



# EXPLORING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE INSIDE OF FOSTER CARE PROGRAMS: THE CASE OF BETHANY CHRISTIAN SERVICES

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## **Abstract**

Title: Exploring Social Work practice inside of Foster Care programs: The case of Bethany Christian Services

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Keywords: Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC), Foster care, Social Work, Decision making, Bethany Christian Services

The aim of this study was to explore how social work practice within the Ethiopian context was practiced. The study fundamentally explored what the roles of social work practitioners in this area and the decision-making process of these practitioners entailed. As such using Criterion Sampling four practitioners who worked in the pioneer NGO in Foster care by the name of Bethany Christian Services were interviewed. The study chose a qualitative design in order to capture the full picture of the experiences of these practitioners. Pragmatism perspective in collaboration with the Decision-making Ecology were deployed as the theoretical framework to help specify and shape the study. The data was collected using extended fully structured phone interviews. The study revealed that Bethany had more than 10 years of experience within foster care where it has built extensive expertise. The organization first recruits families, conducts home assessment, then proceeds with the various extensive trainings which Bethany has through time curated. Once qualified the family then proceeds to the matching process where the decision making is performed in a multidisciplinary team after which the placement commences. Additionally, there is extensive research and knowledge sitting within the organization that is now being exploited by the government in order to revise the existing alternative childcare guideline. This new initiative has become the third foster care program within the organization.

## **Acronym**

MA: Master of Arts

BA: Bachelor of Arts

NGO: Nongovernmental Organization

MoWCY: Ministry of women, children, and Youth

MoWA: Ministry of Women Affairs

ACRWC: African Charter for the rights

## **Operational Definition**

*Community:* For the purpose of this study community is defined as a group of people living in a shared geographic area that know each other and meet semi-regularly for a shared purpose most likely for a religious gathering or Idir meeting.

*Idir:* is a form of traditional social Insurance in Ethiopia established by members of a community where a monthly allocated amount of money is gathered for the purpose of emergencies mostly death.

*Alternative Childcare:* Any form of care given to a child outside of being cared for by biological parents.

*Childcare Institution:* is the most common form of care in Ethiopia which is an establishment operated by the government, an NGO, or faith-based institution where children live in a group with paid caregivers. It may also be called orphanage, children's village, residential care, or institutionalization (FHI, 2010).

*Institutionalization:* the process of putting children into childcare institutions or residential care.

*Community based Care:* For the purpose of this study community-based care will be an umbrella term used to refer to any and all informal cares carried out without intervention from a relevant administrative body. It is a branch of alternative childcare which notably includes methods of care inside of the extended family (kinship care), and care of siblings by eldest child who is 15 or older (child headed household) (MoWA, 2009).

*Traditional Childcare:* is a branch of community-based care in Ethiopia where a child is taken in by a member of the community who is not related by blood and raised in a familial environment (MoWA, 2009).

*Foster Care:* Foster care is a temporary placement of a child in a family other than birth/legal parents until either reunification, adoption or another form of permanent alternative care method is found. Foster care here is used in a formal and narrow sense referring to where children go through an NGO and get placed at a Foster Family whom they do not know.

## **Chapter One**

### **Background**

UNICEF defines an orphan as “as a child under 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents to any cause of death”. Abebe (2010) writes that orphanhood in the context of many African countries does not mean children with no parents rather children who do not have the protection of family (nuclear or extended) or traditional social safety net. He believes that this definition helps explain the circumstances under which the majority of children live in.

According to the United Nations report of 2007, Ethiopia was estimated to have about 4.9 million orphaned children under the age of 17 (UNICEF, 2007). In its 2012 estimate this number decreased to 4.5 million (UNICEF, 2012). In 2014, this number seems to have grown back to 4.8 million putting Ethiopia in the top ten countries with highest orphan population according to the Humanitarian and social research center report (as cited by Relief Web, 2014). Among these statistics 77,000 was the estimated number of child-headed households in Ethiopia in 2005 which is the second highest number in sub-Saharan Africa second to Zimbabwe (FHI, 2010).

Ethiopia has a prevalent number of children residing on its streets in search of daily sustenance and survival resulted by the lack of enrollment into any form of alternative care making them vulnerable to physical, mental, and sexual exploitations (Hailu, 2010). Street children who are not registered in any kind alternative care are estimated by the UN Children’s Fund to be about 600 thousand in the country and more than 100 thousand in the capital, Addis Ababa, alone (UNICEF, 2005).

These children are being denied of their most basic right of the provision of food, shelter, and care. In case of children being parentless the African Charter discusses of the right of children to access alternative family care available in the context (ACRWC, 1990).

### **Causes**

Alem & Laha argue that the problem of streetism arises largely from migration from rural to urban towns. Streets of urban cities with their higher economic opportunities seem more attractive than poverty stricken rural towns. They argue that the number one push factor to streetism is poverty while runaways resulting from violence come a close second.

Family Health International on the other hand, accounts the factors for the prevalence of orphaned and/or unaccompanied children in Ethiopia to HIV/AIDS and related illnesses, as well as severe poverty (FHI, 2010). Abebe further explains that sub-Saharan African countries are still suffering the consequences of the AIDS pandemic as parents were killed off by AIDS leaving tens of millions of children orphaned. Thus, creating the orphan crisis (Abebe, 2010).

### **Alternative Childcare**

Childcare institutions in Ethiopia started during the severe drought of 1984-85 as an immediate solution for orphaned children (FHI, 2010). These institutions provide residential care services. Findings of current studies including the ones conducted by Save the Children in several countries show the harsh reality of the negative consequences of institutionalization on children's full life trajectory. Due to the literature on institutionalization and the low success rate of childcare institutions in Ethiopia, the government has made institutionalization a last choice when it comes to a form of alternative care for children. It is leading by example by reducing governmental childcare institutions. Currently there are only three governmental childcare institutions left (FHI, 2010).

Therefore, as the world is trying to move from institutionalization to community-based care alternatives the Ethiopian government is also trying to follow along and has shifted its focus to the community-based approaches. Deinstitutionalizing children and reintegrating them with society has been of foremost importance to the state as childcare institutions decrease (Save the Children, 2001).

The other main alternative care option that was being widely practiced in Ethiopia was international adoption until its subsequent ban in 2018. This ban left many people questioning what will happen to the numerous children that can no longer be adopted abroad and if as a result society is able to take responsibility for taking care of its own orphaned and vulnerable children (Alula, 2018).

Alula stresses that one of the main characters of Ethiopia is its strong culture of close tied community which manifests itself in caring for any member of the community that is in need including orphans. With international adoption out of the way the most prevalent type of care

now is an informal community-based care such as kinship and traditional care where children are taken in usually by relatives, members of the community or religious institutions (Alula, 2018).

According to the Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey (EDHS) of 2000, 18% of all Ethiopian households are caring for an orphan (as cited by Radeny and Bunkers, 2009). This high number is attributed to the ability of community-based care to allow children to move from family to family to better receive care and gain access to resources without the involvement of the state, legal processes, or formal fostering procedures which can be seen both as an advantage and disadvantage. Such a care can be dangerous since there are no assurances of the child's safety or protection since the state is utterly unaware of the whereabouts of these children making them susceptible to violence and labor exploitations (Abebe, 2010). This type of care also has various advantages for children being raised in a familial environment where they can be cared for by people who uphold the same culture, social values, and practices as their parents. Children would be raised by their own language, religion, and most likely village. It is a traditionally accepted, and cheap alternative that alleviates the burden from the state (Alula, 2018).

With residential care bumped to the bottom due to its multifaceted shortcomings and international adoption fully halted, the few alternative childcare methods that are left are community-based care, domestic adoption, and a bit of foster care. There were way too many orphaned children while the various alternative care provisions were too few in comparison even before the campaign towards deinstitutionalization and the ban on international adoption. Orphaned and vulnerable children in Ethiopia thus started to fall through the crack and gap between the available alternative childcare forms ready to take in children and the number of orphaned and vulnerable children enlarged. Therefore, there is a dire need to strengthen and devise alternative care strategies that will provide better care services and result in better outcomes.

### **Purpose and Aim**

This specific topic was picked because it ticked a lot of boxes in terms of lack of literature in Ethiopia in this field; and the timing of the study as it can aid in the current foster care discussions, help shape the dialogue, and in some small way contribute to the knowledge base of the academic community.

The researcher proposed this research in order to identify the level and extent of work being done with regard to formal foster care in Ethiopia. The research first and foremost assesses the foster care programs available at Bethany Christian services. It explores the strengths and weaknesses of the programs while asking seasoned practitioners to predict the possible opportunities and hurdles to come, in the hopes of informing future programs the road ahead with respect to the relative newness of foster care.

This research hopes to raise awareness about differing alternative care methods while highlighting formal foster care. It hopes to dive into the contextual underpinnings of the country's nitty gritty and explore the various traditional childcare methods in literature. It hopes to inform on the forms of foster care that do exist in Ethiopia and what the practice in this area looks like.

After the conclusion of this research, it wishes to highlight further gaps in research and open the door for researchers to explore this arena. This research also hopes to contribute to the foster care system that is currently being set up in Ethiopia. It has high hopes that the result of this research will in some small way serve as an input to the formal foster care system and also add knowledge to foster care services in Ethiopia, as a result improving the lives of these children in desperate need of basic care.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims to investigate the existing foster care practice in Ethiopia in the hopes of generalizing their best practice and aid in the setting up of a country wide system (Khoo & Olsson, 2020). As such the research questions need to be posed carefully keeping in mind what the research wants to accomplish in the end; what the preferred theories are; and who the target population is or who is accessible.

Therefore, the bullet points below show the carefully selected research questions that will shape the entire research:

- What are the roles of social work practitioners within foster care programs?
- What does the decision-making process ascertain?

## **General Objective**

To explore the practice in formal foster care programs with regards to outcomes, and decision making within the context of the COVID pandemic.

## **Specific Objectives**

- To identify the different roles practitioners, play within foster care programs while exploring their daily tasks and overall practice.
- To explore the decision-making process that leads to the placement of children in foster care.

## **Chapter Two**

This chapter will focus mainly on detailing the context in which the research is set. It will go through every available alternative childcare type in detail in order to draw a picture of the country's overall childcare structure. As one type of these childcare alternatives, foster care will also be reviewed on what it looks like so far in Ethiopia in its relative short age. To further make the picture clearer social work as a field in Ethiopia will be explored. Finally, the legal framework will be discussed.

### **Existing alternative Childcare Structure**

As detailed in the background Ethiopia has quite a high number of orphans forcing the country to procure a range of alternative childcare types to care for its children. Abebe (2010) relates the need for alternative care to be caused by two major reasons. The first cause is orphanhood created by the orphan crisis which hit Ethiopia especially hard because an entire generation of parents killed by the AIDS pandemic. The second cause is abandonment of the child at birth. While Russia's child abandonments are said to have been mostly caused by parental social problems and China's the one child policy, Ethiopia's is most commonly associated with severe poverty (Miller et. al., 2008; Cohen et. al., 2008).

### **Childcare Institution**

In 2001, there were reportedly 34,000 orphans that were being cared for by 112 nongovernmental and governmental organizations country wide (Save the Children, 2001). Out of these institutions 87 of them with 6503 children as of 2008 provide long term care with no intention to find and place the children into other alternative cares. The FHI collected data from these 87 institutions of which 80% are being operated by nongovernmental organizations while 16% are run by religious organizations and 3% by the government. (FHI, 2010).

FHI (2010) criticizes childcare institutions on not adhering to the minimum standards of the National alternative childcare guideline. Institutions are seen not fulfilling the necessary facilities and day to day services required of a viable childcare institution. The lack of structure and procedure resulted in differing services or in some cases no psychological or social services to be given to children. It also resulted in varying child-staff ratio.

Care is dependent on the financial resources available for an institution and the lack of it compromises the quality of care. We can see the illustration of this through a high child to caregiver ratio forcing caregivers to carry for a very high number of children making the workload excessive resulting in a high turnover rate of caregivers. The consequence such an environment is then children who are not well cared for, overworked staff eager to leave the job, and children without a long-term primary caregiver likely resulting in developmental issues from the lack of primary attachment that may last a lifetime (FHI, 2010).

The findings of a study conducted in collaboration by directors of SOS children's villages in six countries show an alarming increase in the number of childcare institutions in many African countries starting from the 1990s while the trend is seen to be opposite in other parts of the world. The study also expresses its concern over the majority of childcare institutions being reliant on the finances of private resources abroad. It highlights that outsourcing the issue of childcare has also made the government surrender its authority to shape the quality and/or quantity of its childcare institutions. In the case of Ethiopia, the government makes no financial contribution to nongovernmental or religious childcare institutions. These institutions are funded by donors from developed countries both individuals and associations from private donations, funding from businesses, international organizations to child sponsorships (Chaitkin, et. al., 2017).

The practice of volunteerism is another concern the study raised. It is a juxtaposition that childcare institutions need people who want to pay to come and volunteer yet they are untrained foreigners who come for only a short time. The practice of volunteerism is relied upon to secure financial support while the attachment theory explains the lifelong repercussions of children forming primary attachments with non-permanent figures in their lives. When institutions allow the practice of volunteers, they gain funds to meet children's immediate needs, yet risking their long-term wellbeing (Chaitkin, et. al., 2017).

The report also explains the difficulty of convincing private donors to support family strengthening and preventive programs over that of alternative cares. Therefore, sustaining residential cares in place to the point of the concept of 'orphanage tourism' being an attraction in countries like Nepal, Cambodia, and now starting in Myanmar. The study notes the existence a system that encourages institutionalization due to volunteers who are eager to spend their money

to work at orphanages and private institutions that want to donate to them while strengthening and preventative programs are indirectly discouraged (Chaitkin, et. al., 2017).

### **Wellbeing of children in Childcare Institutions**

The study conducted by the FHI of the 87 childcare institutions revealed that the children were being facing discrimination perpetuated by community members. They were also experiencing various psychosocial problems as well as facing physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and exploitation within the institution. In addition, adults who were institutionalized felt that they were not equipped with the skills required to cope with the life outside the walls of the institution. They felt like they were lacking in life skills such as financial management (FHI, 2010).

The participants stressed that though basic needs were fulfilled, quality of life is extremely limited. Most mentioning that socialization, love, care and even learning life skills would have been better in a care mimicking a familial environment such as foster care. Respondents associated institutionalization with a number of physical, psychological, and social consequences. Many were physically abused by caregivers including one respondent acknowledging that he/she witnessed a fellow child being raped. Psychologically the findings showed that the lack of attachment and love resulted in behavioral problems, and mental illnesses. Institutionalized children also never got provided the opportunity to be socialized in the ways of what is considered normal in the community, thus acted different, knew different and had the perception of a dichotomy between ‘us’ (People in the institution) and ‘them’ (the community beyond the walls) making assimilation after institutionalization especially difficult (FHI, 2010).

The findings of the FHI study suggest that the conditions of foster care far surpass the conditions under which children are being raised in childcare institutions. Thus, foster care is deemed as an acceptable form of alternative care especially since it fits so well with the already existing traditional childcare system of the country. The report also highlights the need of alternative care that attempts to replicate the familial environment under which children should be raised for their long-term wellbeing (FHI, 2010).

## **Intercountry Adoption**

As Russia and China became new economic powers in the mid-2000s, intercountry adoptions from these countries fell and Ethiopia rose to fill the gap. The sudden surge in cases and agency fees invited in corruption. Biological families were paid, told falsified stories and coerced into legally giving their children up. Courts were overwhelmed with staggering numbers of cases of agency frauds, confused parents, and lost children. These sequences of events led to intercountry adoption's decline and inevitable demise (LaPlante, 2012).

Since the start of intercountry adoption in the early 1990 there have been reportedly more than 15,000 adopted Ethiopian children living in the US alone. In just the year of 2007 three thousand Ethiopian children were adopted by international families. But the success of intercountry adoption in Ethiopia was short lived as its decline began in 2011 as the Ministry of Women Affairs decreased the number of cases to be reviewed by 90%. New regulations were set to ensure that all orphaned and abandoned children first go to governmental childcare institutions and from there start the adoption process to make sure that private actors would not be able to intervene, and each case would be thoroughly investigated (LaPlante, 2012).

Despite the government's efforts to better the adoption process, many cases were coming out of the woodworks crowding the courts and the media. In 2011, the news of a couple who murdered their young daughter and abused their son made headlines in the US. The couple adopted both of their children from Ethiopia and were convicted of manslaughter (BBC News, 2013).

In 2016, Denmark banned adoptions from Ethiopia following a film made by the name of 'girl in return' which gained global recognition. It depicts a story of a young 10-year-old girl who was adopted with her little sister by a Danish family after being lied to by an adoption agency and separated from her family. After living with her adoptive family for a year and a half, she got removed from the house by the municipality and placed in foster care while her sister stayed there. The movie shows her journey towards revoking the adoption and getting reunited with her biological family after 6 years as well as explores the struggles of a young adolescent who is stuck between two worlds (Aljazeera, 2019).

Following many such cases intercountry adoption got banned in 2018 by a decision in parliament. The ban is expected to encourage family reunification and reintegration and promote

domestic adoption. This law is backed by international documents as both the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 21B) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Article 24B) state that any country who has ratified these documents should consider intercountry adoption as a last resort after exploring every means of alternative care in the child's country of origin (UNCRC, 1990; ACRWC, 1990).

### **Traditional Childcare**

Beckstorm, author of the earliest and most cited article piece regarding Ethiopia's differing traditional childcare, wrote that historically communities have always cared for their own children. If a child's biological parents die, then relatives would step up and take on the responsibilities of caring for the child. The likelihood of a child not having any blood relatives no matter how distantly related is low. But even in such rare cases a member of the community maybe elders would take responsibility for the care of the child (Beckstorm, 1972; Getahun, 2011).

The concept of taking in a child is said to have emerged originally from the need of couple who is unable to conceive, to have an heir to their wealth to maintain their lineage (Beckstorm, 1972). In such cases the parent child relationship is seen as mutually beneficial as the child (usually male) receives a home and all the benefits that come with being a member of that particular family while the parents get an heir to their wealth, a helper, and someone to take care of them when they get old (Getahun, 2011).

Godparenthood is understood a bit differently in Ethiopia. In the Orthodox Christian faith godparents are chosen for a newborn before the baptism. The main responsibility of being a godparent is to take care of the child in case anything is to happen to the parents (Beckstorm, 1972). This practice serves as a form of social safety net or a first line of defense for children who become orphans.

A vast majority of Ethiopian household care for children they did not give birth to. A factor accounting to this as presented by Beckstorm is the strict religiousness of the country. It is believed to be righteous to take in an orphan child. It was therefore common for parents who could not care for a child to leave newborns on the doorsteps of good families who are able to care for them. Not taking in such a child is highly unlikely, frowned upon and judged by people

of the community (Beckstorm, 1972). Due to such factors Ethiopia did not have many children in need of formal alternative care methods until the AIDS pandemic and urbanization came around.

Urbanization of the growing cities of Ethiopia are resulting in high levels of rural to urban migration. As such tracking relatives of children whose parents are either deceased or unable to be found became virtually impossible. With Ethiopian laws that make it hard for fathers of children born out of wedlock to pay for the maintenance, more and more young girls living in the cities without a social support who do not have the financial capacity to care for a child abandoned their children on the doorsteps of churches (Beckstorm, 1972).

### **Types of Traditional Childcare**

Within the institute of traditional childcare two ethnicities have set the stride, the Oromo and Amhara. The Oromo version of childcare is the most known and practiced in the country with the Amhara following close behind.

Guddifachaa is a concept in Ethiopia that originated from the Oromo ethnicity, in the early 1800s. It is a form of adoption where a child is integrated into a family who will fulfill all of his/her physical, psychological, and emotional needs (Negeri, 2006). Guddifachaa was adopted into the 1960 civil code (Civil Code, 1960). The law states that the Guddifachaa child shall get all the benefits of being a child in the family joined. Benefits like inheritance, marriage, status, etc. It originally started as a cultural method of problem solving for families who were unable to bear children and others unable to care for their own children (Negeri, 2006).

There is an official ceremony in Guddifachaa where the family giving up their child and the family receiving it including members of the community and elders gather. The ceremony symbolizes the end of life with biological family and the beginning of a new one with new family. During the ceremony, the new parents swear in front of everyone present, with elders as officiators, to integrate the child into their family, fulfill all needs, and reap all benefits. The vow made in front of the elders is binding according to the system of government known as the Gada system through which the Oromo people have ruled themselves for centuries (Negeri, 2006; Getahun, 2011).

Negeri (2006) criticizes the lack of sufficient exploration of Guddifachaa as an intervention potential. Though the concept is included in the law the promotion and growth are limited. He

criticizes the role of NGOs in introducing the western version of domestic adoption as a new institution and imposing it onto people instead of strengthening the accepted traditional institutions that exist informally within the community. The results could have been astronomically positive if the existing traditional structures were researched, understood, and been used as a foundation by NGOs.

On the other hand, there are three different types of traditional childcare frequented in the Amhara region. Madego, Yemar Lij and Yetut lij are quite similar to that of Guddifachaa and all mean similar things but have different names and slightly varying rituals differing according to the community it is practiced in.

Yetut Lij will be explored in this section. The phrase Yetut Lij means breast child and as the name suggests the ceremony involves of ‘the parent to be’ putting a breast or a thumb into honey and the child sucking it. This ritual symbolizes the parent child relationship (Getahun, 2011)

There is a bit of a confusion on what the institute of Yetut Lij entails exactly. Getahun (2010) and Beckstorm (1972) explain that Yetut Lij is the same as Guddifachaa with the only difference being the ethnicity to carry it out and the ceremony through which it is performed. Negari’s understanding is quite different. He explains Yetut Lij, or more specifically Madego as a temporary foster care where the children have no emotional attachment to the family and have no right to the inheritance or other possessions. Another study by FHI, describes this institution as having religious connotations where a child is taken in as a sign of the righteousness of the family therefore, their souls being surely saved. In this case, the child is not treated the same as the biological children, but the care is permanent, and the child is part of that family (FHI, 2010).

Traditional childcare is not without fault. Respondents in the FHI (2010) study noted that many children in traditional childcare are seen as second-class citizens. They are not treated as biological children and thus exposed to labor exploitations and abuse. In addition, since children taken in through most traditional childcare are not known by relevant authorities, they have no recognized right to be in that family in the eyes of the law.

### **Foster Care**

Foster care is understood differently across the world with countries forging their understanding of it thus creating variations in its description. Even in terms of permanency some identify it as

short-term care while others see it as a long term one. But what is known about foster care in many African and Asian countries like Ethiopia is that it is a relatively new phenomenon being introduced by various international NGOs as a new form of alternative care. This introduction is meeting opposition in countries like Nigeria where the culture is resisting foster care seeing it as a Western imposition which regards traditional childcare as backward and seeks to replace it (Chaitkin, 2017).

The Ethiopian national alternative care guideline states the objective of foster care in the country as follows: “to secure a substitute and temporary familial environment for orphans and vulnerable children on a temporary basis, till a child is reunified with his/her extended family or placed in other permanent alternative childcare program” (MoWA, 2009, p.28).

A study was made by the collaboration of the international SOS Children’s Village and the European Union composed of a comprehensive report about various alternative childcare methods in different countries. The report especially explores foster care and what the experience of seven countries in three different continents look like (Chaitkin, 2017).

NGOs have attempted to introduce foster care in countries like Chile, Ecuador, Indonesia, Ethiopia, etc. But it has been limited to just pilot projects because of the little attention that is being given to how these programs can be scaled up to a state level in cooperation with the government. But governments in countries like Indonesia and Ethiopia have shown interest in developing a statewide foster care program (Chaitkin, 2017).

Similar to childcare institutions this report also criticizes where resources are being allocated to. It ponders upon the amount of resources being spent on monthly allowance for the foster child; the investment made into recruitment and follow ups; wages for staff that run the project, provide trainings, and sustain the foster program. If these resources were directed towards supporting the birth family, it may not have been necessary to pour these resources into carrying out a successful foster family program (Chaitkin, 2017).

### **Foster care in Ethiopia**

Bethany Christian Services describes a window of opportunity that opened in 2009 as the first ever alternative childcare guideline was published when the Ethiopian government recognized the problem of orphan crisis and institutionalization became more adamant. The document views

institutionalization as a care of last resort while accepting community-based childcare as a superior option in cost effectiveness. Seizing this opportunity this Nongovernmental organization launched Ethiopia's first Foster to adopt program in 2010 (Bethany Christian Services, 2011).

This project is designed specifically to promote adoption in a society that is new to adopting a child that is not a relative and is not within the same community. It is named a foster to adopt program because fostering is not an end on its own, the permanency within adoption is expected to be the end (Bethany Christian Services, 2011).

Bethany chose Christian churches to recruit foster families because the agency itself is faith based and assumed that least amount of resistance would be met due to the biblical values of religious people. Due to the collectivist culture of the country the social obligation people feel tend to be restricted to the community or ethnicity they are a part of. Though the community takes care of its own through traditional childcare alleviating the need for formal alternative care it also does not feel responsibility for children of other ethnicities. Thus, the city of Adama was chosen for the pilot project because they were found to be more willing, ready, and able. Bethany looked to ten churches in the region and was able to recruit more than 110 families (Bethany Christian Services, 2011).

The long-term goal of Bethany within this project had always been to aid the Ethiopian government in developing the infrastructure and system that would allow for the practice of foster care and domestic adoption throughout the country. After 10 years in this service Bethany's foster care program was able to practically show nongovernmental and governmental agencies of the viability of such an alternative care option in Ethiopia. The success of the pilot project according to Bethany can be turned into a replicable model (Bethany Christian Services, 2011).

It is important to note that a detailed look into their project description reveals that the work they do seems to be interlinked with the Christian faith. The document describes evangelism and ministry as suggestions provided by participants when asked 'where the partnership created by Bethany and faith communities can lead to?' from which foster families were recruited. Each one of the placements are performed at the church through a ceremony (Bethany Christian Services, 2011).

## **Social Work in Ethiopia**

The school of social work originally opened in 1959 by the emperor of Ethiopia as many African countries were being introduced to the field. The school then closed in 1979 when the country fell into a socialist regime. As with many socialist countries of the time the government was the only one responsible of fulfilling the needs of its people. The school then reopened in 2004 after 30 years of being closed. Hence, currently social work is a newly reemerging field in Ethiopia with only 16 years of running (Kebede, 2019).

Due to the field's history, there is a significant shortage of social workers. Measures were taken at different times to alleviate this problem one of which was to train volunteers of different educational backgrounds, those with only high school diplomas or those with no educational certificate at all and deploy them to practice as social workers. Hailu (2013) found that according to his study only 37% of practicing social workers in one of the capital's sub cities would be considered professional with at least the qualification of a diploma while 7% are appropriately trained as psychologists, social workers, and counselors. Hence, currently in Ethiopia social work is being practiced by personnel who are not trained with the theories, skills, and ethics that social workers are expected to hold up.

When it comes to trained social work professionals, Hailu (2013) criticizes the social work in continental Africa for having its education and models imported from the west. He criticizes the complete ignorance of indigenous knowledge and skill. He also warns against the current practice of Eurocentric social work which does not put into consideration the context in which it is attempting to be implemented. Graduates of Social work are reported saying that many of the theories in training were not relevant or applicable in the social and cultural context of Ethiopia.

To summarize, this study while exploring the decision-making processes of social work practitioners, will need to keep in mind *the educational background of the practitioners*, and *the contextual knowledge base* that shaped their practice. These social work practitioners regardless of their educational background or qualification therefore are the population of this study.

## **Legal and Policy Framework**

In this section what is deemed as the most relevant documents internationally, continentally, and nationally with regards to the welfare of a child are reviewed. These specific documents are

chosen on two criteria, one because they are ratified in Ethiopia and are accepted as law. Two, because they refer to foster care or some form of alternative care which was considered relevant for this research.

The three documents are seen mirroring each other in issues such as child participation, right of child to alternative care, intercountry adoption, choice of alternative care on the basis of background, etc.

### **UNCRC, ACRWC, and National Alternative Childcare Guideline**

The UNCRC states that children have the right to be provided with alternative care when their family environment is temporarily or permanently taken away from them (UNCRC, Article 20). Unfortunately, the only national legal document that makes mention of alternative childcare and gets in detail about each care type is the alternative childcare guideline.

The guideline explains the chain of responsibilities in the care formation. Biological parents are the first in line who are responsible for a child. If they are unable to carry out their duties, extended family members are next in line. During such cases no special forms or notification for governmental offices or such are necessary to take a child in who is related by blood in need of a home. Finally, different governmental or nongovernmental organizations take on the care responsibility and are expected to act on behalf of the best interest of the child (MoWA, 2009).

When it comes to foster care as one option of alternative care, the guideline describes foster care as a temporary institution where responsibility of a child is shared between the foster family care organization and foster family. The law demands that this partnership starts by being solidified through the signing of a placement agreement which has to be done beforehand (MoWA, 2009).

The placement agreement as supported by the Ethiopian law has laid down certain responsibilities that the foster family care organizations are expected to adhere by. These organizations have the right to make decisions on behalf of the children under their care putting their best interest at heart; recruit foster families in accordance with a criterion of their choice; to place a child that is in their care in these families; require periodic evaluations of any form from these families; and terminate foster placements when care is found to be inadequate (MoWA, 2009).

To ensure that the foster family care organization is fulfilling its responsibility and not exploiting this vulnerable group the guideline requires it to regularly report to the relevant authority (MoWA, 2009).

As we come to the other side, the document details six eligibility criteria for the recruitment of foster families. The foster parent must be at least 25 years old with an Ethiopian nationality who has the financial capacity to raise a child. He/she must be free from contagious/incurable diseases and mental health problems. The family must also present a document stating criminal record and consent of spouse, if married (MoWA, 2009, p.32).

Once recruitment is complete, the matching process starts. With this regard the guideline details that issues of culture, religion, language, and geographic location must be put into consideration while matching a child with a foster family. The alternative guideline highlights the right of the child to continue to be raised in his/her own environment (MoWA, 2009). This notion is backed by the African charter as it describes the desirability of raising a child in the child's ethnic, religious, and linguistic environment when it comes to the choice of alternative care. The charter describes the likelihood of positive outcomes if the child's upbringing is continued in a familiar environment. Thus, encouraging relevant institutions to put this into considerations when deciding alternative care options for children (ACRWC, 1990, Art.25).

Throughout this process the UNCRC, African Charter and the National guideline all stress the need to ensure child participation. The need for a child to have his/her say in decisions regarding care putting into account age and maturity is essential. Assuming the child can express him/herself, he/she has the right to decide on the type of placement best suited. If foster care becomes the choice of placement, then the child should also have a say on about the foster family they will stay with (UNCRC, 1990; ACRWC, 1990; MoWA, 2009).

According to the guideline the foster family care organization incurs the financial responsibility of the child. The organization is expected to cover the cost of the child including but not limited to providing a monthly allowance for the foster family (MoWA, 2009).

## **Summary**

The concept of formalized alternative care arose in Ethiopia due to famine. It exasperated due to the orphan crisis in sub-Saharan Africa created by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Arguably,

overburdening many of the countries' traditional care structure leading to rises in alternative care options. On the other hand, as urbanization created a flow of migration from the rural to urban areas, people left behind the social insurance that readily provided traditional childcare leading to more and more child abandonments.

Research shows that the isolated nature of childcare institutions has created a range of psychosocial challenges to adults who once resided in them. As deinstitutionalized is then encouraged in the international child welfare community, the government deemed it as the last option amongst the alternative care methods.

Due to a series of cases in which children that were adopted from Ethiopia were found to have come to harm, Intercountry adoption got banned in Ethiopia following a statement that 'we must care of our own children'. As this option of alternative care which was widely being used in Ethiopia gets shut down, it is logical to presume that the problem of street children will get significantly worse in the urban areas as well as residential care and traditional childcare systems being further strained.

With the number of children that reside in various alternative cares and those staying on the streets, Ethiopia is not privileged enough to construct a child protective office whose responsibility is to assess the safety and security of all children and remove a child who is not being adequately cared for or is being harmed. Foster care in the Ethiopian context is thus being recommended to fill the gap in the existing care system. It would serve as an alternative care for the outcasted children without a community that would care for them in the traditional system. These group of children are mainly street children. Urbanization of cities created a high rural to urban migration creating a new category of children with no communities or families to care for them who ended up either working or living on the street. Foster care would, therefore, serve to pick up these children from the streets and put them into a family that is not related to them and does not know them.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Sampling**

Foster care social work is a specialized field of study recognized in many universities globally that works exclusively with children who are placed in foster care; families that foster them, and all other aspects of the institution of foster care. Though such a field is not known or recognized in the education system of Ethiopia, practice of it is just starting to exist with the recent start of foster care placements the country.

Bethany Christian service is a Nongovernmental organization that has pioneered in introducing the concept of foster care in Ethiopia. It has more than 10 years of experience under its belt and has been chosen as the sample for this research. Four people from this organization with a wholesome knowledge of and hands-on practice in foster care in Ethiopia were selected and interviewed in an in-depth phone call.

The nature of the study required the research to employ a non-probability sampling method. Furthermore, since the population that is relevant to the research question is very particular, the sampling technique needed to be purposive sampling, which is a form of non-probability sampling where participants are chosen strategically based on their applicability in relation to the research questions (Bryman, 2012, cpt. 8).

Being also the case that the researcher already has an unwaveringly clear criterion for who will be included in the research, Criterion Sampling, which is a specific purposive sampling approach where all of the practitioners that meet the criteria set up by the researcher are part of the sample, was chosen for this study (Bryman, 2012, cpt. 18).

### **Research Methodology**

As we got to the setting up of the research design, we had to pay close attention to what we were seeking to accomplish within our study and how our research questions were posed since they had the power to decide what our research design looked like which consequently shaped our data collection and analysis (Khoo & Olsson, 2020). Given the research aimed to find out how participants experience their practice, the data collected was qualitative in content, dictating the use of a qualitative research strategy. The design of the research is Cross Sectional, where the

data collected for the purpose of this thesis is at one point in time from a population whose daily work life is close to identical (Bryman, 2012, cpt.2).

Due to the increasing need during this pandemic time to be ready for plans not to go right the researcher felt that there should be two plans in place. First plan for data collection was in depth semi structured interviews with practitioners conducted via phone. The backup plan was to get the help of a research assistant who would go to the workplace of the practitioners and conduct the interviews on behalf of the researcher. The research assistant would then also be a part of the transcription process.

The first plan of action was able to be implemented and data was collected from Ethiopia via phone interview as the main data collection technique. Part of the reason for the choice of interview was because of the shortage of written documents due to the issue's relative short age. The research was limited to interviews and limited information that was available at website and a report which were used as part of the literature review section.

## **Research Approach**

This section shows how this research is positioned in terms of philosophy with regards to the already existing literature and how it can fill the gap that already exists in literature. The researcher has chosen pragmatism as a holistic paradigm that can serve as a guide in the research process.

Pragmatism as a philosophy is concerned about outcomes. It urges us to raise our eyes off abstract concepts and move towards creation of knowledge from successes of the practical application of theories. It is concerned with solving practical problems that exist in the real world (Maarouf, 2019).

Pragmatism is often associated with mixed method studies that deploy both qualitative and quantitative methods. This study on the other hand will be purely a qualitative one which will be carried out according to Morgan's guidelines of pragmatism for qualitative social research (Morgan, 2014).

Both Morgan and Maarouf conceptualize pragmatism as a complete paradigm which has its own epistemological, methodological, ontological, and axiological stance. The understanding of what

pragmatism as an ontology signifies is debatable but for the purpose of this study, we will take Maarouf's definition which tries to incorporate the differing views. Accordingly, it says that there is one reality at a specific context and time but differing perceptions of this one reality. But a change in context results in the generation of a new reality (Morgan, 2014; Maarouf, 2019).

Pragmatism as an epistemology says that knowledge is constructed from the outcomes of experiences. Knowledge is not reality for pragmatists rather it is generated from what works so that people can better manage in their lives (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This study will investigate the world of practitioners who work in the area of formal foster care and record their experiences using an inductive approach where theory will arise out of research (Bryman, 2012, cpt.2).

The researcher chose pragmatism as the research paradigm first because of the lack of literature in Ethiopia about formal foster care. Second, while seeking to generalize the outcome of this study, a pragmatic researcher is aware that these generalizations will become obsolete as the context changes (Maarouf, 2019). It was chosen to highlight the immense influence that context has. Pragmatism will assess the successfulness of the outcome which in this case is the foster care programs of this organization and finds out what works. It wishes to explore the decision-making process using the decision-making ecology and the consequences of these decisions in the hopes of informing and building awareness about the practice, as well as coming up with a literature base that other researchers may base their study on.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The theory of Social Resilience Vs. Social Rupture Thesis**

Abebe (2010) discusses two schools of thought namely the 'theory of social resilience' and the 'social rupture thesis' that were developed to explain the current state of childcare structure, predict the future, and give insights into how to fix problems that arise in care. The two theories have opposing perspectives regarding the effectiveness of traditional care systems.

The social rupture thesis claims that the traditional care system frequented by many developing Asian and African countries is overstretched and eroded, thus making its collapse inevitable. This is asserted by the UN Reports showing the downsides of kinship care with orphans growing up in relatives' houses. It made the case that orphans are not seen as equal with biological children and they are often faced with neglect, abuse, and exploitation (UNICEF, 2003;

UNAIDS, 2002; UNAIDS 2004). They are given harder, more time-consuming chores leading to labor exploitation and they are likely not to receive any material possessions and be vulnerable to property-grabbing (MOLSA 2004).

The theory of resilience on the other hand takes a stand in saying despite the bundles that came hurdling the traditional childcare system has remained resilient and has managed to care for most of its own children with virtually no support from governmental bodies. It argues that even though there are disadvantages to the traditional childcare system, research shows that the presence of a support system is expected to have an enormous positive effect on children's overall wellbeing (Abebe, 2010).

Chirwa (2002) negates the social rupture thesis mentioning Malawi's traditional childcare as a praiseworthy example of the system's adaptive capacities, stressing how it stayed resilient especially through the orphan crisis. However, he stresses that the system's resilience does not excuse the tension created by overstretched family and community structures.

Accordingly, a need for a complimentary system to function as a breather for traditional childcare arose. The Ethiopian government has nominated foster care for this task so that groups like street children are kept from falling through the crack of the care structure. The country's policies imply that the government is promoting external interventions of care to be added to the existing care structure.

With the premise that traditional childcare, if accompanied with some suitable interventions, can offer an array of opportunities, this research will form its basis on the 'theory of social resilience' while negating the 'social rupture thesis'. It stands for reinforcing the existing working childcare structure while offering the foster care system as a temporary solution to give a more proper resting place than that of the streets or orphanages while a permanent plan of care is drafted for each child (Abebe, 2010).

### **The decision-making Ecology**

The decision-making ecology was chosen to be the main theory of this study in order to narrow down the research area, give it a direction, and specify what the study is searching for. The theory is believed to have helped guide the perspective through which we look at the decision-

making process of placing a particular child in foster care and the process of matching that child with a specific foster family.

Reasoning guides decision making. Researchers identify two main types of reasoning: intuitive and analytical. Analytical reasoning relies upon pure logical thinking, data, and tested tools whereas intuitive reasoning gives more weight to experience and emotion; it is a human skill arising from experience and empathy (Munro, 2002).

Hammond theorized that the two types of reasoning should be thought of as a continuum rather than opposing concepts. Munro (2002) further develops Hammond's theory and attempts to reconcile intuitive and analytical reasoning by arguing that one reasoning type is not inherently superior to the other (Hammond, 1996; Munro, 2002).

This conceptualization can aid to identify the degree to which analytical or intuitive reasoning is needed at a certain stage in the child protection process. Deciding to put children into foster care; deciding how long children should stay in the care; assessing risks children are in during evaluations, etc. is high stake with so many factors affecting how practitioners make the decisions (Munro, 2002).

Munro (2002) also notes that the reluctance practitioners show in the child protection decision making by often avoiding or procrastinating decisions can be explained by looking at the weight of the decision. In addition, there is often a lack of any good options further complicating the decision making. In the mean time, social workers are expected to think on their feet and make quick decisions where facts are uncertain and outcomes unpredictable in emergency or fast paced circumstances (Saltiel & Lakey, 2020).

Saltiel & Lakey (2020) add that there are "complex trade-offs between available options, practicalities, value judgments, belief systems, and organizational priorities", and that a web of professional and social factors can be accredited for creating the complex context which makes up the decision-making system.

The decision-making ecology was developed in 1997 to aid in understanding and supporting practitioners (Baumann, et. al., 2014). The decision making of social work practitioners started to get investigated, states Graham (2005), because there is no clear legal guideline about what the criteria is regarding making decisions creating uncertainty and confusion. In addition, there are a

lot of possible external factors that were found to have been essential to decision-making that have very little or nothing to do with the details of the individual case. Factors such as the type of information available, practitioner's professional experience, practitioner's pattern of professional judgement, caseload, and decision-making thresholds, as well as practitioner's reaction to wider issues like ethnicity, gender, income level, etc. present in the context.

As there are no clear right or wrong decisions in placement and a high inconsistency in placement decisions; this research aimed to evaluate and examine practitioners' pattern of thinking prior, during, and after placement in Ethiopia's foster care system. These decisions are likely to be highly influenced by factors surrounding the decision maker and are rarely made by just one practitioner, who is the unit of analysis describing the decision-making process for (Graham et. al., 2005).

Most variances in decision making are accounted to differences in the cases themselves. Practical realities such as availability of foster families, funding, policies, etc. also highly influence the decisions to be made by the practitioners. The other reason for the lack of uniformity in decision making is the differing decision thresholds practitioners have based on their experience, skill, principles, etc. In addition, administrators, supervisors, and multidisciplinary practitioner are in some form or another involved in the decision making as well. (Graham et. al., 2005).

A decision threshold is a point where the amount of information gathered about a case while getting evaluated was found to be strong enough that the practitioner decides to take major action. It is the degree of concern considered to be adequate for an individual to act. It is an individual boundary cultivated by each practitioner through personal experience (Baumann, et. al., 2014).

### **Decision making in the Research**

Though the decision-making ecology is a comprehensive model which incorporates all the decisions made throughout the process of the child protection work of one child, this research referred specifically to decisions made during the recruitment and matching phase and what factors come into play.

In this research decision making ecology was used in parallel with the pragmatism paradigm. The ecology believes that decisions need to be understood within their own contexts and was

made “in an effort to advance the field of Child Welfare decision-making using the knowledge gained from the decision-making sciences” (Baumann, 2011, p.5). This framework was uniquely suited for this study to explore the case, organizational, external, and decision-maker factors (Baumann, 2011).

This ecology was further used to identify the contextual underlinings and the fundamental values and principles of the practitioners that help guide them the decision-making process. What are the eligibility criteria used in the recruitment process? What guides the decision to match a specific child with a specific family? Therefore, the interview was made to ensure that, questions that explore case factors, organizational factors, external factors, and decision maker factors are all incorporated (Baumann, 2011).

### **Transcription**

The data was collected by the researcher. The interview recordings were transcribed by research assistants and edited by the researcher. Since the informational content to be uncovered in the findings is what was wanted for this study a denaturalized transcription was used for the interviews (Oliver et. al., 2005).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Homan describes informed consent as a contractual agreement between researcher and participant specifying what the research is about, what participation entails, and what the purpose is. The concept of consent must ensure that both parties must enter the contract voluntarily and of their own volition (Homan, 1992).

The issue that was suspected to arise within this study with regards to informed consent was that of voluntary participation of the leaders of the organization and the possible repercussions of them feeling obliged to concur to the interview. However, true intentions of the study were revealed and there was no coercion or deception of any kind that may invalidate the consent provided. All factors that may have pressured the participant into deciding to be involved in the research are believed to have been removed (Andanda, 2009).

The researcher deployed all available resources to ensure that participants did not feel pressured by a traditional culture that prompts everyone to help or misunderstandings within the

organization. It is quite common in Ethiopia for higher ups or bosses to order practitioners to be involved in a study. However, the researcher made sure that participants understood they were free to choose to be involved or not involved in the study. Participants were also made to understand that being recorded is a choice that they may choose to refuse.

This research has gone through the necessary ethical assessments through the Norwegian center for research data (NSD). The study has also had approval from the administrators of Bethany Christian services to recruit participants amongst its employees. Written informed consent was also obtained from each participant which was emailed prior to the interview. A copy of the informed consent form has been attached as an appendix.

The consent form specifies that participants have the right to request a change of the information they have given out. Whether this be because they changed their minds, or they found the translation and/or transcription inaccurate; participants were informed of their right to amend the interview they gave during consent. During this period participants were given a chance to correct or delete part of the interview.

Homan also speaks of intrinsic rewards or incentives to bump participation rates. He speaks of appealing to the wishes of participants to feel important and assist in the pursuit of knowledge (Homan, 1992). In the case of this research an appeal was made that this study is an important step in further creating awareness about the important work practitioners are doing in this field.

Confidentiality is another major ethical concern. No harm must come to the practitioners due to a direct or indirect consequence of their participation (Bryman, 2012, cpt.6). To the extent possible researcher must ensure anonymity so that unpredicted consequences do not fall upon participants of the study. The researcher in this case was challenged as the place of employment and their position was revealed. Thus, measures such as not revealing which city the research was conducted and curating the interview questions so that they would not include inappropriate questions that may harm the participant if he/she responded.

Ethical considerations during the literature review consisted of issues such as unintended plagiarism. A lot of documents were needed to be reviewed and because of the sheer breadth of the literature, ethical issues of proper citation, referencing, usage of quotations and copy right matters were given attention to, though mistakes may still occur.

From the start, the likelihood of the researcher being physically present in Ethiopia to collect the necessary data was low due to Covid-19. Therefore, there was an immense need to prepare for things to go wrong and as seen above, a backup plan of using a research assistant was drawn up just in case. Luckily, the researcher was not forced to implement the back-up plan and instead was able to conduct phone interviews.

The use of a research assistant, the contribution they make, and their influence on the study is often an ignored subject. Deane & Stevano (2016) warn of data that is biased and findings that are misleading because of ignoring the impact of the usage of research assistants. The initially chosen research assistant was carefully chosen. In terms of power relations, the research assistant was a colleague of the researcher who was to be employed/ paid.

The researcher's knowledge of the local language through which the interview was conducted proved to have been beneficial for the study. From experience, the researcher believed that the participants were not likely to feel comfortable to express themselves fully using the English language.

Finally, the safety, the proper usage and dissemination of the data was guaranteed. The provision of free access of the final product to any and all participants in the study was assured (Andanda, 2009).

## Chapter Four

### Findings and Discussion

As the data collection phase neared, an application was submitted to Bethany Christian services regarding the possibility of employees participating in the study. Along with the approval, Bethany provided the names and email addresses of possible respondents which were all immediately contacted. Interviews were conducted far apart, over weeks of time due to situational factors.

Participants were asked an array of questions from a structured interview guide. The questions presented to the last practitioner; the coordinator of alternative guideline revision program was slightly altered due to the nature of the work. The following table illustrates the demographic background of the respondents.

Participants	Gender	Religion	Educational Background	Work Position
Participant 1	Female	Protestant Christian	BA- Community Development	Coordinator of Temporary Foster Care
Participant 2	Female	Protestant Christian	MA- Holistic Child Development	Foster to Adopt Program: Family Social Worker
Participant 3	Female	Protestant Christian	BA- Social Work	Coordinator of Foster to Adopt
Participant 4	Female	Protestant Christian	MA- Social Work	Coordinator of Alternative Guideline Revision

### Project description

Bethany Christian services is the first NGO to introduce the concept of foster care in Ethiopia. Participants described the main purpose of foster care programs as, *‘taking children that are living in adoption centers or places away from parents and provide them with a setting that is*

*best suited to them*'. The programs prioritize the best interest of the children and thoroughly assess the conditions of parents in the process of making the matches.

Bethany has three main foster care programs under its wings. Foster to adopt program is the longest and most established one which has been operational for more than 10 years now. It started in 2010 and has so far placed more than 650 children and led to their adoption. This program is currently functional in three regions in Ethiopia. It was situated exclusively at Adama for the first few years. It then progressed to SNNPR-- more specifically Hawassa, then came to Addis Ababa (Bethany Christian services, 2011).

Following the program's success, Bethany has recently started a second program, temporary foster care. This program was designed by Bethany to function as a transitional home for children to stay at before they move to a foster family who is interested in adoption. This program will eliminate the need for an orphanage further reinforcing Bethany's objective to strive towards deinstitutionalization. One of the challenges of temporary foster care since its recent launch has been explaining to people that the children will be taken back after some time. During the pilot of the program while explaining that the kids would stay under one care for 2-6 months, people would often ask why they were being given children that would eventually be taken back from them. Letting go is a challenge especially after building an attachment.

The last program works in collaboration with the government and is funded by USAID with the objectives of drafting a new, revised alternative childcare directive; modelling a training manual which other organizations can follow; and promoting foster care placement and deinstitutionalization. While the main themes of the alternative childcare guideline remain intact, the new guideline differs in terms of intervention, quality, service delivery, and stake holder's responsibility. To tackle the writing of this new alternative childcare guideline directive, Bethany assembled a task force that is comprised of 16 selected non-governmental and governmental organizations. For the sake of practicality, the members of the task force were grouped into four depending on their expertise, the groups being Community based care, reunification, foster care, and adoption. For example, Bethany works in foster care and adoption, so members recruited from it were placed in the respective groups. UN, with its collection of experts in many fields, contributed members to most of the groups.

The directive was explained by one of the participants as ‘a general rule guiding the overall process of the subject’. For example: a directive with regards to the process of matching or the attachment (bonding) training would give a general provision on what is expected of a service provider but not details on how to do. It is being written by practitioners with a lot of expertise who are advocating for deinstitutionalization. The document also divides foster care into long term, temporary, and respite foster care. Giving more detail than the existing national alternative childcare guideline (MoWA, 2009).

The primary motivation for the start of the project is the lack of a well-structured uniform directive to refer to regarding foster care and adoption. There are manuals, and a service delivery standard, but what little document exists predominantly focuses on adoption, giving minimal attention to foster care. In addition, these documents are not even recognized as law. This concern was brought before the ministry, where Bethany joined forces with the ministry and all other concerned bodies to bring in experts who are now working on a comprehensive alternative childcare system.

After the completion of the directive’s preparation, Bethany will be developing a training manual. This is essential because a system that is unstandardized will result in an irregular service provision. Its existence will also ensure effective communication once Bethany starts collaborating with other organizations or government offices on a bigger scale. Furthermore, a uniformly modeled training manual prepared by Bethany—an organization with more than ten years of experience—is bound to benefit upcoming organizations with similar missions.

## **Process**

The very first task in the foster to adopt program is advocating for the program. Families who sign up will then get oriented on general knowledge about foster care, adoption, foster to adopt program, temporary foster care, etc. After orientation, an intensive home assessment is performed by an appointed social worker to assure that the home is suitable for a child. The third step is giving an overall training about issues of trauma, parenting skill, child development, children with special needs and the like. Once this phase ends and the parents are qualified, the matching stage commences.

The matching process immediately follows the home assessment. Based on the feedback from the social workers, a multidisciplinary team will decide which household is the fittest to which child, based on the principle of the best interest of the child. The next step is called “attachment and bonding”, which allows the children and the prospect parents to familiarize themselves with each other. Following is placement, where the child will start living with the foster family for the intended time. In the case of foster to adopt program the intended time is until a decision regarding following through with an adoption is made. In the case of temporary foster care its two to six months until a more permanent family is found. After the placement, the organization performs evaluation and follow ups two years.

### **Relevant Authority**

The Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth (MoWCY) is the authority that Bethany has signed a project agreement with and reports to as mandated by the existing National alternative childcare guideline (MoWA, 2009). It provides a list of children in need of placement and needs to be present to approve and sign off on the placement agreement between the foster family and Bethany. The ministry also expects evaluation reports post placement. Additionally, Bethany does a closure report at the end of the two-year postplacement evaluations which is then submits to the ministry. Even after Bethany has finished its work the court mandates that the family submit the children’s progress files to the ministry until they turn 18.

### **Roles**

Every social worker who is in the foster to adopt and temporary foster care program is involved in the recruitment of families. After that is completed, however, there is division of work. While family caseworkers do home studies and facilitate paperwork related to eligibility (medical information, fingerprints, and the like); child caseworkers are more concerned with assessing the background and current state of the children, preparing birth certificates and checking the children’s’ medical conditions. After each of the tasks are done, the social workers gather and, based on the information collected from all sides, start the matching process.

### **Recruitment Advocacy**

Chaitkin (2017) explains that the introduction of foster care in many African and Asian countries is being met by opposition. When assessing how recruitment was accepted in Ethiopia one

respondent answered, “it was met with open arms”. Taking in children in need and raising them is not an alien concept in the Ethiopian culture (Beckstorm, 1972). However, one of the main characteristics of foster care, its temporality, caused a lot of confusion. People often ask the recruiters to leave the children with them permanently.

Given its religious background, Bethany mostly targets its recruits through religious institutions. It advocates foster care to religious leaders who serve as gatekeepers and aid in recruitment. It further uses billboard advertisements, large meetings, and orientation sessions to create awareness and win potential foster families.

Another respondent stated that, during the start of the project in Adama, people were willing to take the children only on the condition that they did not have to commit to anything official. Most clarified that they did not want the recruiters to return and were clearly intimidated by the idea of shouldering a formal responsibility. This is likely caused by people being used to the informality of the traditional childcare system such as Guddifachaa and yetut Lij (Getahun, 2010). The imposition of formal responsibility is a foreign concept that respondents reported to having faced resistance. Therefore, it was deduced foster care’s least attractive aspect that resulted in resistance to most people was its formality.

The most resistance, however, comes from those who fear the financial strain that fostering brings. Some say taking in more children while they are already struggling to raise their own is downright impossible, while some are more receptive towards fostering older kids because of the less attention and money the children would require. One respondent stated that change was able to be brought through consistent education, awareness events, and through testimonials of the first foster families.

### **Eligibility**

Bethany abides by the eligibility criteria stipulated under the existing National alternative childcare guideline. Accordingly, anyone older than 25 and younger than 65 is eligible to participate in the foster care program. Married couples who want to apply are required to provide evidence for their marriage, while unwed individuals are asked to give unmarried certificates. ID’s, financial documents, business licenses (if any) are some of the personal documents Bethany requests. Applicants are also required to do a full medical test and bring the papers.

Bethany pays especial attention to infectious diseases like HIV, Hepatitis B and lung diseases. Mental health is also examined. The applicants also bring a letter from the Ethiopian Federal Police Commission Forensic Investigation Department attesting to no history of criminal activities (MoWA, 2009).

In addition to what the National alternative childcare guideline has specified, Bethany demands that the families bring letters of recommendations. The letters' content is expected to outline the families' social interaction, their role in the community, and if there is any history of addiction and violence. The applicants can have the letters written by their religious leaders or their *idirs*.

Child eligibility criteria, unlike family eligibility, are quite simple and straightforward. Once full developmental assessments, medical examinations, and relevant background evidence and provided, the matching process can commence.

### **Preparations/ Training**

As mentioned above, there is no standard training manual in Ethiopia for potential foster families. Bethany was therefore required to develop its own content and procedure. The organization prepared its own manual after 10 years of work experience. Now under the supervision of Bethany a uniformly modeled training manual will be prepared for any and all institutions interested in working with foster care.

Bethany's training involves an intensive training of 16 hours coursing over a period of two days. Primarily topics like healthy child development, abuse, and trauma are discussed. Though one participant described these discussions as 'purely scientific', another attributed a biblical nature to the adoption, parenting skills and discipline trainings.

Furthermore, the training helps the families examine the true source of their motivation to foster the children; and prepares them for the inevitable, uncomfortable questions of identity that will come from the children. Discussions regarding how to handle such inquiries and the timing to address them are carried out. There is also a session that explains how kids process separation, attachment, and bonding so the parents are equipped to deal with the manifestations of these experiences.

Once the training is done parents are given certification. In the face of the practical information the families received about raising foster children, they must decide if they will continue in the program at this point. Those who are willing to proceed go the next step, which is home assessment.

Home assessment happens in two rounds. Initially, appointed social workers visit each applicant's house simply for introductory purposes. In the following round, however, the social workers visit to observe the environment, check if the couples have healthy relationships, and assess the level of readiness demonstrated by them. Previous experiences of raising children, and their own interaction with their parents and siblings are also important information that the social worker must gather. These sessions help the families to engage in deep conversations about their life stories; what about parenting makes them anxious and their expectations. Home assessment is generally the part where Bethany gets to vastly understand the families and their living conditions.

Lastly, there is a session called 'attachment and bonding', where the parents get a chance to visit the orphanage three up to nine times and get acquainted with the children. This helps ensure the potential for healthy attachment formations. During this session, the parents bathe, feed, dress and play with the children in the presence of family social workers. The social workers observe the parents' performance, and the children's reaction. Since most children at the orphanage are very young, they do not find it difficult to bond with the parents. The relatively older children are verbally informed in detail about their prospective parents as it isn't easy for them to form an attachment. Currently, Bethany no longer permits physical visits Due to COVID protocol. Instead, the family is allowed to see the children in videos.

## **Religion**

Bethany Christian Service is a faith-based organization and attributes its conception to religion. Though the organization serves the community in a nondiscriminatory manner, it does utilize its opportunity of its relationship with religious groups as an advantage. As a result, many of the foster families are protestant Christians. This is most likely attributed to the modes of advocacy used by Bethany, the cities it operates in, and its tight connection to the church and its leaders.

One respondent indicated that religious people are the most receptive group to foster care. The respondent stressed that religion, with its abundance of guidance and principles, creates individuals who value family highly and lead very conscious lives. This, according to the respondent, makes religious households favorable for children's development. Furthermore, religion provides the healthiest motivation to foster as it teaches helping others is a truly rewarding act.

All the participants were found to be followers of Protestant Christianity. When asked how their religion has affected their work, one respondent said, "*I would say that my religion has influenced me to get into this field and into Bethany. I am much attached to my religion and whatever I do is based on it*"; while another said, "*my religion makes me love my job, because it teaches me there is no better service than serving children. So, it helps me value it as the great service that it is. It also keeps me motivated. The work system presents many challenges, which I pass through the help of prayer.*" Overall, the participants believe religion affects their work positively. They are properly motivated as they consider it a spiritual service, and thus do not back out in the face of stumbling blocks.

The existing alternative childcare guideline highlights issues of identity including religion which it deems must be put into consideration when placing a child with a foster family (MoWA, 2009). Placing an infant on the other hand means that the background of the child including the religious history is unknown since most of them are found abandoned. In most cases, they take up the religion of their caretakers at the orphanage or the religion of the foster family.

This article in the guideline is a controversial one that can be understood in vastly differing ways. One could argue that the intent of the guideline is to ensure that children's right to ethnic, religious, and linguistic identity is protected. As the age the children are being placed at as well as the circumstances under which they are found does not allow them to have these identities beforehand making the guideline itself null in the case of infants.

On the other hand, a contesting argument can be made that certain requirement should be put about the amount of effort that should be invested into finding out about the history of the child and to ensure that he/she grows up within that same community. Another argument can also be made about what constitutes a community and what makes an infant who is unable to make a

choice to automatically belong to a certain community just because the biological parents who most likely abandoned the child belonged to it.

### **Post placement Evaluation**

In the foster to adopt program there is a tried-and-true method of evaluation that is followed post placement in Bethany. In the foster to adopt program, a physical visit is done after 15 days at first, then on 1st, 3rd, 6th, 9th, 12th, 18th and finally 24th month of the first day of placement. The case of a child, therefore, remains open for up to two years after adoption. Everything observed during these visits are written down in the post placement report.

When it is temporary foster care, the procedure is similar, but the children's stay in placement is only 3 to 6 months. Starting from on-arrival report, a call is made to the foster family on a daily basis for a checkup for the first week. After the 2nd week, the call becomes every other day. During this time, a physical visit is also made once a week. After the child stays with the foster family for three months an opportunity to adopt is given for the foster parents. At this time if another family is looking to adopt, the child will be transferred to that family.

### **Age of Children placed**

Participants iterated that during the start of the project, Bethany used to place older children. In fact, people preferred to foster older children on the justification that they can often take care of themselves and are low maintenance as opposed to expensive and time-consuming infants. The demand was therefore for older children but because this was while it was a pilot project, the baggage of trauma and pain that older kids come with was relatively unknown and presented a lot of challenges to the foster family after placement.

There was a lot of disruption during the first three years due to the lived experiences of some of the children that had previously been on the street before joining the orphanage. These children exhibited challenging behaviors during their stay at the placement. Leading to some children being brought back due to behavioral problems. Accordingly, Bethany turned its attention to infants and decided it's best to take it slow and educate itself while learning from its mistakes. There were many uncared-for infants in need of loving homes who needed advocacy to achieve it making it an easy transition towards working with children who are aged 0 to 5 years.

One respondent stated that, “*now since the awareness about fostering and older children is becoming mainstream, even the government is getting involved and working in similar projects*”. Bethany is also slowly migrating back to fostering relatively older children within the Temporary foster care program in the face of the lowering of number of infants. But the organization is fully aware now that these children are likely to have lived on the streets and believe that the society have abandoned them making the job of integrating these children within a family environment that much harder.

### **Deinstitutionalization**

Bethany is open about its promotion of deinstitutionalization. It advocates for children to grow up under the protection and care of families. For this to happen orphanages need to decrement gradually. One participant stated Bethany “*intends for them to close down within the coming 7 years*”. Children who flee their home need to never step foot on the street or orphanages and go straight to other alternative care options that resemble the family environment. The creation of the temporary foster care program is a step in this direction that proves that the country is moving towards deinstitutionalization.

### **Matching: multidisciplinary team of decision makers**

To make the matching process effective, Bethany designs a team of four to six professionals made up of a nurse, a project supervisor and two to four social workers, half of which are family social workers and the rest, child social workers. Family social workers conduct home assessments while child social workers handle the children’s cases. The team does a desk review where each member suggests their professional opinions on which family should be matched with which child. Creating this group of decision makers becomes necessary only in the case of foster to adopt program as it is the only one that is long term.

The respondents iterated that decision making leans heavily on organizational and external factors rather than decision maker ones. The inner workings of the professionals themselves have yet to be utilized as foster care programs largen and cases get more complicated (Baumann, et. al., 2014). But participants unanimously stressed that the best interest of the children is always prioritized within these decision-making groups. In addition, the temperament, health conditions and age of the children are factors that decision makers carefully consider. For example, in a

situation where an infant is in need of placement and the decision makers have a choice between a working and a stay-at-home mother to place the child under, the team's professional inclination is expected to be towards the latter option.

The matching phase is concluded with the families being convened to be fully informed about the children they are matched with. They are given a chance to ask questions, see vital documents like birth certificates, vaccination papers, medical history, etc. and look at photographs and videos of the children. After this, they are asked to take 24-48 hours to think about their decision.

### **Parental Preference of foster children: Age and Gender**

Though Bethany has strict rules against letting families hand-pick kids, it allows them to specify the sex and age of the children they want. Most participants want a healthy child but according to some respondents, there are parents who have specific preferences such as a child that resemble them. These specifications are weighed in during matchmaking though prioritized after conditions like health status for children whose health status necessitates that they move out of the orphanage immediately. Specifications are considered because families are known to parent much more enthusiastically when their interests are met. are recommended to parents even when the When necessary, however, Bethany tries to persuade families into changing their preferences. But all in all, the system allows little room for discrimination.

In terms of sex, an estimated 97% of parents ask for female children, one participant responded. As of age, the participants were unable to state an exact percentage, but revealed that most parents, especially during the pilot of the project, were notably interested in fostering only older children. However, Bethany was able to fruitfully contend with this by persistently educating the parents. Then, the demand for younger children, particularly those just over a year old, drastically increased. With further education about trauma, abuse and their lasting effects, parents are now willing to adopt infants just days old. This is especially true for those who want to hide the history of adoption.

### **Financial Support**

With foster to adopt program, Bethany provides no financial compensation. To ensure that families can support the children, the organization requires the family to have a monthly joint

income of at least 5000 ETB. In the case of temporary foster care, however, since the primary aim is not adoption, Bethany provides a monthly stipend of 65 USD for the foster family (purposely made small in amount to avoid making money the main motivator to foster).

Expenses for the process of adoption such as trainings, medical expenses for children before placements, and transportation costs during placements are entirely covered by Bethany. In times of crisis, similar to that of the current COVID-19 pandemic, a program called one-time support system is employed to help families overcome the situations they are in.

### **Failed Cases: Abuse, neglect**

Bethany's first line of defense against abuse and/or neglect is the trainings it gives. The trainings are seen as preventative measure and are given ample attention. It additionally uses ongoing evaluations through phone calls and home visits to ensure the safety and security of foster children.

Recently, there was a case of a woman who physically assaulted two children she fostered. When Bethany learned this, the children were immediately separated from her; taken to the hospital for check-ups eventually transferred to another family. The woman was brought before court and her case was, at the time the interview, still the police's hand.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the program**

Bethany's firstness in foster care programs makes it a pioneer in evaluating the successes and failures within the programs. The organization is faith based which according to respondents helps it find some very good families while also lessening the chances of divorce due to the religious community's principles. Bethany also makes working with the community towards a common goal its first priority.

One respondent mentioned that the organization's meticulously done pre-placement process can be considered one of its strength. The trainings are detailed and comprehensive; the families are carefully screened; and the assessments are done by social workers who are known to be committed. The organization is also rich with experienced managers and directors who tirelessly follow-up on the program and lend support. Moreover, the program is recognized and funded by USAID, which gives it credibility and enables it to fund good quality trainings.

The organization is harboring much more attention with its current utilization of social media. As a result, numerous organizations are contacting Bethany with the intention of launching new projects. This encourages the organization to entertain innovative ideas, one of which is simultaneously recruiting and training families. Besides, trainings are being given to police officers, court social workers, and government officials in addition to prospective foster families which helps the project reach deeper into the community. Bethany is also planning to expand to more regions taking the lessons of the three regions it has been working in so far.

Bethany is planning to build a centralized temporary foster care space where abandoned children can stay at while Bethany is arranging for their placement. When infants are found abandoned on the streets, the normal procedure is for them to be referred to a government orphanage called *Kebebe Tsehay*, from where they are once again taken to other orphanage centers. This drags and complicates the process for Bethany while also possibly hurting the children.

If utilized correctly, the Ethiopian community's openness to helping kids is an excellent opportunity says one respondent. The country's culture is already conditioned to the concept of foster care (though in the traditional sense). For example, in an instant where parents are unable to take care of their kids, it's largely normal in Ethiopia for these kids to grow in the hands-on neighbors.

The unintended consequence of Bethany's commitment to offering high-quality service became that it got constrained from operating on a large scale. Each step from the training up to post-placement evaluations is extremely time consuming. Besides, the nature of the project itself, which requires careful case management, does not allow for a wider scope of tasks forcing numerous amounts of children to remain in orphanages.

In Bethany, one social worker can handle only as high as 25 cases. Government offices, on the other hand, demand that the organization puts 100 kids under placement within 6 months, which Bethany fails to do constantly. This can be accounted to the shortage of manpower that is reported by participants. One respondent stated, "*I am overburdened with work*".

Since the ban of international adoption, families who have another citizenship even though they are born and are residing in Ethiopia are regarded as foreigners by law and are prohibited from

fostering. This minimizes the demography of potential foster families especially since this community likely already has knowledge of foster care and adoption.

Since Bethany does not have its own orphanage, its forced to coordinate with other available orphanages. Thus, the lack of children referral from governmental offices for the program can create a big problem. Even if there is a foster family, if children are not being referred matchings cannot be done. This problem is especially noticed in Addis Ababa where children are not being referred to Bethany as much while the foster families on the waiting list are getting larger.

One participant expressed her frustration by saying, *“I now believe that the government doesn’t want the children to be out of orphanages and placed in homes”*. She detailed that working with the government has presented numerous problems while finishing up the adoption process. She expressed that sometimes it feels like all the work done is going to waste when the government shows unwillingness to sign the papers needed for the adoption and the process is halted.

Coordination may end up being the biggest obstacle in the program where the alternative childcare directive is being drafted. In this program the police, the orphanage, the Ministry of Women and Children, health offices, and the courts are all stakeholders that have to work very closely with each other. The challenge of coordinating these groups is already noticed during consultation meetings. The challenge becomes double fold when/if issues of high workload, staff turnover, etc. occur. Coordinators need to be immensely committed. Thus, failure to coordinate well or the overall lack of coordination is a big threat that may derail the entire project.

Laws and guidelines are prepared with great effort. Then, a lot of money is poured into trainings and familiarizing sessions for practitioners to practice in accordance with the new law. But often times due to high turnover and shortage of skilled manpower the implementation process get halted and slowly these guidelines are forgotten. Follow ups to check if the standards are met and regulated can be a threat. Since the project is being done in coordination with several stakeholders, accountability and implementation might be tricky to navigate in the future.

## **COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced all of our lives, our environments and within the organizations striving to work in differing arenas. As such, as the pandemic started Bethany was forced to alter many of its workings and struggle to continue its work. Home visits have stopped

resulting in post-placement evaluations to be conducted through phone calls. Due to the restrictions placed, social workers could not freely visit homes or orphanages. When home studies are absolutely necessary, protective measures are taken. Trainings were also halted for a long time due to the restrictions put on the number of people able to gather. The government has now lifted this ban and trainings are given in spacious halls and with a maximum of 50 people.

Courts were also closed, which caused the accumulation of a lot of unprocessed cases. To make sure these tasks were not left unattended, Bethany transitioned to undertaking the assessments and visits online. The organization also resorted to social media as its main channel for recruitment of families. Facebook pages, telegram channels and billboards at traffic prone spots around the city were used to advertise Bethany and foster care.

The pandemic's another negative effect was noticed on the attachment and bonding sessions. To create a deeper bond between the families and children, Bethany under normal circumstances encouraged a certain degree of physical proximity, which the COVID protocols did not allow. Families therefore had to resort to pictures, videos, and other social media platforms to make up for the visits foster families would have made to the orphanages to form a deeper bond with the children.

At the start there were difficulties in drafting the alternative childcare revision program due to the political unrest in the country. The COVID-19 pandemic then came along, exasperated the problem, and disrupted the schedule. The program was struggling to continue through alternative means of meetings such as zoom calls, but it proved to be ineffective because participants did not engage actively. This in turn caused the delay of many related activities that, according to one participant, should have been completed by the time of the interview.

On the other hand, Bethany was overwhelmed at the whirlwind of positive reception of foster care during the pandemic. The participants mentioned that members of the community unexpectedly came out in search of children to foster. Though the number of people who went to the organization seeking service was anticipated to be lower, the opposite happened. Since families were going to be spending much of their time at home, they wanted to use this time effectively and foster children.

## **Decision making ecology**

As discussed in the above section all decisions in Bethany are made during matching in collaboration with a multidisciplinary team. The decision-making ecology is comprised of four main factors that each collaborate to make up the overall model (Graham et. al., 2005; Saltiel & Lakey, 2020).

*Case Factors:* The specifics within the case are reported to have a high influence on placement decisions. One participant mentioned an example of children with special needs who are likely to have been abandoned by parents due to their disability and the inability of parents to take care of such children. As such the placement of these children needs to be with foster parents who are willing to take in special needs children and who are trained for it.

*Organizational Factors:* include influences such as teams, resources, workloads, etc. that have effects on the final decision. Decisions at Bethany are made in a multidisciplinary team composed of different professions. Each case is presented and decided upon based on the information provided by the social workers. Then a child is placed with a family that is believed to be the best fit.

Participants reported that resources are not much of an issue in Bethany but as the program expands and other organizations take up the program resources might be found to be a factor that affect the decision-making process. Participants have also reported to have had a high workload.

*Decision Maker Factors:* Participants described decision making as detached from their principles, values, or preference and that ultimately availability and circumstances ensure the decision. But religion due to the nature of the organization and the faith of the participants themselves has an influence. The respondents believe that religion has a highly positive influence on their decision to join the program, their conviction to always try to do better and to not easily burn out due to the nature of the work.

*External Factors:* The main issue that affects decision making in this arena is the fact that Bethany does not have an orphanage of its own meaning it has to wait for recommendations from orphanages owned by the government. Many participants described this arrangement to be challenging because there is usually a discrepancy between the available children and foster families. Participants said that right now there are many foster families that have been trained

and prepped who are awaiting to receive children, but the relevant institution is not children that are in need of homes. Such bureaucracies can have a great impact on placement decisions.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion and Recommendation

The study found that foster care and traditional childcare are quite similar with just a few differences that have been highlighted in the literature review section. Foster care has a legal background; is recognized by governments and its processes are completed through court, whereas traditional care is looser. Participants unanimously agreed that foster care's formalized nature makes it a much more secure practice. In traditional care, for instance, parents may abandon children at the first sign of misbehavior, while the constant follow-up and the intervention of courts, when necessary, generally minimizes irresponsibility in foster care.

Foster Care system is laid to provide eligible care for such children who might be double orphaned, abandoned, whose families cannot be found, whose parents might be mentally unstable, whose parents are incapable of taking care of them, or those who are separated from their families for different reasons such as migration. The foster care program serves as a replica of the traditional care for children who do not have relatives or a community to care for them. The program aims to create awareness about national adoption and lead to foster children being adopted.

There are three types of foster care programs in Bethany provided for small children. Long term foster care is provided under the foster to adopt program where children are fostered by a family until their adoption. Temporary foster care is the second program where children are temporarily fostered until families who are interested in adoption come along. Respite care is a type of foster care that provides a break for families. This system gives temporary relief for parents who, for example, might need someone to take care of their kids for two weeks until they are done dealing with an emergency, or parents with a disabled child who need to take a break. For such cases, the organization recruits volunteers who are believed to have the capability to take care of the children responsibly.

On the other hand, one of the participants spoke of a program called independent living for children who are believed to be capable of taking care of themselves. In this program older children live together on their own under the supervision of different organizations who run the program. They would rent their own house and be in charge of taking care of themselves. Their

domestic and school expenses will be covered. At the same time, they will also be exposed to different skill trainings on issue like managing money.

With such programs for older kids being provided and with infants/smaller children taken care of under programs of adoption and foster care, there emerges a clear gap for primary and middle school aged children though we will call them older children in aggregate for the sake of this study.

As the foster care grows and becomes more common, the most immediate issue to arise will probably be that Bethany has already encountered. This problem is that of the fostering of older children. The study found that though Bethany originally attempted to foster older children, various behavioral problems arose which the families and Bethany was not prepared to address. As such Bethany and other organizations that will grow into fostering older children as well may struggle to manage.

When it comes to the work on the revision of the alternative childcare directive, one participant explained that the nature of a directive limits it from predicting the future. It rather takes the best available practice now and get others to follow. This would mean that the directive will still not adequately cover issues of fostering an older child since there is not much practice on that. Thus, organizations are going to be flying in blind into this arena.

Issue of child participation will also be another issue that will arise as the program expands to include children who have reached an age when they can express their opinion. One participant stated that in cases where children are older than 3, some things are discussed with them. At three they can speak, have their own interests, and they also hear a thing or two during their stay in the centers. But at this age children are also easy to manipulate and accept whatever they are told and do not necessarily know what is good for them. Participation will be an issue when dealing with older children who can form their own opinion independent of stakeholders and express themselves.

This research while diving into the topic of foster care wants to stress the importance of accurately depicting the context of Ethiopia at a Macro level along with its policies, its history, and its culture. The specific region this study is carried out in, the language, and the ethnicity on

a Mezzo level is crucial to note. In addition, the need to highlight the specific NGO, the programs, and families at the micro level cannot be overestimated.

The research attempted to triangulate information between the alternative childcare guideline, decision making ecology, and practitioners' experience to illustrate the gap that exists between what is being done and what should be done.

This research arose with two fundamental research questions which it had aimed at answering by the end.

**First Question:** What are the roles of social work practitioners within foster care programs?

The findings illustrated that social work practitioners in Bethany put on multiple hats. They play the role of coordinators in all three of the projects related to foster care; they function as both family and child social workers; they work in recruitment; they play a part in matching; and they are also entrusted with the trainings.

**Second Question:** What does the decision-making process ascertain?

This research used the decision-making Ecology as a model to analyze the decision making done at one stage in the child protection process. The major aim was to mingle data related to a range of factors in order to contextualize the decisions made. The framework helped guide to identify the various factors present that influence child welfare decision making.

### **Further Research**

One of the main aims of this research from the get-go was to highlight gaps in research and open the door for researchers to explore related issues. A discussion, for example, can be made about how the foster care program started 5 years after the school of social work opened in Ethiopia (Kebede, 2019). This would be around the time the very first students of the school graduated. A study could explore to assess if such a narrow timespan is due to pure coincidence or if there is a huge contribution that social work has made to the foundation of foster care in Ethiopia. The correlation could be examined to identify if such a hypothesis could pen out. The awareness that a field like social work brings to a person's perception of reality and the sufferings around us can be investigated alongside.

While this study wants to stress that foster care in this research is not being promoted to facilitate deinstitutionalization, a further study could explore the movement towards deinstitutionalization and its relationship with the movement towards foster care. For that there would be a need to dive into the state of residential care in Ethiopia in comparison to the potential of the pilot projects in foster care.

Lastly, it should be noted that the literature raises the issue of quality of care repeatedly. As seen on the literature review, due to the short longevity of the existence of the social work field, the country filled the gap left by the lack of social workers by 'related social science field' or trainees (Hailu, 2013). It comes under scrutiny as we question the knowledge and skills of professionals sitting in a position of power or in charge of the direct care of children which would make for an interesting research.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix I

#### Invitation Letter



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#### **Erasmus Mundus master's in social work with Families and Children**

This letter is written to invite your organization to allow your practitioners to be participants in a research project entitled “Exploring Social Work practice in Formal Foster Care programs in Ethiopia”. The main purpose is to explore what the process of constructing a foster family, the role of practitioners, and the decision-making process is like in the foster care program your organization runs.

#### **Needed participants**

To the best knowledge of the researcher Bethany Christian Services is the pioneer of foster care in Ethiopia. Since practitioners in this arena are likely to be few, the researcher is interested in all the practitioners in this organization who work within the foster care programs.

#### **Entailment of participant**

A consent form with more detailed information will be provided to each participant which they may choose to sign if they freely choose to be a part of this study. Once it is signed then participants are expected to provide a date and time that is convenient for participants to conduct an in-depth interview which will be conducted over the phone. The interview is expected to take approximately 1 - 1:30 hour. The phone call will be recorded for the purpose of transcription and be discarded immediately at the end of the research period.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The research abides by the rules set up by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) to protect the rights of research participants and has gotten the approval to proceed with the project. The research strives to uphold the highest standards of ethics as instituted by the supervising University, the Erasmus Mundus program and the NSD.

## **Contact**

- Student Researcher: Eshcol Teferra email: [eshcol.teferra@gmail.com](mailto:eshcol.teferra@gmail.com)
- Supervisor: Kathrine Skoland email: [kathrine.skoland@uis.no](mailto:kathrine.skoland@uis.no)
- NSD: The Norwegian Centre for Research Data email: [personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)

## **Appendix II**

### **Are you interested in taking part in a research project aimed at “Exploring Social Work practice in Formal Foster Care programs in Ethiopia”?**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore what the process of constructing a foster family and the role of practitioners is like in Ethiopia. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

#### **Purpose of the project**

This research is being carried out in fulfilment of a master’s thesis with the University of Stavanger as the responsible institution for the project.

The project aims to identify social work practice in the area of formal foster care. It hopes to explore the roles that practitioners play by targeting two NGOs in Ethiopia who have foster-to-adopt programs. The research also wishes to examine the decision-making process of the practitioner.

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

To the best knowledge of the researcher there are only two NGOs in Ethiopia that exercise formal foster care programs, Bethany Christian services and SOS Children’s Village. Since practitioners in this arena are likely to be few, the population meaning all practitioners in these two organizations who work with formal foster care will be part of the sample.

#### **What does participation involve for you?**

If you choose to take part in the project, this will involve an in-depth interview which will be conducted via phone. It is expected to take approximately 1 hour. The phone call will be recorded for the purpose of transcription.

#### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made

anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- The only people who will have access to the interview conducted will be the researcher in charge of the project and the supervisor.
- The recorded audio will be transcribed during which all personal data will be coded, the respective code will be saved separately from the main transcription. The folders under which both these data are saved will be locked under a protective password.

Due to the nature of the research, the employment position and place of work of the participants will be visible which unintentionally will reveal the identity of the participants. But since the purpose of the interview is to explore the inner workings of seasoned social work practitioners with regards to their work, it is not expected to be a problem.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end on September 29<sup>th</sup> during which the sound recording, and transcription will be deleted.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- Access the personal data that is being processed about you.
- Request that your personal data is deleted.
- Request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified.
- Receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- Send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with University of Stavanger, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

**Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- University of Stavanger via Eshcol Teferra by email [eshcol.teferra@gmail.com](mailto:eshcol.teferra@gmail.com) or Kathrine Skoland, [kathrine.skoland@uis.no](mailto:kathrine.skoland@uis.no)
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: [personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader  
(Supervisor)

Student  
(Researcher)

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**Consent form**

I have received and understood information about the project [Exploring Social Work practice in Formal Foster Care programs in Ethiopia] and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent:

- To participate in an interview
- For my employment agency and position to be revealed which may identify me as a social work practitioner working at an NGO.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approximately September 29<sup>th</sup>.

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(Signed by participant, date)

## Appendix III

### Interview Questions 1

1. Educational Background
2. Position (Job description/ role)
3. How long have you worked in Bethany and in this specific program?
4. Briefly describe the project and what it does.
5. Religion
6. What is the religious orientation of the foster families? How about the children under the care of the institution?
7. What kind of response do people have when you attempt recruitment for the program?
8. How many children and foster families are in the foster care project right now?
9. What are the criteria for recruiting a foster family and children?
10. Who is involved in the recruitment and placement decisions?
11. How many children can one family foster?
12. What is the preference of families when it comes to children to foster in terms of ethnicity, age, gender?
13. What goes into the preparation of the foster child and the family prior to placement?  
Trainings
14. Describe a typical placement day.
15. How does the financial support for the foster families look like?
16. How many cases are you personally handling? Statuses
17. How is a specific child matched with a specific family?
18. Do the children participate in the choice of placement? Are they involved in the process?
19. Do you consult the alternative childcare guidelines in your work?
20. In your opinion what do you think is the best alternative childcare form? Why?
21. What do you think of foster care when compared to traditional childcare?
22. Would you personally ever foster a child?
23. Do you think your faith or the families' faith can affect the work that is done?
24. Has there been cases of children being abused, neglected, or exploited by their foster families? Describe it.

25. Could anything have been done to prevent it? Or has anything been done afterwards to stop it from ever happening again?
26. What do you perceive are the strengths of the program?
27. What are the weaknesses?
28. How should the weaknesses improve?
29. What opportunities exist to further strengthen this program?
30. What do you perceive as threats to the program?
31. Describe the follow up and evaluation process after placement. Frequency, type, forms, home visits, tools, etc.
32. Do you report back to any government authority?
33. How has covid affected the work that you do?

## Appendix IV

### Interview Questions 2

1. Educational Background
2. Position (Job description/ role)
3. How long have you worked in Bethany and in this specific program?
4. Briefly describe the project and what it does.
5. How did it get started and what stage is it on now?
6. What are the main themes of the new alternative childcare guideline you are working on?
7. Specifically on the area of foster care what major changes have been introduced?
8. So, what does your day-to-day job look like?
9. How are you deciding what should be included?
10. Who is involved in the decision making?
11. How is it being funded? Government or NGO?
12. Religion..... Do you think the religion of the NGO you are working on or your own personal religion affects the work you do positively or negatively?
13. What does the document address in recruitment? Specific criteria
14. What does the document address in Matching? Specific criteria
15. What should be involved in the preparation of both the family, the agency, and the child?
16. What is your opinion on older children and foster care?
17. What topics are being given emphasis on the document?
18. What were the shortcomings of the last document?
19. In your opinion what do you think is the best alternative childcare form? Why?
20. What do you think of foster care when compared to traditional childcare?
21. Would you personally ever foster a child?
22. What do you perceive are the strengths of the existing alternative childcare guideline?
23. What are the weaknesses?
24. How should the weaknesses improve?
25. What opportunities exist to further strengthen this program?
26. What do you perceive as threats to the program?

27. Describe the follow up and evaluation process after placement. Frequency, type, forms, home visits, tools, etc.
28. How has covid affected the work that you do?