

**Precious Akodi (SPD 2016-17)**

**OVERVIEW OF MY RESEARCH FOR THE AWARD OF MA IN SOCIAL POLICY  
FOR DEVELOPMENT**

I conducted a research in Ghana with the support of SPD funds in July and August 2017. The fund enabled me purchase flight ticket from The Netherlands to Ghana and back and also to take care of some miscellaneous expenses.

The topic of my research before the field data collection was “Vulnerabilities of Adolescent girls of incarcerated mothers in Ghana”. This topic has however changed after the field research to “Redefining the invisible victims of incarceration: survival strategies of young girls of incarcerated mothers in Ghana”. This change in topic is as a result of my findings from the field which showed that though these girls in one way or the other are facing a number of challenges due to their mothers’ incarceration, they have devised various strategies in coping with life and to sustain their livelihoods.

I call these girls “invisible victims” in my new topic because they are not recognized in Ghana’s child and family welfare policy which seeks to address the needs of vulnerable children. Though through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) in Ghana, a number of programmes and interventions such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme (LEAP) have come through the government, local and international organizations for children and youth, none of these programmes/interventions specifically address the needs of children of incarcerated mothers. They are also seen as victims because the vulnerabilities and problems of most of them started when their mothers were imprisoned.

**Relevance of the Research**

Researching into this topic is relevant because it brings to the front burner other circumstances apart from physical disabilities and orphan hood that are seen to perpetuate the vulnerabilities of young children especially girls. It also helps us to understand the caregiving arrangement in Ghana that holds for children in the absence of their parents and whether caregivers consider caring for

other people's children in the period of incarceration an imposition or a no-choice situation. The research will also help us to know the various strategies adopted by young girls to survive in the absence of their mothers. The recommendations from this research all other things being equal, will inform policies of Ghana government and other organizations not to lump vulnerabilities together but to categorize specific vulnerabilities in children and devise appropriate measures to address each.

I used Qualitative research methods in collecting my data. Ten young girls whose mothers have been incarcerated at the Nsawam Medium Security Prison in Ghana were my primary research participants. I also interviewed the mothers of these ten young girls at the prison, staff of Department of Children at the MoGCSP and one NGO that provides support to prison inmates. Agency and Resilience are key concepts in the analysis of the findings in my report.

### **Key Findings**

- Most young girls have become heads of their household and taking care of their younger siblings
- Three out of the ten young girls I interviewed have also become mothers after the incarceration of their mothers
- Some of these girls have relocated from the areas they stayed with their mothers before their incarceration due to shame and stigma.
- Some caregivers though provide roofs over the heads of some of these young girls, they do not care about the other needs of these girls
- Some of these young girls survive through friends
- Some of these young girls do not know that their mothers are in prison because their parents see them as children who cannot emotionally handle the incarceration of their mothers.

