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Understanding Why Households Foster-in Children: Evidence from Ghana

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Abstract: *Child fostering – that is, the practice of children living under the care of adults who are not their parents – is pervasive in many African societies. Using data from the 2012/2013 Ghana Living Standards Survey, this analysis examines the determinants of child fostering, with a view to identifying any economic underpinnings. The study's findings suggest that households employ the fostering-in of children to adjust their size and composition, as well as meet their demand for labor. The results are also indicative that fostered and biological children may largely be treated as substitutes in household decision-making. The findings therefore support the view that child fostering decisions in the developing world are often consistent with rational economic reasoning. These findings have policy implications for the design of social interventions that have a direct bearing on household livelihoods.*

Keywords: Fostering, household structure, living arrangements, Ghana

Introduction

A feature common to households in most developing countries is the fluidity and flexibility of household size and composition. This feature has been partly attributed to the high mobility of children between households (Lloyd and Desai, 1992). This practice of non-parental child residence, generally referred to as child fostering, is most pervasive in sub-Saharan Africa (Isuigo-Abanihe, 1985). Based on information from Demographic and Health Surveys of eleven West African countries, Marazyan (2009) estimates that about 9.5% of all children less than fourteen years reside in households where their biological parents are absent. This relatively high rate of non-parental child residence could be explained within the extended family systems and traditional child-rearing practices of most African cultural systems.

The extended family systems of traditional African societies serve as an important social safety net and risk-sharing mechanism against unexpected hazards, agricultural losses, and income shocks (Kobianè et al., 2005; Cox and Fafchamps, 2008; and Fafchamps, 2011). The prevalence of child fostering is perhaps one of the most visible and clearest indications of the role the extended family network plays in the economic decisions and welfare of households, as well as the nature and extent of the economic relationships that exist between members of an extended family system (Stecklov, 2003; Cox and Fafchamps, 2008; Marazyan, 2009). The practice of fostering is also one of the manifestations of the welfare linkages between urban and rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa (Eloundou-Enyegue and Stokes, 2002). This is evidenced by the apparent movement of children from poor rural households to better-off urban households (Eloundou-Enyegue and Stokes, 2002; Serra, 2009).

The economic study of household structure and decision-making in sub-Saharan Africa requires the extensive study of child fostering arrangements. The institution of child fostering makes attempts to explain fertility behaviour in Sub Saharan Africa based on standard neoclassical theories problematic. Neoclassical microeconomic theories of fertility are built on the idea that the costs and benefits of child bearing and child rearing are borne by the same unit

(Becker, 1960). However, the practice of child fostering, which enables households to send their children to reside temporarily in other households, splits the cost and benefits of child bearing and child rearing between different households. As such, the fertility decisions of a household are not necessarily determined by the costs and benefits of an additional child (Serra, 2009). Thus, child fostering may provide relief in terms of the cost of childrearing for the biological family of a child in the short-term, whilst the biological household still receives benefits in economic support and lineage.

As Ainsworth (1996) argues, child fostering, unlike fertility, is a reflection of the short-run demand for children. As such, for economists to fully appreciate the fertility decisions of households in developing countries, equal attention should be devoted to an empirical study of the institution of child fostering (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987). The high prevalence of child fostering requires that policies to control fertility decisions take into account the role of fostering as a social mechanism for managing the cost of rearing many children within a household.

Studies on household livelihood strategies and risk coping behaviours have focused primarily on adult migration while paying little attention to child relocation or shifting between households. Serra (2009) argues that child fostering has implications for understanding the strategies households devise to increase income, smoothen consumption over time, or insure against contingencies. Particularly, the institution of fostering makes susceptible the assumption that variations in household size in developing countries are random (Murdoch, 2000; Akresh, 2009).

The practice of child fostering is an integral part of the social and kinship structure and an accepted means of child rearing among several communities in Ghana (Goody, 1982). However, there exist few studies that have attempted to examine the practice of child fostering in Ghana (see Isuigo-Abanihe, 1985; Apt, 2005). These studies are qualitative in nature and have contributed tremendously to our understanding of the experiences of individuals engaged in such informal arrangements. This study stems from the need to undertake country-specific empirical analysis of in-fostering of children to deepen our understanding of the precipitating factors. Since child fostering is an integral part of the child living arrangements in Ghana, knowledge of the economic determinants and welfare consequences is relevant for designing policies that aim at influencing the welfare outcomes of this practice. This study examines the demographic and economic determinants of household child fostering decisions in Ghana.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 discusses the meaning and purposes of child fostering. Section 3 provides a brief review of relevant literature. Section 4 presents the empirical strategy as well as a description of the data. Section 5 discusses the estimation results. Section 6 concludes the paper with final remarks and policy recommendations.

The Meaning and Purposes of Child Fostering

Meaning of Child Fostering

A common difficulty with studies on child fostering is the lack of clarity on the meaning of the phenomenon. The absence of a universally accepted definition makes comparisons among these studies unclear and problematic. For example, Isuigo-Abanihe (1985) and Castle (1995) describe a child as fostered if such a child lives under a customary non-maternal care arrangement. By this definition, foster children include children whose primary caregiver are not their biological mothers as well as those who reside in different households from their biological mothers.

Another definition commonly used in studies of child fostering is the “practice of voluntarily sending children on a temporary basis to live in another household” (Ainsworth, 1996; Gibbison and Paul, 2006; Serra, 2009; Yèmèlè et al., 2010). The fifth round of the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS 5) which collected information on fostered children defined a fostered child as a “person under 18 years who lives in a household where neither the mother nor father is present.”

Ardington and Leibbrandt (2010) and Marazyan (2009), on the other hand, define a fostered child as “a child with at least a living parent and resides in a household where no parent is present.” The definitions proffered by Ardington and Leibbrandt (2010) and Marazyan (2009) exclude children who have no living parents. For these children, their residential status is as a result of a necessity and not the choice of the biological parents.

The definitions offered by these authors highlight some key elements of the practice of fostering in developing countries. First, the definitions highlight the temporary and reversible nature of such arrangements, which makes such exchanges markedly different from adoption. In fostering arrangements, though a child does not reside with the biological parents, the fostered child remains a part of the household of birth and retains all customary rights and obligations to the biological household. Second, the definitions capture fostering to include non-parental residence; such that a fostered child is one who resides in a household where neither biological parent is present. Another feature that is highlighted by the definitions is the delegation of parental obligations and responsibilities from biological parents to other adults.

This study adopts a definition of child fostering that is similar to the definition proposed by Grant and Yeatman (2012), such that a child’s residential status does not depend on the survival status of the parents. For the purpose of this study, a fostered child is defined as an individual not more than fifteen years old, who is a member of a household where neither parent is present but whose care is the primary responsibility of a co-resident adult. Such a definition of fostering enables us to identify and isolate independent child migrants and child-headed households from children actually fostered. This definition, unlike the one proposed by Marazyan (2009), does not exclude orphans from the study. The inclusion of fostered orphans is particularly important as parental death is an important reason for the fostering of children (Isuigo-Abanihe, 1985; Akresh, 2009).

The Purposes of Child Fostering

The practice of child fostering serves multiple purposes for households in Ghana. The motives for participating in a fostering arrangement generally depends on the circumstances of the households involved. Since fostering exchanges are not always clearly defined between participants, identifying whether a household reneges or fulfils its obligations in the arrangement is not easy to accomplish.

Fostering may be classified broadly into two groups based on the purpose for which it occurs – crisis fostering and non-crisis fostering (Isuigo-Abanihe, 1985; McDaniel and Zulu, 1996; Grant and Yeatman, 2012.). Crisis fostering refers to the relocation of children from their parental households to other households as a response mechanism to a sudden shock and/or an ongoing hardship. As such, crisis fostering arises out of a necessity by households to smoothen consumption. Non-crisis fostering, on the other hand, arises out of the desire of parents to relocate their children owing to reasons other than the onset of a crisis or shock. Non-crisis fostering is primarily driven by parental choices.

Crisis Fostering

Fostering as a risk-coping strategy is generally thought to improve the survival chances of children by removing them from environments that are detrimental to their welfare and life, whether real or perceived. Children in households that experience a dissolution of the conjugal unit may be temporarily relocated to the households of members of the kinship network. Divorce and spousal (parental) death are primary causes of marital dissolution (Madhavan et al., 2012; Grant and Yeatman, 2013). Custody of children in such circumstances is dictated by descent rule of the kinship group. In matrilineal systems, such children are likely to be sent to the household of their mother's brother, whilst in patrilineal societies, these children may be sent to reside with the father's sister or brothers. Another group of children who are commonly found in non-parental residential households are orphans—children who have lost at least one of their parents (Ansell and van Blerk, 2004; Yamano et al., 2006; Beegle et al., 2010; Taiwo, 2012). A child who loses the mother is more likely to live in a household where the father is absent. For children who have no surviving parent, they will reside in households where neither parent is present.

Again, in traditional societies that do not look favourably upon childbirth out of wedlock, children born to individuals who are not married to each other are particularly vulnerable to stigmatization. These children, in order to avoid the embarrassment of the community, are fostered out to kinsmen who reside outside the community. Thus, the welfare of such children depends to a large extent on the ability of members of the extended family to support them.

Another crisis situation that usually precipitates the fostering of children is the fear for their survival (Castle, 1995). For a woman who experiences repeated infant or early child mortality, it is usually believed that sending her next child away from her household may increase the chances of survival of the child. A closely related group of children who have a high probability of being fostered are children residing in polygamous households. The fear of witchcraft by a co-residing wife may lead to the relocation of such children to other households (Castle, 1995). Equally, children who co-reside with a parent after a marital breakup are likely to be sent to a kin when the parent remarries.

Parental migration is another reason for the fostering of children (Beck et al., 2015). Fostering tends to ease some of the constraints and costs that children impose on migrating parents. Parents are able to leave their children behind with relatives until such a time that they are well settled to be joined by their children. Such parents are expected to send remittances to the household in which their children reside for the children's maintenance, schooling, and health costs.

Non-Crisis Fostering

Households do not engage in fostering arrangements only as a risk-coping strategy, but also as a means to enhance the opportunities available for a child's social mobility. In this regard, fostering provides a mechanism to smoothen socio-economic inequalities that exists between households in an extended family or kinship network. Thus, fostering is the consequence of the need to reallocate resources between households in a kinship network.

The practice of fostering is employed to strengthen the ties and solidarity that exists between households in a kinship network (Zimmerman, 2003). The experience of living with a relative for an extended period of time is expected to deepen the personal ties and cement the social relations within the extended family. It is also thought that such experiences increase the willingness to support a network member when in need. Available anthropological evidence

suggests that fostering arrangements predominantly take place within the extended family system (Akresh, 2009; Marazyan, 2011). Fostering between non-kin is primarily to establish and strengthen the political, social, and economic alliances that exist between households (Bledsoe, 1990).

As the basic unit of socialization in traditional societies, fostering provides an opportunity to share the costs and responsibilities of childrearing among related kin. It is believed that other members of a kinship network are in better positions to discipline and inculcate socially accepted norms of behaviour into a child. For many young mothers, fostering provides a leeway to combine childbearing responsibilities with labour market participation.

Usually, children are sent out to their grandparents at an early age to facilitate the process of weaning and socialization (Duflo, 2003; Abler, 2004; Gibson and Mace, 2005). In a culture that places a high social value on fertility, grandmothers are particularly willing to raise their grandchildren. The presence of a grandchild in the grandparent's household provides an important link to the resources of the child's parents as well as boost their reputation in the community in which they reside. For adults who were fostered as children, it is expected of them to foster a child from their host household, especially when the adult is in a better socio-economic position (Goody, 1973).

Another reason for fostering is the widely held perception of children as substitutes for old-age insurance and support in the absence of well-functioning capital and financial markets (Hoddinott, 1992; Pörtner, 2001; Marazyan, 2009). For households with no children, it is deemed to be rational to foster and invest in the education of a child. The expectation is that such a child will provide support through remittances and transfers in old age. Thus, fostering provides an opportunity to invest in a child as old-age security unconstrained by fertility and age.

Children serve as cheap sources of domestic labour. The institution of fostering permits the redistribution of available child labour services among households, as well as balance the demographic structure of households (Ainsworth, 1996; Akresh, 2009). Such labour arrangements usually involve the host household sponsoring the child to attend school or learn a trade. An emerging trend in such arrangements is the payment of token wages, either to the children or their biological parents, in addition to the maintenance and sponsorship that the host households provide (Apt, 2005; Serra, 2009).

Due to the large differences in schooling accessibility and quality between rural and urban areas, children are fostered to relatives as well as non-relatives who reside in urban centres with better quality schools. Fostering, thus, affords children in rural households an opportunity for education and vocational training that may otherwise not be available. The fostering of children for educational purposes is thought to reflect the demand for human capital of children by parents in a modern society. The fostered children are expected to provide domestic services in exchange for sponsorship to pursue formal schooling or vocational training. The practice of fostering in part explains the observed movement of children from rural households to more affluent urban households.

Relevant Literature

Studies on the economic and demographic determinants of the household decision to send or receive a child have gained considerable attention as a household livelihood strategy in developing countries in recent times. Isuigo-Abanihe (1985) studied the relationship between the characteristics of a mother and her household and the decision to send out a child in Ghana using data from the 1970 Population and Housing Census. The results show the existence of significant

gender differences in the rates of fostering, with more girls sent out than boys. This result is also confirmed by Apt (2005) in a study of Northern Ghana. Isuigo-Abanihe (1985) finds that a mother's age negatively influences the decision to send out a child. The number of surviving children and the person-room ratio positively affects the maternal decision to send out a child. Isuigo-Abanihe (1985) argues that fostering-out may be employed by poor households as a livelihood strategy.

Beck et al. (2015) examines household fostering decisions in Senegal. The findings of the study reveal that a household with a polygamous head is more likely to engage in a fostering exchange compared to households with monogamous heads. The authors established that being a girl increases the probability of a child residing in a non-parental household. Girls are fostered out to mainly help with domestic chores. Parental circumstances, such as death, sickness, migration, and marital disruption, increases the probability of a household sending out a child. These findings are similar to those of Grant and Yeatman (2014) in a study of rural Malawi.

A regression analysis of the probability of a household engaging in a fostering arrangement reveals that household characteristics, such as gender composition and shocks, affect the decision to send or receive a child (Beck et al., 2015; Grant and Yeatman, 2012). A household that has more male residents before fostering is more likely to send out a boy, whilst those dominated by females are more likely to foster-out girls. A household that experiences a negative shock is more likely to send out a girl than a boy. Further, a household located close to a school is more likely to receive a child (Grant and Yeatman, 2012).

Using the Cote d'Ivoire Living Standards Measurement Survey, Ainsworth (1996) examines the economic aspects of child fostering. The addition of an adult household member increases the likelihood of a household receiving a child. However, a household with no resident woman is unlikely to receive a child. Ainsworth (1996) finds that rural households send more children than urban households and receive fewer children, contrary to the findings of Isuigo-Abanihe (1985). High income households are more likely to foster-in a child, but are less likely to send out a child. This result, Ainsworth (1996) opines, is evidence of the hypothesis that resource constrained households employ child fostering to manage high fertility and provide a mechanism of social mobility for children. Ainsworth (1996) provides evidence to support a demographic adjustment motive for child fostering similar to the findings of Beck et al. (2015).

Zimmerman (2003) studies the determinants of child fostering decisions for a sample of Black South African households. Using the share of biological children of school-going age who are currently enrolled as a proxy for the predicted enrolment of the fostered child, Zimmerman (2003) finds a positive and significant effect on the probability that the household receives a child. In addition, households in close proximity to healthcare facilities are more likely to have fostered-in a child. These findings, taken together with those of Beck et al. (2015), provide evidence in support of a human capital motive for fostering, as sending households may consider access to healthcare and the opportunities for schooling in fostering-out a child to a potential receiving household.

In a seminal work, Akresh (2009) examines the economic and demographic characteristics that predict household fostering decisions in the Bazega Province of Burkina Faso. Akresh (2009) finds that a household that experiences a negative shock in a given year is more likely to send out a child. Specifically, a household may send out a child less than five years in response to a consumption shock; whilst older children are fostered-out for labour productivity reasons. The socioeconomic status of the potential receiving household also influences whether a child will be sent. A household with better network quality is more likely to

foster-out a child. Akresh (2009) finds that a household's demand for childcare influences the household fostering decision, contrary to Zimmerman (2003).

A household's likelihood of fostering-in a child, Akresh (2009) finds, is reduced when the household experiences an adverse agricultural shock in a given year. This finding is consistent with the risk-sharing hypothesis of child fostering motives. A household within a social network with a member with a good occupation is more likely to receive a child. The results also suggest the prevalence of kin fostering – a close relative is more likely to receive a child within the social network. The marital status of a network member also influences the decision to foster-in a child. A network member in a stable marital union is more likely to receive a child compared to a divorcee, widow, or a member who has never been married.

The decision to foster children appears to differ by the age of the child (Serra, 2009). Most studies have focused on children of school-going age. Vandermeersch and Chimere-Dan (2002), however, study the determinants of fostering children under six years in Senegal. Mothers' migration was found to positively influence the out-fostering of young children. The results further indicate that households engage in fostering to adjust demographic imbalances. The fostering of young children at early ages appears not to be motivated by human capital or child labour considerations.

A majority of empirical studies on child fostering have focused on the practice in Sub Saharan Africa. Gibbison and Paul (2006) provide empirical insights into child fostering arrangements in Jamaica from a nationally representative survey dataset. Gibbison and Paul (2006) provide evidence to support a child labour motive for the decision to receive a child by the household. The study further found the existence of gender differences in the determinants of the child fostering decisions. The presence of more adults in the household raises the household's demand for foster children. Agricultural households are more likely to foster-in a boy. Household annual consumption, employed as a proxy for household permanent income, exerts a positive and significant influence on the decision to foster-in a child. The number of resident own-children reduces the odds of a household fostering-in a child.

Eloundou-Enyegue and Stokes (2002) report that during periods of economic downturns in Cameroon rates of out-fostering declined significantly. The finding reveals differences in the motivations to send out a child between rural and urban households. Whilst urban households send out children in response to shocks, rural households foster-out to provide opportunities for the children. A child's schooling status also influenced the decision to foster-out. Examining the relationship between orphanhood and child fostering for selected sub Saharan African countries, Grant and Yeatman (2012) established a negative relationship between orphan and non-orphan fostering. For countries and communities with high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates, adult mortality may exert pressure on the capacity of households to foster non-orphans (Grant and Yeatman, 2012).

Grant and Yeatman (2014), on the other hand, focus on the impact of family transitions on child fostering in rural Malawi. Their findings suggest maternal remarriages increase the risks of out-fostering a child. However, the relationship between marital change and fostering appears to differ across descent systems – with children in matrilineal societies less likely to be fostered out after a maternal remarriage. Marazyan (2011), on the other hand, finds that in Indonesia, most fostered children reside with their grandparents in rural households. Castle (1995) also finds that children are transferred from biological mothers of low socioeconomic status to foster mothers of high socioeconomic statuses. Cichello (2003) finds that child fostering in South

Africa does not arise from children moving out of their households, but as a result of parental migration.

The findings from the various empirical studies suggest there exist substantial variability in the determinants of a household's child fostering decisions. These conflicting results in part reflect differences in the methodological strategies and definitions adopted by the various authors. These differences in the determinants of child in-fostering decisions across countries may also be attributable to differences in cultural attitudes towards the practice of child fostering.

Empirical Strategy and Data Source

Specification of the Child in-Fostering Decision

The household decision to foster-in a child (y_i) is specified as a dichotomous variable. The decision is modelled as a linear function that depends on household demographic and economic characteristics and the personal characteristics of the head of the household.

The household demographic characteristics are captured by the number of household members within specified gender and age groups. The economic characteristics of the household included as explanatory variables are household wealth quintiles generated from total household income from wage and non-wage sources. We take caution to avoid potential endogeneity between household income status and the decision to foster-in a child by excluding the income earned by fostered children in the household. Other household economic characteristics include the number of inhabitable rooms and household ownership of the place of residency. The group of personal characteristics of the head of the household include age, categories of formal educational attainment, current marital status, and gender. Finally, a binary explanatory variable is included to assess the effect of household location (rural or urban) on the probability of a household to foster-in a child. The household decision to foster-in a child is specified as

$$y_i = x_i' \beta_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where x_i is a vector of the explanatory variables; β_i is a vector of estimated parameters including a constant term, and ε_i is a random error term with a mean of zero and assumes the standard normal distribution.

However, the fostering-in decision of the household is unobserved. What is observed is an event that defines whether a fostered child is a member of the household or not; such that

$$y_i^* = 1 \text{ if } y_i > 0 \text{ (Household fosters-in a child)}$$

$$y_i^* = 0 \text{ if } y_i \leq 0 \text{ (Household does not foster-in a child)}$$

The probability that a household fosters-in a child given the set of explanatory variable is obtained as

$$\Pr(y_i^* = 1 | x_i) = \Pr(y > 0) = \Phi(x_i' \beta_i)$$

where Φ is the cumulative density function of the standard normal distribution.

Data Source and Descriptive Statistics

Data for the study are sourced from the sixth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey conducted in 2012/2013 by the Ghana Statistical Service. The GLSS is a nationally representative survey and covered a sample of 16,772 households in 1200 enumeration areas. Based on the definition of child fostering adopted, approximately 14% of households foster-in a child. The data suggest that 59.15% of fostering households receive one child; 25.83% receive two children; with the remaining 15.02% receiving three or more children. A decomposition of households by the gender composition of the children fostered indicates that 32.1% of fostering households receive boys only, 46.0% of fostering households receive girls only, whilst the remaining 21.9% of fostering households receive both boys and girls.

Results and Discussions

The marginal effects of the logit regression model estimating the probability that a household receives a foster child are presented for ease of interpretation. The results are presented for the entire sample of households, as well as subsamples for rural and urban households. The results indicate that the household decision to foster children, although an essential part of the cultural and traditional child-care practice of most communities, also depends on the demographic and economic characteristics of the household.

In all three estimations, the characteristics of the head of household, in terms of age and gender, significantly influence the probability that the household receives a child. Female headship of a household increases the probability that the household receives a child. The positive relationship between the age of the household head and the decision to receive a child may be taken as an indication that households that foster-out children prefer that these children reside in households in which the household head is a mature person capable of providing appropriate care for the child.

A household headed by an individual who is either widowed, divorced or separated, or never married is less likely to receive a child compared to a household headed by someone who is married or in a consensual union. Akresh (2009) argues that being in a stable marital or domestic union increases the quality of the household within its social network and, hence, the probability that the household receives a child. The educational attainment of the household head, compared to household heads with no education, increases the probability that the household fosters a child. The educational attainment of the household head may be taken as a proxy for the opportunity cost of time of the household head. This implies that a household may foster-in a child to relieve the household head of domestic chores. Conversely, the sending household may prefer to foster-out to a household where the head has attained higher education, if the sending household perceives that such a receiving household is likely to pay attention to the human capital development of the fostered child.

The coefficients of the household demographic variables provide evidence to support the demographic adjustment role of child fostering in Ghana. This mirrors the findings of Ainsworth (1996) and Akresh (2009). An increase in the number of non-fostered children in the household reduces the probability of the household receiving a fostered child, irrespective of the gender and age category of the non-fostered children. The negative relationship between the number of non-fostered children and the household in-fostering decision is an indication that households treat biological and fostered children as substitutes in the household utility function (Ainsworth, 1996; Zimmerman, 2003; Akresh, 2009). In urban centres, where wages are high, in-fostering provides a cheaper alternative for households to acquire the services of baby minders, as well as domestic

Table 1 Marginal Effects of the Logit Regression Estimating the Probability that a Household Receives a Fostered Child

VARIABLES	Full Sample	Rural Subsample	Urban Subsample
Household head's age	0.0020*** (0.0002)	0.0018*** (0.0003)	0.0023*** (0.0004)
Female	0.0778*** (0.0096)	0.0637*** (0.0137)	0.0958*** (0.0135)
Marital Status			
<i>Currently Married/Union</i>			
Previously married/union	-0.0128* (0.0076)	0.0019 (0.0110)	-0.0262** (0.0104)
Never married/union	-0.0585*** (0.0099)	-0.0502*** (0.0154)	-0.0582*** (0.0139)
Educational Attainment			
<i>No Education</i>			
Basic Education	0.0054 (0.0064)	0.0133 (0.0081)	-0.0120 (0.0108)
Secondary Education	0.0039 (0.0121)	0.0112 (0.0205)	-0.0086 (0.0156)
Other Education	0.0102 (0.0129)	0.0534** (0.0249)	-0.0173 (0.0154)
Tertiary Education	0.0037 (0.0139)	-0.0011 (0.0237)	-0.0014 (0.0175)
Number of:			
Non-fostered children 0 to 5yrs	-0.0065* (0.0038)	-0.0123** (0.0049)	0.0058 (0.0059)
Non-fostered boys 6 to 10yrs	-0.0253*** (0.0053)	-0.0302*** (0.0067)	-0.0149* (0.0088)
Non-fostered boys 11 to 15yrs	-0.0265*** (0.0054)	-0.0338*** (0.0067)	-0.0108 (0.0094)
Non-fostered girls 6 to 10yrs	-0.0252*** (0.0056)	-0.0181*** (0.0068)	-0.0384*** (0.0104)
Non-fostered girls 11 to 15yrs	-0.0197*** (0.0059)	-0.0283*** (0.0075)	-0.0069 (0.0097)
Men 16 to 49yrs	-0.0025 (0.0037)	-0.0092* (0.0049)	0.0075 (0.0055)
Men ≥ 50yrs	-0.0172** (0.0083)	-0.0251** (0.0110)	-0.0035 (0.0127)
women 16 to 49yrs	0.0121*** (0.0036)	0.0118** (0.0052)	0.0124** (0.0048)
Women ≥ 50yrs	0.0649*** (0.0059)	0.0731*** (0.0079)	0.0526*** (0.0090)
Owns place of residence	0.0088 (0.0063)	0.0113 (0.0085)	0.0054 (0.0093)
Number of habitable rooms	0.0279*** (0.0030)	0.0307*** (0.0038)	0.0264*** (0.0048)
Rural	0.0017 (0.0067)		
Household Income Quintile			
<i>Poorest</i>			
Poorer	0.0203*** (0.0070)	0.0247*** (0.0090)	0.0145 (0.0112)
Middle	0.0341*** (0.0080)	0.0466*** (0.0110)	0.0158 (0.0115)
Richer	0.0449*** (0.0091)	0.0572*** (0.0128)	0.0278** (0.0130)
Richest	0.0462*** (0.0102)	0.0764*** (0.0149)	0.0125 (0.0137)
Observations	16,750	9,313	7,437
Standard errors in parentheses	*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		

assistants, for households with resident young children. The results fail to confirm the demand for child-care motive of in-fostering in Ghana.

For each of the estimates, we find that an increase in the number of adult women in the household increases the probability of the household in-fostering a child. The result reflects the suggestion that the upbringing of children is culturally the responsibility of women in the household. The presence of maternal substitutes assures the sending household that the fostered child will receive sufficient care in the receiving household. The number of resident men aged at least fifty years reduces the probability of the household fostering-in a child. This is significant for the full sample of households and also for the rural subsample.

The number of rooms of the place of dwelling of the household, adopted as a proxy for the capacity of the household to accommodate additional members, is positive and significant for all three estimations. Vandermeersch and Chimere-Dan (2002) assert that the household decision to receive a child is conditional on the availability of space for them.

The marginal effects of the household income quintiles suggest better-resourced households are more likely to foster children, as proposed by Serra (2009) and Kèmèlè et al. (2010). The results are also similar to the findings of Ainsworth (1996), Gibbison and Paul (2006), and Zimmerman (2003). For the urban subsample, the lack of significance of the coefficients of the income quintiles, as well as household demographic characteristics, in predicting the probability of the fostering decisions of households may be a reflection of the fact that the decision to foster may not necessarily arise from the receiving household, but rather a decision of the sending household.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Child fostering is a pervasive cultural institution in most developing countries and serves a variety of purposes in such societies. Households employ the practice as a risk-coping and risk-sharing strategy. The practice also serves as a mechanism for enhancing the economic and social opportunities of children. Fostering further serves as a means of strengthening the ties and solidarity that exist between households within a social or kin network. Additionally, households engage in child fostering arrangements as a means of adjusting their demographic composition, either by sending or receiving children of specific gender and age categories.

The analysis of the household decision to foster-in a child reveals that the characteristics of the household heads are significant predictors of the household decision to receive a child. The results provide evidence to support the demographic adjustment role of child in-fostering within households in Ghana. The availability of maternal substitutes within the household exerts a positive and significant influence on the household's decision to receive a foster child.

The main conclusions drawn from this study have a number of important implications for policy. The results presented suggest that networks formed by kinship constitute an important strategy for household livelihood. In the absence of institutionalised care for children from vulnerable households, the extended family provides a traditional safety net for such children. However, the spread of the nuclear family system in urban areas and the additional hardship imposed by changing economic conditions have weakened the safety net that the traditional family system provides. As a result, appropriate public interventions must be designed to preserve and strengthen the extended family as the first line of protections for households.

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