

**BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**

**Bindura University
of Science Education**



**Strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative
care in Zimbabwe. A case of Bindura District.**

BY

TRISH C. CHIMANYIWA

(B210099B)

Supervised by: Ms. Muregi

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Social Work, in

Partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Science

Honours Degree in Social Work.

June 2025

DECLARATION

I, Trish Conceptor Chimanyiwa studying for a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work, aware of the fact that plagiarism is an academic offense and that falsifying information is a breach of the ethics of Social Work Research, I truthfully declare that:

1. The dissertation report titled: Strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care, a case of Bindura District is my original work and has not been plagiarized.
2. The research was crafted within the confines of the research ethics and the ethics of the profession.
3. Bindura University of Science Education can use this dissertation for academic purposes.

Student's name..... Signature..... Date.....

Permanent Home address:

Muzavazi Primary School

P. O. Box 44

Mubaira

Chegutu

RELEASE FORM

I certify that I supervised **Trish C. Chimanyiwa** in carrying out this research titled: **Strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. A case of Bindura District**, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Science, Honours Degree in Social Work and recommend that it proceeds for examination.

Supervisor

Name..... Signature..... Date.....

Chairperson of the Department Board of Examiners

The Department board of examiners is satisfied that this dissertation report meets the examination requirements and therefore I recommend to Bindura University of Science Education to accept this research project by Trish C. Chimanyiwa titled: **Strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. A case of Bindura District** in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Science, Honours Degree in Social Work.

Chairperson

Name..... Signature..... Date.....

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Almighty for giving me the strength and opportunity to complete this dissertation. I am incredibly thankful to everyone who has contributed to this journey. Firstly, I extend my sincerest appreciation to my research supervisor, Ms. R. Muregi, for her priceless guidance and support throughout this research process. To my parents, I owe a debt of gratitude for their unwavering belief in me and constant encouragement towards achieving my academic aspirations. Their advice and support have been a cornerstone of my four-year university journey. I would also like to thank my friends Mukai, Emma, Gamuchirai and Valeria for their encouragement, support and assistance in the writing process of this dissertation. Their belief in me has been a driving force behind the completion of this research. I am also grateful to all those who participated in this study for their valuable contributions that have enriched the findings present in this dissertation.

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK



Thumanywa *Trish C. Chimanywa* *22/08/2025*

Student Signature

Date

fy

22/08/25

Supervisor Signature

Date

Itu

22/08/25

Chairperson Signature



DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my parents, Mum and Dad, for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my academic journey. Your belief in me has been a constant source of motivation, and I am very grateful for all the sacrifices you have made to ensure my success. To my sisters Mukai Mushoriwa and Valeria Tinotenda Mahlengezana, thank you for always being there for me with your love and understanding. Your presence has brought joy and strength in my life during both challenging and joyful times. Lastly, I dedicate this project to my siblings, Prenamenter, Wismy and Ashmore Chimanyiwa. You have been a beacon of light in my life, inspiring me to push through obstacles and strive for excellence. Your love fuels my determination, and I am forever grateful for the bond we share. This project stands as a testament to the support and love I have received from my family, who have been pillars of strength in my life. Thank you all for being my rock and guiding me towards achieving my goal.

PLAGIARISM REPORT

CHIMANYIWA TRISH C B210099B.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

10 %	5 %	5 %	4 %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

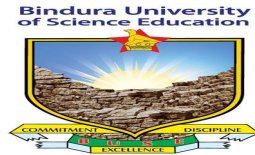
PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to Bindura University of Science Education Student Paper	1 %
2	van Rooyen, Filicity. "The Views of Caregivers at a Child and Youth Centre in Tshwane on Play and Play Areas", University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2023 Publication	1 %
3	d.lib.msu.edu Internet Source	1 %
4	Submitted to University of Stellenbosch, South Africa Student Paper	<1 %
5	Submitted to University of Venda Student Paper	<1 %
6	Teresa Toguchi Swartz. "Parenting for the State - An Ethnographic Analysis of Non-Profit Foster Care", Routledge, 2020 Publication	<1 %
7	Boeding, Sarah M.. "Understanding Foster Parents' Experiences of Secondary Traumatic Stress", Marquette University, 2024 Publication	<1 %
8	Submitted to Midlands State University Student Paper	<1 %
9	ir-library.ku.ac.ke Internet Source	<1 %

10	Jennifer M. Geiger, Megan Hayes Piel, Francie J. Julien-Chinn. "Improving Relationships in Child Welfare Practice: Perspectives of Foster Care Providers", Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 2016 Publication	<1 %
-----------	---	----------------

MARKING GUIDE

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK



Name: TRISH CONCEPTOR CHIMANYIWA

Registration No: B210099B

MARKING GUIDE: UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION	Possible Mark	Actual Mark
Abstract	10	
Background to the study- what is it that has made you choose this particular topic? Include objectives or purpose of the study	20	
Statement of the problem	10	
Research questions	15	
Assumptions	5	
Significance of the study	15	
Limitations of the study	5	
Delimitations of the study	5	
Definition of terms	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
Weighted Mark	15	

Comments.....
.....

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction- what do you want to write about in this chapter?	5	
Conceptual or theoretical framework	10	
Identification, interpretations and evaluation of relevant literature and citations	40	
Contextualisation of the literature to the problem	10	
Establishing gaps in knowledge and how the research will try to bridge these gaps	10	
Structuring and logical sequencing of ideas	10	
Discursive skills	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
Weighted Mark	20	

Comments.....

Chapter 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction	5	
Research design	10	
What instruments are you using to collect data?	30	
Population, sample and sampling techniques to be used in the study	25	
Procedures for collecting data	15	
Data presentation and analysis procedures	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
Weighted Mark	25	

Comments.....

Chapter 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction	5	
Data presentation	50	
Is there any attempt to link literature review with new findings	10	
How is the new knowledge trying to fill the gaps identified earlier	10	
Discursive and analytical skills	20	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
Weighted Mark	30	

Comments

.....

Chapter 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction- focus of the chapter	5	
Summary of the whole project including constraints	25	
Conclusions- have you come up with answers to the problem under study	30	
Recommendations(should be based on findings) Be precise	30	
References	5	
Appendices i.e. copies of instruments used and any other relevant material	5	
Total	100	
Weighted mark	10	

Comments

.....

SUMMARY: -

	Actual	Total
<u>Chapter 1</u>		
<u>Chapter 2</u>		
<u>Chapter 3</u>		
<u>Chapter 4</u>		
<u>Chapter 5</u>		
Total		

ABSTRACT

The study's aim was to investigate and analyse the challenges that foster parents face in caring for children in alternative care, as well as coping strategies to curb those challenges in Bindura District, Zimbabwe. The primary objectives of the study were to examine the psychosocio-economic challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care, to evaluate the effectiveness of support services available to foster parents and to come up with intervention strategies that can be utilized by foster parents to overcome these challenges. A phenomenological research design was utilized in this study, which was qualitative in nature and involved in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion for data collection. The study used a sample size of 11 participants, selected from the target population to gather the required information. Social control theory was applied in the research. This investigation successfully identified the key issues faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care from the challenges they face to how they cope bringing out what needs to be done to improve foster care. The research revealed that foster parents encounter a number of challenges such as stigma and isolation, financial constraints, stress and burnout. The study also uncovered the available support services available to foster parents and their effectiveness bringing out strategies that foster utilize to address those challenges. The study proposed a multifaceted approach as a strategy that can be used by foster parents to overcome the challenges they face as part of the recommendations.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	i
RELEASE FORM.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
DEDICATION	iv
PLAGIARISM REPORT	vi
MARKING GUIDE	vii
ABSTRACT.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiv
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....	1
1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	3
1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY	4
1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	4
1.6 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY	4
1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS	5
1.8 DISSERTATION OUTLINE.....	6
1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY	7
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 INTRODUCTION	8
2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY	8
2.3 MAIN LITERATURE.....	11
2.3.1. Alternative Care and Foster Parenting.....	11
2.3.2. Foster Care Challenges in Zimbabwe	12
2.3.1 CHALLENGES FACED BY FOSTER PARENTS.....	12
2.3.2 EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS	14
2.3.3 INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO REDUCE CHALLENGES FACED BY FOSTER PARENTS	16
2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY	17
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	18
3.0 INTRODUCTION	18
3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY	18

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH	19
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN	19
3.4 STUDY SETTING	20
3.5 TARGET POPULATION	21
3.6 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND SAMPLE SIZE	21
3.7 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS	22
3.7.1. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS.....	22
3.7.2. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS	23
3.8 RESEARCH PROCEDURE.....	24
3.9 VALIDITY	25
3.10 RELIABILITY.....	25
3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	26
1.11.1 Informed consent.....	26
3.11.2 Confidentiality.....	26
3.11.3 Ethical approval.....	26
3.12 DATA ANALYSIS	26
3.13 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	27
3.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY	28
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	29
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	29
4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS.....	29
4.2.1 DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY AGE	30
4.2.2 DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY EXPERIENCE	31
4.2.3 DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY GENDER	31
4.2.4 DISTRIBUTION OF CAREGIVERS BY MARITAL STATUS.....	31
PRESENTATION OF OTHER FINDINGS BASED ON OBJECTIVES.....	32
4.3 THEMES	32
4.3.1 THEME 1: THE PSYCHOSOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY FOSTER PARENTS	32
4.3.2 THEME 2: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE TO FOSTER PARENTS	42
4.3.3 THEME 3: STRATEGIES TO CURB THE CHALLENGES BEING FACED	47
4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY	53
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	55

5.1 INTRODUCTION	55
5.2 SUMMARY	55
5.2.1 Psychosocio-economic challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care.....	55
5.2.2 Effectiveness of support services available to foster parents	56
5.2.3 Intervention strategies that can be utilized to overcome these challenges.....	56
5.3 CONCLUSIONS.....	56
5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK.....	57
5.4.1 The need to strengthen case management and follow-up.....	57
5.4.2 Integration of psychosocial support into foster care services	57
5.4.3 Promotion of economic empowerment programs	58
5.4.4 Advocacy for policy reform and community sensitization	58
5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	58
5.5.1. To the Government.....	58
5.5.2. To the Community	59
5.5.3. To Stakeholders.....	59
5.5.4 To Foster Parents	59
5.5.5 MULTIFACETED SUPPORT STRATEGY	59
5.6 AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY	61
5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY	61
5.7 REFERENCES	62
5.8 APPENDICES	70
Appendix 1: Request to conduct research.....	70
Appendix 2: Permission to conduct research	71
Appendix 3: Consent form	72
Appendix 4: In depth interview guide for key participants (foster parents)	73
7. Do you have anything else to say?.....	75
Appendix 5: Focus group discussion guide for key participants	76
Appendix 6: In depth interview guide for key informants.....	78

LIST OF FIGURES

Table 1: Demographics of participants	29
---	----

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Foster care is vital for children being taken care by foster parents. These children will have been separated from their biological parents due to different reasons, either abuse, neglect, abandonment, or parental incapacity. Zimbabwe is one of the countries which need this child care system, and Bindura District is no exception. This study aims to explore the specific challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District, highlighting their experiences and identifying potential strategies to enhance support and resources within the foster care system. This chapter present background of the study, statement of the problem, the study's aim, objectives, justification of why conducting the study is important, definition of key terms and the outline of the dissertation. The research seeks to contribute valuable insights that can improve outcomes for both foster families and the children they care for, ultimately strengthening the foster care framework in Zimbabwe.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Foster care has emerged as a crucial component in child welfare systems through the provision of short-term care for children who cannot continue living with their biological families due to a number of reasons such as neglect, abuse, abandonment and many others. An estimate of 17 million children have been under alternative care worldwide indicating that there is an acute need for impactful support services for foster parents as well as children in their care (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)). Literature have shown that foster parents face numerous challenges including inadequate financial resources, insufficient and emotional distress and these challenges negatively impact their ability to provide quality care to the children in their care. foster parents across the globe experience challenges in trying to manage behavioral and emotional needs of children which affect placement stability and outcomes of fostering (Lopez et al., 2022). In United States' foster care system, 25% of the children has estimated to face placement disorders underscoring the need to strengthen support services to foster families (Hannah & Woolgar, 2021).

In other regions like Southern Africa, Australia and Europe, foster caregivers encounter important challenges as a result of socio-economic factors such as cultural dynamics and poverty which influence their caregiving abilities. Luke et al. (2021) highlighted in his study conducted in United Kingdom that lack of adequate support services affect foster parents leading to stress and burnout.

A similar study conducted in Australia by McWey et al. (2022) indicated that mental health services are difficult to access meaning this can accelerate behavioral problems that result from trauma. Perceptions of societies about family structure complicate the integration of foster families into communities since they will feel isolated.

Foster parents in Africa also face significant challenges in caring for children in their care as a result of harsh economic conditions as well as societal beliefs. Theron et al. (2022) in his study conducted in South Africa highlighted that providing support services that are culturally sensitive to foster parents would help foster parents who struggle to manage complex needs of foster children. The rise of HIV/AIDS pandemic in many African countries increased the number of children in need of care thereby increasing the number of children to be placed in foster care placing additional strain on foster parents (Foster & Williamson, 2021).

In Zimbabwe, Bindura District to be precise, foster parents face a number of challenges as a result of the socio-economic situation in the country. Foster parents face difficulties in trying to fend for themselves as well as for the children in their care failing to access basic needs (Mawere et al., 2023). According to a study by Machingura et al. (2022) lack of support to these caregivers also influence their ability to provide adequate care for the children's development and wellbeing as a result of placement instability. The Zimbabwean government has implemented different policies to promote foster care as a feasible alternative for children in need. Policies like the National Orphan Care Policy, Zimbabwe National Case Management System and the Children's Act (Chapter 5:06) have been implemented but several shortcomings have hindered the effectiveness of these policies. These include inadequate financial and material support, weak community sensitization and police-practice gap. The policies are failing to address different challenges evidenced through increased cases of placement breakdowns in foster families and unmet psychosocial and developmental needs among fostered children. This gap is due to lack of implementation of these policies as a result of funding constraints and absence of localized enforcement mechanisms.

Appreciating these difficulties in the context of Bindura District is important for developing strategies that are context-specific for enhancing support for foster parents. By examining both local and global perspectives, this research aims to enlighten on the essential issues faced by foster

families in Zimbabwe specifically in Bindura District contributing to the wider discourse on improving alternative care systems.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The number of children in alternative care in Zimbabwe is increasing stemming from a number of socio-economic factors. These children depend on institutional care for their emotional, psychological and physical needs. Foster parents as one of the key players in alternative care systems face difficulties in providing care to these children. This research examines diverse challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District. These challenges affect the ability of foster parents to provide effective care for children in alternative care. Foster parents face a number of challenges aside from their role in supporting vulnerable children such as societal stigma, inadequate training and limited access to financial resources. This problem is particularly critical in rural areas like Bindura District where access to support services is limited and resources are insufficient. This presented problem lead to foster parents struggling to provide excellent care for children in their care. These problems make foster parents feel less motivated affecting the quality and stability of care provided.

The challenges foster parents face are complex and they require a broad approach to address them. Their role is reduced by the absence of context-specific intervention strategies to address these challenges. This accelerate the problem leading to poor outcomes for the children. In Bindura District, the problem is further complicated by the fact that it is a mining area and many young people become parents at a tender age where they cannot even cater for themselves due to economic hardships in the country. Some of them end up dumping children in the streets so that they can continue with their mining jobs which is a valid reason to improve alternative care systems. This study aims to examine the challenges foster parents face so as to come up with effective strategies to address them to improve the development and wellbeing of children in alternative care.

This research seeks to answer the question; what intervention strategies can be utilized to support foster parents caring for children in alternative care in Bindura District? By examining the experiences of foster parents and coming up with strategies, this study aims to contribute to the advancement of evidence-based solutions. The data from the research aim to inform policy and practice in alternative care systems. This would help ensure that foster parents get the necessary

support they need to provide quality care. The research also aims to ensure better outcomes ensuring development and wellbeing of children in alternative care.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to identify and analyze the strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District to inform policies and practices that enhance support for alternative care systems.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the psychosocio-economic challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of support services available to foster parents.
- To come up with intervention strategies that can be utilized by foster parents to overcome these challenges.

1.6 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The research aims to examine the challenges that foster parents face when caring for children in alternative care and find strategies that are effective to curb these challenges. The study will significantly contribute to the existing body of knowledge by filling the gap in literature on the context-specific experiences and needs of foster parents in Zimbabwe. The study will provide valuable insights into the economic and psychosocial factors that impact the ability of foster parents to provide quality care by examining the complexities of foster care. The data gathered will inform development of interventions and support systems, enhancing the overall wellbeing of children in alternative care.

The study will also inform the development of social policies and programs specifically in the Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 framework, which stresses the significance of nurturing and developing the whole child. Through the identification of effective coping strategies to support foster parents, this study will contribute to the development of policies and programs that promote child resilience and wellbeing. Moreover, the recommendations of the study will be of use to policymakers, social workers and other stakeholders in the child welfare system seeking to improve the foster care system ensuring that children have access to all the necessary needs for their growth and development.

The research will directly benefit the study participants and community. The research will provide a platform for the voices of the foster parents to be heard and their needs will be addressed through direct engagement with them. The findings of the study will be shared to stakeholders and participants so as to empower them with knowledge and resources to improve their caregiving practices. Furthermore, the research will contribute to the mission of the University which is to create the future and build Zimbabwe by advancing knowledge and develop innovative solutions to real-world problems.

The research findings will also inform the development of curriculum, particularly equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to support foster families effectively. The study will also enhance the reputation of the university as a leader in research and community engagement, contributing to the advancement of Education 5.0 principles and practices. Finally, the research will have a positive impact on the lives of foster parents and children in alternative care.

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Alternative Care

UNICEF (2019), defines alternative care as a form of care provided to children who cannot live with their biological families, encompassing foster care, residential care and any other form of child care arrangements due to a number of reasons.

The Children's Bureau (2021), defines alternative care as a replacement care system for children living outside their biological family's environment which is meant to meet the child's psychological, emotional and development needs.

Foster Care

American Academy of Pediatrics (2016), defines foster care as a form of care where a child is placed under the care of a certified foster parent due to the inability of parents to provide proper care or other circumstances.

Foster Parent

A foster parent is a person or a couple who are willing to provide temporary home for children who are unable to live with their biological families providing support and nurturing environment essential for their development and wellbeing during their stay in foster care (National Foster Parent Association, 2020).

Baker & McGrath (2018), defines foster parents as individuals who assume the responsibility of providing a stable, safe and nurturing environment for a child removed from their biological family with temporary or permanent placement intentions.

Child in Care

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2018), defined a child as a minor who has been removed from their biological parents' home environment and legally placed under a place of safety for temporary living due to neglect, abuse or abandonment.

A child in care has been defined by Graham & Brown, (2015) as a minor who has been placed under the care of the state, other authorities or an alternative care provider as a result of abuse, neglect, abandonment or parents' inability to provide care.

Challenges

Challenges refers to the difficulties faced by foster parents such as scarcity of resources, emotional trauma among others (Hickson, 2018).

1.8 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents background of the study, the study's aim, statement of the problem, justification of why conducting the study is essential, objectives of the study, definition of key terms and also a brief outline of the project. It encompasses the important aspects that guide the study throughout the research since the project focus on objectives and aim.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter would focus on the theoretical framework that guides the study. It explains how a certain theory address the research problem which in this case is, the challenges faced by foster

parents in caring for children in alternative care. It also reviews the existing literature on the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. The literature review will focus on what other studies have said regarding this issue bringing out the gap that has led to this research.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology and design used to explore the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. It also explains the research approach, data analysis and procedure that will be used to collect data based on the research topic. This chapter would also discuss ethical consideration that are going to be maintained during the research to ensure confidentiality and quality data collection.

Chapter 4: Results and analysis

This chapter presents research findings, analyzing the data collected from foster parents and other relevant child welfare stakeholders. The findings are organized around the main themes in the research questions fully filling the research objectives. Tables, charts or other visual aids may be used to support the results from the findings.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the findings from the research based on the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Bindura District. It would give recommendations on how to tackle these challenges which includes formulation of policies that will address these issues. The chapter would also give recommendations to the government based on the findings so that it will aid foster care systems in Bindura District as well as the nation at large. The chapter concludes by highlighting areas for future research on the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care.

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter introduced the research topic, background to the study, and statement of the problem. It further explains the aim of the study, objectives, research questions, and justification of the study. The chapter concludes by defining key terms in the research topic and showing the outline of the entire dissertation highlighting the key concepts of each chapter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the body of research from previous studies, thoroughly examining the key concepts, themes and findings on the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. The chapter begins by presenting the theory guiding the research which is the Social Control Theory, a conceptual framework for comprehending how attachment, commitment, involvement and belief influence the challenges that foster parents face in caring for children in alternative care. The chapter also highlights how these challenges affect effectiveness of foster care on the development and well-being of foster children. This is done to see research gaps so that the researcher can recommend intervention strategies that can be used by foster parents to overcome these challenges. Therefore, this chapter provide a comprehensive literature review to fully understand the study.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY

Theories are a collection of connected concepts, assumptions and principles that provide an explanation for a particular phenomenon. They help explain new phenomenon, test hypothesis and create new ones (Sanberg, 2021). This study utilizes Hirschi's Social Control Theory (SCT) as it provides a unique concept on the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. It explains how individuals are less likely to engage in deviant when they have strong social bonds which includes attachment, commitment, involvement and belief.

Social control theory, developed by Travis Hirschi in 1969, provides valuable lens for examining the challenges faced by foster parents in Zimbabwe's alternative care system, particularly in Bindura District. The theory posits that individuals are less likely to engage in deviant behavior when they have strong social bonds, which include attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. In the context of foster care, this framework can be applied to understand how stronger social bonds between foster parents, children and community institutions can mitigate challenges such as behavioral issues, lack of resources and societal stigma. The theory also suggests that the strength of the bond between the foster parents and the child can impact the child's behavior and adjustment to their new environment. By fostering these bonds, foster parents may experience greater support, reducing the likelihood of burnout and improving the quality of care provided to children in alternative care.

Attachment, a key element of social control theory, emphasizes the emotional connections between foster parents and children. In low resource areas, many foster children have experienced trauma, leading to attachment disorders. Strong emotional bonds can help mitigate these issues, but foster parents often lack training in trauma-informed care. Social control theory suggests that strengthening these attachments through counseling, parenting workshops and community support groups can enhance stability in foster placements. In these areas, there are little to no community support groups that can offer counselling to foster parents. Additionally, commitment to the foster care role can be reinforced through incentives such as financial support or recognition, aligning with Hirschi's argument that investment in conventional activities reduces deviance, in this case, foster parent attrition. Muzvidziwa, (2017) in his study on the challenges faced by foster parents in Zimbabwe, highlighted the need for support resources to ensure the well-being of both foster parents and children. This means that communities should work together to ensure effective development and well-being of foster children.

Involvement, another dimension of social control theory, refers to the time and energy individuals dedicate to socially approved activities. Foster parents in low resource areas like Bindura District, often struggle with balancing caregiving responsibilities and economic hardships, leading to neglect or abandonment of foster children. Strategies such as vocational training and income-generating projects for foster parents can increase their engagement in caregiving while improving their economic stability. Mawere & Mawere (2016) emphasize the importance of providing foster parents with training and support so that they can be able to manage the challenges of foster children. This can be done through income generating projects which can be in form of sustainable livelihood projects given to foster parents to sustain themselves as well as the children in their care. Furthermore, community involvement through volunteer programs or mentorship initiatives can distribute caregiving responsibilities, preventing foster parents from becoming overwhelmed. According to a study by Chikweche & Mutsau (2020), community-based initiatives can play a crucial role in supporting foster families and promoting the well-being of children in alternative care. By keeping foster parents actively engaged, social control theory predicts a reduction in foster care breakdowns.

Belief, another important aspect of the social control theory pertains to the acceptance of societal norms and values supporting foster care. In Zimbabwe, cultural misconceptions about foster

children (e.g., labeling them as “cursed”) contribute to stigma and discrimination. Social control theory suggests that reinforcing positive beliefs through awareness campaigns, religious interventions and traditional leadership engagement can shift societal attitudes. Foster parents who feel validated by their community are more likely to persist in their caregiving roles, reducing instances of child rejection. Policymakers and social workers can leverage this by integrating cultural sensitization programs into foster care support systems. This is where social workers can utilize the conscientization theory by Paulo Freire to make sure community members are aware of the importance of foster care in the society and in Zimbabwe at large.

The theory has its shortcomings as it focuses more on individual deviance rather than systemic challenges. Its focus on individual undermines the environmental and institutional factors that poses challenges for foster parents. Many foster children have broken or weak social bonds due to trauma, abuse or neglect yet the theory presupposes that people have strong social bonds. The social control theory also poses a challenge as it emphasizes on conformity over support failing to address challenges faced by foster parents with an individualized therapeutic intervention. It also focuses more on prevention of deviant behavior failing to account for understanding of foster parents’ burnout or satisfaction which is significant in tailoring effective intervention strategies for foster families.

Finally, the application of the social control theory underpins this study, offering insights into designing intervention strategies as highlighted in the third objective. By strengthening attachment, commitment, involvement and belief, stakeholders can create a more supportive environment for foster care. Strategies such as trauma-informed training, economic empowerment, community engagement and anti-stigma campaigns align with Hirschi’s principles, promoting stability in alternative care. Applying this theory can inform policy interventions that enhance foster parents’ capacity to provide sustainable care, ultimately improving outcomes for vulnerable children in Zimbabwe. Thus, Social Control Theory provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding the challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District and for developing targeted interventions aimed at addressing these challenges.

2.3 MAIN LITERATURE

2.3.1. Alternative Care and Foster Parenting

Alternative care, including foster parenting, is a critical component of child protection systems in the globe since it is meant to provide safe and nurturing environments for children who cannot stay with their biological families due to a number of reasons such as abuse, neglect or abandonment. Regardless of foster care providing children with environments that ensure their growth and development, foster parents also face challenges in trying to deliver care to these children. The number of children in need of alternative care have increased due to economic hardships and HIV/AIDS leaving children orphaned. Internationally, foster care systems are designed to provide stable environments for children who cannot remain with their biological families, yet Zimbabwe's system struggles with resource limitations and policy gaps. Chikwaiwa et al. (2020) highlight that foster parents often lack sufficient training and psychosocial support, exacerbating caregiving difficulties.

Within the globe, research indicates that foster parents encounter challenges such as behavioral issues in children, attachment disorders and bureaucratic hurdles in legal guardianship processes. Studies in the UK and USA emphasize the importance of structured support systems, including respite care and financial subsidies to alleviate caregiver burnout (Smith & Jones, 2019). In contrast, Zimbabwe's foster care system lacks such comprehensive frameworks, leaving caregivers to rely on informal networks. Cross-national studies by Johnson (2021) suggest that, trauma-informed care training significantly improves foster parents' ability to manage children with histories of abuse or neglect. These international best practices could inform Zimbabwe's policies, yet their implementation remains inconsistent due to funding shortages.

In Africa, countries like South Africa and Kenya have developed community-based foster care models that integrate extended family systems, reducing institutional reliance (Mkhize, 2018). In Zimbabwe, traditional kinship care remains prevalent, but formal foster care is underutilized due to stigma and legal complexities. Research by Ndlovu (2022) in Bindura reveals that foster parents often face social exclusion, with community members questioning their motives for taking in non-biological children. All these studies advocate for culturally sensitive interventions, such as community awareness campaigns and peer support groups, to strengthen foster care systems. However, Zimbabwe's economic instability hinders the scalability of such initiatives since the

budget of the country allocate minimum funding to the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare meaning there will be no funding for these campaigns.

2.3.2. Foster Care Challenges in Zimbabwe

Existing literature have shown that there are systemic barriers, including delayed foster care grants and insufficient social worker involvement (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2020). In Bindura, foster parents report struggling to meet children's educational and nutritional needs due to unemployment. A study by Dube (2023), found that only 30% of foster parents in the district receive government assistance, forcing many to rely on precarious informal sector incomes. Additionally, legal ambiguities in the Children's Act (Chapter 5.06) complicate guardianship transfers, leaving caregivers in bureaucratic limbo. These findings present the need for policy reforms and targeted financial aid to support foster families. The study aims to design intervention strategies that are tailored to address these systemic problems affecting effective foster parenting.

2.3.1 CHALLENGES FACED BY FOSTER PARENTS

2.3.1.1. *Financial constraints*

Foster parents in Zimbabwe, face significant challenges in caring for children in alternative care. Financial hardships are a major concern, with many foster parents struggling to provide for the basic needs of the children due to limited financial resources (Muzvidziwa, 2017). According to Mawere and Mawere (2016), the lack of financial support can lead to foster parents experiencing difficulties in providing adequate care, including nutrition, clothing and education. To curb this challenge, strategies such as providing financial assistance, subsidies or access to resources could be employed (Chikweche & Mutsau, 2020). Additionally, government and non-governmental organizations could provide training on financial management and planning to help foster parents make the most of their limited resources. Furthermore, fostering partnerships between local businesses and foster care organizations could provide additional financial support and resources (Manyonganise, 2020).

2.3.1.2. *Emotional and psychological stress*

Emotional and psychological stress is another significant challenge faced by foster parents. According to Chimbindi (2018), the emotional demands of caring for children who have experienced trauma can be overwhelming. Foster parents may experience burnout, anxiety and depression, which can impact their ability to provide quality care (Mupedziswa, 2019). In Zimbabwe, the absence of structured counseling for foster families exacerbates these issues, as

unresolved trauma perpetuates cycles of behavioral crises. Comparative studies in South Africa suggest that community-based mentorship programs could alleviate isolation, but Zimbabwe lacks scalable models. To mitigate this, strategies such as providing emotional support, counseling and respite care could be implemented (Manyonganise, 2020). Furthermore, support groups for foster parents could provide a safe space for them to share their experiences and receive support from others who are facing similar challenges. Moreover, providing training on trauma-informed care could help foster parents better understand and support the emotional needs of the children (Makombe, 2018).

2.3.1.3. Social stigma and isolation

Social stigma and isolation are also significant challenges faced by foster parents. According to Dithale & Chinasire (2022), foster parents may experience social stigma due to societal attitudes towards foster care. This can lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion (Ringson, 2020). To address this, strategies such as community awareness campaigns, support groups and social integration programs could be employed (Chigudu, 2025). By raising awareness about the importance of foster care and the challenges faced by foster parents, communities can become more supportive and inclusive. Additionally, fostering a sense of community among foster families could help reduce feelings of isolation and increase support networks (Muzvidziwa, 2017).

2.3.1.4. Trauma and behavioral management challenges

Children in alternative care frequently exhibit trauma-induced behaviors such as aggression or academic disengagement, which foster parents are often unprepared to address. In Bindura, limited access to child psychologists or trauma-focused therapies forces caregivers to rely on punitive measures, worsening behavioral issues. International research advocates for trauma-informed care (TIC) models, like Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), but these remain inaccessible in rural Zimbabwe. Without proper training, foster parents struggle to differentiate trauma responses from diagnosable mental health conditions, leading to mismanagement.

2.3.1.5. Cultural and familial resistance

Cultural norms in Zimbabwe often prioritize biological kinship, creating resistance to foster care arrangements. Extended families may view non-relative caregivers with suspicion, undermining foster parents' authority. In some parts of Zimbabwe, foster children face discrimination in schools or communities, reinforcing feelings of alienation (Masanga, 2024). Regional studies in Zambia highlight similar patterns, where foster parents battle societal prejudice while advocating for

children's rights. Addressing these cultural barriers requires community sensitization campaigns and traditional leadership engagement.

2.3.1.6. Legal and policy gaps

Zimbabwe's Children's Act promotes family-based care but lacks enforceable provisions for foster parent support (SOS Children's Village, 2023). Guardianship disputes, delayed court processes, and vague operational guidelines leave caregivers in legal limbo. Comparatively, South Africa's foster care policies include clearer stipend structures and kinship care incentives, reducing attrition rates. Bindura's foster parents cite bureaucratic inefficiencies as a major stressor, with many abandoning caregiving due to unresolved legal battles.

2.3.2 EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Foster parents encounter numerous challenges, including financial constraints, emotional stress and inadequate training, which hinder their ability to provide quality care (Johnson, 2024). Research indicates that effective support services, such as financial aid, counseling, and skills training, significantly improve foster parents' capacity to nurture children (Brown et al., 2019). In countries like the UK and the USA they have well-structured foster care systems where social workers conduct regular home visits to assess foster families' needs (Taylor, 2021). However, in low-resource settings, the lack of government funding and policy implementation gaps limit service delivery. Existing literature also highlight the importance of peer support networks in alleviating foster parents' isolation and burnout (Mitchell et al., 2024). Despite these findings, disparities persist in service accessibility, particularly in developing nations where child welfare systems are underfunded (UNICEF, 2023).

Additionally, foster care systems face unique challenges, including cultural stigmatization and insufficient legal frameworks (Mkhize, 2017). South Africa has made strides in providing foster care grants and psychosocial support, yet rural areas still experience service gaps (Lombard & Kleijn, 2019). A study in Kenya revealed that foster parents often lack formal training, leading to poor child outcomes (Kivuvu, 2023). Regional bodies like the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) advocate for standardized foster care policies, but implementation remains weak (ACERWC, 2021). Zimbabwe, like other Southern African nations, struggles with economic instability which affects the consistency of foster care allowances. Without structured support, foster parents in the region rely heavily on NGOs, which often operate

with limited resources (Save the Children, 2023). In Bindura District where these NGOs only operate in limited wards and focusing on a small number of children, it means foster parents will get little to no help from these.

In Zimbabwe, foster care is governed by the Children's Act (Chapter 5:06), but enforcement is inconsistent, leaving many foster parents without necessary assistance. The Department of Social Development provides foster care allowances, but delays and inadequate amounts are common (Dube, 2021). A study in Harare found that 60% of foster parents received no counseling services, exacerbating stress and placement breakdowns (Moyo & Ndlovu, 2020). NGOs such as UNICEF Zimbabwe and Childline offer supplementary support, yet coverage is limited in rural areas like Bindura (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2022). Cultural beliefs also influence foster care, with some communities resisting formal systems in favor of informal kinship care (Gomba, 2019). Without comprehensive policy reforms, foster parents in Zimbabwe remain underserved (Chiguvare & Mupedziswa, 2023).

Foster parents in Zimbabwe, face significant challenges in caring for children in alternative care. Government and non-governmental organization (NGO) programs play a crucial role in supporting foster parents. According to Muzvidziwa (2017), government programs such as the Department of Social Services provide essential support to foster parents, including financial assistance and training. NGOs also provide critical support, including emotional support, counseling and respite care (Manyonganise, 2020). However, gaps in service delivery can still occur, leaving foster parents without adequate support.

Community-based support is also essential for foster parents. According to Chikweche and Mutsau (2020), community-based initiatives can provide foster parents with access to resources, training and emotional support. Community-based support groups can also provide a safe space for foster parents to share their experiences and receive support from others who are facing similar challenges (Ditlhale & Chinasire, 2022). Furthermore, community-based initiatives can help raise awareness about the importance of foster care and reduce social stigma (Machingura, 2020).

Despite the importance of government and NGO programs and community-based support, gaps in service delivery can still occur. According to Mawere and Mawere (2016), gaps in service delivery can include inadequate financial support, lack of training and resources and limited access to

emotional support. To address these gaps, strategies such as increasing funding for foster care programs, providing training and resources for foster parents and improving access to emotional support services could be employed (Mupedziswa, 2019). Additionally, improving communication and coordination between government agencies, NGOs and community-based organizations could help ensure that foster parents receive comprehensive support.

2.3.3 INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO REDUCE CHALLENGES FACED BY FOSTER PARENTS

2.3.3.1 Support programs

The emotional toll of fostering is well-documented, with caregivers experiencing stress, compassion fatigue and secondary trauma (Harris, 2021). In Zimbabwe, where many foster children have experienced loss or abuse, parents often lack access to counseling services. Research in Bindura by Gozho et al. (2024), highlights that foster mothers, in particular, face heightened anxiety due to societal expectations of unpaid caregiving. International literature recommends psychosocial support programs, such as support groups and mental health workshops to bolster caregiver resilience. However, Zimbabwe's underfunded healthcare system limits the availability of such services, exacerbating caregivers' emotional strain.

2.3.3.2 Livelihood strategies

Financial instability is a pervasive challenge, with foster parents in Bindura citing inadequate stipends and rising living costs. Studies by Gumbo (2022) show that many caregivers engage in informal trading or subsistence farming to supplement incomes, yet these efforts are often insufficient. Comparative research from Botswana (Moloi, 2020) demonstrates that cash transfer programs significantly improve foster children's well-being, suggesting that Zimbabwe could adopt similar social protection mechanisms. Additionally, microfinance initiatives tailored for foster parents could enhance economic resilience, though current implementation remains fragmented.

2.3.3.3 Peer support networks

Effective coping mechanisms include peer support networks, access to respite care, and financial literacy training (Petersen, 2023). In Bindura, some foster parents form informal savings groups to pool resources, a strategy echoed in studies from Uganda (Nabukeera, 2021). Policy recommendations include integrating foster care training into community health worker programs and expanding social protection schemes. Scholars argue that, multi-sectoral collaborations

between NGOs, government, and communities are essential to sustainable solutions (Chikomo et al., 2024).

2.3.3.4 Policy Recommendations

To address systemic gaps, Zimbabwe must prioritize foster care reforms, including streamlined legal processes, increased funding for caregiver stipends, and mandatory psychosocial support services. International models, such as Kenya's community health volunteer system, offer replicable frameworks. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of economic empowerment programs on foster family stability. By adopting evidence-based strategies, Zimbabwe can mitigate caregivers' burdens and improve outcomes for children in alternative care.

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The studies pertinent literature has been examined. With literature reviewed highly demonstrating the challenges faced by foster parents and how they affect their effective delivery of care to foster children. It also examines how the beliefs, attachment and involvement contribute to effective foster care delivery. The researcher highlighted the population, conceptual, geographical, empirical data and methodological gaps that exist on provided literature that are going to be addressed by the study. The Social Control Theory was presented providing an explanation on the challenges faced by foster parents which served as the underpinning of the study

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research methodology that was used by the researcher to examine the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. It is comprised of the research philosophy, approach, design, study setting, target population, sampling techniques, sample size, data collection techniques and tools. The study adopted a case study approach aiming to gain more insights on the psychosocio-economic challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District. These data collection methods were also designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the support services available to foster parents. This methodology was designed to ensure that the research process and analysis are valid and reliable in addressing the challenges being faced by foster parents in Bindura District. It also aimed at upholding social work ethics in every step taken in the study and to fish out limitations of the study. All these was used to gather information that was relevant in addressing the challenges faced in the foster care system with the ultimate goal of making recommendations to improve policy and practice in alternative care for children.

3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The research adopted an interpretivism research philosophy. This philosophy focused on the understanding that human experiences and meanings that individuals assign to their social worlds. In this study on the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Bindura District, interpretivism was relevant to the study since it gave room for a deeper examination of the experiences and perceptions of foster parents. Interpretivism focus on individuals experiences to explain complex human behaviors. The study focused on the experiences of the foster parents which helped to uncover unique meanings and interpretations related to foster parents in Bindura District. This research philosophy assumes that experiences are shaped by a number of social, cultural and psychological factors that can be understood if one engages with the people experiencing it. The research would use an ontology philosophical stance as it views the experiences of foster parents as socially constructed. It acknowledges that challenges foster parents face and coping strategies are mainly shaped by individual perceptions, systemic structures and cultural norms. The study also adopts an interpretivist epistemology as it focuses on lived experiences as the research will focus on making meaning from the subjective narratives of foster parents. Interpretivism focus on the importance of context-based interpretation of the data by the researcher. The research was also based on value-neutral perspective where the

researcher had to minimize her influence on the research data (Cofie et al., 2024), however adopting an interpretivism research philosophy, the researcher had to acknowledge that her own values and biases can shape the research data. This approach helps to understand specific challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. The data collected in this study was constructed through the interaction between the researcher and the foster parents in Bindura District. Interpretivism research philosophy help to gather findings that would help recommend coping strategies that can be utilized by foster parents in Bindura District.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study adopted an inductive research approach to examine a detailed analysis of the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. This research approach enables the researcher to gather rich, contextualized data through close engagement with foster parents that care for children in alternative care. Inductive research approach would help to understand the complex social phenomena that are influenced by human experiences and perceptions that are central to investigating the challenges faced by foster parents with a focus on Bindura District (Lester, 2023). It focused on understanding the unique psychosocio-economic experiences of foster parents in Bindura District. Inductive research approach is essential as it help to explore the challenges faced by foster parents explaining why they are facing them and bringing out tangible solutions to the challenges rather than quantifying the data as it does not give deep explanations to the data. This research methodology would help the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the psychosocio-economic challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District. It is more relevant in exploring the effectiveness of the support services available to foster parents. Inductive research approach would also help one to delve more into the explanatory part of the study rather than quantifying the data. This can help to gather insights that would be significant in coming up with context-based coping strategies that can be utilized by foster parents to overcome the challenges they face in caring for children in alternative care.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study on the strategies to curb the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care made use of the phenomenological research design. This design is a powerful way to understand subjective experiences of foster parents and to gain insights around people's actions and motivations contributing to the development of new theories, changes in policies and also the

strengthening of the existing laws to ensure safety of children in alternative care. This research design helped to gather rich, detailed data about the lived experiences of foster parents. Phenomenological research design helps the researcher to seek reality from individual's narratives of their experiences and feelings so as to produce descriptions on the challenges faced by foster parents particularly in Bindura District. It also helps the researcher to interpret the collected data expanding them from the explanations of their experiences. Phenomenological research design delves more into bracketing and contextualization of the gathered data (Wells, 2024). This help the researcher to present authentic accounts of the challenges faced by foster parents since on may have gathered the data directly from the people who work closely with children in alternative care. It is a more humanistic style of research that demonstrate respect for the individual and the meaning they give to their lived experiences. Phenomenological research design enables the researcher to engage in flexible activities that can describe and help to understand the challenges being faced by foster parents in Bindura District. This research methodology would help the study to fulfill its objectives of exploring the effectiveness of the support services available to foster parents. By understanding the meanings that foster parents associate with their experiences, phenomenological research design would enable the researcher to develop contextualized coping strategies that can be utilized by foster parents to overcome the challenges they face in caring for children in alternative care.

3.4 STUDY SETTING

The study was conducted in Bindura District, a rural-urban town in Mashonaland Central Province of Zimbabwe. Bindura District is an area with an estimated population of approximately 120000 people (ZIMSTAT, 2020). It is characterized by a mix of urban and rural areas with varying socio-economic conditions which makes it a good place to conduct a research in that area since it would capture the experiences of both rural and urban foster parents on the challenges they face in caring for children in alternative care. Most of the district's population is predominantly involved into agricultural production and there is a notable number of children in foster care due to a variety of socio-economic and familial challenges (Zhou, 2019). The number of children placed under foster care has arisen due to socio-economic difficulties in the country. In Zimbabwean culture, traditionally extended families have been the one to take care of children, however due to modern pressures and disintegration of extended family structures foster care had come into place as a

solution to child welfare concerns. Bindura District have a number of social services as well as child welfare services that oversee the provision of care and support to children in alternative care.

3.5 TARGET POPULATION

The target population for this study comprised of foster parents who currently care for children in alternative care within Bindura District, Zimbabwe. The focus will be on both urban and rural foster families, as these different environments may present unique challenges and coping mechanisms (Chinyakata, 2021). The study will specifically target foster parents who have been involved in the care of children for at least one year, as this time frame allows them to provide comprehensive insights into the long-term challenges and experiences of fostering. According to Moyo & Gumbo (2021), understanding the experiences of foster parents over an extended period is essential for capturing the psychological toll of fostering, which can evolve as children settle into new environments. The target population will also include foster parents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to reflect the varying degrees of access to resources, support systems, and community acceptance. The study will not only focus on the perspectives of primary foster parents but will also consider the roles of secondary caregivers, such as social services personnel. Additionally, the study aims to incorporate the perspectives of social workers and community-based organizations who work closely with foster families, as they can provide valuable insights into the support structures available (Mahlangu & Kgadima, 2022). By selecting a broad and representative sample within Bindura District, the research aims to capture a wide array of challenges faced by foster parents, ensuring the findings are contextually rich and applicable to diverse foster care situations in Zimbabwe. This would ensure the researcher to get a detailed account of the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care thereby recommending for effective coping strategies that can be utilized to overcome these challenges.

3.6 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND SAMPLE SIZE

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique since it was most suited for qualitative research. This sampling technique helped the researcher to select participants based on their expertise and experiences that are relevant to the research study. In this case, purposive sampling was used by the researcher to select foster parents, social workers and other stakeholders who have the knowledge and experience of the foster care system in Bindura District. Using this sampling technique, the researcher selected foster parents who had a year or more in fostering children so

as to gain information on both long term and short-term challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District. The main reason for using this sampling technique was to gather rich firsthand information on the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care (Mulisa, 2022). This sampling technique was seen more relevant to the study since it ensures that foster parents from both rural and urban areas of Bindura District are included. The study was able to gather in-depth data on the experiences of both foster parents since there was a balanced representation of foster parents from rural-urban environments which have different socio-economic living conditions. This sampling technique allowed the researcher to select foster parents and social workers that could provide rich and meaningful data that could enhance the research findings (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The research has a sample size of 11 participants comprising of 8 foster parents, 2 social workers working at the Department of Social Development and 1 stakeholder from a local organization (Friends for Child Development) that provide child protection services.

The study made use of purposive sampling with an idea of getting information from experts regarding the research. The selected participants who had firsthand experience and expertise which made them ideal for the study. In purposive sampling, saturation was achieved when the sample size used was sufficient to represent all the subgroups in Bindura District (Siverman, 2021). The sampling technique used helped to ensure that participants were selected based on their relevance to the challenges being faced by foster parents in Bindura District. It also allowed the researcher to gather rich, in-depth data from a small sample of participants.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS

3.7.1. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

For this study on the challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District, interviews and focus group discussions will be employed, focusing on gathering in-depth, personal insights from foster parents, social workers, and representatives of community organizations. The primary data collection methods that was used include semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions each tailored to capture a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of foster parents. Semi-structured interviews were the central method, providing flexibility in questioning while allowing participants to share detailed narratives. These interviews were also conducted from social workers as key informants of the study. According to Hollett et al. (2022), this approach

was effective for exploring complex topics as it encourages participants to elaborate on their personal stories while also ensuring that key themes related to the research questions are addressed. The semi-structured format enabled the interviewer to follow up on responses, allowing deeper exploration of specific challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Bindura District, exploring the effectiveness of support services available to foster parents thereby ensuring the researcher to recommend coping strategies that can be employed by foster parents in Bindura District to overcome these challenges.

3.7.2. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In addition to individual interviews, focus group discussions were conducted with groups of foster parents to facilitate a collective exchange of experiences and ideas. Focus groups were beneficial in exploring how participants perceive shared challenges, and they can encourage interaction that might elicit new insights or solutions that individuals might not have considered in one-on-one settings (Mannering et al., 2023). Foster parents from both urban and rural areas of Bindura District were grouped separately to ensure that differences in socio-economic and cultural contexts are adequately captured. During these discussions, participants will be encouraged to share their perspectives on the challenges they face, as well as the support systems available to them. Focus groups will also provide an opportunity to observe group dynamics, such as how foster parents discuss their roles and responsibilities within the community and how they address issues such as stigma and isolation.

The data collection tools for this study comprised of interview guides for both foster parents as well as key informants and focus group discussion guide. The interview guides were developed to ensure that key topics related to the challenges of fostering are covered while allowing room for flexibility in the conversation. It included open-ended questions about the foster parents' experiences, coping strategies, support systems, and perceptions of the foster care process. The focus group discussion guide was structured to guide the conversation towards shared experiences, while also allowing for the exploration of group dynamics and collective problem-solving. Together, these tools helped the researcher to ensure that the data collected was both comprehensive and consistent, allowing for a thorough analysis of the challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District. By using these tools, the research generated rich, contextually

grounded data that could inform both academic understanding and practical interventions for improving foster care in Zimbabwe.

3.8 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The procedure section of the study explained to the participants about the steps to be taken in the investigation. It was carried out by conducting semi-structured and structured interviews to eight foster parents, two social workers from the Department of Social Development in Bindura District and one representative from local community organization who work closely with foster parents and understand the causes of the challenges being faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care as well as the impacts of these challenges on both the caregivers and the children. On data collection, the researcher considered the following steps;

- Bindura University of Science Education approved the investigations for this study and gave the researcher permission after the review of the board from the school. The supervisor assessed the research proposal and tools and approved they were good for research.
- The researcher then went on to seek permission from the Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare to conduct a research in Bindura district which is their area of jurisdiction.
- The investigator was helped by community child care workers to arrange meetings with foster parents informing them about the research.
- Before conducting the interviews, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to all the participants ensuring that they gave consent. She also informed participants that the information gathered would be treated with confidentiality and names and other important information about the participants would not be disclosed. At the end of the interviews, the researcher thanked all the interviewees for their participation.
- Thematic analysis would be used to analyse the research findings. This involves data identification and interpretation of patterns within qualitative data. Data will be presented in themes derived from the objectives.
- The researcher compiled a dissertation report with the guidance of a University supervisor.

- The research findings will be then disseminated to the relevant stakeholders including the University, MoPSLSW and policy makers in form of a report as feedback. This will help to address the identified gaps or areas of improvement in foster care systems.

3.9 VALIDITY

Ensuring the validity of this study was crucial for producing reliable and credible findings. To enhance construct validity, the research clearly defined and operationalized the key concepts such as "challenges faced by foster parents" and "alternative care," ensuring that the questions and data collection tools directly address these concepts. The use of multiple data collection methods, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions enhanced triangulation, allowing the researcher to cross-verify findings from different perspectives and increase the robustness of the results. Furthermore, member checking was employed, where participants had the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interviews, providing an additional layer of validation (Harper & Cole, 2023). This ensured that the interpretations of their experiences accurately reflect their views on the challenges they face in caring for children in alternative care. In addition, peer debriefing was done, where colleagues or experts in the field of social work and child welfare would review the research process and findings to identify any potential biases or oversights, further enhancing the study's validity. By employing these strategies, the research aimed to ensure that the findings were credible, accurate, and reflective of the realities faced by foster parents in Bindura District, contributing valuable insights to the field of foster care in Zimbabwe.

3.10 RELIABILITY

Reliability in this study was achieved through careful design and consistency in data collection and analysis processes. To ensure consistent and dependable results, the researcher used structured and detailed interview guides and focus group protocols. During the interviewing process, the researcher made some adjustments to ensure clarity, minimize ambiguity, and standardize the questions asked across different participants, ensuring consistency. Additionally, the researcher maintained detailed field notes to ensure that all data collected was accurately captured and can be re-examined if necessary. The use of multiple data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, enhanced reliability through data triangulation—cross-checking data from different sources to confirm consistency and strengthen findings (Patton, 2022). By employing these methods, the study aimed to ensure that the findings were reliable and could

be trusted to reflect the true challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District helping the researcher to come up with coping strategies that could be used by foster parents to overcome these challenges.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topic, which involves vulnerable populations such as foster parents and children in alternative care.

1.11.1 Informed consent

First and foremost, informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection begins. Participants were fully briefed about the study's purpose, their role, and their right to withdraw at any point without consequence, ensuring that their participation was voluntary.

3.11.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by ensuring that all personal identifiers are removed from the data and that any shared information remains private, accessible only to the research team. Additionally, to protect the welfare of foster children involved in the study, the researcher ensured that no identifiable details of the children's circumstances or experiences were shared during data collection. Participant well-being was prioritized, with the researcher offering support referrals or counseling options should any distress arise during interviews or focus groups.

3.11.3 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was sought from an institutional review board, and local authorities were informed and involved in the study, ensuring that the research complies with national and international ethical standards. Lastly, the researcher was particularly sensitive to the power dynamics in the data collection process, as foster parents may feel pressure to provide socially acceptable responses, and efforts were made to create a safe, non-judgmental environment where participants could feel comfortable sharing their true experiences (Patthof et al., 2023). By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the study aimed to conduct research in a way that respects the rights and dignity of all participants.

3.12 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis for this study employed thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method that allows for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This method was particularly effective in analyzing the rich, narrative data

collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The process begun with data transcription, where all recorded interviews and discussions were transcribed verbatim. The researcher then engaged in open coding, reading through the transcripts and notes to identify key phrases, words, or concepts that relate to the challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District. These initial codes were grouped into broader themes based on similarities, such as, psychological, and socio-economic challenges (Hashim et al., 2023). To ensure rigor and reliability, the researcher used data triangulation, cross-checking findings across the different data sources (interviews, focus groups, and observations) to validate the emerging themes. Additionally, member checking was employed, where a subset of participants was asked to review the findings to confirm that the themes identified reflect their lived experiences. To enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis, the researcher also used peer debriefing, involving colleagues or experts in qualitative research to review the coding process and the interpretation of data. This was done to ensure that the final analysis was grounded in the data and provides a trustworthy account of the challenges faced by foster parents in the context of Bindura District.

3.13 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study on the challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District encountered several limitations that could affect the scope and generalizability of its findings. First, the use of purposive sampling to select participants who were experienced foster parents might have introduced selection bias, as it limits the diversity of perspectives, potentially excluding foster parents who have faced fewer challenges or those with shorter caregiving experiences. Additionally, while the study focuses on Bindura District, the findings might not be easily generalizable to other regions in Zimbabwe due to the unique socio-economic and cultural characteristics of Bindura. Moreover, the sensitive nature of the research topic, involving vulnerable populations, might lead to social desirability bias, where participants might provide responses that they perceive to be more acceptable or aligned with social norms, rather than their true experiences. Language barriers could also present challenges, as interviews and discussions would be conducted in English or Shona, and the potential for miscommunication could affect the depth and clarity of responses. Lastly, although the study would rely on triangulation and member checking to enhance validity, the researcher's personal biases and subjectivity in interpreting qualitative data could influence the analysis, despite efforts to maintain objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). These limitations were acknowledged throughout the study and considered when interpreting the findings.

The researcher selected participants from different backgrounds with differences in years of experiences so as to address the selection bias that may be caused by using purposive sampling in order to get different perspectives. The researcher also recommended future studies in different regions in Zimbabwe as a way to address the bias posed by the research which focused on Bindura District's context-specific challenges and intervention strategies. To address language barrier, the researcher conducted interviews in the language preferred by the participant.

3.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the research methodology used to explore the challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District. It outlines the research design, which adopts a qualitative approach to capture the lived experiences of foster parents. The chapter explains the research philosophy and approach, emphasizing interpretivism and a case study design, which enables an in-depth understanding of the specific context of Bindura District. Sampling techniques are discussed, with purposive and snowball sampling methods used to select foster parents, social workers, and community organization representatives who have direct knowledge of the foster care system. Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, all of which aim to gather comprehensive and contextual data. The data analysis process involves thematic analysis, ensuring that patterns related to the challenges faced by foster parents are identified and interpreted. Finally, ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of vulnerable participants, are emphasized to ensure that the research is conducted responsibly and ethically.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focus on the data presentation, interpretation, analysis and discussion of findings of the research on the strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Bindura District. The major focus of the study was to answer the objectives of the research which were to examine the psychosocio-economic challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care, to evaluate the effectiveness of support services available to foster parents and to come up with intervention strategies that can be utilized by foster parents to overcome these challenges. The data was collected from eight foster parents who had children currently in their care and three professionals who also deal with child protection cases working closely with foster parents. Analysis and presentation of data was done through themes in accordance to research objectives. Verbatims were utilized in the research and further translated to English.

QUALITATIVE DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Demographics play a huge role in research in that they are useful in the analysis of data which help the researcher to interpret data collected thereby leading her to draw meaningful conclusions of the research which are tailor made towards the age, gender of the participants and economic level as the disparities that exist within their societies (Ferreira, 2017). The main participants of the study were foster parents who care for children in alternative care in Bindura District.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE FOSTER PARENTS ARE SUMMARISED IN THE TABLE 1 BELOW:

Table 1: Demographics of participants

Participants' id	Gender	Age	Experience	Marital status
Foster parent	Male	40 years	5 years	Married
Foster parent	Female	45 years	6 years	Single

Foster parent	Male	39 years	7 years	Married
Foster parent	Male	38 years	5 years	Married
Foster parent	Male	40 years	6 years	Married
Foster parent	Female	48 years	9 years	Widowed
Foster parent	Female	35 years	5 years	Married
Foster parent	Female	45 years	8 years	Single
Social development practitioner	Male	34 years	8 years	Married
Social worker	Male	46 years	14 years	Married
Social worker	Female	32 years	6 years	Single

4.2.1 DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY AGE

The purpose of the age in the study was to investigate the depth of the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care as challenges may vary according to the age of the foster parents. Young foster parents face a lot of challenges as compared to older ones, this is because young foster parents are still growing their resilience towards caring for these children hence they are likely to face more emotional burden as compared to older people. Compared to older foster parents, younger foster parents may feel a bit more overwhelmed and isolated with little to no social support from others whilst older ones may have a lot of support from various sides such as the family and all.

As noted above, age was very important in the study in that it allowed for the comparison between the different ages to see the depth of their challenges as all foster parents face unique challenges caring for a child in alternative care. For instance, older foster parents in age groups such as 40 to 50 years have their own physical burdens such as high blood pressure, heart problems to mention but a few hence caring for a child who have been placed in their care may need patience. When it

comes to the physical burden, older foster parents may face a huge challenge as compared to the younger ones as caring for a child may be both demanding and tiresome.

4.2.2 DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY EXPERIENCE

The researcher selected participants who took part in the study according to their years of experience so that they could provide authentic information about challenges faced by foster parents in Zimbabwe and suggest strategies that can be used by foster parents to overcome the difficulties they face. Experience plays a crucial role in research especially in qualitative research where one would need detailed information about a hypothesis. The findings show that foster parents had an average of 6 years' experience which is very useful for the study as all are experienced enough to provide relevant information and longitudinal aspects in relation to the study. Studies have shown that experience enhances the quality of the research data. Smith (2017) emphasizes the need for researchers to consider participants' experience especially if one wants to gather rich in-depth data.

4.2.3 DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY GENDER

Gender also play a key role in this research since foster parents unique challenges based on gender differences. Research should also consider gender dynamics since male foster parents and female may face different challenges in caring for children in alternative care. Also gender dynamics matters on how foster parents react to children's behaviors. Female parents had been associated with showing love and being more caring than male parents. This means that challenges vary according to gender since the way people are created is different based on gender and foster parents' response to life issues differ according to gender. The researcher gathered information through interviews from both male and female foster parents balancing the number of participants according to gender. The researcher considered this because it would help her to gather data from both genders showing equity and inclusivity of all people.

4.2.4 DISTRIBUTION OF CAREGIVERS BY MARITAL STATUS

Demographic data was collected including the caregiver's marital status. This was considered as key since foster children are placed in foster homes as places of safety. The department of social development respect marital statuses of foster parents with their main concern on the welfare of the child during his or her stay in the foster home. Marital status was considered as child welfare officers would be concerned about giving the child a complete home so that they would not feel

like they are missing what other children with both parents are getting. These matters though some of the foster parents are single especially women but they would have been seen deemed to provide adequate care for the children.

PRESENTATION OF OTHER FINDINGS BASED ON OBJECTIVES

Qualitative findings

The data collected was presented using thematic analysis. The findings of the study are presented according to the objectives which are the main themes. These objectives also had their subthemes. The researcher would elaborate more.

4.3 THEMES

4.3.1 THEME 1: THE PSYCHOSOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY FOSTER PARENTS

On this objective the findings that came out were emotional strain including stress which could impact the ability of foster parents to provide effective care to children in their care. Participants also brought out that stigma and isolation is one of the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care. Findings also brought out that financial constraints are a challenge being faced by foster parents in Bindura District. These findings would be explained in subthemes below.

4.3.1.1. EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

A foster parent highlighted that it was hard to deal with the emotional needs of children that are put under foster care. One states that she does not know what to expect from the children due to the fact that their past experiences keep on haunting them. She added that the stress that comes with parenting children in foster homes was palpable and she often feel like she is not good enough. Another foster parent resonates with the first foster parent, saying she feels drained from dealing with children is behavioral issues and trauma. He felt like he was losing himself in the process so he felt that there is need for psychological support to help them deal with the stress they face in caring for children in alternative care. A social worker notes that, *“foster parents usually face high levels of psychological and emotional strain due to multifaceted needs of foster children.”* The researcher saw the need to provide foster parents with adequate support and resources to manage the stress. One of the foster parents concluded that she was worried that the strain can cause long-term effects on her mental health, and it was hard to ask for help when they are in

remote areas like the rural areas in Bindura for example Audrey farm in Matepatepa. She suggested that they (foster parents) need a safe space to share their concerns so that they get support without judgement anxiety.

One foster parent said that:

“Kuva muchengeti kuvana ava kunorema dzimwe nguva kunyanya kana uchichengeta mwana akasangana nekushungurudzwa kwakanyanya. Dzimwe nguva unonzwa sekuti uri kutadza kuvapa rudo rwakakwana zvinova zvinorwadza. Izvi zvinoita ndiite pfungwa nendangariro zvinozokanganisa pakuchengeta vana ava. Hunhu hunoratidzwa nevana dzimwe nguva unoita ufunge kuti ndiwe uri kuwedzera zvinova zvinondikanganisa uye zvinokanganisa kugarisana kwangu nehama.”

Translated to:

(Being a foster parent, most of the times I feel overwhelmed and emotionally drained. The burden of taking care of the nuanced needs of children is wearisome and I often feel like I have reached my capacity. My experiences as a foster parent has made me feel depressed and overwhelmed since I became a foster parent and it is difficult to feel like I’m not doing the best for the children in my care. The impulse control disorders and emotional distress can be triggering and sometimes I feel anxious and uneasy as if I’m making things worse. It's like I'm carrying a weight on my shoulders all the time, and it's affecting my relationships with my family and friends. Fostering often have a huge toll on our lives as foster parents since one has to focus more on the child and I end up losing myself in the process. Due to the fact that I’m eager to help these children I will have no option on how to tackle the situation.)

Another foster parent highlighted that:

“Kuva foster parent kunogarokanganisa pfungwa dzangu nekuda kwekuti ndinenge ndichishungurudzika kuti vana vagere zvakanaka here. Zvinoita ndigare ndichitarisira kuti ndinogona kungosangana nezvandinenge ndisina kutarisira nekuda kwehunhu hwevana. Dzimwe nguva zvinoti netsei kumanager maemotions evana vanenge vachiratidza imwe behavior. Ndinofunga zvinenge zvakanaka kupota tichipihwa counselling kubva kumaSocial

Workers kuti tibatsirike pakumanager hunhu hwevana ava. Ndakadzidza kuti kugara nevana ava kunoda munhu ane patience nekuti vanokura vachiita vachichinja nekufamba kwenguva.”

Translated to:

(Being a foster parent usually affect my mental health. I’m always worried about the wellbeing and safety of the children in my care. Fostering have made me feel like I have to expect anything anytime due to children’s behaviors since they act differently everyday due to their past experiences and the trauma they have faced. Sometimes it is hard to manage my emotions when they start acting up. I think it would be wise if we get constant counselling from social workers to help us manage the behaviors of these children. I learnt that I have to be more patient with these children since their behaviors can be unpredictable sometimes and being patient have helped me a lot. These outbursts have affected my well-being since it gives me questions if I can be able to continue managing this effectively. This emotional strain is intense and its affecting other parts of my life.)

Participant 3(key informant-social worker)

“If a parent has raised a child and came across challenges with the child which has suffered abuse that she same experienced the feeling is felt twice and may develop anxiety or psychological challenges in dealing with trauma because of her emotional involvement. But usually we ensure our parents are fit psychologically to ensure they exercise the proper responsibility for our children since we would have deemed it a place of safety.”

The findings show that foster parents are facing psychological and emotional challenges. This aligns closely with findings from recent literature on the experiences of foster parents. These studies highlighted that foster parents consistently experience high levels of depression, stress and anxiety as a result of the demanding nature of their roles as caregivers. Goemans et al. (2020) highlighted that the stress faced by foster parents is an important predictor that show where foster children’s mental health issues come from. It also emphasizes the bidirectional relationship between the child’s behavior and the foster parent’s well-being. According to Hirschi’s social control theory, he suggests that attachment can help foster parents to manage the behavioral outbursts of children. Many children that are placed under foster care have experienced insecure

and disrupted attachments which challenge the ability of foster parents to form secure bonds which can result in the caregiver being emotionally stressed out. Hirschi highlighted that if children are befriended they tend to behave better and it could be a bit easy for foster parents to manage the psychological and emotional strain that comes with foster parenting. Foster parents frequently report high levels of stress, particularly when caring for children exhibiting behavioral and emotional problems, which could lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

The two foster parents mentioned of feeling emotionally drained and consumed and these explanations resonates with the findings mentioned in the paragraph above as foster parents often face emotional tolls in trying to manage the multifaceted needs of children who have experienced trauma. The sense of one losing themselves in the process of fostering and neglecting their personal needs has been suggested as a common experience being faced by foster parents as it leads to strained personal relationships and burnout. As mentioned by foster parent 1 on the issue of the emotional distress of children being triggering and making them feel uneasy as if they are the ones making it worse, echoes the concept of secondary traumatic stress (STS) where foster parents experience trauma symptoms due to their exposure to the children. Carew (2016) in his research found out that 20% of foster parents have reported experiencing moderate to severe levels of STS, with 12% meeting criteria consistent with a diagnosis of PTSD as a result of indirect exposure to their foster child's trauma.

The findings are similar to existing literature which speaks that foster parents face emotional and psychological stress as a result of fostering. They align with a study by Mupedziswa (2019) who states that fostering cause emotional toll on foster parents if it is not managed well. This goes in line with the social control theory which states that to address the challenges foster parents face there has to be strong social bonds between the caregiver and the children. This cannot be done within a short period of time since many of the children may have experienced abuse which made it difficult for them to secure strong bonds. As mentioned by foster parents from the gathered data it is clear that the findings reflect broader existing challenges faced by foster parents across the world. The research notes that there was need to have peer support groups that help these children form meaningful relationships giving them room to trust and build relationships with their caregivers.

4.3.1.2. SOCIAL STIGMA AND ISOLATION

Findings from foster parents based on this subtheme found out that foster parents are experiencing judgement from people who do not understand their roles as caregivers. One of the foster parents says, “*people make presumptions about foster children and my family and it hurts.*” Another foster parent added that they have felt being isolated by the community and felt being alone in this process as if they are the only one struggling to manage the behaviors of children. A social worker from the department of social development noted that foster parents often face stigma and isolation due to misconceptions that people have around foster care. One foster parent concluded that, it was hard to explain to people what it was like to be a foster parent and what we face in providing care to foster children. In essence they were all suggesting that they have to work together as stakeholders in the child protection system to break down the stigmas surrounding foster care and build communities that are supportive to fostering since this could be due to ignorance.

Participant 1

“Ndakasangana nekushungurudzika nekuda kwekuti vanhu munharaunda vanga vavekusada kuva pedyo neni. Vanhu vanenge vachitaura zvakaipa pamusoro pekuchengeta vana kwandinoita kuti kungoda kuonekwa semunhu akanaka nekuda kungobatsirwa uye kunzwirwa tsitsi. Zvakaita ndisafarire kutaura taura nevanhu nekuti vainge vave kutarisa mararamiro angu kuda kuona kuti ndinochengeta sei vana. Vamwe vaive pedyo neni vakasuduruka nekusada kunzi vanowirirana neni. Vanhu munharaunda umu Havana ruzivo pamusoro pekuchengetwa kwevana kufoster ndizvo vachiona maonero avanoita.”

Translated to:

(I have experienced isolation and social stigma from the society which I never expected. People always make false assumptions about being a foster parent thinking that we only need to be seen as good people, be pitied and be receiving help all the time and it's difficult to deal with their criticism. This made me feel like people are always watching after me and how I treat those children and it made me withdraw from almost all forms of social interactions. Many people who were close to me drew away from me as a result of the stigma surrounding foster care, and it was difficult to find people who understand what I'll be going through. I always feel like I'm living a lonely life and the people in the society

will not perceive the difficulties that we face and one cannot explain to them because they always have their stereotypes judgement around being a foster parent which was hard to deal with.)

Participant 2

“Ndinogarofunga kuti vanhu havatione sevanhu nekuda kwekuchengeta vana mufoster. Vanhu vanogara vachingobvunza mibvunzo isina maturo nguva dzese nekungotaura taura nepasingade kuti vanhu vataure. Vamwe ndivo vanobvunza kuti sei ndiri kuvachengeta uye sei vasiri kuendeswa kuhamu dzavo. Vazhinji vacho havana ruzivo kuti foster chii izvo zvinoratidza kuti vanoda kudzidziswa kuti vakwanise kunzwisisa nekugarisana neu nevana ava zvalkanaka.”

Translated to:

(I have felt like people do not see me as a human being as a result of being a foster parent. People always ask unnecessary questions trying to invade my privacy and make thoughtless comments which was hard to deal with their misunderstanding. Some can even ask you why caring for these children and questioning why they were not taken by the members of their extended families. Many of them are ignorant about what was foster care and why it was done which makes it very important for the need to make them aware so that they can render support to reduce the burden that we go through. These unnecessary questions make me feel like I’m living in a separate world apart from others making it difficult to break that feeling. The stigma and isolation are hard to navigate.)

Participant 3 (key informant, Social Worker)

“As a social worker, I’ve seen firsthand the impact of social stigma and isolation on foster parents. They often feel like they’re on their own, struggling to manage the complex needs of the children in their care. The stigma surrounding foster care can be overwhelming, and it is hard for foster parents to find support and understanding in their communities. I’ve seen foster parents feel isolated and alone, struggling to connect with others who don’t understand what they’re going through. It is a significant challenge, and one that we need to address in order to better support our foster families.”

The findings found out that social stigma and isolation are experienced by foster parents as mentioned by foster parent one and two. These challenges are well documented in recent literature; recent studies indicate that foster parents face misconceptions and judgement from the society in regard to the roles they play in caring for children in alternative care. The findings of the study align with a study by Weistra & Luke (2017) which highlighted that parents who adopt children, a group of people closely related to foster parents encounter stigmatized perceptions which lead to personal stigma and psychological stress. These experiences encountered do not only have an emotional toll on foster parents but it could result in social withdrawal and broken relationships since foster parents end up losing friends as a result of fostering.

The in-depth data shows that social support plays a crucial role in ameliorating the effects of stigma. Social support networks including family, friends and community groups have significantly been seen as a way that could reduce the negative impacts of stigma on foster parents and adoptive parents. The researcher observed that foster parents who took time to engage in support groups have better experiences as they feel a sense of being socially included and felt shared understanding which helps to lessen the feelings of isolation. Findings show that supportive environments and social networks are crucial for the well-being of foster parents. Hirschi's social control theory also added that involvement was important in addressing the challenges faced by foster parents. He emphasized that foster parents have to be closely involved in the healing process of the children who may have experienced trauma in their past experiences as it helps them to better understand the emotional needs of these children. This would then reduce the emotional strain they face when dealing with the issues of children. Involvement also work on both sides; the community also have to be closely involved in helping foster parents with social support so that they cannot be overwhelmed with fostering. This was in line with the ubuntu philosophy which suggest that a person cannot live in isolation, 'I am because we are'. Hence social support was needed for foster parents and foster children for effective outcomes.

The findings are similar to existing literature by Ringson, (2020) which speaks about societal attitudes towards foster care a reason why foster parents feel socially isolated. This also goes in line with the involvement part of the social control theory which states that involvement of people in foster care activities can make it easier for foster parents to handle fostering since they would be feeling emotionally supported. Based on this, it was clear that the findings reflect broader

existing challenges across the world. Therefore, the researcher notes that there is need to strengthen community involvement in foster care to improve foster care outcomes. The researcher also suggest that communities should be conscientized on the importance of their involvement in foster care so as to reduce the burden on foster parents thereby improving foster care outcomes.

4.3.1.3. FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Findings show that foster parents are facing financial hardships to cater for foster children. Many of them lives in rural areas where they do not have a stable source of income and those in the urban areas are not formally employed due to lack of educational qualifications and the crisis in the employment sector. This reason was enough for them to face challenges in trying to meet the needs of the children in their care. One foster parent shared that they have to sacrifice their financial stability to care for the children. This female foster parent added that she was raised by an extended family member after her parents were all killed in the second Chimurenga so as a result of being an orphan she faced a lot of ill treatment and discrimination. As she grew up, she decided to provide basic care to orphans and vulnerable children who have no one to take care of them. This gives her the energy to sacrifice anything for these children. This foster parent is a public figure in her community so she faces limited financial constraints since she has some projects like poultry that support her financially though it may not be enough. A development practitioner who work from a local organization that focuses on child welfare noted that foster parents suffer financially especially those who care for children with complex needs. One of the foster parents concluded that the many people expect them to act like superheroes when they are just normal people who are trying to make end meet. One social worker from the department of social development noted that, there's need to advocate for financial support for foster families so as for them to provide the best care to the children. Foster parents also said that they wish to provide the best care for the children's development and well-being but they are financially unstable.

Participant 1

“Ndinowanzotambura kuti ndiwane zvese zvinodiwa nemwana. Hurumende inenge ichiti inotipa rubatsiro as munogona kuita makore pasina chamawana kubva kwairi. Sevanhu vasina mabasa ekuti tinotambira mari, zvinotirempera kuzenge tichiwana zvese zvinodiwa nemwana sekuti vamwe vana vanounzwa varikumashure kuchikoro ini semubereki ndinenge ndichida kuti aenderane nevamwe saka panenge pachida kuti aite ma extra

lesson zvino kana pasina mari zvinokundika. Izvi zvinokanganisa zvavanzobuda nazvo muzvidzidzo zvzvo zvinova zvinokanganisa ramangwana ravo.”

Translated to:

(I constantly struggle to meet the needs of the children. The government reimbursements are only said but not delivered. They even fail to provide for the children's clothing needs yet we do not have sustainable livelihood sources of income to support ourselves as well as for the children in our care. Since we do not have stable financial status, this ends up affecting the foster children in the sense that some of them may be behind in school and there will be need for extra lessons so that they will be on the same page with other students improving their educational outcomes. Due to lack of income we end up failing to provide that for them which will affect their development and well-being. It's hard how the government and other child welfare organizations want us to provide for the children without any help they render. It is not about foster parents wanting money but due to this harsh economic system, we may need some kind of help so as to reduce the burden on us.)

Participant 2

“Chinonyanyondinetsa ndechekuti isu semafoster parents tinotarisirwa kuprovider zvese zvinodiwa nevana takazvimirira. Izvi zvinova zvinondishungurudza sezvo ndisisna basa rakanyatsoringana ringagone kundichengeta nevana pasina chinoshota. Nzvimbo dzatinogara dziri kure nemaOffice ekuti tingawane rubatsiro uye kuti usvikeko panoda mari yetransport. Hurumende inofanira kutibatsirawo sevanhu vanenge vazvipira kubatsira vana chero tisinawo vakakwana. Tinowanzorarama nekurima uye mari inobva pakurima haisi mari yakanyanya kuwanda. Ndinoshuvira kuramba ndichichengeta vana ava asi zvinenge zvakanakawo tikawanawo rumwe rubatsiro.”

Translated to:

(What shocks me the most is that we as foster parents are expected to individually provide for the needs of the foster children. This has a huge toll on my mental health since I'm not employed. In the rural areas where we live we are far away from any child welfare offices and it takes us a lot of money for transport to visit the department of social development.

The government should consider that as foster parents one may have sacrificed to cater for the foster children. I live by farming and gardening and these does not produce huge amounts of money. As an individual I have my own needs and that of my family and with little income it will be difficult to cater for all the needs of the children that are placed in my care. I'm passionate about caring for these children but it would be more appreciable if I get other support services to support me financially.)

Participant 3 (Key Informant - Social Worker)

“As a social worker, I have noted that that foster parents do not have accurate resources especially finances to cater for health needs for the child and theirs. So, when they fall sick they won't be able to go to work and this results in little or no economic growth ending in poverty. Coming from the impoverished areas results in them failing to get connected to better people due to less or little exposure hence they remain ignorant or less informed of better opportunities for themselves thus they remain poor and with no access to better things.”

The challenges that foster parents have mentioned from the gathered data shows that there are little to no grants for foster parents in Zimbabwe. Different studies have highlighted that financial strain was highly faced by foster parents due to lack of reimbursement and when it used to come it was limited with the high cost associated with caring for children in alternative care. A study by Muzvidziwa (2017) aligns with the findings of the study as it highlights how untimely grants for foster parents affect the development and wellbeing of children in alternative care. Findings have also shown that there are insufficient foster care grants to cover the basic needs of the children that are placed under foster care and this results in foster parents facing financial burdens. Koh et al. (2022) indicated that kinship caregivers in the United States encounter high stress levels and health problems as a result of financial hardships such as rent overdue or utility disconnections. This usually accelerate psychological stress on foster parents reducing the impact of the care they provide

Financial constraints faced by foster parents as highlighted by the foster parents in Bindura District are similar to past researches which talks of financial instability among foster parents as a leading factor to the malfunctioning of foster care placements. This also aligns with a study conducted in

Ghana by Doku (2023) which found out that pressures such as financial strain impacted the abilities of foster parents to provide effective care negatively affecting the outcomes of children in alternative care. This goes in line with the involvement part of the social control theory which stresses the importance of support from various stakeholders in foster care. Therefore, the researcher notes that supporting foster parents financially so that they could be empowered was crucial for sustainability and also to reduce malfunctioning of foster care placements.

4.3.2 THEME 2: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE TO FOSTER PARENTS

This theme examines the effectiveness of support services available to foster parents focusing on accessibility and quality. The theme will show the findings that will fill the gap in the research about the significant barriers foster parents in accessing essential support services including counselling, financial assistance and relief care. The quality of available services is inadequate exacerbating the challenges faced by foster parents.

4.3.2.1. ACCESSIBILITY OF SUPPORT SERVICES

"As a foster parent I have to work hard to get the needs of the child", says one foster parent. Foster parents complained about limited access to support services to cover the needs of the children in their care. A social development officer noted that services are not accessible by foster families indicating that many are underfunded or hard to reach leaving foster families in a crisis. Another foster parent added, *"it seems like the government is not prioritizing the needs of the children in alternative care."* Foster parents highlighted that they need more access to support services. A social worker concluded that there was need to increase funding to make support services accessible to foster parents in time so as to make a difference in the lives of children in alternative care.

Participant 1 (Foster Parent)

"Zvinonetsa kumirira rubatsiro rwekubatsira vana uye hatiudzwe nguva ingazowanike rubatsiro rwacho. Nedistance yatinofamba kubva kunzvimbo dzatinogara kuenda kune maoffices ehurumende tinenge tichitarisirawo kuwana rubatsiro asi tinongoudzwa zvimwe chete. Izvi zvinoita ndishungurudzike sezvo zviri zvimwe zvezvinhu zvinozokanganisa kukura kwemwana zvkanaka."

Translated to:

(It is hard to wait for support services for the children. We are not provided the time when services will be available since they only tell us they will notify us. With the distance some of us travel to the child welfare offices, we expect to get some support but to no avail we hear the same statements. This issues always get me worried how to keep up with the delays in service delivery yet I cannot travel weekly to check up on the services available at the Department of Social Development. The uncertainty is having a toll on my mental health as I get worried about the impact of this on the child's development and well-being.)

Participant 2(foster parent)

“Semuchengeti wevana ndakaona kuti kugara wakatarisira rubatsiro kubva kuSocial welfare kupedza nguva nekuti runowanika pano neapo uye zvirizvishoma. Masocial workers havawatsovisitire vana nenguva kuti vaone kuti varikugara sei uye varikuchinja hre nekuti vanenge vachiti havana fuel apa zvinhu zvakakosha kuti vapote vachitaura nevana pano neapo kuitira kuti vabatsirike pfungwa. Kuwanika kwerubatsiro kumafoster parents kwakakosha zvinobatsira pakukura kwevana.”

Translated to:

(As a foster parent I have seen that basing on provided support services for the child's welfare and development from the child welfare service department is a waste of time since these services are found once in a while and in limited quantities which does not sustain us to survive for some time. The social workers do not even make home visits on timely basis to check on the children in alternative care with an explanation that they do not have fuel to make that happen yet it is important for the children to have some interaction with them on timely basis for the good of their mental health and well-being. Accessibility of support services on timely basis by foster families is very crucial for the sustenance of foster care and improvement of outcomes.)

Participant 3 (social worker)

“From the perspectives of a social worker, I have evidenced the challenges that foster parents face in accessing support services for the children in their care. There are many

programs being implemented to support foster families but they are not being funded to that they fulfill their goal which is to support the needs of foster families. Many databases are compiled but the issue always fail at the funding stage. This shows that the budget set for foster care is not enough to support them that is why many of these foster parents are now more focused on being empowered so that they can support themselves. This lack of accessibility is an important barrier to the provision of quality care to these children.”

The findings from the experiences of foster parents and social workers highlights the recurring challenges regarding access to support services and mental health for children in alternative care. The research highlighted that fragmented service delivery, long wait times and bureaucratic barriers as crucial obstacles to effective foster care. These issues always make foster parents feel isolated and strained since they are forced to stand up for the needs of their children without adequate institutional support. The findings harmonize with the existing literature by Save The Children (2023) which states that support services are not readily available for foster families mainly due to economic hardships in Zimbabwe. Many services that can be accessed by foster parents are from NGOs and these ones operate in limited areas.

Foster parents voiced frustrations on issues of eligibility and administrative complexities being disproportionately affecting foster families, who may be having behavioral trauma-related issues and placement issues. Issues mentioned by the second foster parent relating to overwhelming paperwork reflects what has been referred to as “systemic neglect” by Van Holen et al. (2021) meaning a failure of systems to provide responsive care as a result of organizational inefficiencies. The research indicates the need for trauma-informed and more integrated approaches.

The findings go in line with the involvement dimension of the social control theory which states that all child welfare organizations and stakeholders should partake in making sure children receive the services required for their development especially those in alternative care facilities. This reflects what has been said by Chikweche & Mutsau (2020) stating the need for collaboration between all stakeholders to make sure services are accessible to foster parents. The research suggests strengthened involvement of all child welfare stakeholders as well as community members so as to address the challenge faced by foster parents in terms of accessibility to support services.

4.3.2.2. QUALITY OF SUPPORT SERVICES

“The quality of support services differs, some could be good and beneficial while others are damaging and unhelpful”, says one foster parent. A social worker notes that, the quality of support services available to foster parents vary depending on the provider and funding source. Services from independent partners like SOS Children’s Villages are of good quality as they can make a big impact in the lives of foster families as compared to those offered by the government through the department of social development. Some are effective and evidence-based while others lack the required expertise and funding. Foster parents need support services that are tailored to their specific needs as well as those of the children in their care. Services that are tailored to suit everyone does not work effectively in foster care. The social development officer added that, support services that are impactful in the lives of foster families require ongoing training and support for staff, as well as a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by foster families. Quality support services helps to provide safe, stable and loving homes for children in alternative care.

Participant 1(foster parent)

“Rubatsiro rwatinopihwa harusi of quality nguva dzose. Therapy sessions anopihwa vana mwamwe anobatsira asi mamwe haabatsire. Vamwe matherapists acho havatouye pavanenge vavimbisa kuti vachauya apa vanenge vasina kupa chikonzero chavatadzisa. Ini chandinongotarisira uye kuda iprogress inbatsira vaan ava vanenge vari mufoster.”

Translated to:

(There is inconsistency in the quality of support services. Some therapy sessions for the children are good and impactful while others seem like they do not have an ounce of care for the child. From my experience, some therapists could not even show up for the therapy without giving an excuse and explain later after wasting our time seeming like they do not have care for the child’s needs. All I want is real and meaningful progress for the benefit of the child’s development and wellbeing.)

Participant 2 (Foster Parent)

“Kubva mukushandidzana kwangu nekubatsirwa kwatinoita semafooster parents ndakaona kuti vamwe vabatsiri vanenge vaakzvipira uye vaine ruzivo pane zvavanenge vachitaura asi vamwe vanenge vachiratidza kushaya ruzivo. Mamwe maServices anonyanya kutarisa hunhu hwemwana asingatarise chakakonzera hunhu ihwohwo. Chinodiwa rubatsiro runobatsira mwana nemaneeds ake.”

Translated to:

(My experiences with support services were different, some provided passionate, knowledgeable services while others seem like they lack expertise and understanding of foster care. Some services focus more on the child's behavior neglecting the underlying trauma, focusing more on treating the symptoms rather than the cause. What was needed was to provide support services that are unique and specifically addresses the child's needs holistically.)

Participant 3 (social worker)

“Most of the support services are not improving the quality of life to foster families. Some of them are effective especially those offered by external partners like SOS Children's Villages. These ones provide foster children with uniforms, fees, books and many others. Unfortunately, with the department of social development the committal grants are not paid. BEAM has not disbursed funds for the program but the children are not sent back home. They remain in class thus ensuring their education or learning was not disturbed. I have witnessed the struggle foster parents face to find services that truly meet their child's needs and concerns. The inconsistency in quality of services available to foster parents can be destabilizing especially for children who have experiences trauma.”

The findings of the study reveal important concerns in regard to the inconsistent quality of support services provided to children in alternative care specifically foster care. This aligns with a growing body of literature that critiques variability in therapeutic and social service provision. The findings highlight the uneven implementation of trauma-informed care across agencies. Based on foster parent 1's explanations, there was a widespread issue where service provision becomes more

procedural than person-centered prioritizing compliance with institutional mandates over meaningful outcomes. Moris et al. (2018), highlighted on this phenomenon which was sometimes described as the “administrative burden”, emphasizing form over function stating that it results in a disconnect between the intention of services delivered and the real impact. Participants suggest the irresponsible and mis-individualized nature of services undermining the therapeutic relationship and potentially exacerbates children’s vulnerabilities rather than mitigating them.

This aligns with existing literature which talks of services failing to address root causes of behavior that foster children portrays such as attachment disorders, trauma and developmental disruptions (Rohani & Jamaluddin, 2019). The focus on behavior rather than trauma which was not holistic can lead to short-term behavior management at the expense of long-term emotional healing. Inadequate training for service providers and a lack context-based understanding of foster care dynamics contribute to foster parents’ dissatisfaction and limited engagement with services. The social worker added on the importance of relationship between the child and the caregiver for continued, evidence-based and relationship-driven interventions. Therefore, the research suggests that putting unique, day-to-day experiences of foster parents in Bindura District can help address the challenges foster parents face. It also adds light on how perceived service quality negatively influence placement stability, children's developmental needs and foster parents stress. This calls for standardized, more specialized mechanisms within service delivery systems of foster care.

4.3.3 THEME 3: STRATEGIES TO CURB THE CHALLENGES BEING FACED

This theme examines key strategies that foster parents can use to curb the challenges the face in caring for children in alternative care. It has three sub-themes which include; livelihood strategies, support programs and policy gaps. Livelihood strategies talks of empowering foster parents through income-generating activities to ensure household stability. Counselling services, peer support networks and parenting workshops are some of the support programs essential for equipping foster parents with emotional and practical tools. Identifying and addressing policy gaps such as inconsistent funding could lead to more improved and sustainable solutions overallly improving the well-being of both foster parents and children in their care.

4.3.3.1. LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

Findings highlights that foster parents get assistance from different child welfare service providers. This assistance was not well enough for them to cater for all the needs of the children in their care.

A foster parent noted that she does everything within her power to make sure the children in her care have access to basic needs and many things that are needed for the child's survival, growth and development. Another foster parent added that he has to rely on his own resources and sources of income and be more resilient so as to make ends meet. Caregivers struggle to support the children but they are pushed by their needs to sacrifice for the betterment of the children in their care. A social worker states that foster parents' livelihood strategies are usually shaped by the needs of the children in their care.

Participant 1 (Foster Parent)

"I struggle to provide for these children. I get some kind of help from different organizations or donors through the department of social development. I work in my fields farming so as to make extra farm produce for sale as this can help us in times where we do not have other sources of income. This also help me to support for food stuffs in the family extending to educational needs like uniforms. The Department of social development through the ministry of education help us with children's fees through the BEAM program and this help to reduce the pressure on us. It was a bit challenging trying hard to be a supportive parent to the children, but since foster homes are regarded as places of safety for these children then we have to struggle to provide these children with a caring and loving home environment."

Participant 2 (Foster Parent)

"Being a foster parent can be hard especially if you do not have sustainable sources of income. I have learnt that if you have passion for fostering, you would have to be ready to deal with everything that comes with it. In this case I survive through doing projects that help to gain some form of income. These have helped me a lot in caring for children placed in my care since there are little to no support services. As a foster parent I encourage the government or any other organizations who want to support fostering to empower foster parents through the provision of self-help projects as this could help to solve the financial problems that we face."

Participant 3 (Social worker)

“I have worked with foster parents for a long time and i have evidenced the financial strain that foster parents go through in providing care for children in alternative care. There is funding gaps-those foster parents enrolled in social protection programs are not getting assistance because the programs are not funded for example children enrolled under BEAM being turned away because of non-payment of fees by the government. Those on cash transfers are not receiving cash etc. Apart from all these challenges foster parents face, they are motivated by their passion and commitment to the children's welfare and development.”

The findings show that foster parents face financial burdens as they have expressed. The social worker states that funding programs that are available to foster parents with an intention of reducing the financial burden they face are not effective since there is no funding. It becomes more challenging especially if a foster parent would be caring for a child with complex emotional, behavioral and medical needs. McDonald et al. (2022) indicates that foster parents may fail to provide adequate emotional care to the children placed in their care due to a lot of responsibilities on their plate. They would be looking after children's physical and emotional needs yet they are supposed to be working to provide for the financial needs. This could negatively impact foster care placements' stability. The findings from the social worker shows that many foster parents are driven by internal passion to care for vulnerable children. This can make the government and other supporters reluctant to help foster parents.

From the findings of the study, it was evident that foster parents would have to use their personal income to cater for children in alternative care. This resonates with studies by Font & Gershoff (2020) who states that foster parents have to cover children's needs from their income to cover the gap in reimbursement structures. This could pose a challenge for those foster parents with low income. Foster parents in Bindura District needs to be empowered especially in farming since most of them rely on informal trading or subsistence farming. Empowering them help to improve sustainability in foster care systems since these strategies they rely on are insufficient to cover all the required needs of foster children. This aligns with studies by Moloi (2020) who states that empowering foster parents would improve their lives thereby bringing better outcomes from foster care. The research notes that empowerment can enhance better outcomes in foster care since foster

parents will be self-sustained. This strategy being context-specific for foster parents in Bindura District could reduce disruptions in foster care placements.

4.3.3.2. SUPPORT PROGRAMS

One foster parent note that he wished for more support programs designed to the distinct needs of foster children. He added that some of the programs may be helpful but failing to address the exclusive challenges that we face as foster parents. Another foster parent witnessed that they have seen programs that provide relief care and counselling services making a noticeable difference in the lives of both the foster parents and foster children. She goes on to say that more of these programs would be of great importance to the lives of foster parents and children in alternative care. These programs can be a lifeline for foster families but they should be provided with necessary facilities and guidance needed to care for children with complicated needs. A foster parent concludes that provides emotional support and interaction and relationships with other foster families since these would make a great difference in the context of foster care. The social worker harmonizes with what the foster parent had said suggesting that support programs can help foster families feel more empowered and less isolated providing quality care.

Participant 1 (Foster Parent)

“Support services have acted as a lifesaver to us. Support programs have been a lifesaver for us. Temporary relief care has given us a break and, counseling services have helped the children in alternative care work through their trauma. We have benefited much from support groups with other foster parents where we get a chance to link with other foster families who experience similar challenges as ours as they would understand us. These are informal support programs but there are limited formal support programs except those arranged by SOS Children's Villages. More of these would be of help to us as foster parents as they would make us feel more capable and confident.”

Participant 2 (Foster Parent)

“As a foster parent I have been lucky to have great support programs. Mentorship programs provided by SOS Children's Villages in close collaboration with the department of social development have helped us to provide positive caregiving services to our children helping them build positive relationships. This has also helped in molding their

behaviors. Support programs like these are crucial for foster families as they provide guidance on how to cater for children's complex needs.”

Participant 3 (Social worker)

“Trainings capacitate foster parents to be better parents. Counseling and psychological support services ensure foster parents and foster children cope with challenges, enhancing their wellbeing and improving their quality of lives. They provide emotional support, safe spaces empathy and understanding, personal growth and development for example supporting them meet their goals, enhancing and building resilience and improving relationships between or among them, trauma and crisis support, social support and connection.”

The findings presented indicates that the crucial role of support programs in enhancing the capacities of foster families to manage the demands of care giving and ensure positive outcomes for children. Foster parent talks of multidimensional value of comprehensive services such as relief care counseling and support groups which are important for foster care placements. These services do not only address the needs of foster children with trauma histories but also provide foster parents with practical emotional and psychological support. These result-oriented support services improve foster parents’ satisfaction, and increase placement stability. These support services could help foster parents to build resilience and retention of foster systems.

Research findings shows that foster parents face heightened anxiety as a result of limited support from the surrounding community which affect their ability to provide quality care to children negatively impacting the lives of foster children. This resonates with existing literature by Gozho et al. (2024) who speaks of heightened anxiety on foster parents as a result of societal expectations of unpaid caregiving. This can make foster children to feel isolated and lack self-esteem. Based on this, it was clear that the findings reflect broader existing challenges faced by foster parents across the world.

The researcher notes that there was need for individualized, child- specific interventions. This goes in line with the involvement dimension of the social control theory which states that support programs are essential for the improvement of foster care outcomes as a result of collaboration between all relevant stakeholders. Therefore, the research suggests the need for strengthening

community-based support programs to ensure long-term sustainable means of addressing foster care challenges. This could be done through awareness campaigns ensuring participation of community members to enhance shared responsibility.

4.3.3.3. POLICY STRATEGIES

Gathered data highlights that there was a difference between policy and reality. The systems fail to account for the unique needs of each child. One foster parent said that, it was frustrating how policies focus more on procedure rather than the well-being of the child. A social development officer notes that, policy gaps can lead to delays, inconsistencies and lack of support to foster families. One foster parent suggest that policies should be flexible and respond to the foster parents. The social worker added that, filling the gap in policies could lead to more production and better outcomes on foster care.

Participant 1(foster parent)

“I have seen gaps in policies that require us to transition the child the child placed in our care to a new placement at the age of 18. This does not consider the unique needs of the child and attachment between the child and the foster family. These policies always prioritize procedure over the child's wellbeing. Policies also limit the number of children that foster parents should care for and this cause challenges since they do not account for siblings.”

Participant 2(foster parent)

“Gaps in polies would discourage one to continue fostering for example policies around funding for therapy sessions which are restrictive. They take time to be approved on the type of therapy that suits the needs of the child in your care. Also, policies that require us to write down every interaction with the child can be overwhelming since some of the things the child can express it at random and you would not be prepared to jot down. Policies like these focuses more on bureaucracy rather than the child' swell-being without considering real-life impact of these on foster families.”

Participant 3(social worker)

“As a social worker, I have seen policy gaps that can impact negatively on the lives of foster parents and children placed in their care. Policies that states about permanent planning do not account for complexities associated with each child. Some of these policies are not effectively implemented so there was need to amend them to be flexible so that they help increase the outcomes of fostering, addressing challenges faced by foster parents thereby improving the lives of children in alternative care.”

The findings from foster parents and social workers indicate the challenges that comes from rigid and bureaucratic policies within the child welfare system. From what foster parents said on placement transitions based on age policy and number of children, foster parents face challenges in terms siblings. This shows that child welfare policies prioritize legal mandates and administrative consistency over continuity in fostering and emotional wellbeing of both foster parents and children in their care. This highlight how issues of prioritizing bureaucracy can affect the sustenance of foster care especially when the foster family have built a strong bond with the child. Findings from foster parents indicates that policies should be amended to address different challenges faced by foster parents since a one-size-fits-all approach was failing to address the problems being faced by foster parents.

Data from foster parents are similar to existing literature by O'Brien et al. (2020) which states that policy structures place administrative burden on foster parents which negatively impact their caregiving roles. Based on this, it was clear that the data findings resonate with broader existing challenges across the world. Therefore, the research suggests the need for flexible policies that suit every context of foster care in Zimbabwe.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presents the findings from a case study on foster parents in Zimbabwe, conducted particularly in Bindura indicating the challenges foster parents face in caring for children in alternative care. The research reveals that foster parents experiences financial constraints, psychological strain and inadequate support services. To address these systemic and practical challenges, the research proposes strategies to improve foster care outcomes such as providing counselling and emotional support, offering financial assistance, improving communication between stakeholders and enhancing training for foster parents. The chapter's analysis provides

what is needed to be done to strengthen support systems for foster parents and ultimately improve care for children in alternative care.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter presents the summary of the research and the findings of the previous chapters of the study. It also highlights the analyzed and obtained data from all the previous chapters and also gives sound conclusion of the research and the recommendations on the presented data on the strategies to curb the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Bindura District. Recommendations highlighted in this chapter intend to address the major concerns that were brought by this research in chapter 4 in order to ensure that the welfare of the foster parents are also taken into consideration in Bindura District.

5.2 SUMMARY

The research adopted the Social Control Theory by Hirschi which highlighted how weakened social bonds contribute to behavioral challenges in foster children in Bindura District, Zimbabwe which intensifies the difficulties faced by foster parents. The gathered data from conducted interviews indicate that strained relationships and inadequate support systems reduce the impact of the efforts foster parents put in caring for children in alternative care. The framework advocated for strengthened social bonds, mentorship programs, school support and community engagement which help to build trust and social integration to ease foster parenting challenges.

5.2.1 Psychosocio-economic challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care.

The findings from the study highlighted that foster parents experience a range of psychological challenges such as anxiety, stress and emotional fatigue due to the demanding nature of fostering. Many of them expressed feelings of burnout as a result of lack of counselling services and psychological support. The society often views foster children with suspicion labeling them as problematic which affects foster parents through isolation from community members. The findings also highlight that foster parents struggle with limited financial resources that cannot cover for their healthcare services and daily sustenance since they rely on informal income sources. Delays in disbursements of foster care grants and inconsistent support from social welfare institutions were major concerns. The caregivers emphasized the need for improved foster care environments through income-generating projects, community awareness programs and psychosocial support. In essence, gathered data indicate that addressing the mentioned psychosocio-economic challenges was critical to strengthening foster care in Bindura District.

5.2.2 Effectiveness of support services available to foster parents

The study was able to evaluate the effectiveness of support services that are available to foster parents. The findings revealed that while support structures exist, their effectiveness was inconsistent and limited. Many foster parents reported that support from the government such as food assistance and financial grants was irregular and insufficient to meet the welfare needs of children in alternative care. The study reveals that there was minimal monitoring and guidance for foster families due to irregular follow-ups from social workers. This exacerbates the challenges that foster parents face in caring for children in alternative care. It has been highlighted that community-based organizations and churches play a modest role in offering moral and material support, although the services are not universally acceptable and standardized. The findings indicated a lack of coordination between service providers resulting in inefficient service delivery which calls for consistent and well-funded support programs, including mental health services, economic empowerment initiatives and parenting skills training. The research shows that support services exist but they need improvements to make them effective and sustainable for foster parents.

5.2.3 Intervention strategies that can be utilized to overcome these challenges

The study was able to come up with intervention strategies that can be utilized by foster parents to overcome the challenges they face in caring for children in alternative care. The study highlights a strong need for multi-faceted community-based strategies to empower foster parents. Foster parents suggested that they want peer support groups that allow them to share experiences and learn from each other. Awareness campaigns could help reduce stigma surrounding foster care and promote a supportive environment for foster families. In summation, the findings indicate the importance of a practical, holistic and locally driven strategies to address the difficulties of foster care.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that foster parents face a number of challenges ranging from emotional stress, financial constraints and inadequate support from relevant agencies. From the findings, it was evident that effective practical strategies such as continuous training, psychosocial support, financial assistance as well as improved communication with child welfare authorities are important in mitigating these challenges.

The research has taught the researcher that fostering requires a well-structured and systematic support network to sustain it. One can conclude that policy reforms and the active involvement of both non-governmental and governmental stakeholders is important in promoting the welfare of both foster parents and the children in their care. It has also highlighted the resilience and commitment of foster parents due to their passion to care for vulnerable children, emphasizing the need for empowerment rather than minimal engagement.

The research concluded that it was important to involve community members in matters that concerns them emphasizing the importance of community engagement and unique interventions tailored to suit the socio-economic and cultural context of Bindura District. The study indicated that localized intervention strategies play a critical role in addressing challenges that foster parents face in caring for children in alternative care while working hand in hand with national policies which provides a framework for practice. The study also stresses the importance of incorporating community structures in strategies to improve foster care in Bindura District as well as Zimbabwe at large so as to enhance sustainability.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The study strategies to curb the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care has a number of implications on social work as profession and these include:

5.4.1 The need to strengthen case management and follow-up

There's need for social work practice to prioritize regular home visits and assessments to identify challenges in time and offer timely interventions. Since the study highlights a crucial gap in consistent monitoring and follow-up by social workers, a more structured case management will help improve foster care outcomes. Strengthening the relationship between social development officers and foster parents can positively improve trust, communication and accountability. Equipping social workers with adequate resources to conduct effective fieldwork was required. Reinforcing these monitoring mechanisms, children's welfare is safeguarded while supporting foster parents practically and emotionally ensuring a more protective environment for children in alternative care.

5.4.2 Integration of psychosocial support into foster care services

Findings from the study indicate that limited psychosocial support made foster parents to experience burnout, emotional stress and isolation. Psychosocial support services such as support

groups, counselling and stress management training should be integrated into social work practice to enhance positive foster care outcomes. Social workers should facilitate peer support networks and therapy sessions where foster parents can share their experiences and access professional guidance. Given that many foster children have histories of abuse and neglect, incorporating trauma-informed care training is essential.

5.4.3 Promotion of economic empowerment programs

Foster parents have highlighted that they experience economic strain which calls for social workers to actively link foster parents with sustainable economic empowerment initiatives. Social workers could enhance the financial stability of foster households by partnering with government departments, NGOs, and local businesses to provide skills development. They could also play a critical role in facilitating access to income-generating projects, microfinance programs and vocational training acting as brokers to foster parents. This allows foster parents to provide quality care for the children also reducing stress for foster parents. Social workers should assess economic needs of foster families and develop unique plans that align with available resources and opportunities. This would help promote economic independence within foster care systems.

5.4.4 Advocacy for policy reform and community sensitization

The findings from the study indicate that social workers should play a pivotal role in advocating for policy reforms that improve training access, increase financial assistance and streamline foster care processes. They should also conduct community awareness campaigns to combat stigma around foster care and promote acceptance and cooperation within communities so as to foster a more supportive and inclusive environment. Collaboration and engagement with all stakeholders that deal with the welfare of children in national dialogue, social workers can ensure better support and recognition of foster care system in Zimbabwe.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcomes of the research outlined in the previous chapter regarding strategies to curb the challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Bindura District prompted the researcher to develop the subsequent suggestions:

5.5.1. To the Government

The government should implement structured training programs for foster parents through vocational and training institutions which goes in line with Education 5.0 model that emphasize

innovation, industrialization and community development. The programs implemented should focus on trauma-informed care, income-generating skills and parenting skills. Increasing and standardizing foster care grants and ensuring timely disbursements of funds can help relieve the financial burden being faced by foster parents. Public private partnerships can help support innovation hubs to empower foster families with entrepreneurial skills aligning with the industrialization pillar of Education 5.0.

5.5.2. To the Community

Through community awareness campaigns, communities could actively support foster parents. Sensitization of foster care and promoting collective responsibility for child welfare can be done by community leaders. Communities can collaborate with local educational institutions to host community education initiatives to empower caregivers with practical skills aligning with the philosophy of Education 5.0.

5.5.3. To Stakeholders

Stakeholders like NGOs, churches etc. should invest in capacity-building programs and support services that align with Education 5.0 goals of producing practical, problem-solving citizens. Mentorship programs, psychosocial support and material aid like food humpers and school fees support can be offered by faith-based organizations and NGOs. The private sector could adopt corporate social responsibility initiatives that support foster care for example, providing micro-loans for income-generating projects.

5.5.4 To Foster Parents

Foster parents should take an active role in improving their capacity through participating in training and initiatives promoted under Education 5.0. They should strengthen their collective voice in policy matters through engaging in self-help groups and advocacy platforms. They should also collaborate with social workers and other child welfare service providers like schools to monitor the psychosocial and educational progress of the children in their care. They can align with the transformative goals of Education 5.0 by becoming active contributors and learners thereby enhancing their effectiveness in providing alternative care.

5.5.5 MULTIFACETED SUPPORT STRATEGY

Collaboration between stakeholders- Advanced training and support programs- Robust monitoring and evaluation system- Engaged community-based support systems (CARE)

Using a multifaceted strategy is important in addressing the challenges foster parents face in Bindura District. Improving training and support programs targeting the unique needs of foster parents is very fundamental. For their effectiveness and positive outcomes, the programs should be inclusive of areas like, child psychology, legal responsibilities, trauma-informed care and child protection protocols. To manage behavioral issues and emotional trauma exhibited by children in alternative care foster parents should have regular workshops and other child protection courses ensuring they are well-equipped. Furthermore, peer support groups and counselling can play a vital role making foster parents psychologically equipped to manage stress thereby building resilience.

The development of a robust monitoring and evaluation system is a crucial strategy to ensure continuous improvement of foster care processes. This system should encompass, tracking children's welfare, timely home visits and quick responses to address reported concerns. Foster parents' capacity to provide adequate care should be assessed together with the children's progress on timely basis. This can help ensure data-driven decision making which help identify gaps in the provision of services that can inform policy revisions. The community leaders and educators, local stakeholders' involvement in the process can enhance positive outcomes and relevance of the monitoring system.

There is need to strengthen community-based support systems to ensure sustainable means of addressing challenges in foster care. Stigma could be reduced through community engagement initiatives since they make people aware and improve their understanding of foster care encouraging a culture of inclusion and support. Religious groups, community-based organizations and local leaders could be included to create networks that provide moral, emotional and material support to foster families. Inclusive approaches that value participation of community members can foster a sense of shared responsibility, reduced social isolation and promote acceptance of foster children.

Collaboration between non-governmental organizations and governmental institutions would be important in improving access to fundamental resources and services. Governmental institutions responsible for child welfare and protection should work with NGOs to develop policies that put the needs of foster families at the forefront. Collaboration in programs can reduce the economic burden of foster parents by improving access to educational materials, health services and food aid. This comprehensive partnership could facilitate training, research and advocacy efforts

making foster care reforms responsible for addressing the evolving needs of foster parents and children in their care in Bindura District. The adoption of this multifaceted and cooperative approach could enhance the welfare of children in alternative care and the capacity of foster parents.

5.6 AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

- There is need for further research on a comparative study exploring the differences in challenges faced by foster parents in Urban and Rural settings to reveal location-specific challenges so as to inform context-sensitive intervention strategies.
- There is also need for the examination of the impact of foster care on the wellbeing and development of children in alternative care to improve the effectiveness of current models of foster care and inform improvements in support services and child welfare policies.

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented a summary of the results, included a segment on conclusions and one on suggestions for addressing the gaps found in the study. The suggestions focused on strategies that could be utilized in order to assist foster parents to cope and overcome the challenges they face in caring for children in alternative care. Findings of the study made the researcher to recommend a multifaceted approach as a strategy to address the challenges that foster parents face. The approach focused on improvement in training and support and support, collaboration between stakeholders, community-based support systems and a monitoring and evaluation system. This would ultimately improve the alternative child care system.

5.7 REFERENCES

- African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). (2021). *Foster Care Policies in Africa*. Addis Ababa: ACERWC.
- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2016). *The importance of family-centered care in pediatric practice*. American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Baker, C., and McGrath, K. (2018). *Foster care practices and policy*. Foster Care Institute.
- Barth, R. P. (2009). *The Foster Care Crisis: Translating Research into Practice*. The Haworth Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative psychology*, 9(1), 3.
- Brown, A., Green, L., & Davis, P. (2019). *Support Systems for Foster Parents: A Global Review*. New York: Routledge.
- Carew, N. M. (2016). *Secondary traumatic stress and the foster parenting experience: Exploring factors associated with the prevalence of secondary traumatic stress in foster parents caring for children who have experienced trauma*. Michigan State University.
- Chigudu, D. (2025). *Assessing the Intersectionality of Climate Change, Health, and Economic Development in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities for Resilience-Building by 2030*.
- Chiguvare, T., & Mupedziswa, R. (2023). *Child Welfare in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Prospects*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press.
- Chikwaiwa, B. K., et al. (2020). *Foster Care Challenges in Urban Zimbabwe*. International Journal of Social Work.
- Chikweche, T., & Mutsau, M. (2020). *Community-based initiatives supporting foster families in*

- Zimbabwe. Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 35(1), 123-140.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). *The foster care system in the U.S.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Chimbwanda, T. (2017). *The effects of trauma on foster children.* Foster Care Review, 12(1), 34-45.
- Chinyakata, R., Beautiful, M. F., Belinda, D. P., & Vanessa, R. N. (2024). Factors inhibiting control over one's environment: A human capabilities perspective. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2292862.
- Denlinger, M., & Dorius, C. (2018). Communication patterns between foster parents and case managers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 89, 329-339.
- Ditlhake, K. J., & Chinasire, H. (2022). Experiences of teenagers residing in a place of care in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Social Work*, 12(5), 257-266.
- Doku, P. N. (2023). Child maltreatment and associated sociodemographic factors among children affected by HIV/AIDS in Ghana: a multi-informant perspective. *AIDS care*, 35(1), 106-113.
- Dowdy-Hazlett, T., Cooley, M., Clark, S. L., Engelhardt, E., Mitchell, J., & Barney, R. K. (2024). *Associations between foster parent characteristics and professional quality of life.* Child Welfare, 102(1), 87-108.
- Dube, S. (2021). *Social Protection in Zimbabwe.* Pretoria: HSRC Press.
- Dube, T. (2023). *Economic Survival Strategies of Foster Parents in Bindura.* Bindura University Press.

- Font, S. A., & Gershoff, E. T. (2020). *Foster care and best interests of the child: Integrating research, policy, and practice*. Springer Nature.
- Garcia, M., & Fernandez, R. (2020). *Comparative Child Welfare Systems*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Graham, J., & Brown, M. (2015). *Building better foster care practices*. Child Development Journal, 18(2), 44-56.
- Gozho, C. S., Muridzo, N. G., & Muzingili, T. (2024). The tale of professional parenting: caregiver experiences in dealing with delinquent children in Zimbabwe's residential care centers. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 60(4), 849-869.
- Gumbo, F. (2022). *Informal Livelihoods and Foster Care in Zimbabwe*. Development Southern Africa.
- Harris, P. (2021). *Caregiver Mental Health in Resource-Limited Settings*. Journal of Child & Family Studies.
- Hashim, S. N. A., Yaacob, A., Suryani, I., Asraf, R. M., Bahador, Z., & Supian, N. (2023). Exploring the Use of Gibbs' Reflective Model in Enhancing In-Service ESL Teachers' Reflective Writing. *Arab World English Journal*, 14(2).
- Hickson, J. (2018). *Supporting foster children in school settings*. School Education Review, 9(4), 123-135.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. University of California Press.
- Irwin Harper, L. N., Groves, N. B., Marsh, C. L., Cole, A. M., & Kofler, M. J. (2023). Does training working memory or inhibitory control produce far-transfer improvements in set shifting

- for children with ADHD? A randomized controlled trial. *Child Neuropsychology*, 29(5), 825-845.
- Johnson, L. (2021). *Trauma-Informed Care in Foster Systems*. Global Child Protection Review.
- Johnson, I. C., Achulo, S. H., Brevard, K. C., & Ansong, D. (2024). *Examining Financial Hardship and Caregiver Subgroups in Kinship Foster Placements: A Machine Learning Approach*. *Societies*, 14(3), 38.
- Kelly, V., & Simmel, C. (2020). Summary Article. *Child Welfare*, 97(6), 287-296.
- Kgadima, P. N., & Mahlangu, T. (2022). Social Workers' and Homeless People's Understanding of Ways to Redress Homelessness. *Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development*, 34(2), 18-pages.
- Kivuva, R. M. (2023). *Effectiveness of Community-Based Child Protection Structures on Child Safety in Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Nairobi County, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, Kisii University).
- Koh, E., Daughtery, L., & Ware, A. (2022). Informal kinship caregivers' parenting experience. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 133, 106360.
- Lester, J. N. (2023). Introduction to special issue: Qualitative research methodologies and methods for theory building in human resource development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 22(1), 7-14.
- Mannering, N., Cornet, R. J., & Mannering, M. (2023). FOCUS GROUPS. *Professional Safety*, 68(10), 39-41.
- Mapfumo, C. T., Kaseke, D. N., Zinyemba, D. A., & Chikomo, A. (2024). Rethinking

- Sustainability for Foreign-Funded Community-Based Projects (CBPS) in Low-Income Countries. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(3s), 2063-2076.
- Mavhunga, R. (2015). "*Foster Care and Social Welfare in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of Bindura.*" *Zimbabwe Journal of Social Welfare*, 4(1), 55-70.
- Mawere, M., & Mawere, M. (2016). *Challenges faced by foster parents in Zimbabwe*. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(1), 211-222.
- McLean, K., Clarke, J., Scott, D., Hiscock, H., & Goldfeld, S. (2020). Foster and kinship carer experiences of accessing healthcare: A qualitative study of barriers, enablers and potential solutions. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 113, 104976.
- Mkhize, S. (2018). *Community-Based Foster Care in Africa*. *African Journal of Social Development*.
- Morris, A. S., Jespersen, J. E., Cosgrove, K. T., Ratliff, E. L., & Kerr, K. L. (2020). Parent education: What we know and moving forward for greatest impact. *Family Relations*, 69(3), 520-542.
- Moloi, M. N. (2024). *The Development of Explicit Deposit Insurance Schemes in Selected Countries in Southern Africa* (Master's thesis, University of Pretoria (South Africa)).
- Moyo, I., & Gumbo, T. (2021). *Urban Informality in South Africa and Zimbabwe*. Springer Nature: Cham, Switzerland.
- Moyo, J., & Ndlovu, T. (2020). *Foster Care in Urban Zimbabwe*. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 35(2), 45-67.

- Mqali, P. N. (2020). *Perspective and experiences of young mothers who are recipient of child support grant (CSG): A case study in rural KwaZulu-Natal*. University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal.
- Mugumbate, J., & Nyanguru, A. (2020). *Social Protection for Foster Families in Zimbabwe*. Harare: SAPES Books.
- Mulisa, F. (2022). Sampling techniques involving human subjects: Applications, pitfalls, and suggestions for further studies. *International Journal of Academic Research in Education*, 8(1), 74-83.
- Mupedziswa, R., Rankopo, M., & Mwansa, L. K. (2019). *Ubuntu as a Pan-African Philosophical*. Social work practice in Africa: Indigenous and innovative approaches, 21.
- Muzvidziwa, V. N. (2017). *Foster care in Zimbabwe: Challenges and opportunities*. Journal of Social Work and Human Services, 15(2), 145-156.
- Nabukeera, M. (2021). Prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) during novel Covid-19 lock-down in Uganda. *The Journal of Adult Protection*, 23(2), 116-133.
- National Foster Parent Association. (2020). *Supporting foster parents and families: A guide for advocacy*. National Foster Parent Association.
- Nkosi, W., Mthembu, M., Ramphabana, L., & Mlotshwa, A. (2025). Challenges caregivers experience when transitioning to kinship foster care in low-income families in South Africa. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 61(1), 149-169.
- Ntshongwana, Z., & Tanga, P. (2018). The life experiences of foster parents who nurture foster children in Zwelitsha, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. *African Journal of social work*, 8(1), 14-20.

- Parmenter, S., Shockley McCarthy, K., Benavides, J. L., Bayar, Ö., Maguire Jack, K., & Yoon, S. (2024). The Lived Experience of Youth in Congregate Care: *Youth Perceptions of Safety, Relationships, and Support Through Qualitative Inquiry with 10 Young Adults*. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 1-14.
- Patton, M. Q. (2022). Impact-driven qualitative research and evaluation. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design*, 2, 1165-1180.
- Petersen, R. (2023). *Coping Mechanisms for Foster Parents*. Child Welfare International.
- Potthoff, S., Hempeler, C., & Scholten, M. (2023). Research ethics in qualitative health research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 16094069231189335.
- Ringson, J. (2020). *Traditional leadership and the custodianship of the orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe*. *Journal of Public Administration*, 55(1), 133-148.
- Rohani, R., & Jamaluddin, Z. (2019). A Literature Review on Residential Child Care: An Attachment Theory Perspectives. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 4(3), 14-21.
- Sibanda, P. (2020). *Foster care: A global perspective*. *International Child Welfare Journal*, 19(3), 55-70.
- Silverman, D. (2021). *Qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Smith, J. A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Getting at lived experience. *The journal of positive psychology*, 12(3), 303-304.
- Taylor, C., & Noë, A. (2021). *The explanation of behavior*. Routledge.
- Teunissen, M. S., Goemans, A., Van Holen, F., Vanderfaeillie, J., Nefs, H. T., Pijnenburg, H. M., ... & Vedder, P. H. (2021, April). Family reunification decision-making in Dutch family foster


- care: A dual perspective approach. In *Child & youth care forum* (Vol. 50, pp. 199-228). Springer US.
- The Children's Bureau. (2021). *Foster care statistics 2021*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Thonje, A. (2023). Love, Care, and Cure: Economies of Affect in a Zimbabwean Transnational Pentecostal Church (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg).
- UNICEF. (2019). *Children in foster care worldwide: A study of international practices*. United Nations Children's Fund.
- UNICEF. (2023). *The State of the World's Children*. New York: UNICEF.
- World Vision. (2025). *Strengthening Alternative Care in Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: World Vision.
- ZCC (2020). *State of Foster Care in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Recommendations*. Zimbabwe Child Care Report.

5.8 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Request to conduct research

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

P. Bag 1020
BINDURA, Zimbabwe
Tel: 263 - 71 - 7531-6, 7621-4
Fax: 263 - 71 - 7534

 *Approved*
Signature 7/4/25

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

Date: 17 FEBRUARY 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH PROJECT IN YOUR ORGANISATION

This serves to introduce the bearer: TRISH CONCEPTOR CHIMANZIWA
Student Registration Number: B21009918 who is a BSc SOCIAL WORK student
at Bindura University of Science Education and is carrying out a research project in
your area/institution.

May you please assist the student to access data relevant to the study, and where
possible, conduct interviews as part of a data collection process.

Yours faithfully


MS E.E. Chigondo
MS E.E. CHIGONDO
CHAIRPERSON

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
SOCIAL WORK CHAIRPERSON
17 FEB
16 JAN 2025
Signature
FACULTY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
PRIVATE BAG 1020, BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

Appendix 2: Permission to conduct research

Official communications should
Not be addressed to individuals

Telephone: 703711 / 790721-4
Harare


ZIMBABWE

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, LABOUR AND SOCIAL
WELFARE
Compensation House
Cnr S.V Muzenda and Central Avenue
HARARE

07 April 2025

Trish C. Chimanyiwa (B210099B)
Bindura University of Science Education

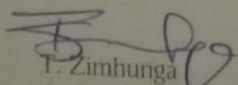
**REF: LETTER OF APPROVAL TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY
TITLED 'STRATEGIES TO CURB CHALLENGES FACED BY FOSTER
PARENTS IN CARING FOR CHILDREN IN ALTERNATIVE CARE IN
ZIMBABWE.' A CASE OF BINDURA DISTRICT.**

Receipt of your letter with the above mentioned matter is acknowledged.

Please be advised that permission is hereby granted for you to carry out research
titled "Strategies to curb challenges faced by Foster Parents in caring for
Children in Alternative Care in Zimbabwe"

Permission is granted **STRICTLY** on condition that the research is for academic
purposes only in pursuit of your Bachelors of Science Honours Degree in Social
Work. The data collected should not be shared to third party (3rd).

You are requested to submit a copy of your final research documents to the
Department of Social Development upon completion as your research has a
bearing on the Department's mandate.


T. Zimhunga
Acting Chief Director, Social Development and Disability Affairs
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, LABOUR AND SOCIAL WELFARE

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, LABOUR
AND SOCIAL WELFARE
SOCIAL WELFARE REGISTRY
07 APR 2025
P.O. BOX CY 429, CAUSEWAY
ZIMBABWE TEL 0242-790721/4

Appendix 3: Consent form



INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant

My name is Trish Conceptor Chimanyiwa, a fourth-year student at Bindura University of Science Education pursuing a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Social Work. As part of the requirements of the degree, the student is expected to conduct a research project, which I cordially welcome you to participate in. Before deciding to engage in the research, you are welcome and feel free to ask anything you may need to know if you don't understand anything during the interview so that I will explain it. I am humbly asking you to assist me in carrying out my research by sparing a few minutes of your time to respond to the following questions openly. I am undertaking a research on the topic; **Strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Zimbabwe, a case study of Bindura District**

The study is going to be confidential and any responses given will be used for research study only. Any person that is going to be participating is going to do it on voluntary basis that means any person who feels uncomfortable has the power to withdraw at any point. The discussion will not take more than 30 minutes of your time.

Contact details

If you feel like adding more or asking something, you can contact me on

Email; chimanyiwatrish@gmail.com, Phone number; 0788104107

If you are free to participate in the study, please enter your information in the sections provided below.

Participant's signature..... Date.....

Researcher's signature..... Date.....

Thank you.

Appendix 4: In depth interview guide for key participants (foster parents)



INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant

My name is Trish Conceptor Chimanyiwa, a fourth-year student at Bindura University of Science Education pursuing a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Social Work. As part of the requirements of the degree, the student is expected to conduct a research project, which I cordially welcome you to participate in. Before deciding to engage in the research, you are welcome and feel free to ask anything you may need to know if you don't understand anything during the interview so that I will explain it. I am humbly asking you to assist me in carrying out my research by sparing a few minutes of your time to respond to the following questions openly. I am undertaking a research on the topic; Strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Zimbabwe, a case study of Bindura District.

Date.....

Start time..... End time.....

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Participant's marital status?
2. Participant's age
3. How long have you been a foster parent?
4. How many children do you currently foster?
5. What is the age range of the children you foster?

Section B: Challenges in Caring for Children in Alternative Care

This section focuses on identifying the specific challenges foster parents face in their daily caregiving duties.

1. What are the challenges you face in taking care of children in foster care?
2. Have you encountered any difficulties with the children's behavior? If so, can you provide examples?
3. Do you experience any challenges in meeting the needs of the children?
4. Are there challenges related to managing the children's educational needs (e.g., school attendance, learning difficulties)?
5. Have you faced any difficulties in maintaining a bond or relationship with the children you foster?
6. Do you face any challenges when it comes to financial resources for providing the children's needs (e.g., food, clothing, school fees)?
7. How do you communicate with the children about their past experiences, and how do you help them adjust to their new home?

Section C: Understanding of Foster Care and Support Systems

This section aims to understand the foster parents' perception of foster care, including the support and resources they have access to.

1. What motivated you to become a foster parent?
2. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of a foster parent?
3. Have you received any formal training or guidance on how to care for children in foster care?
4. Are there any local organizations, governmental bodies, or NGOs that provide support to foster parents in Bindura District?
5. Do you have regular contact with social workers or other professionals? If yes, how often?
6. What kind of support do you receive from the community or your extended family members?

Section D: Coping Strategies and Solutions

This section seeks to understand how foster parents cope with challenges and what strategies they use to manage their caregiving role.

1. What coping strategies have you found helpful in managing the challenges of fostering?
2. Are there any community or social networks that you rely on for emotional support or advice?
3. What do you do to manage your stress and avoid burnout?
4. Have you found any effective ways to deal with the behavioral or emotional issues of the children in your care?
6. What recommendations would you make for foster parenting to be easier for you and other foster parents.

Closing question

7. Do you have anything else to say?

Appendix 5: Focus group discussion guide for key participants



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section A

1. What are the challenges you face as foster parents in caring for children in alternative care?
2. How do you think your socio-economic status affects your ability to provide adequate care for the children in your care?
3. How do you manage the stress and pressure of fostering, particularly when dealing with challenging behaviors?

Section B

1. What types of support services have you received as foster parents in Bindura District? (e.g. training, counseling, financial support)
2. How effective do you think these support services are in addressing your needs and the needs of the children in your care?
3. Are there any gaps in the support services currently available to you in Bindura District?
4. How can support services be improved to better meet your needs of foster parents and those of the children in your care?

Section C

1. What strategies have you found to be effective in managing the challenges of fostering?
2. How can the community, government, and other stakeholders support foster parents in caring for children in alternative care?
3. How do you cope with the feeling of isolation or lack of support, if applicable?

Closing question

1.Does anyone have anything else they would like to add regarding the challenges you face in caring for children in alternative care.

Appendix 6: In depth interview guide for key informants



INTRODUCTION

My name is Trish Conceptor Chimanyiwa, a fourth-year student at Bindura University of Science Education, pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. As part of completing the degree programme, students are required to conduct individual research. Therefore, I am conducting a research study on the topic, 'Strategies to curb challenges faced by foster parents in caring for children in alternative care in Zimbabwe, a case study of Bindura District'. The research focuses on examining the challenges faced by foster parents in providing care to children. Be reminded that your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous and will be used strictly for academic purposes only. Also, your participation in this study is voluntary. I am going to engage you in an interview that will not last for more than 30 minutes as part of data collection. You are allowed to excuse yourself at any part during the interview.

Start time.....

End time.....

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section A

1. From your experience working with foster parents, what are the challenges they face in caring for children in alternative care?
2. How do you think the socio-economic status of foster parents affects their ability to provide adequate care for children in alternative care?
3. What psychological challenges have you observed foster parents facing when caring for children who have experienced trauma or abuse?

4. How do you think foster parents can be better supported to manage the emotional demands of fostering, particularly when dealing with challenging behaviors?

Section B

1. What types of support services that are currently available to foster parents in Bindura District?
2. How effective do you think these support services are in addressing the needs of foster parents and children in alternative care?
3. Are there any gaps in the support services currently available to foster parents in Bindura District?
4. How do you think the support services could be improved to better meet the needs of foster parents and children in alternative care?

Section C

1. What strategies do you think would be most effective in supporting foster parents to overcome the challenges they face?
2. How can the community, government, and other stakeholders support foster parents in caring for children in alternative care?
3. Are there any programs or initiatives that you think could be replicated or scaled up to support foster parents?
4. What role do you think foster parents themselves can play in developing and implementing intervention strategies?

Closing questions

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience or your observations about the challenges faced by foster parents in Bindura District?
2. Are there any other stakeholders or individuals who you think I should speak with to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by foster parents?