisations and other civil and corporate non-governmental organisations. Three approaches to child care and protection are discernible. These are familial, community-based and institutional care (Pretorius and Ross, 2010:470).

Studies in the international literature report intrinsic and extrinsic foster parents' motivations for non-relative fostering in their studies. For example, Daniel's (2011:910) Canadian study reported foster parents to be greatly motivated to care due to empathy and personal experience of being in alternative care themselves before in their lives. Similarly, data from a United Kingdom study by McDermid et al. (2012:29) reported

foster parents felt because they had experienced similar situations themselves it put them in a better position to have ‘something to offer’ children in similar situations of life. Elsewhere in the African continent, Rodlach’s (2009:428-429) study in Zimbabwe reported that foster parents were deeply motivated by a religious value largely expressed in the responsibility to care for the poor and less privileged and by personal experiences. These studies indicated better outcomes for children whose foster parents were themselves in care at some time in their life. A possible explanation for this outcome may be due to the fact that they understood the foster children’s pains since they had been in ‘their shoes’ and ‘knew where the shoes hurt.’ This made them be in a better position to be able to relate to and connect with them.

Studies from South Africa suggest a preoccupation with relative fostering. For example, Boning and Ferreira (2013: 519), Pretorius and Ross (2010:470), Fallensen (2013:1003), Dhludhlu and Lombard (2017: 165), Abebe (2014:3) and Snyder (2012:26) document evidence of fostering within the extended family setting. These studies suggested that domestic, familial care is the most preferred option to any other forms of care such as group care or institutional care. Relative or kinship fostering in the extended family have been associated with the high deaths arising from the HIV and AIDS epidemic where many children’s care automatically devolved to their living grandmothers at the demise of their biological parents (van der Westhuizen et al., 2012:467). In most of these placements, the caregiving arrangement is only formalised through the court in order for the grandmothers to be able to access the Foster Care Grant. This is due to the fact that most of the children were already residing in the same house as their grandmothers before the demise of their biological parents (Boning and Ferreira, 2013: 520).

Pretorius and Ross (2010:470,472) discuss further with particular reference to relative or kinship placement. They posit that the possibility of easy adaptation to care due to already existing familiarity, ease of adjusting and coping to change in living arrangement, the need for attachments, bonding and stability have often been raised and considered to be better fostered and promoted by kinship and relative placements. They suggest that these considerations compel placing agencies to favour relative placement over non- relative placements. Kangethe and Kausi (2014:555) resonate with this evidence indicating that child protection social workers and policymakers prefer relative fostering due to issues of

concern with child best interest which is perceived to be likely compromised in non- relative placement.

Further motives for relative child fostering is reported in Simula's (2016:41) South African study to include a passion for children and to see them safe, develop and succeed in life. It also included children's age, HIV status and health of children. The cultural background of the child, gender, the presence of the child's relatives and siblings, and relationship to the child were also reported as motivating factors influencing foster parents decision to foster in South Africa by Hearle and Ruwanpura (2009:427). Other South African studies exploring the motivation for relative child fostering by Richter (2010:2) and Nyasani et al. (2009: 184,189) reported children's age and availability of financial support as instrumental to the decision to provide fostering. The desire for financial benefit from the foster care grant as well as a desire and personal conviction to help and protect orphans and vulnerable children were also reported as principal motivating factors for relative child fostering.

The literature on motivation for fostering reviewed in the above discussion reveals so much about relative child fostering. There is little research that has been done to explore and understand the intrinsic motivations of non-relative foster parents for fostering non-relative foster children. This study attempts to fill this gap. It is important for government departments and child protection organisations to understand the motivations that influence the decision to foster non-relative foster children. Knowledge of this nature is central to being able to develop appropriate responses that ensure the effective recruitment, monitoring and supervision of non-relative foster parents. This would inevitably enhance and promote quality care, the achievement of placement goals culminating ultimately in foster parents' satisfaction and retention. It would also ensure, promote and guarantee the welfare and wellbeing of children in their care. It is important for the state and child welfare and child protection organisations to find innovative ways of incorporating these issues into recruitment and assessment tools in order to translate them into practical service delivery to fostering homes. This would no doubt, in practice, be a desirable component of effective foster care and child protection programmes which could boost the state's response to the care and protection of the country's vulnerable population.



## **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts the social exchange theory and the ecological theory as the conceptual and theoretical framework. The social exchange theory is regarded in the field of family science as very instructive and insightful in explaining the factors influencing the decisions to pursue and form sustain or terminate human and social relationships (Hamon and Bull, 2016:27). The main thesis of the theory is that social behaviour involves social exchanges where people are motivated by rational thoughts in their choice of relationships which they are willing to enter based on their values which they calculate in terms of the pain (cost) and pleasure (rewards). Social exchange theorist posit that people seek profits in their exchanges such that rewards (what they gain from the relationship) are greater than the cost (what they give away or lose in the relationship). Extended to and applied in the context of the foster parent-child relationship, the theory could be used to explain how the reward (satisfaction and sense of fulfilment emanating from heeding a call to serve, pleasure and gratification arising from making a difference in other lives) could be exchanged or forfeited at a cost (time, personal financial and housing resource and capital, love, passion and commitment) in motivating foster parents to decide to provide care for non-relative children in South Africa.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of human development, on the other hand, looks at a child's development within the context of the interconnectedness and interrelationships of forces resident in the person-context transactions and milieu. Bronfenbrenner's theory in its widest and most developed form, stresses human development within the interplay of process-person-context-time (PPCT) model. The Ecological Theory holds that to study a child's development, all forces within the process, person, context and time continuum and the interaction between them must be studied and understood. In this direction, an understanding of human development begins with the understanding of its primary mechanism which according to Bronfenbrenner (2005) is the proximal process. This refers to forms of on-going, relatively stable mutually influencing interaction between an individual which he referred to as an 'active,' evolving biopsychological

human organism and the person, objects and symbols within its immediate external environment or context. This mutually influencing interaction offers the opportunity and platform for participating individuals to learn, understand and assimilate aspects of their cultural norms and social existence essential to survival and continuity. In relation to this study, proximal processes would be equated with the foster child-foster parent and foster parent-case manager relationships and interactions as it pertains to socialization and orientation.

The Ecological Theory was adopted as a framework for this study as it may allow for the gaining of insight into and knowledge of how context and the complexity of human development and experiences can impact a population (non-relative foster parents and their foster children). The Ecological Theory could enable and empower us to examine how foster parents' decision to foster non-relative foster children in De Deur, South Africa could be influenced by foster parents and child's characteristics, adversities and personality traits and other social-cultural factors. These social-cultural factors include poverty, AIDS pandemic, absent father or mother, abuse, neglect, abandonment, income, the larger foster care system, local, national and international laws and regulations, education and other areas of the environment

## **Research Area and Methods**

The study was conducted in De Deur in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The study utilised a qualitative approach. The approach was chosen because it is best suited for studies with the desire to understand the lived experiences of individuals and their intentions within their 'life-world' – in this case, the motivations for choosing to foster non-relative foster children. The population of the study comprised of 60 participants caring for non-relative foster children in the caseload of Vereeniging Child and Family Welfare Society in their De Deur Satellite office. The study sample of twenty foster parents who were providing care to non-relative foster children was selected utilising the non-probability purposive sampling technique. Twenty in-depth individual interviews with the participants with the help of an interview schedule and a focus group discussion consisting of six foster parents were used to collect data. The collected data were analysed using the thematic method of data analysis following the guide by Tesch (in Creswell, 2014:186).

## **Findings**

The findings of the study are presented in this section

### ***Biographical information of participants***

All the twenty foster parents who participated in the study were females who were aged between forty-two years to sixty-seven years. In terms of racial identity, the majority of the foster parents (fifteen) were black Africans, (four) were white and one participant was coloured. The ages of children in their care ranged from one to seventeen years and the number of children ranged from one to seven. Regarding the number of years of experience of fostering, all the participants had been foster parents for more than two years with the highest number of years being thirty-six years. An interesting demographic was that the majority of the white foster parents (three) were caring for black children while one cared for both white and black children. Among the black foster parents, a majority (eight) of Sesotho cultural background and identity cared for children of the same identity while seven foster parents of Zulu cultural background and identity provided care for children of Zulu and Sesotho origin.

Regarding religion, all the participants were Christians with a majority of them (ten) identifying as Pentecostals, five were Catholics, three were Baptists and two were affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church. Majority of the participants (ten) were married and living with their partners, six of the participants were single; three were widowed while one participant was divorced.

### **Motivation for Non-Relative Fostering**

Regarding the motivation to take up the role of fostering non-relative children, four themes emerged which include, fostering as a calling, personal life experiences; desire to make a difference and responding to the great demand for caregivers of vulnerable and at-risk children.

### ***Theme 1: Fostering as a calling***

One of the themes that emerged in the study was that fostering was as a result of divine calling among the participants. The majority (twelve) of the participants reported to having been motivated by a call by God and a sense of divine purpose to serve humanity. The response of one of the foster parent succinctly captured this theme during the interview:

It is a calling. God sent me to care for these children. I didn't just wake up and started to do this. God sent me these little ones over 30 years ago. He sent me to little ones who have got nowhere to go and who nobody wanted. So I took them in and then it just grew from there. Those two are now 31 and 35 (pointing to two grown ladies sitting in the living room who were once in her care). That is how I started and I have remained in the duty ever since and I am enjoying it.

Another foster parent commented that she was motivated by a call from God to take on the care of children in the face of poverty, HIV and AIDS, child abuse, neglect and child abandonment plaguing the South African society. She said,

I was motivated and called by the Lord to look after these children and serve them and the society in this capacity. This is a divine service to the sick, poor, abandoned and abused in the society and only God can also give you the heart for it. You cannot do this without God because He is the one who looks after us all and provides the means for us to take care of these children.

Another participant in the focus group discussion who was fostering for the first time and caring for just one child also described her fostering role and duty as a calling from God. She said:

You know what? I think this is a call from God to help the less privileged ones in the community who don't have families and people that can care for them. I know I love children but the day I saw this boy in my office when they first brought him, something just touched my heart and said, 'you really have to take care of this boy.' I immediately fell in love with him because I know the Lord sent him to me to look after him since his family couldn't. I am just obeying his command and know I will get my reward from him.

This statement below by one of the foster parents further revealed this theme:

This is a vision that God gave to us. God said I and my husband should take care of other people to help them fulfil their destiny. I just want to fulfil the call and vision of God to help others who are in need of help. I feel that is my service to God and society and I know He is the rewarder.

### ***Theme 2: Personal Life Experiences***

One other factor that emerged in the study as a motive for fostering non-relative foster children was due to personal life experiences. Five participants mentioned that they were in alternative care before. One of the participants said,

I decided to care for these abandoned children because I too was abandoned by my mother when I was a baby. I only met and knew her when I was 18 years. I grew up in the rural area in the care of a non-family member and life was really hard for me. I had always lived with the desire to help children who had similar circumstance as mine when I was a child. So when I came to Gauteng and had the opportunity, I decided to take these children and give them that love and care and security which I didn't have when I was growing up.

Similarly, another participant's narrative during the focus group discussion revealed the same sentiment as the above participant:

I decided to care for these children because I was rejected and abandoned by my mother and so I don't want to see any child suffer what I suffered when I was a child. I don't want children to pass through what I passed through in life.

Furthermore, the theme of fostering due to life experiences surfaced in the responses of a foster parent who was caring for two neglected and abused boys because she could not bear male children. She reported that she chose to care for the two boys because she wanted sons as she was not able to bear her husband male children. She said:

I took these two boys because I always wanted sons and I had reached the age where I could no longer have children. I had a medical problem

I could no longer have more children. I have two daughters and always wanted male children and I think God brought these children to me in answer to my prayer. I believe God gave me this opportunity to raise these two boys for him.

The other participant caring for children with physical and mental disabilities reported that she was motivated to provide care due to her having a child with a physical disability. She made this statement in her response:

My motivation for deciding to care for children with physical and mental disability is strongly influenced by the fact that I have a child with physical disability. I know the challenges they go through in terms of the rejection, discrimination, stigma, and at times torture and the rest. Since I know from experience how to care for their peculiar needs, I decided to take them in and care for them so that I can give them love and the same attention as my child.

### ***Theme 3: Fostering to make a difference in the lives of children***

From the analysis of data it further emerged that the participants fostered the non-relative children because they wanted to make a difference in the lives of these children. This theme came up in the responses of three participants:

My motivation stems from my desire to help my community and society care for the less privileged in order to ensure that children are well cared for so that society could be free from crime and other social ills that may result from a lack of care and safeguard of these vulnerable group.

I started caring for these children because of the love I have for children and more so because I wanted to make a difference in their lives and help humanity.

I started caring for children because of my desire to ensure that I do my best to see that there was no needy child out there without shelter and roof over his or her head and food to eat while I am sleeping comfortably in my house. I don't want to see a needy and hungry child

suffer when I can help to provide. This is why I decided to help to do my little best to make a difference.

#### ***Theme 4: Fostering in response to the great need for carers***

Another theme that emerged from the data from the study as a motivation was the response to the perceived great need for caregivers. This came out from the responses of four participants:

I started caring for children because of my desire to ensure that I do my best to see that there was no needy child out there without shelter and roof over his or her head and food to eat while I am sleeping comfortably in my house. I don't want to see a needy and hungry child suffer when I can help to provide. This is why I decided to help to do my little best to make a difference.

I became motivated and involved with fostering 18 years ago when I first became aware of how bad the HIV/AIDS situation was. I saw how big the need was to provide home and shelter, care and love to children whose parents had died because of the epidemic. I was not happy with the way many of the children born to deceased HIV patients were treated in hospitals and so I decided to volunteer to take them in my care.

My interest and desire to foster non-related foster children arose due to the great need in South Africa considering the biting poverty and abuse of children. Since I can afford shelter and other material things essential for the good life that their parents and families could not afford, I decided to offer this help to make sure these children have somewhere to stay and feel loved and cared for.

#### **Discussion**

Important and useful insights and information pointing to intrinsic and altruistic motives for fostering were deduced from data emanating from individual interviews and focus group discussion with the participants in this study. It was clear from the participants' responses and narratives that they took up their fostering role and duties largely because of their religious affiliations of being Christians. All the participants seemed to suggest that they were fulfilling a divine mandate and service and regarded their calling by God to serve as foster parents to non-relative

foster children as obligatory by assent and felt committed to fulfilling this role. To the majority of the participants, the awareness of being foster parents as a result of a call from God and a service was seen in the study to be responsible for the resilience, commitment and zeal which the participants possessed. This made the foster parents able to cope with the enormous challenges they might have faced caring for non-relative children. This finding that shows that foster parents were motivated to foster non-relative children as a sense of calling and purpose is in line with what was also found in other South African studies by Akintola (2010:59) and Du Toit et al. (2016:395). This finding is further supported by a study by Blythe et al (2012:15) on non-relative fostering done in the United Kingdom. These two studies found that foster parents who provided long-term foster care felt they were uniquely called and equipped on a mission to provide child-centred care. This was characterised by self-sacrifice which was often normally emotionally intensive and time-consuming.

Personal life experiences of participants were found to also inform the decision to care for non-relative foster children. This was in order to offer opportunities to the vulnerable and at-risk children that they lacked in order to avert the deplorable and degradable circumstances and condition of life that they had experienced. Some of the foster parents who reported this as their motivation suggested that it was only a natural thing to do and believed it to be in line with divine expectations. They indicated that it was their way of giving back to the community and thanking God and showing appreciation to him for sending people to rescue them when they were in similar situations of life. Findings that foster parents were motivated to provide care by their personal life experiences align with the non-relative study by Malm and Welti (2010:185) in the United States of America.

Further intrinsic and altruistic motive for fostering was obvious in the desire to make a difference in the lives of the children. This was due to the desire to help the poor and vulnerable children who lacked means of surviving and leading normal lives due to their dysfunctional family background. They wanted to contribute to the good of the community and society at large by offering to foster these less privileged children. This finding resonates with earlier non-relative studies by Du Toit et al. (2016:396) in South Africa and Rodlach (2009:428,429) in Zimbabwe which found that foster parents are indeed motivated to care due to the



awareness of the need for carers of vulnerable and at-risk children with a view to making a difference in their lives, thereby helping the community and society at large.

In addition to these motivations for fostering was the desire to respond to the great and urgent need for caregivers of vulnerable and other at-risk children in the community and country. This was viewed by participants as a moral obligation particularly considering the HIV and AIDS context, poverty and abuse. Some of the foster parents alluded that the reality of this made them choose to care for children no matter their cultural differences, colour, race or relationship except just to help them have better lives as normal human beings.

What was interesting and striking from participants' responses regarding care motives was the fact that all of them seemed to suggest that their caretaking role arose from a selfless desire to make a difference in the children's lives and not for personal gains. Their motive was found to be no doubt connected to and influenced by their religious beliefs and values as Christians. This study discovered that it provided a buffering and cushioning effect on the negative impact of the care challenges such as elevated stress and consideration to cease fostering. The motivation of foster parents in this regard enabled them to continue to adopt a positive posture towards their job and foster children in the face of the hard realities of the care experience. This is a crucial finding as it has important value for discussion regarding the recruitment and retention of this care category.

There is no doubt that the social exchange and the ecological theories this study adopts have enormous relevance and application. The social exchange theory fosters our understanding of what influences foster parents to decide to elect to provide care for non-relative foster children. It explains how all the rewards which include satisfaction and sense of fulfilment emanating from heeding a call to serve, pleasure and gratification arising from making a difference in other lives override the costs which include burden to take time to care, personal financial and housing resource and capital. These rewards have contributed to the motivation of foster parents to decide to provide care for non-relative children in South Africa. The ecological theory provides insights into understanding how that the family and individuals do not exist in isolation but within the wider society comprised of different layers of interacting influences. This may enable us to comprehend how the

interactions between different layers of settings determine the content, nature and form of child and family adversities and foster parents' decision and capacity to respond in providing care in order to secure the protection and ensure the welfare, wellbeing and development of children.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper concludes that foster parents of non-relative children have good intentions in taking up their role, at least as shown in this study. Due to the good intentions of the non-relative foster parents, it is more likely that there is an achievement of better and more positive outcomes for the children and overall placement stability. This is because the child's best interests are at the core of this fostering arrangement. The notion of apathy and suspicions surrounding this care arrangement can, therefore, be rejected. It is acknowledged that this qualitative study is from a small scale, therefore, the results cannot be generalised to the whole population of non-relative foster parents. However, it has provided a basis for arguments which is essential in promoting the development of effective strategies which are crucial in enhancing care outcomes for children and promoting stability, recruitment and retention. It is thus recommended that the selection and assessment criteria for non-relative foster parents should be based on the examination of their motivations to ensure foster care placement success and retention.

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## Declaration

The article is original and has not been published elsewhere.