

Examining the Perspectives of Pentecostal Pastors' Wives on the Right of Children in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse is a common phenomenon in Ghana. It is reported that about ninety percent of children in Ghana experience different forms of abuse of their rights. Promotion and protection of the rights of children are appropriate interventions where child right abuses exist. The Children's Act of Ghana (Act 560) mandates all persons and institutions to uphold the rights of children. The paper explores the perspectives of Pentecostal pastors' wives on the rights of children, including their roles in the protection of the right of children. Using a qualitative approach, data was generated from thirty-five participants. The study observed that participants have adequate understanding of child rights and view their roles as pastors' wives as a vital tool to effect changes in areas of child right abuses. The paper concludes that despite adequate understanding and involvement in child rights promotion and protection among Pentecostal pastors' wives, intentional institutional collaborations are needed for enduring impacts.

1. Introduction

Despite the legal and policy commitments, child rights violations are still prevalent in Ghana. According to UNICEF Ghana, approximately 90% of children experience some form of abuse in homes, schools and the community at large (UNICEF 2018). This implies that violation of the right of children is a public health concern since it has both short-term and long-term devastating effects. The 2021 population census estimates that there are 12.9 million children in Ghana, which is 34 per cent of the total population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022). The Constitution of Ghana and the Children's Act of 1998 (Act 560) define a child as any person below 18 years. Ghana was one of the first countries to sign the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990, more than 30 years ago.

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The CRC is considered as a human treaty that is most widely ratified in human history (Arigatou 2019). In the notion of the CRC, a child is “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Article 1). There are four articles of the CRC (articles 2, 3, 6, and 12) that make provisions for interpreting and implementing all other rights in the Convention:

Article 2: The rights in the CRC shall apply to all children without discrimination of any kind irrespective of the child or the child's parent's or legal guardians' status.

Article 3: In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 6: Every child has the inherent right to life, survival, and development.

Article 12: Children have the right to express their views in all matters that affect their lives and to be heard, while taking into account their age and the level of their maturity.

There is evidence that these four basic principles such as non-discrimination; the best interest of the child; right to life, survival, and development; and respect for the views of a child are consistent with the teachings of Scripture and the Christian faith (Arigatou 2019).

Ghana after the ratification of the CRC in 1990, developed her own guidelines contained in the Children's Act of Ghana (Act 560). The Children's Act 1998 (Act 560) stipulates among other provisions, that “the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration by any court, person, institution or other body in any matter concerned with a child.” (Government of Ghana 1998, 6). Drawing from this principle, the Act outlines key specific rights of children such as right to:

Non-discrimination; name and nationality; to grow up with parent; parental property; education and well-being; social activity; opinion; protection from exploitative labour and torture. The article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that governments must protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, abuse, neglect, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while under the care of parents, guardians, or any other caregiver.

The Government of Ghana (MoGCSP), in collaboration with its partner NGOs, has launched several policies and programmes to support child rights protection. For instance, the Child and Family Welfare Policy was launched in 2014 to ensure a wide protective network of children by working with all stakeholders to promote child welfare. The policy mandates churches to “provide communication and education initiatives that promote positive family values; provide direct help to vulnerable families and serve as their advocates; provide care and support services to families, children and adolescents; and participate in national co-ordination activities to minimize duplication and enhance the establishment of complementary programmes, projects and activities” (MoGCSP 2014, 22).

In addition, Ghana launched a programme, with support of the UNICEF Ghana called the ‘Ghanaians Against Child Abuse’(GACA) since 2017. This programme leads the advocacy that creates awareness of the rights of children and mobilizes stakeholders towards the protection of children's rights. Since its launch, one key stakeholder the initiative targets are the faith communities. Over the last three years, the Department of Children with support from UNICEF has been holding workshops with religious leaders with the aim of creating awareness of the rights of children. The workshops also highlight the strategic position religious leaders occupy in the communities that can be leveraged to lead child right and protection campaigns in their respective institutions and communities.

In response to national and international pressure, the Church of Pentecost has introduced its Child Protection and Safety Policy in July 2024, which requires all members to ensure the rights of children are promoted and child abuse prevented. But the implementation of the policy requires the understanding and agency of the frontline actors in the church. Revered as 'mothers of the church', pastors' wives have a special opportunity to impact child protection because of their access to women and children. However, their views have not been much discussed in the literature. This study, therefore, examines Pentecostal wives' perceptions of children's rights, types of child abuse they witness in their communities and their role in the promotion and protection of children's rights in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

1.1 Understanding of Child Right and Protection among Pastors' Wives

Understanding of children's rights and the need for their protection is key to be explored in clergy's wife since their role in both society and the faith community is connected to care and welfare of children. In a global study on the multi-religious leader's role in the promotion of the rights of children, it was observed that there is a growing support for the promotion of Children's right among religious leaders globally (Arigatou 2019). This could partly be due to the understanding among religious leaders on the rights of children. For instance, it was reported that faith communities played active role in the drafting, shaping and promotion of the ramification of the convention of the right of the child (Arigatou 2019). Similarly, UNICEF (2015) reports that historically, faith communities were active players in the promotion of the rights of children before the commencement of the work of UNICEF.

In spite of this data, studies in relation to Christian faith community's role in the promotion of children's rights were among pastors. However, there is limited data on the subject among the pastors' wives (Eyber et al, 2018). Most studies that connect with clergy's understanding of child protection were among clergy, which is male dominated in Ghana and Africa as a whole. According to Eyber et al, (2018), pastors wives surveyed had adequate understanding of child abuse and protection issues in their communities. Consequently, many of them initiate and support child protection efforts in their communities. Pastors' wives understand the contextual complexities of child protection and are able to adopt local measures to address them since they approach the problem from an 'insider' perspective. However, the level of knowledge of children's rights and protection issues among the study population could be due to the fact that participants had received training from the World Vision on children's rights and welfare issues prior to their participation in the study.

1.2 The Role of Pentecostal Pastors' Wives in the Protection of the Rights of Children

The World Council of Churches (WCC) conversation on the advocacy for the rights of children concluded that "the church is called to care for children in the community and the church by advocating for their rights in partnership with other organizations, by empowering them to stand up for their rights and by implementing policies and procedures to protect children (WCC 2017).

The pastor's wife is considered as the mother of the whole church. As part of their motherly role, the pastors' wives are expected to pay special attention to the needs of women and children (Sande & Maforo 2021). The mother role model is crucial when it comes to raising children in the fear of the Lord for women and children. The pastors' wives play key roles in counselling women and their children, making them obtain a comprehensive understanding of issues of women and children in the communities.

In the Ghanaian context, women play key role in the care and protection of children. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) observes that women lead efforts against child abuse and play key roles in implementing national programs such as the Child and Family Welfare Policy (MoGCSP 2021). Some studies in Ghana that explores the role of pastors' wives concluded that apart from domestic roles, they are considered helpers to their husband's ministry by leading, educating and providing counselling for women in the church (Kyere 2023; Andor 2013). The continuous engagement of women in the church implies they are involved in the care of children by influencing women to care for their children. Frimpong (2022), in a study of the role of women in the church of Pentecost in Ghana observed that women play crucial roles such as teaching on wives' responsibilities at home, child welfare, care and education.

Pastors' wives in the Church of Pentecost are expected to support their husbands to build all the ministries, especially women and children ministries. In a study to explore engagement of child protection issues in the community by faith communities in Malawi, it was observed that pastors' wives are powerful resources for addressing child protections concerns at the community level (Eyber et al 2018). It was reported that pastors' wives played key roles such as sensitization and mobilization of women groups in their church and communities. Others were involved directly in preventing violation of the right of children such as sending children to school, harsh punishment, child marriage and child labour. The ability of the pastors' wives to play key roles in child protection stems from the unique position of trust they occupy, giving them access to women and using that to influence women in the congregation and the communities. Additionally, some wives are able to partner with their husbands to use existing church structures to promote the right of children (Eyber et al 2018).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Religious Actors' Engagement with Children's Rights

Religious institutions occupy a complex and often contradictory position within global child rights discourse. Historically, faith communities have played significant roles in the promotion of children's welfare through caregiving, education, advocacy, and moral formation (Katz, 2023). The World Council of Churches (WCC, 2017) maintains that churches possess a divine responsibility to protect children through advocacy, empowerment, and institutional safeguarding measures. Similarly, UNICEF (2015) observes that religious organizations promoted children's welfare long before the formal emergence of international child protection institutions. Arigatou International (2019) further found increasing global support among religious leaders for the four guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), namely non-discrimination, survival and development, best interests of the child, and participation rights. These studies together place religion as a potentially powerful force to promote child protection and social justice.

However, there is increasing empirical evidence of conflicts between religious teachings and some aspects of child rights protection (Shelley, 2013; Ziebertz & Sterkens, 2018). A big paradox is the discipline of many Christian and Pentecostal families. Throughout history, the Bible has been used to justify corporal punishment as a means of moral correction, as in Proverbs 13:24 (Shelley, 2013). Gershoff et al. (2018), however, show that physical punishment has long-term emotional, psychological and behavioural consequences for children. This puts a direct tension between religious disciplinary culture and Article 19 of the CRC which requires protection from all forms of violence and abuse. Similarly, an emphasis on submission to parental and spiritual authority in many African Pentecostal settings can

negatively influence the participatory rights of children as described in Article 12 of the CRC, which guarantees children the right to express their views on matters affecting them (Dube, 2018). The other contradiction is on the issue of institutional accountability. Churches are sometimes considered gatekeepers of morals, but studies have shown that they can also be involved in facilitating abuse in order to preserve their reputation and spiritual legitimacy. McLeigh and Taylor (2020) identified that some religious groups were able to silence disclosure of child sexual abuse, which led to the continuation of victimisation. Thus, religion becomes a protective and restrictive force in the discourse of child rights. Such tensions indicate that while there is in principle support for children's rights, this does not always mean that there is in practice protection of children's rights. Understanding how religious actors negotiate these contradictions therefore remains an important scholarly and policy concern, particularly within African Pentecostal settings where religion exerts strong influence over family life, morality, and social behaviour.

2.2 The Position of Pastors' Wives: Empowerment or Constraint?

The tensions in religious child protection discourse are further highlighted in relation to the role of pastors' wives. Pastors' wives, who have a significant role in the lives of women, children and vulnerable families, have been relatively under-researched in the field of faith-based child protection, which has tended to focus on clergy, formal church leaders and institutional religious structures (Eyber et al., 2018). This neglect is important because the role of the pastor's wife is a unique one that involves informal authority in the areas of care, counselling, moral guidance, and spiritual leadership in Pentecostal communities.

In many African churches, the pastor's wife is socially acknowledged as the “mother of the church” (Sande & Maforo, 2021), which gives her a social mandate to relate to women and children and to hold the mandate of moral and spiritual wellbeing. Women in Ghana are already heavily engaged in grassroots child welfare and child protection interventions (MoGCSP, 2021), and pastors' wives are expected to assist women and children's ministries in counselling, parenting guidance and emotional support (Frimpong, 2022). The roles might place pastors' wives in a position of influence in the local child protection systems or in faith-based welfare interventions.

But the influence that comes with the role can also come with limitations. Kyere (2023) suggests that the Ghanaian clergy wife had been historically formed by the missionary ideologies of the colonial era which highlighted domesticity, subservience and supportive caregiving of the woman, rather than independent authority. Similarly, Andor (2013) views pastors' wives in terms of their serving as assistants and helpers to their husbands' ministries. This results in structural tension as the wives of the pastors can have moral influence and social legitimacy while simultaneously not having institutional autonomy and decision-making power. Their situation, as a result, is thus a state of empowerment and constraint at the same time. They may also have significant relational power in their families and congregations, but they may have less autonomy in influencing child protection decisions and making advocacy.

The limited empirical studies available further expose this ambiguity. Eyber et al. (2018), in a study conducted in Malawi, found that pastors' wives possessed substantial understanding of child abuse and child protection concerns and actively mobilized communities against harmful practices such as child marriage, denial of education, and child labour. They were effective because they had access to local communities and were trusted. However, the same study reported that participants had been beneficiaries of world Vision's child protection training, casting doubt on whether their child rights consciousness was a product of the Pentecostal institutions of care or external advocacy efforts. Furthermore, the Malawian context differs

considerably from Ghana's sociocultural and ecclesiastical environment. Despite Ghana's Children's Act 560, Child and Family Welfare Policy, and the Church of Pentecost's recently launched Child Protection Policy, no comparable study has explored how Ghanaian Pentecostal pastors' wives understand, interpret, and promote children's rights. This creates an important empirical and conceptual gap within both child-rights and Pentecostal studies scholarship.

2.3 Research Gap and Theoretical Anchor

The literature reveals unresolved tensions regarding the relationship between religion, gender, and child protection within Pentecostal contexts. While there is recognition that faith communities can contribute to the well-being of children through care, advocacy and moral guidance, evidence also shows that some religious beliefs and practices can negatively affect children's rights through institutional silence about abuse, suppression of children's participation and through the use of corporal punishment. Likewise, the role of the pastor's wife is depicted as one of powerful spiritual mother and caregiver, but also as one who is limited by patriarchy that places her in a subordinate role as helper, not as an independent agent. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how Ghanaian Pentecostal pastors' wives think about children's rights, understand child abuse and practice child protection in churches and communities.

The study, therefore, uses Social Role Theory (1987; 2012), Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 1994), and Rights-Based Theory (1989; 2003) as complementary theoretical anchors to address these gaps. Social Role Theory (1987; 2012) explains how gendered expectations shape the nurturing, caregiving, and supportive responsibilities associated with pastors' wives while also exposing how these expectations may constrain independent agency and leadership (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012). Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 1994) places child protection among other interrelated systems such as the family, church, community, culture, and policy systems, as a way to understand how the wife of the pastor operates at multiple levels of influence and negotiation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Based on the principles of the CRC, Rights-Based Theory (1989; 2003) offers normative benchmarks for determining if local understandings and practices are consistent with internationally recognized child rights frameworks (United Nations, 1989; Jonsson, 2003). The integration of these theories provides a robust analytical lens for examining how Pentecostal pastors' wives negotiate the intersections between religion, gender, culture, and child protection within contemporary Ghanaian society.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design grounded within an interpretivist philosophical paradigm. Interpretivism was deemed suitable as it acknowledges the subjective and context-specific aspects of the human experience, including child rights in faith-based contexts influenced by spirituality, gender roles, and sociocultural values. A descriptive phenomenological approach was used to understand lived experiences and the way of making meaning out of child rights promotion and protection by Pentecostal pastors' wives (Sandelowski, 2000).

Participants were recruited through criterion purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) from the Church of Pentecost in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The denomination was selected because it launched a Child Protection and Safety Policy in July 2024, maintains a structured women's ministry system, and represents the largest Pentecostal denomination in Ghana. Eligibility criteria required participants to be legally married wives of ordained pastors actively serving within the Church of Pentecost, have a minimum of five years' experience as pastors'

wives, and be at least 30 years old. The five-year requirement ensured adequate ministerial and relational experience, while the age criterion excluded younger wives whose experiences may differ significantly; this remains a limitation of the study.

Recruitment was conducted through four randomly selected districts within Greater Accra. District pastors issued introductory letters to eligible participants, after which the research team contacted them directly. No incentives were provided. Out of 46 eligible pastors’ wives identified, 35 consented to participate, representing a 76% response rate. The age rang distribution is follows: 23 (65.7%) participants were between 31-40 years old whilst 12 (34.3%) were between 40-50 years old. Regarding duration in ministry, 15 (42.9%) participants were in ministry between 6 -10 years whilst 20(57.1%) were in ministry for more than 10 years.

The study received ethical clearance from the Pentecost University Research Ethics Committee (Protocol No. PU-REC/2025-04) and institutional approval from the Church of Pentecost headquarters. All participants were given the opportunity to provide written informed consent, which included the purpose of the study, the voluntariness of participation, confidentiality, and the ability to withdraw, as well as data protection procedures.

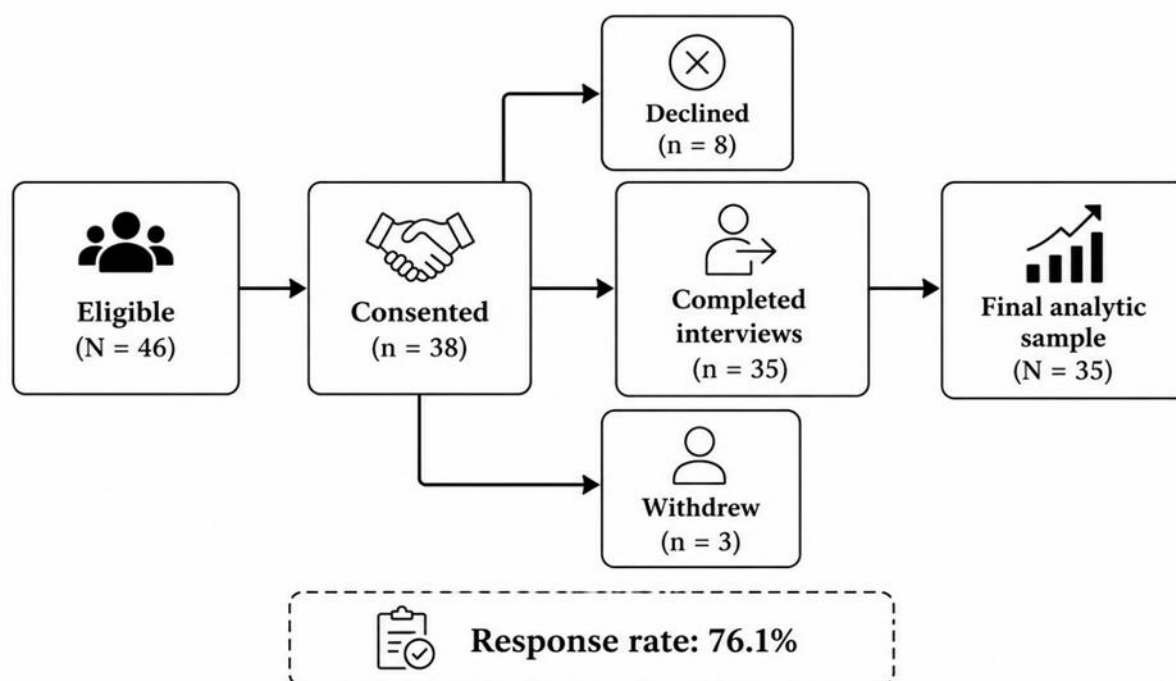


Figure 1: Recruitment Flow Diagram

Data were collected in English using one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was developed specifically for this study, based on the research objectives. The guide contained four main thematic sections: understanding of child rights (e.g., “How do you understand the right of the child?” and “Why should children have rights?”); knowledge of specific child rights (e.g., “What are some of the rights of children?”); perceptions of child right abuses in the community (e.g., “What constitutes abuse of the right of the child in your community?”); and church involvement and collaboration (e.g., “Which institutions are tasked with protecting child rights in your community?” and “Does the church work with any of them?”). All questions were open-ended and followed by neutral probes such as “Could you tell me more about that?” and “Can you give me an example?” to encourage detailed responses. The interview guide was piloted with three pastors’ wives who were not part of the final sample; this pilot helped refine wording, adjust question sequencing, and estimate interview

length (which averaged 55 minutes). After the pilot, only minor changes to the phrasing of two probes were made. Each participant took part in one interview, conducted in a private, quiet location of their choice (usually a private room in the church building or the participant's home). All interviews were audio-recorded with the explicit written consent of each participant.

After each interview, the researcher wrote descriptive and reflective field notes. The descriptive notes documented non-verbal cues, the physical setting and any interruptions; the reflective notes recorded the researcher's initial impressions and potential biases. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. All transcripts were anonymised immediately after transcription: participant names, names of specific churches, and any other identifiers were removed and replaced with participant codes. The master sheet linking codes to real identities was stored separately in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the principal researcher.

A total of 35 pastors' wives participated. The sample size was not fixed in advance; instead, data collection continued until data saturation was reached, defined as the point at which no new codes or themes emerged from the interviews (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). After 30 interviews, no new codes were identified; the final five interviews served as a saturation check and confirmed that the existing codebook was comprehensive. Therefore, 35 participants were deemed sufficient for the study aims.

Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework described by Braun and Clarke (2006). In Phase 1 (familiarisation), the researcher reads each transcript three times, listened to the audio recordings while reading, and made initial notes in the margins. In Phase 2 (generating initial codes), the researcher used NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software to systematically assign codes to segments of text relevant to the research questions. Codes were inductive (grounded in the data) rather than pre-determined; for example, segments discussing children's access to food, school materials or medical care were coded as "basic physical needs." In Phase 3 (searching for themes), codes were collated and grouped into broader candidate themes; for instance, the codes "denial of education," "child labour during school hours," and "children not sent to school" were combined under the candidate theme "educational neglect." In Phase 4 (reviewing themes), candidate themes were reviewed at two levels: first, within each theme to ensure coherence and distinctness; second, against the full dataset to ensure that no relevant data had been missed. In Phase 5 (defining and naming themes), each final theme was given a clear definition and a concise, descriptive name. The findings reported in Table 1 of the paper are a direct output of this phase. Phase 6 (producing the report) involved writing the narrative findings, using direct quotations from participants to illustrate each theme.

To enhance rigour, a second researcher (a PhD candidate with experience in qualitative methods) independently coded 25% of the transcripts (approximately every fourth participant). The two coders then compared their coding; the percentage agreement (number of segments coded identically divided by total number of coded segments) was 88%. All discrepancies were discussed and resolved, and the final coding frame was a negotiated product of two independent perspectives. Trustworthiness was established following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement (the researcher spent two weeks in the church communities before data collection), peer debriefing (the study supervisor reviewed two transcripts and the initial codebook), and member checking (a summary of preliminary findings was presented to five participants, who confirmed that the themes resonated with their experiences). Transferability was supported by thick description of the participants, their roles, the Ghanaian Pentecostal context, and the Greater Accra Region setting. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a complete audit trail that included raw data, field notes, codebooks,

analysis memos and records of all methodological decisions, which was examined by an external auditor. Confirmability was achieved through the researcher's reflexive journal, in which personal assumptions and biases were documented, and through the extensive use of direct participant quotations.

4. Findings

This section presents findings on participants' knowledge and perception of children's rights. Several themes emerged and these are categorised to encompass pastors' wives understanding of children's rights and their role in the promotion of children's rights in the church as well as the community in which they serve.

4.1 Perspectives of children's rights and Perceived Importance

The findings of the study indicated a range of interpretations that represent a diverse yet integrated understanding of children's rights among Pentecostal pastors' wives. The responses were categorised into fundamental needs and protection, freedom and rights to decision making and expression, love, care and attention, and structures ensuring children's rights are protected.

Some participants associated the right of the child and its importance with access to basic needs and protection. They highlighted amenities such as food, clothes, shelter, education, and other critical resources that support a child's physical, mental, and social development. As evident in the narratives below, this perspective offers a practical and material interpretation of children's rights, founded in the everyday realities of caring and family responsibilities.

All children are vulnerable and need to be protected (Field Interview, March 2025)

The child has access to basic needs and protection (Field interview, March 2025)

In addition to basic amenities and protection, other participants introduced the spiritual dimension and the need for children to have rights because they are also children of God:

... Things a child is entitled to get or have that will not harm him/her physically, spiritually, emotionally or socially. (Field Interview, March 2025)

..That children are part of God's creation and, therefore, must be allowed to develop well (Field Interview, March 2025)

According to this narrative, a child's wellbeing extends beyond physical and emotional needs to encompass spiritual nurture and social stability for holistic development. In relation to emotional wellbeing, other participants also emphasized the emotional components of children's rights by making reference to love, *care and attention* given to the child, thereby recognizing how crucial they are in the rights of children. As evident in the passage below, participants also found it necessary for children to have rights because they are also humans with dignity:

They should have rights because they are human beings with inherent value and dignity (Field Interview, March 2025)

Because humans deserve every right. Adults are not superior to children in terms of rights (Field Interview, March 2025).

Further, other participants framed the rights of the child in terms of freedom and entitlements, while others alluded to the importance of decision making and expression, highlighting the right of children to speak, ask questions, and make decisions.

A guided freedom of the child for the child to develop into a useful being without fear or favour and devoid of intimidation and inferiority complex. (Field Interview, March 2025)

...The child is supposed to speak and ask questions...to give them some opportunity to take some decisions for themselves (Field Interview, March 2025)

However, in conversations on why children should have right, the issue of guided freedom was thus clarified as in the narrative below which indicated that while children are allowed to make decisions, these decisions should be guided since they are too young to make informed decisions that will shape them to be responsible individuals in future.

To ensure that they have the best of care and training in a good home that will help nurture them into good, respected, acceptable adults in our society.

They are young and cannot take informed decisions for themselves (Field Interview, March 2025).

Finally, in addition to parents and family efforts, one participant acknowledged the necessity of procedures and organizations that ensure children's rights are upheld by referring to "systems put in place to ensure fairness, protection and optimal livelihood for the child's right to life, education, growth, etc, and another participant brings to the fore that "societal processes that promote fairness, education, growth, and protection" (Field Interview March 2025).

This implies an understanding that children's rights must be institutionalized and protected by policies and coordinated actions.

4.2 Knowledge of Rights Among Pastors Wives

The findings reveal knowledge of children's rights among participants.

The Figure 2 seeks to give a vivid illustration of the knowledge of children's rights as mentioned by participants. As apparent below, education/school emerged as the most mentioned.

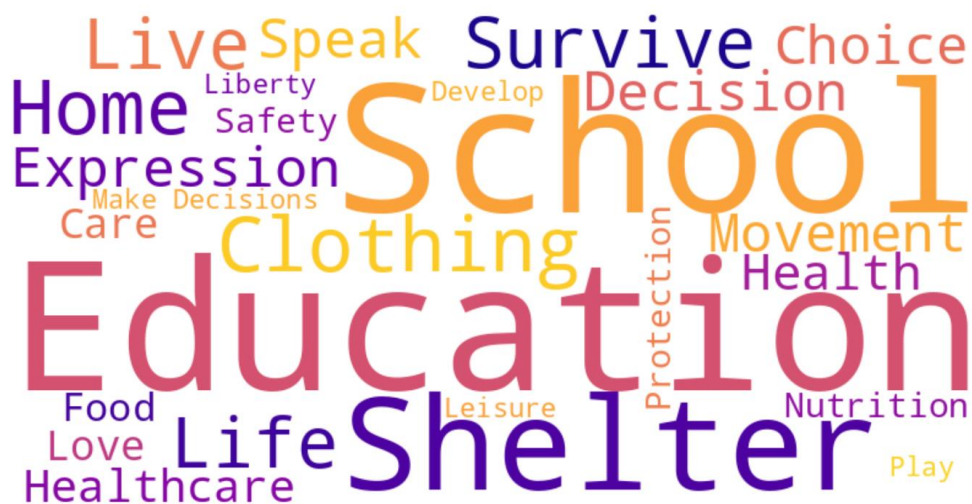


Figure 2: word cloud representing knowledge of children's rights among participants

The right to education appeared as the commonly underlined, emphasizing its vital significance in encouraging both individual development and greater society advancement. The right to shelter and clothing was also stressed, bringing to bare the imperative of ensuring children had access to safe and suitable living conditions. Similarly, the right to life and survival, and the

right to freedom of expression and participation also highlighted the necessity of safeguarding children’s lives and enabling their involvement in decisions affecting them.

The right to health and access to healthcare was also viewed as significant, reflecting the significance placed on the physical well-being of children. Emotional and social components were expressed in references to the love and care needed to nurture relationships and familial support. Furthermore, the right to protection from injury and exploitation featured in the findings, suggesting concern for children’s safety and general welfare. Conversely, the right to play and related entitlements got comparably less attention, showing that while these rights are acknowledged, they may be seen as secondary to more immediate requirements such as education, health, and protection.

4.3 Knowledge of Children’s Rights Abuse Among Pastors’ Wives

As indicated below, the participants responses reveal various forms of child rights abuse within their communities, with several areas of concern highlighted.

Table 1: Summary of responses on what constitutes abuse of child rights

| Category | Examples of Reported Abuses |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Denial of Basic Needs | Denial of food, clothing, shelter; hunger; lack of love and attention; lack of provision for schooling materials; unmet basic needs. |
| Educational Neglect | Denial of education; children working during school hours; children sent to farm instead of school; preventing access to basic education. |
| Child Labour and Exploitation | Street hawking; excessive workload; hazardous work; child labour in farming or other business; treating children as labour source. |
| Physical Abuse | Beating; physical punishment; inflicting physical harm; overly punishing children; physical ill treatment. |
| Emotional and Psychological Abuse | Emotional abuse; verbal abuse; bullying; harassment; psychological maltreatment; treating children wrongly; oppression and confinement. |
| Sexual Abuse and Exploitation | Sexual abuse; child trafficking; sex trafficking; forced early or child marriage. |
| Neglect and Poor Parenting | Negligence of parents; irresponsible parenting; unconcerned or wicked caregivers; bad parenting; single parenting; broken homes. |
| Financial and Resource Mismanagement | Misuse or misappropriation of child support funds; poverty; lack of financial care and provision. |
| Cultural and Social Barriers | Community norms that restrict movement (e.g., not going out after 7pm); forcing children to act beyond age; lack of awareness of children’s rights. |
| Spiritual and Moral Deprivation | Lack of physical and spiritual direction. |

From the table above, denial of basic needs was indicated as the most common form of abuse, with children being deprived of essentials like food, clothing, love, and attention. Some children are denied educational resources with instances where funds allocated for the children are misused. Participants also recounted that harsh punishment and excessive work contribute to the neglect of children's rights. Physical, mental, and verbal abuse was another common form of children’s rights violations mentioned by participants. Bullying, harassment, and the denial of education were also regarded as types of abuse that affect children's emotional and psychological wellbeing. Sexual abuse, child labour and exploitation are serious concerns,

especially in communities where youngsters are expected to work rather than attend school, thereby forcing children to take on responsibilities that are not age appropriate.

4.4 Perspectives on Church Involvement in Promoting Children's Rights

The findings demonstrate a strong belief in the church's role in promoting child rights, with all participants affirming its involvement. Several narratives were cited to support this position.

If we don't, the world will and do it in the wrong way. (Field Interview, March 2025).

Because biblically it is the church that has the biblical and moral values to train a child in the way of the Lord (Field Interview, March 2025).

As seen above, from a biblical and religious perspective, participants considered the church as accountable for protecting vulnerable individuals, particularly children, expressing God's love and moral values. To participants, the church's mission extends beyond spiritual disciplines to developing holistic individuals, emphasising the significance of being proactive to prevent future societal difficulties. The church's societal effect is also underlined by some participants:

Most of the children's parent are in the church and church have great influence in the community (Field Interview, March 2025).

The Church of God seeks to reconcile the world to God through His word and deeds set as examples in the bible. Should children be left to do whatever they wish or left uncared for, they would grow up becoming hooligans and burdens in the same society, and then the church would be expected to right the wrongs which could have been prevented from the very beginning. (Field Interview, March 2025).

As demonstrated above, in addition to the church's significant numbers, its capacity to successfully convey children's rights to the public can considerably alleviate the challenges of child protection initiatives. The church's role in educating and protecting children is essential, particularly in combating abuse and neglect and to break the cycle of perpetuation of abuse.

Further, the church's role in holistic ministry and shaping now and future leaders is another key issue. Children are considered vital now and the future, and the church has the potential to influence their moral and spiritual growth:

Because the church will promote the child's right holistically (physical, emotional and spiritual) (Field Interview, March 2025).

Children are the future leaders and must be of great concern to the church (Field Interview, March 2025).

The possessing the nations agenda does not exclude children and I believe we build tomorrow based on today through the children (Field Interview, March 2025).

Thus, the church is viewed as the right place for promoting children's rights both on biblical and moral foundations, able to change society views regarding childcare and establish safe circumstances for children. Its voice can lead to greater care and rights for children.

4.5 Collaboration Between the Church and Institutions

The findings from the study about the partnership between the church and agencies tasked with the protection of children's rights reveal a blend of awareness, engagement, and opportunities for development. There were 11 missing responses which could imply no church collaboration or awareness and several instances where, participants acknowledged a lack of information

regarding current connections between the church and child protection institutions. Some expressions used in this regard are;

None that I know of, there is collaboration but don't really know more about it... I am not aware of any collaboration...can't tell for no... no idea...yet to collaborate (Field Interview, March 2025).

This indicates that either communication about these activities has not reached all participants of the community or that formal collaboration is still in its early stages. Some pointed out that the church works alongside social welfare services and social professionals to support vulnerable children. Some avenues of collaborations are depicted in the narratives below:

We both collaborate to provide education and support to community and abused children. (Field Interview, March 2025).

The church is collaborating with UNICEF, NGOs, NCCE, COPCEF and others to protect the right of the child (Field Interview, March 2025).

Thus, the church's support for child protection operations is obvious, with several participants describing church-led collaborative projects such as capacity building programmes, lobbying campaigns, with agencies like UNICEF and local groups such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) to educate children about their rights. However, while there are current collaborations, some participants indicated that these relationships are often not fully understood or precisely defined.

4.6 Pentecostal Pastors Wives Personal Contribution to Children's Rights Promotion

Findings from the study reveal several key contributions of pastors' wives in promoting child rights such as parental and community engagement, child-centred support, and empowerment. Some participants frequently referenced the use of biblical teachings, and church platforms to instil values and shape positive moral responsibility in children. This approach emphasises the spiritual duty to protect and nurture children.

...Spread the love of Christ, how He loves children and wants us to embrace them with love and care (Field Interview, March 2025)

Speaking to members of my church about parenting. (Field Interview, March 2025)

Further, participants showed a focus on educating parents and sensitizing the wider community about children's rights and responsibilities. Pastors' wives use church activities, seminar, and informal gatherings and conversations to influence attitudes and practices around children's right as evident in the narratives below.

Letting them know that the right of the children will help them know their responsibility and be wonderful kids (Field Interview, March 2025).

Training parents to become agents of child rights protection and organising seminars for children to understand their rights and responsibilities (Field Interview, March 2025)

Additionally, other narratives highlight practical and emotional support for children, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds. This includes provision of food, education, basic needs, and creating safe spaces where children can be heard and supported.

Spending time with Children to listen to their struggles and what they wished their parents would do for them and communicating them back to the care givers (Field Interview, March 2025).

We help them with educational support, food and for those on the street get foster parents who are willing to take responsibility of them (Field Interview, March 2025).

We have opened our doors for the community, members including children to come in with their problems, so they do come to us. We handle maintenance cases often in the mission house. We buy things they need for school (Field Interview, March 2025).

Respondents also described the use of informal educational platforms and creative activities to empower children and encourage their personal development.

Discipling the children and teens in my church and community through clubs and Sunday school meetings (Field Interview, March 2025).

Engaging the children in disciplinary training sessions to help foster their ability to listen to instructions and abide in them like drama, chorography, Kadet, art club, singing and lastly educating children on the need to obey and honour their parents. (Field Interview, March 2025).

5. Discussion

The study's findings demonstrate a varied yet unified understanding of children as vulnerable groups to be protected, the Church of Pentecost is not an exception to the general assumption that churches are one of the key institutions tasked with caring for and supporting vulnerable populations, including children. Spaumer & Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2025), found that Pentecostal church leaders in South Africa provide care for children in need, addressing physical, psychosocial, and spiritual needs. The findings do not deviate from that assertion as it showed that pastors' wives understood children's rights in terms of vulnerability and access to basic needs as well as mental and spiritual needs. This however, is in contrast to a study conducted by Kpalam (2023) among the congregation of the Church of Pentecost in Winneba, which suggests that while members understood child protection as the plans, activities, and structures put in place to protect children, child protection efforts are considered insufficient, focusing primarily on salvific aspects rather than more comprehensive practical child protection measures. Contrarily, this study reveals a step forward where pastors wives are paying attention to physical requirements and safety as opposed to only spirituality.

The faith and spiritual dimension as interpreted by pastors' spouses in this study cannot be overemphasized as it also constitutes child protection. Sagberg (2017), argues, spiritual development is crucial for human flourishing and should be included within the framework of children's rights. Faith further serves as a form of resilience for children suffering chronic vulnerabilities such as poverty, sickness etc in sub-Saharan Africa, enabling them to adjust to hardships and keep cultural identity (Mhaka-Mutepfa & Maundeni, 2017). Thus, for pastors' wives, spirituality in children's rights may not only be supplemental but intrinsic to child up bringing practices building a sense of hope and resilience to contribute to overall welfare. While spirituality is key, the emotional dimension was not left out. Participants concurred with Blaisdell et al. (2021) that the emotional and relational side of children's rights, particularly the emphasis on love, care, and attention. Emotional support was explained as vital for a child's growth and should be regarded as an essential entitlement.

The study acknowledged Article 12 of the UNCRC, which states that children have the right to express their opinions on matters affecting them. The acknowledgement of children's rights

to guided freedom expression and decision making in matters affecting them in this study represents a shift towards viewing children as active agents in their development. However, the term "guided freedom" also reflects a tension between autonomy and control, an issue examined by Millei (2012), who argues that adult interpretations of guidance can sometimes impede true participation and expression. That notwithstanding, the study indicates that guided freedom as expressed by pastors' wives is focused towards doing what is best for the child and aiding them make favourable decisions. This underscores the view that when adults make decisions, they should consider how their actions may affect children. All adults should do what is best for children. This further highlights Article 3 of the CRC which postulates that; In all activities regarding children, the best interests of the child shall be a fundamental consideration

The mention of systems and structures ensuring children's rights highlights the relevance of institutional procedures in the implementation of these rights. This is in line with the article 19 of the CRC that governments must protect children from all forms of abuse of the rights of children. It corresponds with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which highlights the importance of structures in implementing children's rights, focusing on legislative measures, integration in practices, cooperation, raising awareness, resources, and monitoring (Sormunen, 2020). However, while institutional structures are crucial, their performance in religious contexts typically rely on collaboration with community actors, including faith leaders (Kraft, 2020).

Regarding knowledge of children's rights, the emphasis on education overlaps with international human rights frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which regards education not only as a fundamental right but also as a crucial mechanism for the realization of other rights (UNICEF, 2020). Mutigwe & Konyana (2020) conducted a study on Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe and found that children's access to education was frequently hampered by the "working talents," theory which prioritized entrepreneurial activities over formal schooling and encouraged children to participate in labour-intensive activities such as horticulture and street hawking. Contrarily, this study on Ghanaian Pentecostal pastors' wives highlights the importance of the right to education. Thus, Pentecostal pastors' wives in Ghana demonstrates a more supportive attitude of children's rights, including the right to education, emotional care, and holistic development. The Ghanaian Pentecostal setting appears to prioritize education as vital to children's right and growth and reflecting global and national discourse on quality education, SDG 4.

The right to shelter and clothes were also notable, revealing an understanding among Pentecostal pastors' wives for the basic socioeconomic conditions required for child wellbeing. This accords with The General Comment No. 21 on street children's situations UNCRC (2017), which underlines the significance of safe housing for children's development and dignity. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) additionally establishes a child specific right to sufficient housing, recognizing children's inherent vulnerabilities (Wind et al., 2023). Notably, the mention of the right to life, health and survival, with freedom of expression and participation, implies a dual concern with both physical protection and participatory inclusion. This emphasises the movement in children's rights rhetoric from protection only models to more empowering approaches (Warrington & Larkins, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2023). This dual emphasis also resonates with the CRC Article 12 which stipulates children have the right to voice their views on all topics that affect their lives and to be heard, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) which states that children have the right to not only secure life but also growth and voice.

However, the minimal focus on the right to play and leisure cannot be overruled. This brings to bare that despite its vital role in fostering children's engagement, development, and wellness, play typically receives minimal acknowledgment (Colucci & Wright, 2015). Thus, even among faith communities, there is the need to advocate for a more inclusive, rights-based approach to leisure as linked with article 31 to provide children's access to safe, inclusive, and age-appropriate play options (Wright, 2018; Mukherjee, 2024).

Children's rights abuses were common observations in this study. The findings on known children's rights abuses concur with Amegadzi (2020) whose study on the impact of children's rights abuse in Ghanaian basic school pupils academic performance postulate that despite the country's ratification of the UN Convention on children's rights, children's rights violations such as denial of basic needs, verbal assault, sexual harassment, and emotional violence persist throughout various Ghanaian communities. While neglect of education is against Children's Acts of Ghana 1998, the Pastors wives pointed to children being neglected or forced into employment during school hours. This, to some extent, corresponds with Okeowhor et al. (2019), who opines that economic difficulties often pushes families to prioritize income above education and even misuse funds designated for children, thereby exposing children to long-term vulnerabilities and impeding their potential. Contrarily Tevington et al. (2017), indicated that middle income families in Philadelphia may compromise savings, retirement assets and lower college plans to finance their children's education. This brings to bare differences in prioritisation of child schooling and normalization of child employment in disadvantaged contexts, stressing how it infringes on children' right to a safe and enjoyable childhood (Gunnlaugsson, 2022).

The study revealed children's rights abuse such as restricting children's movement, beating as punishment, physical abuse, may be cultural standards of discipline. Nonetheless, Dye (2020) and Gershof et al. (2014) illustrate that such mistreatment can lead to substantial behavioural and psychological ramifications, even when culturally sanctioned as discipline. Sexual abuse and exploitation, including trafficking and early marriage as mentioned by participants are severe rights breaches with lifelong implications. Chaudhuri (2015) is of the view that these abuses are typically underreported because of stigma and lack of protective institutions. However, that entirely cannot be accentuated in this study as some participants made mention of some institutions that they collaborate with to address such issues.

Also, while not widely emphasized in this study, the problem of neglect of spiritual guidance was cited as constituting children's rights abuse. This puts to the fore the focus on spirituality among pastors' wives, highlighting that children require not just material assistance but also moral and spiritual care to grow into responsible individuals. This correlates with Schafer (2023), who calls for prioritizing spirituality in children's upbringing to develop peace, harmony, and stability in a world marked by the life-threatening challenges.

With respect to collaboration for child protection, the findings offer a complex view of the interaction between religions and agencies obligated to defend children's rights. While some individuals identified current collaborations, a considerable number either lacked awareness or provided ambiguous responses, indicating a mismatch between collaborative efforts and community-wide knowledge or engagement. It can therefore be sided with Kpalam (2023), that there may be limited strategic alliances with state agencies that are active in child safety and although the pastors and the ministry leaders are aware of these agencies, the churches have limited information as to what sorts of relationship can be created. Similarly, Fu et al., (2021), opine that although non-profit collaboration is prevalent, faith-based organizations (FBOs) are less likely to collaborate than other non-profits and this can be related to influence of religiosity and operational capability of FBOs.

However, the recognition by some participants of collaborative efforts such as with UNICEF, COPCEF and other NGOs on advocacy, capacity building, and programme demonstrate that functional relationships are developing, particularly in areas where churches act as community anchors (Hays, 2023). Additionally, while appreciable collaborations were acknowledged, the absence of written memoranda of agreement or structured referral systems in the conversations shows a need for more established collaboration models. Spaumer & Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2025) therefore emphasise that there should be formalised coordination and referral systems that will guarantee the protection and promotion of children's rights

The role of churches was highlighted as significant agent for advancing children's rights, with pastors' wives recognized as essential actors in this mission. This view among Pentecostal church pastors' wives to a large extent enforces the unanimity of faith-based actors in defending children's rights (Eyber et al., 2018; Eyber & Jailobaeva, 2020). This position relates to a deeply entrenched theological and moral belief that the church not only has the authority but also the responsibility to advocate for the wellbeing of children (Olajire 2019). The church is thus considered not only as a spiritual institution but also as a moral and educational platform that influences parenting and social standards (Kamanzi & Shilunga, 2021; Riley et al., 2021)

The findings further give prominence to a proactive, rather than reactive strategy to children's rights promotion. Thus, corroborating with Daro & Karter (2019) that despite increased investments in this strategy, a singular focus on targeted interventions and reactive child protection policies has not helped much to the discourse on child protection. Rather than simply responding to abuse or neglect, the church is considered as playing a formative role in moral and emotional development. This preventative perspective is backed by children's rights frameworks that prioritize early intervention as opposed to later reactive methods. Pastors' wives in this study consider child protection and development as essential now and to the future of both the church and society. Children are not just current beneficiaries of care but are considered as future leaders whose formative experiences affect long-term societal wellness.

Furthermore, pastors' wives adopt a multidimensional approach to promoting children's rights. Their efforts integrate faith-based guidance, community-level advocacy, and direct support to children, helping to shape an environment where children's rights are recognized, respected, and protected. Sibanda (2021) emphasizes the crucial role of pastors' spouses in pastoral care for families. The findings are consistent with other studies that report that pastors' wives are pivotal in promoting children's rights within their communities, primarily through faith-based lobbying, parental education, and direct care for children (Kyere 2023; Frimpong 2022; Kraft, 2020; Eyber & Jailobaeva, 2020). Further, Rizqi et al. (2024) notes the role of religious and social values cannot be undermined in developing children's character and promoting favourable qualities. This reflects observations by Adebayo (2011) that Christianity and international legal systems both offer mechanisms to protect children's rights and interests, with religion enhancing legal safeguards by fostering respect for humanity and ethics.

This study therefore demonstrates that religious leaders and their spouses, following participation in child protection seminars, frequently take measures to tackle issues like child marriage, school attendance, child labour, and sexual abuse. However, this faith-based concept is not without critique. Although not confirmed in this study, it is argued that religious institutions can be detrimental to children's rights, concealing instances of children's rights abuse for religious reasons (McLeigh & Taylor, 2019). Further, the study corroborates Kraft & Wilkinson (2020) who observe that local church actors effectively deploy informal community mobilization tools to oppose harmful practices and shift unfavourable norms. Similarly, as seen in this study, pastors' wives support child engagement through informal communal meetings such as clubs and choreography to provide meaningful participation for

children. Inarguably, pastors' wives as key actors in children's rights protection holds significant promise in boosting child protection outcomes.

6. Recommendation and Implications for Practice

Given the fact the study brought to light the strategic positions pastors' wives occupy in the promotion of the well-being of children within families, churches and communities, these recommendations could strengthen their role. Since the Child and Family Welfare Policy make provision for the participation of religious leaders in child protection, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection should provide trainings for pastors' wives on the policy and the expectations of church leaders. It is expected these engagements will provide the requisite knowledge and skills to be effective advocates for the right of children in churches and society at large. Additionally, pastors' wives should equip other women leaders and women groups in the church on children's rights promotion and safeguarding practices for children. Closely link with this is the need for sustaining continuous advocacy for the protection of children and care of children by pastors' wives in the church and community.

It is also recommended that strategic collaborations be established between the Church of Pentecost and relevant agencies tasked with safeguarding and welfare of children such the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Department of children and the Police Service. These collaborations could create clear pathways for referrals, trainings, resource mobilization and well- coordinated advocacy for the welfare of children. It would also create opportunities for the Church of Pentecost to join state-led strategic initiatives for children's welfare such as Ghanaians Against Child Abuse (GACA). Given the crucial roles churches play at the community levels in Ghana, their involvement in nationwide initiative like GACA could contribute to a lasting impact.

7. Strengths and Limitations

The study has some strength and limitations. The strength of the study lies in the fact that it offers useful insights for faith-based engagement and collaboration on the Ghanaian child rights promotion because it engages the experiences and perspective of an understudied group - Pentecostal pastors' wives. The present study's limitations lie in a small sample size, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population and lack of considerations for the influence of socio-demographic factors such as age, education and work experience prior to ministry could also impact the findings. Additionally, the results of this study could be skewed since the participants were recruited from only one church denomination and from only the Greater Accra Region. Future studies should expand the sample size to include participants from other Pentecostal- charismatic churches and other regions in Ghana.

8. Conclusion

The paper explores Pentecostal pastors' wives' perspectives on child rights and their role in the protection of the rights of children in church and community. It was observed that though perspectives may vary, pastors' wives are not oblivious of child rights and promotion. Participants view religion and their roles as pastors' wives as a vital tool to effect changes in areas of child right abuse and aim further to make societies a safe place for children. The study concludes that although there are adequate understanding and involvement in child rights promotion and protection among Pentecostal pastors' wives, intentional institutional collaborations are needed for enduring impact. It is therefore recommended that churches should forge strategic partnership with state agencies and other non-governmental

organizations tasked with the responsibility of child right promotion and protection to strengthen their local initiatives for the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

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