



CHILD RIGHTS ABUSES IN GHANA: CASE STUDY OF SEMPOAH IN THE KWAHU EAST DISTRICT IN THE EASTERN REGION

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Abstract:

The study was conducted in the Sempoahtownship of the Kwahu East District in the Eastern Region of Ghana, aiming to investigate child rights abuses in Ghana. The study employed the qualitative method. Data was transcribed under themes and narratives. The study included a total of 40 respondents. According to the findings of the study, the most prevalent form of abuse found in the Sempoahtownship includes: child labour, sexual violence/ abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, child marriage, deprivation of food and shelter, child neglect, expulsion from school, and tagging children as evil. The causes of these forms of child rights abuses in the Sempoahtownship include: illiteracy, occupation of parent/guardian, cultural beliefs of the people, lack of parental care and financial difficulties/ poverty. The study finally identifies some ways by which the problem of child rights abuse can be reduced in the Sempoahtownship. They include public education, strengthening institutions mandated to safeguard children's rights, and arresting and prosecuting perpetrators of such acts against children.

Keywords: child rights, abuse, child maltreatment, parent or caregiver, societal factors

1. Background to the Study

"Can there be a more sacred duty than our obligation to protect the rights of a child as vigilantly as we protect the rights of any other person? Can there be a greater test of leadership than the task of ensuring these freedoms for every child, in every country, without exception?". (Kofi Annan, 2002).

According to Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, *"all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."* Atzl *et al.* (2019). It is

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evident from this quotation that human beings are naturally endowed with some rights which they are entitled to. These rights are claims we have just because we are humans rather than as citizens of a country. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 established a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations. This feat was the international response to a critical need for mechanisms to prevent violations of the dignity of the human person and to ensure the primacy of human rights and freedoms through the protection of the rule of law. According to Dershowitz (2004), historically, human rights have emerged from our growing awareness of great wrongs. Through the centuries, humanity has slowly become aware of the horrors caused by religious wars, slavery, mass killings, and other forms of injustice and suffering that humans cause to others. As our awareness of each other rises, humanity has sought to end these evils by erecting human rights as barriers against them. Ghana was one of the first countries in the world to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), first in February 1990, and is also a signatory to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children.

Article 28 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana, and the Children's Act 1998, other covenants and protocols explicitly make provisions for the promotion and protection of children's rights. Ghana, as a country, has established various state institutions such as the Department of Children under the Ministry for Gender, Children, and Social Protection. Department of Social Welfare (DSW), Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the police service, National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) which are all responsible for publicizing and creating awareness to the general public on children's rights.

Despite the creation of all these state institutions and the passage in December 2005 of the Human Trafficking Law, Act 694, which prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons, child trafficking, and, for that matter, the abuse of children, it is still rife in Ghana. The CHRAJ notes with concern that Ghana is a source, transit, and destination country for children trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation. Children are trafficked within and outside the country as domestic servants, laborers, for work in the fishing industry, and for use in sexual exploitation. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that the number of trafficked children in the country is in the thousands. The issue of child labour in Ghana remains a serious problem, serving as one prominent source of child exploitation and abuse. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Global Report, relaunched in May 2006, indicated that there are about two million children in Ghana who are engaged in child labour. It is a very common sight to see children of school-going age at all times of the day engaged in menial jobs. Sectors that are rife with child exploitation include fishing, agriculture, mining, and quarrying. What is of concern is the increase in rape and defilement of children and the resulting conviction rate for offenders. The Sempoah township in the Eastern region is not an exception to this case. Child rights abuse still prevails in this town.

2. Statement of the Problem

By ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC, 1989), and signing the Africa Charter on the Right and Welfare of Children (ACRWC, 1990) and other conventions, covenant and protocols, the government is responsible to undertake actions and formulate policies in the interest of children and also to hold itself accountable to the international community. Based on this, the government of Ghana has put in place various institutions, interventions, policies and a lot of programmes to protect and promote the rights of the child. However, these institutions are not performing to expectations; therefore, child rights abuse still prevails in the country. The case of Sempoaah township in the Eastern region is, however, worse. Children are engaged in street hawking, agriculture, and fishing activities at the expense of going to school. These have raised eyebrows about whether we still uphold the effort to protect the rights of children.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To explore the forms of child rights abuses in the Sempoaah township.
- 2) To identify the causes of child rights abuses in the Sempoaah township.
- 3) To examine how best the menace of child rights abuse can be controlled in the Sempoaah township.

2.2 Research Questions

- 1) What are the forms of child rights abuses in the Sempoaah township?
- 2) What are the causes of child rights abuses in the Sempoaah township?
- 3) What are some of the ways of controlling child rights abuses in the Sempoaah township?

3. Literature Review

3.1 The Concept of Human Rights

According to Britannica, the expression "*human rights*" is relatively new, entering everyday parlance only after World War II, the founding of the United Nations in 1945, and the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It replaced the phrase "*natural rights*," which fell into disfavor in the 19th century in part because the concept of natural law (to which it was intimately linked) had become controversial with the rise of Legal Positivism. Legal Positivism rejected the theory, long espoused by the Roman Catholic Church, that law must be "moral" to be law. The term Human Rights also replaced the later phrase "*Rights of Man*," which was universally understood to include the rights of women.

Most students of human rights trace the origins of human rights to ancient Greece and Rome, where it was closely tied to the doctrines of the Stoics, who held that human conduct should be judged according to, and brought into harmony with, the Law of

Nature. A classic example of this view is given in Sophocles' play "Antigone", in which the title character, upon being reproached by King Creon for denying his command not to bury her slain brother, asserted that she acted in accordance with the immutable laws of the gods. In part because Stoicism played a role in its formation and spread, Roman Law and with it, pursuant to the "*Jus Gentium*" (Law of Nations), certain universal rights that extended beyond the rights of citizenship. According to the Roman jurist Ulpian, for example, natural law was that which nature, not the state, assures to all human beings; Roman citizens are not. It was not until the Middle Ages, however, that natural law became associated with natural rights. In Greco-Roman and Medieval times, doctrines of natural law concerned mainly the duties, rather than the rights of "*man*". Moreover, as evidenced in the writings of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, these duties recognized the legitimacy of slavery and serfdom and, in so doing, excluded perhaps the most important ideas of human rights as they are understood today: freedom (or liberty) and equality.

The conception of human rights as natural rights (as opposed to a classical natural order of obligation) was made possible by certain basic societal changes, which took place gradually beginning with the decline of European Feudalism from about the 13th century and continuing through the Renaissance to the Peace of Westphalia, 1648. During this period, resistance to religious intolerance and political and economic bondage, the evident failure of rulers to meet their obligations under natural law, and the unprecedented commitment to individual expression and worldly experience that was characteristic of the Renaissance all combined to shift the conception of natural law from duties to rights. The teachings of Aquinas and Hugo Grotius on the European continent, the Magna Carta (1215) and its companion Charter of the Forests (1217), the Petition of Right (1628), and the English Bill of Rights (1689) in England were signs of this change. Each testified to the increasingly popular view that human beings are endowed with certain eternal and inalienable rights that never were renounced when humankind "*contracted*" to enter the Social Order from the Natural Order and never were diminished by the claim of the "*divine right of kings*" Edmundson (2004:15), in his Book Introduction to Right, says, the concept of right first became unmistakably prominent during the period of modern intellectual history known as the Enlightenment, which, for our purpose, had its beginnings in the early seventeenth century and ran to the end of the eighteenth. The concept of human rights implies that basic rights belong to every member of the human race. In contrast to the European "*divine right of kings*", which gave kings God-given (and often God-like) authority, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, discussed below, states that human rights belong to every human "*without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status*" (Article 2).

From the moral perspective, human rights refer simply to the morally justifiable claims that every human should be able to make upon society. For example, if one can make the moral claim that no person should be sold into slavery, then the right not to be enslaved is, morally speaking, a human right. Human rights, therefore, according to

Britannica, belong to an individual or group of individuals simply for being human, or as a consequence of inherent human vulnerability, or because they are requisite to the possibility of a just society. Whatever their theoretical justification, human rights refer to a wide continuum of values or capabilities thought to enhance human agency or protect human interests and declared to be universal in character, in some sense equally claimed for all human beings, present and future. It is a common observation that human beings everywhere require the realization of diverse values or capabilities to ensure their individual and collective well-being. It is also a common observation that this requirement, whether conceived or expressed as a moral or a legal demand, is often painfully frustrated by social as well as natural forces, resulting in exploitation, oppression, persecution, and other forms of deprivation. Deeply rooted in these twin observations are the beginnings of what today are called "*human rights*" and the national and international legal processes associated with them. According to the United Nations, Human Rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the rights to liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

The UNICEF postulates that Human rights are standards that recognize and protect the dignity of all human beings. Human rights govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other, as well as their relationship with the State and the obligations that the State has towards them. Human rights law obliges governments to do some things and prevents them from doing others. Individuals also have responsibilities: in using their human rights, they must respect the rights of others. No government, group, or person has the right to do anything that violates another's rights. According to the UNICEF, rights are Universal and Inalienable, Indivisible, Inter-dependent and Inter-related, Equality and Non-discriminatory, Participative and Inclusive, Accountability and Rule of Law. Universality and Inalienability. Human rights are Universal and Inalienable. All people everywhere in the world are entitled to them. No one can voluntarily give them up, nor can others take them away from him or her. Indivisibility. Human rights are indivisible, whether civil, political, economic, social, or cultural in nature; they are all inherent to the dignity of every human person. Consequently, they all have equal status as rights. There is no such thing as a "small" right. There is no hierarchy of human rights. Inter-dependence and Inter-relatedness. The realization of one right often depends, wholly or in part, upon the realization of others. For instance, the realization of the right to health may depend on the realization of the right to education or of the right to information. Equality and Non-discrimination. All individuals are equal as human beings by virtue of the inherent dignity of each human person. All human beings are entitled to their human rights without discrimination of any kind, including race, color, sex, ethnicity, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth, or other status, as explained by the human rights treaty bodies. Participation and Inclusion. Every person and all

peoples are entitled to active, free, and meaningful participation in contributions to and enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural development, through which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be realized. Accountability and Rule of Law. States and other duty-bearers must comply with the legal norms and standards enshrined in human rights instruments. Where they fail to do so, aggrieved right-holders are entitled to institute proceedings for appropriate redress before a competent court or other adjudicator, in accordance with the rules and procedures provided by law. Laski (1976:91) explains rights as that condition of social life without which no man can seek, in general, to himself at his best, since the state exists to make possible that achievement; it's only by maintaining rights that the ends may be secured. Laski's possession of rights does not mean possession of claims that are empty of all duties. We have the right to safeguard our uniqueness in the pressure of social forces. The reason why we have that right is the fact that we are members of the state. For one person to be protected against attack from others implies that the person has to desist from attacking others. Rights are built upon individual personality because ultimately, the welfare of the community is built upon the happiness of the individual. According to McFarland (2015), the concept of human rights implies that basic rights belong to every member of the human race. Human rights are legally guaranteed by human rights laws, protecting individuals and groups against actions that interfere with fundamental freedoms and human dignity. Non-discrimination is a cross-cutting principle in international human rights law. The principle is present in all the major human rights treaties and provides the central theme of some of the international human rights conventions, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The principle applies to everyone in relation to all human rights and freedoms, and it prohibits discrimination based on a list of non-exhaustive categories such as sex, race, color, and so on. The principle of non-discrimination is complemented by the principle of equality, as stated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*" They are expressed in treaties, customary international law, bodies of principles, and other sources of law. Human rights law places an obligation on States to act in a particular way and prohibits States from engaging in specified activities.

However, the law does not establish human rights. Human rights are inherent in entitlements that come to every person as a consequence of being human. Treaties and other sources of law generally serve to protect formally the rights of individuals and groups against actions or abandonment of actions by governments that interfere with the enjoyment of their human rights. According to Wikipedia, human rights are moral principles or norms for certain standards of human behaviour and are regularly protected in municipal and international law. They are commonly understood as inalienable, fundamental rights "*to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being*" and which are "*inherent in all human beings*", regardless of their age, ethnic origin, location, language, religion, ethnicity, or any other status. They are applicable everywhere and at every time in the sense of being universal, and they are egalitarian in

the sense of being the same for everyone. They are regarded as requiring empathy and the rule of law and imposing an obligation on persons to respect the human rights of others, and it is generally considered that they could not be taken away except as a result of due process based on specific circumstances.

The concept of human rights has been highly influential within international law and global regional institutions. Actions by states and non-governmental organizations form a basis for public policy worldwide. The idea of human rights suggests that, "*if the public discourse of peacetime global society can be said to have a common moral language, it is that of human rights*". The strong claims made by the doctrines of human rights continue to provoke considerable skepticism and debates about the content, nature, and justifications of human rights to this day. The precise meaning of the term right is controversial and is the subject of continued philosophical debate; while there is consensus that human rights encompass a wide variety of rights, such as the right to a fair trial, protection against enslavement, prohibition of genocide, free speech, or a right to education.

3.2 Right of the Child

"Creating a world that is truly fit for children does not imply simply the absence of war. It means having the confidence that our children will not die of measles or malaria. It means having access to clean water and proper sanitation. It means having primary schools nearby that educate children, free of charge. It means changing the world with children, ensuring their right to participate, and that their views are heard and considered. It means building a world fit for children, where every child can grow to adulthood in health, peace, and dignity" (Carol Bellamy, 2002).

In Antiquity, nobody thought to give special protection to children. In the Middle Ages, children were considered "small adults". In the middle of the 19th century, the idea appeared in France to give children special protection, enabling the progressive development of "minors' rights". Since 1841, laws have started to protect children in their workplace. Since 1881, French laws have included the right for children to be educated. At the beginning of the 20th century, children's protection started to be put in place, including protection in the medical, social, and judicial fields. This type of protection starts first in France and spreads across Europe afterward. Since 1919, the international community, following the creation of the League of Nations (later to become the UN), has started to give some kind of importance to that concept and has established a committee for child protection. The League of Nations adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child on September 16, 1924, which is the first international treaty concerning children's rights.

In five chapters, it gives specific rights to the children and obligations to the adults. The Geneva Declaration is based on the work of the Polish physician Janusz Korczak. World War II and its casualties left thousands of children in a dire situation.

Consequently, the UN Fund for Urgent Needs was created in 1947, which became UNICEF and was granted the status of a permanent international organization in 1953. From its inception, UNICEF focuses particularly on helping young victims of World War II, taking care mainly of European children. But in 1953, its mandate was broadened to a truly international scope and its actions expanded to developing countries. UNICE then puts in place several programs for helping children in their education, health, and their access to water and food. Since December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has recognized that "*motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.*" In 1959, the General Assembly of the UN adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which describes in 10 principles the children's rights. Whereas this text has not been signed by all the countries and its principles have only an indicative value, it paves the way to a Universal Declaration of Children's Rights.

After the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN wanted to introduce a Charter of Human Rights, which would be enforceable and would oblige the states to respect it. Thus, a Commission on Human Rights was set up to write this text. In the midst of the Cold War and after hard negotiations, two texts complementary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were adopted by the General Assembly of the UN in New York: The International Charter for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the rights to the protection against economic exploitation, the right to be educated and the right to healthcare, The Charter related Civil Rights establishes the right to have a name and a nationality. The year 1979 was declared the International Year of the Child by the UN. That year saw a real change of spirit, as Poland proposed to create a working group within the Human Rights Commission, which is in charge of writing an international charter. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989. It's 54 articles that describe the economic, social, and cultural rights of the children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the text in relation to human rights that has been the most rapidly adopted. The text becomes an international treaty and enters into force on September 2, 1990, after being ratified by 20 states. The Organization for African Unity adopted the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child on July 11, 1990. In May 2000, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the involvement of children in armed conflicts was ratified. It entered into force in 2002. This text prohibits minors from taking part in armed conflicts. As of today, the International Charter of the Child Rights has been signed by 190 states of 192, even though there are a few reservations concerning certain parts of the text.

Today, its idea and its forceful character are almost universally accepted. However, its application could still be improved, and the transformation of words into acts remains to be done. In a world where the urgency is the master, where a child dies of hunger every 5 seconds, it is time to join theory together with its application. The Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 defines the term "child". A child is any human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier. The idea through this definition and all the texts

concerning child welfare is that the child is a human being with rights and dignity. What characterizes the child is his youth and vulnerability. Indeed, the child is growing into a future adult who has no means to protect himself. So, the child has to be the object of a particular interest and a specific protection. In this perspective, texts proclaiming the protection of the child and his rights were adopted (Jean, 2001). Children's rights include; their rights to association with both parents, human identity as well as the basic needs for physical protection, food, universal state-paid education, health care, and criminal laws appropriate for the age and development of the child, equal protection of the child's civil rights and freedom from discrimination based on the child's race, gender identity, national origin, disability, color, ethnicity, or other characteristics. (UNICEF 2004). Interpretations of children's rights range from allowing children the capacity for autonomous action to the enforcement of children being physically, mentally, and emotionally free from abuse.

The League of Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924), which enunciated the child's right to receive the requirement for normal development, the right of the hungry child to be fed, the right of the sick child to receive health care, the right of the backward child to be reclaimed, the right of the orphans to shelter, and the right to protection from exploitation. A growing child deserves every protection possible from all individuals. Children must grow up in a safe environment and be able to develop into adults in a healthy and balanced way. People who are victims of violence or abuse during childhood often carry the scars of those traumatic events with them for the rest of their lives. Based upon their own responsibility, family, society and government must therefore make every effort to ensure that children are protected from any harm to their physical and mental integrity (UNICEF, 2007). Children's rights include the right to health, education, family life, play and recreation, an adequate standard of living and to be protected from abuse and harm. Children's right covers their developmental and age-appropriate needs that change over time as a child grows up. (Children's Rights Alliance, 1995).

According to the Children's Rights Alliance (1995, four general principles underpin all children's rights. They include: Non-discrimination: this means that all children have the same right to develop their potential in all situations and at all times. For example, every child should have equal access to education regardless of the child's gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability, parentage, sexual orientation, or other status. The best interest of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions and decisions concerning a child, and must be used to resolve conflicts between different rights. For example, when making national budgetary decisions affecting children, the government must consider how cuts will impact the best interests of the child. The right to survival and development also underscores the vital importance of ensuring access to basic services and to equality of opportunity for children to achieve their full development. For example, a child with a disability should have effective access to education and health care to achieve their full potential. The views of the child mean that the voice of the child must be heard and respected in all matters concerning his or her

rights. For example, those in power should consult with children before making decisions that will affect them.

3.3 Child Rights Abuse

Definitions of what constitutes child abuse vary among professionals, between social and cultural groups, and across time. The terms abuse and maltreatment are often used interchangeably in the literature. Child maltreatment can also be an umbrella term covering all forms of child abuse and child neglect. Defining child maltreatment depends on prevailing cultural values as they relate to children, child development, and parenting. Definitions of child maltreatment can vary across the sectors of society that deal with the issue, such as child protection agencies, legal and medical communities, public health officials, researchers, practitioners, and child advocates. Since members of these various fields tend to use their own definitions, communications across disciplines can be limited, hampering efforts to identify, assess, track, treat, and prevent child maltreatment. In general, abuse refers to (usually deliberate) acts of commission, while neglect refers to acts of omission. Child maltreatment includes both acts of commission and acts of omission on the part of parents or caregivers that cause actual or threatened harm to a child, while others do not. This is because the harm may have been unintentional, or because the caregivers do not understand the severity of the problem, which may have been the result of cultural beliefs about how to raise a child. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022),

Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. International studies reveal that nearly 3 in 4 children aged 2-4 years regularly suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers, and 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child. Every year, there are an estimated 40,150 homicide deaths in children under 18 years of age, some of which are likely due to child maltreatment. This number almost certainly underestimates the true extent of the problem, since a significant proportion of deaths due to child maltreatment are incorrectly attributed to falls, burns, drowning, and other causes. In armed conflict and refugee settings, girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse by combatants, security forces, members of their communities, aid workers, and others (Durrant and Enson, 2012).

The most common form of physical abuse is physical punishment in intent and effect. Overlapping definitions of physical abuse and physical punishment of children highlight a subtle or non-existent distinction between abuse and punishment. Intentional use of physical force against the child that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning, and

suffocation. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishment.

According to Cook (1980:20), child abuse and neglect are not typical biological diseases like measles or polio. They must be viewed in other conceptual frameworks to understand their genesis and consequences. They must be viewed as a syndrome. In such a framework, it is recognized that the acts of physical abuse and neglect are not the disease but part of the mosaic pattern. If child abuse and neglect are present in a family, then it must be assumed that other pathological characteristics of illness are found in the family and in the parent-child relationship. Abuse and neglect can be viewed as signals, as signs that there is family disorganization and failure in parenting. Martin (1976:43), child abuse can never be seen as simply caused, nor is it merely the inevitable consequence of a child being born into a violent and disturbed family. In every case, a sequence of interrelated events leads up to the final catastrophe. While the pedigree of the family generally sets the stage for abuse, the final outburst is the result of the interaction between parent and child. Abuse is an extreme manifestation of bonding failure. The formation and maintenance of a healthy bond is a two-way process, influenced both by attributes in the child and by the perceptions and expectations of the parents. According to the UNICEF (2013, girls and boys in Ghana still experience frequent and multiple forms of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse and violence. The 2013 UNICEF Child Protection baseline research report indicates that when children were asked about their experiences of physical discipline, over 57 percent of respondents (aged 14-17 years) said they were beaten at home "all the time" or "sometimes", while 34 percent confirmed being beaten in school by the teacher. This appeared to be the case for both girls and boys, in rural and urban areas.

3.4 Consequences of Child Maltreatment or Abuse

According to the WHO (2022), child maltreatment causes suffering to children and families and can have long-term consequences. Maltreatment causes stress that is associated with disruption in early brain development. Extreme stress can impair the development of the nervous and immune systems. Consequently, as adults, maltreated children are at increased risk for behavioural, physical, and mental health problems such as perpetrating or being a victim of violence, depression, smoking, obesity, high-risk sexual behaviours, unintended pregnancy, alcohol and drug misuse. Via these behavioural and mental consequences, maltreatment can contribute to heart disease, cancer, suicide, and sexually transmitted infections. Violence against children is also a contributor to inequalities in education. Children who experienced any form of violence in childhood have a 13% greater likelihood of not graduating from school. Beyond the health, social, and educational consequences of child maltreatment, there is an economic impact, including costs of hospitalization, mental health treatment, child welfare, and longer-term health costs.

3.5 Risk Factors of Child Maltreatment or Abuse

Several risk factors for child maltreatment have been identified. Not all risk factors are present in all social and cultural contexts, and the list here provides an overview when attempting to understand the causes of child maltreatment:

3.5.1 Child

It is important to emphasize that children are the victims and are never to blame for maltreatment. Characteristics of an individual child that may increase the likelihood of being maltreated include: Being either under four years old or an adolescent, being unwanted, or failing to fulfill the expectations of parents, having special needs, crying persistently or having abnormal physical features, having an intellectual disability or neurological disorder and identifying as or being identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

3.5.2 Parent or Caregiver

Characteristics of a parent or caregiver that may increase the risk of child maltreatment include Difficulty bonding with a newborn, not nurturing the child, having been maltreated themselves as a child, lacking awareness of child development or having unrealistic expectations, misusing alcohol or drugs, including during pregnancy, having low self-esteem, suffering from poor impulse control, having a mental or neurological disorder, or being involved in criminal activity and experiencing financial difficulties.

3.5.3 Relationship

Characteristics of the relationships within families or among intimate partners, friends, and peers that may increase the risk of child maltreatment include: family breakdown or violence between other family members, being isolated in the community or lacking a support network, and breakdown of support in child rearing from the extended family.

3.5.4 Community and Societal Factors

Characteristics of communities and societies that may increase the risk of child maltreatment include: gender and social inequality, lack of adequate housing or services to support families and institutions, high levels of unemployment or poverty, the easy availability of alcohol and drugs, inadequate policies and programmes to prevent child maltreatment and child pornography, child prostitution and child labour, social and cultural norms that promote or glorify violence towards others, support the use of corporal punishment, demand rigid gender roles, or diminish the status of the child in parent-child relationships and social, economic, health and education policies that lead to poor living standards, or to socioeconomic inequality or instability.

3.5.5 Prevention

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) urges that prevention and response to child maltreatment requires a multisectoral approach. The earlier such interventions occur in

children's lives, the greater the benefits to the child (e.g., cognitive development, behavioural and social competence, educational attainment) and to society (e.g., reduced delinquency and crime).

Effective and Promising interventions include: parent and caregiver support: Information and skill-building sessions to support the development of nurturing, non-violent parenting delivered by nurses, social workers, or trained lay workers through a series of home visits or in a community setting and education and life skills approaches: increasing enrolment in quality education to allow children acquire knowledge, skills and experiences that build resilience and reduce risk factors for violence. Programmes to prevent sexual abuse that build awareness and teach skills to help children and adolescents understand consent, avoid and prevent sexual abuse and exploitation, and seek help and support. and interventions to build a positive school climate and violence-free environment, and strengthening relationships between students, teachers, and administrators.

3.5.6 Norms and Values Approaches

Programmes to transform restrictive and harmful gender and social norms around child-rearing, child discipline, gender equality, and promote the nurturing role of fathers. Implementation and enforcement of laws: laws to prohibit violent punishment and to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Response and support services: Early case recognition coupled with ongoing care of child victims and families to help reduce recurrence of maltreatment and lessen its consequences. To maximize the effects of prevention and care, WHO recommends that interventions be delivered as part of a four-step public health approach: defining the problem, identifying causes and risk factors, designing and testing interventions aimed at minimizing the risk factors, disseminating information about the effectiveness of interventions, and increasing the scale of proven effective interventions.

4. Methodology

The qualitative research approach was employed to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This stems from the fact that the researcher aimed to investigate child rights abuses or child maltreatment in Sempoa in Kwahu East District in qualitative terms rather than using official figures, which might not be readily available. This study adopted a research design called the qualitative design. Unlike the quantitative research approach, which relies on the measurement of quantity or data that can be expressed in terms of quantity, qualitative design focuses on the subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions, and behaviour. The sample size considered for this study was 40 respondents, comprising teachers, parents, community heads/leaders and children who have in one way or another experienced abuse. Respondents were selected by a purposive sampling technique; they were selected at the convenience and perception of the researcher. Questionnaires were used to collect

demographic information of respondents, while the in-depth interviews gathered subjective viewpoints of respondents. The study adopted interviews as the main data collection instrument. This is because most of the natives cannot read or write. The researcher sent the questionnaire and interview guides to the town and the people targeted for the research work through random sampling. A thorough explanation was given to the people, especially children and parents who are illiterate. Before distributing the instruments, the researcher made the respondents aware that the purpose of the questionnaire was for strictly scientific studies and not for fault-finding. All the research instruments were collected on the same day it was administered.

5. Discussion and Findings

5.1 Sex of Respondents

Analysis of the sex of respondents indicates that 18, representing 45% of the respondents, are males and 22, representing 55% of the respondents, are females. This indicates that more females are used in the study than males.

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Sex of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Males	18	45
Females	22	55
Total	40	100

Source: Field report, 2025.

The age target for the purpose of this research is 10-60. However, these ages were categorised into ranges (10-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and 50-60). This is how the research instrument was administered to respondents in the town. Analysis of the age of the respondents indicates that 4, representing 10% of the respondents, fall within the age bracket of 10-19, and 10, representing 25% of the respondents, fall within the age bracket of 20-29. 12 representing 30% of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 30-39, 10 representing 25% of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 40-49, and the remaining 4 representing 10% of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 50-60.

5.2 Age of Respondents

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Age of respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
10-19 years	4	10
20-29 years	10	25
30-39 years	12	30
40-49	10	25
50-60	4	10
Total	40	100

Source: Field report, 2025.

5.3 Marital Status of Respondents

The research also finds out the marital status of its respondents. According to the research, 16 respondents, representing 40% of the respondents, are single (not married), and 24, representing 60% of the respondents, are married.

Table 3: Marital Status of Respondents

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	16	40
Married	60	100
Total	76	140

Source: Field report, 2025.

5.4 Educational Background of Respondents

According to findings in this research, the greater part of the respondents are partially educated; in other words, most of them do not have higher education. Among the respondents, 8 representing 20% secondary education, 6 representing 15% had J.H.S./ Middle school education, 14 representing 35% had primary education, and the remaining 12 representing 30% had no education.

Table 4: Educational Background of Respondents

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SHS/ Secondary	8	20
Middle/ JHS	6	15
Primary	14	35
No formal education	12	30
Total	40	100

Source: Field report, 2025.

5.5 Occupation of Respondents

Among the 40 respondents that constitute the population of this study, 20, representing 50% of the respondents, are engaged in fishing activities, 8, representing 20% of the respondents, are into farming, 5, representing 12.5% of the respondents, are into trading, and the remaining 7, representing 17.5% of the respondents, are students.

Table 5: Occupation of Respondents

Occupation of respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fishing	20	50
Farming	8	20
Trading	5	12.5
Students	7	17.5
Total	40	100

Source: Field report, 2025.

5.6 Child Rights Abuses in the Kwahu East District

This section of the research discusses the perceptions of respondents in relation to child rights abuses in the Kwahu East District, specifically Sempoa. Their perceptions were discussed according to the research questions and the questions stated in the questionnaire and interview guide.

5.7 Perception of Respondents on the Existence of Child Rights Abuse in the District

According to the findings of the research, all respondents (40) constituting 100% seem to have agreed on the existence of child rights abuse in the district, especially in the Sempoa township.

5.8 Forms of Child Rights Abuses in the Town

According to the respondents, children in the town suffer a lot of abuse, both physically and emotionally, from different levels of people in the community, ranging from their parents/guardians, peers, teachers, and other community members. According to the respondents, the popular forms of abuse against children found in the town include: child labour, sexual violence/abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, child marriage, deprivation of food and shelter, child neglect, expulsion from school, and tagging children as evil.

Table 6: Forms of child rights abuse

Forms of child rights abuse	Frequency		Percentage (YES)
	Yes	No	
Child labour	36		90
Sexual violence/abuse	22	18	55
Physical abuse	38	2	95
Emotional abuse	20	20	50
Child marriage	18	22	45
Deprivation of food/shelter	14	26	35
Child neglect	11	29	27.5
Expulsion from school	30	10	75
Labelling a child as evil	33	7	82.5

Source: Field report, 2025.

The table displays the types of child rights abuses in the town, and respondents' opinions on the severity of the various types in the town.

5.9 Child Labour

According to 90% percent of the respondents, which include school teachers, parents, community heads, and children, exploiting children for economic gains has been the order of the day in the Sempoa community. According to them, the economic activities that prevail in the town include fishing, farming, and hunting, with fishing and farming leading the chart because of the presence of a water resource (river) in the community. According to the research findings, 20 of the respondents representing 50% agreed that

children in the town engage in fishing and farming activities, 10 of the respondents representing 25% agreed that children engage in farming, fishing, hunting, and 2 representing 5% indicated that children engage in farming and hunting activities. While 8% representing 20% agreed that children engage in fishing and hunting.

In response to the interview question, "How severe is child labour in the community?" Some of the interviewees gave several responses, which are stated below:

"As a parent, I am aware of the fact that there are certain things that my child or children are not supposed to do. But in today's world, a lot of children go astray from doing good because they were not brought up well. I have to make sure that from infancy, my child learns how to do work that will earn him/her money in the future, so that he/she might not end up being an irresponsible child. Some end up becoming thieves because they do not have the knowledge to do anything other than steal from others."

I started going to the farm with my parents when I was 10 years old, and fishing when I was 12 years old. Now I am 16 years old, and I know how to fish and farm on my own, and I also get money from it. Now I have to go fishing after school to cast a net and wake up early at dawn to harvest it before going to school. The problem is that when I arrive at school, I feel tired and cannot learn, and sometimes I can only sleep in class. My academic performance is not encouraging, and I think it's because I don't have enough time to study. I am a primary school teacher in this town. We sometimes try our best to educate parents/guardians on not exploiting these children economically because it is against their rights, but they don't listen. Sometimes, some of these children come to school late, sick, and tired. It makes it difficult to teach them, and sometimes we have to return some of them home to take a rest or go to the hospital, which is not helping teaching and learning in the school."

5.10 Sexual Violence/Abuse

According to the respondents, sexual violence/abuse of children is another form of child rights abuse that is on the rise in the township. They believe that some of these children willingly take part in sexual acts, while others were forced or persuaded by adults to take part in the act. Some of these perpetrators happen to be teachers in the town, some elders and even parents of these teachers. 55% of these respondents believe that sexual violence/abuse is found in the Sempoah Township.

Responding to the interview question, "What is your view on sexual violence/abuse in the Sempoah township?" Some respondents have this to say:

"I have been an elder in this town for a very long time, and I will say that sexual immorality in the town now is on the rise compared to what we experienced some decades back. These children get exposed to things like pornographic materials at an early stage of their lives, and as children, they are curious; they try to practice whatever they see, which makes them engage in such acts at an early stage. However, some elders in these communities entice or persuade these children to engage in such acts. Some even go to the extent of raping these

young children. It will surprise you that some of these children suffer the same problem from their own parents.

As a teacher, there are times when these children come to school, and you realize that they are not getting the love, care, and attention that they deserve in their homes. So, as a teacher, if you try to make yourself available to these students, they become drawn to you, and if care is not taken, that is when some teachers will end up taking advantage of these young ones and having sexual intercourse with them. Some students will also deliberately offer themselves to teachers because of a favour that they are expecting from them."

5.11 Physical Abuse

According to the findings of the research, physical abuse seems to be the order of the day in the Sempoa town. According to them, the physical abuse of children in the town includes: beatings, kicking, hitting with hands and objects, knocking on the head, and other physical punishments inflicted on them, mostly by their parents or guardians, and sometimes their peers. According to the respondents, these punishments sometimes cause severe injuries to these children, which can be unbearable for them. Some of these children, according to the respondents, have to run away from their homes for fear that they might be abused again if they do wrong, and they end up becoming homeless. Some of them end up engaging in immoral acts in the town.

Responding to the interview question, "Have you witnessed any kind of physical abuse in the town? How often does it occur?"

A student responded:

"I am a victim of physical abuse myself. It does happen to me almost every day. In the house, the only way my parents seem right to punish me for a wrong I have done is to inflict pain on me. It is either by canning, knocking on the head, or kneeling for a long period of time. It is either that they forgive me by not punishing me when I am wrong, or they inflict pain on me. They don't use any other way to make me pay for my mistakes. At school, it's a bit different because either they give us grounds work to do or they go by canning to make up for our disobedience."

A different respondent who is a parent said:

"Physical abuse of children in the township is more of any other form of Child Abuse you can think of. These children suffer abuse from their parents, teachers, elders in the town and even their peers. However, I believe that an elder, parent, or teacher will not just punish a child if they have not done anything wrong. And mostly what they do is to either cane, knock on the head, or hit them with something else. I personally stick to canning my children when they go wrong. That is how I have brought up my four children and I personally don't see anything wrong with that form of punishment since it is making them better people in society. However, some guardians or parents go to the extreme and even to

the extent of hitting their children until they get hurt physically. I would say that this happens every day in the Sempoah township."

A teacher in the Sempoah township said:

"Yes, we sometimes sought to punish the students by canning. But we only do it occasionally and we are always careful when carrying out such punishments. The town as a whole is a different story because some parents or guardians can't control the amount of pain they inflict on these children. Some children sometimes end up in the hospital because of physical abuse by their parents and guardians."

5.12 Emotional Abuse

According to the findings of the research, most respondents have little or no idea of this form of child abuse. They only get to understand what it means after the researcher explains what it means to them. Their responses, however, indicate that some of these children who go through the other forms of child rights abuses identified in this study find it difficult to recover from the damages caused to them. According to the respondents, sometimes there is no one available to talk to these children and provide them with the necessary love and care that they require to heal from the damages caused to them and some of them end up growing up in these conditions, which most of the time affects their health in return.

One respondent in the town said:

"I have witnessed a situation in this same town when a child became handicapped after he was physically abused by his own father and till now, that child, who used to be a social type, is now always indoors and can no longer socialise with his peers. He even decided to quit going to school. I am convinced that after the harm was done, he has no one to talk him out of his problem and it continues to tear him apart."

5.13 Child Marriage

Child marriage is another form of child rights abuse discovered in the Sempoah township. Even though it is not predominant in the town, 18 out of the 40 respondents believe it exists in the town, where young girls are the most affected. As young as 14 years old, girls are forced into marriage by their parents or family members for several reasons. Some reasons have to do with poverty in the family, so they try to force their young girls into marrying someone who is worthy enough to take care of these children and also take care of some needs of the family as well. Sometimes, the bride prices they take are a source of income to the family. Sometimes the mouths to feed in a family are too much for the breadwinners of such a family, so they see that the best possible way to reduce the number of members in the family is to give some out in marriage. Some reasons also have to do with some children engaging in sexual acts, which most of the time end up in

teenage pregnancies. And so, the only choice they have most of the time is to force these children to marry whoever got them pregnant.

5.14 Deprivation of Food/Shelter

This form of child rights abuse is one of the unfortunate discoveries that this research has realised in the Sempoa Township. The perpetrators of this form of abuse are mostly the parents and guardians of these children. According to the findings of the research, it is not because these people who deprive their children of food and shelter cannot afford it, but they, however, used this form of abuse as a punishment for these children. They starve these children because of an act of disobedience committed by these children. Some have to sleep on an empty stomach overnight to pay for their wrongs, or sometimes they go to school without any food or buy money to enable them to feed and drink. Some parents and guardians also find pleasure in not allowing their children to sleep in their rooms because they disobey them. They threaten them not to set foot in their own homes. According to the findings of this research, most of these children are girls who become pregnant at an early stage without the approval or consent of their parents. Some victims are also school dropouts, who intentionally stop going to school, not because their parents can't afford it, but because they find pleasure in joining bad companies in the town, and their parents, in turn, forbid them from coming back home.

5.15 Child Neglect

This form of child abuse, however, is not common in the Sempoa Township. According to the findings of the research, 11 of these respondents believe that this form of child rights abuse still exists in the town. Child neglect can simply be understood as the failure on the part of either the parents or guardians of these children to provide the necessities of life to these children, which include: food, clothes, shelter, medical care, love, etc., to these children. According to the respondents, many of these children are left to take care of their needs themselves. They believe it is a fact that some of these parents don't have the means to take care of the needs of these children. Some respondents also established the fact that the birth of some of these children is not the desire of the parents. Some were born out of unwanted pregnancies: some were not the sex desired by their parents and some, however, were born with some form of deformity. And so, some of these parents neglect these children in the town to take care of themselves. These parents are sometimes forced to do little for these children.

5.16 Expulsion from School

This is another form of child rights abuse discovered by this research in the Sempoa Township. This happens when children are suspended from school or any school-related activities for a long period of time, which may be one year or even more. According to the findings of this research, some students tend to be recalcitrant or choose to behave in some ways that deviate from the norm and for the good of others in the school; they have to be expelled from the school. More findings of the research reveal that this abnormal

behaviour of some students emanates from the fact that the town is not much concerned with education or any activities related to school. Some students see going to school as a form of punishment for them. They, however, intentionally engage in some activities that will provoke the school authorities to expel them from school. And some of these children never have the opportunity of going back to school again.

5.17 Labelling a Child as Evil

The last of the forms of child rights abuse found in the Sempoa town by the research is the fact that some children are labelled in the town as evil. According to some respondents who believe that this form of abuse exists in the town, they believe that deviant behaviours by children in the town are likened to witchcraft. Children who seem to deviate from the norm are labelled as evil. According to the respondents, children who are born with some forms of physical deformity are usually the victims, especially from their peers. Also, it is believed that some elderly people in society, especially women, are evil, so if a child is under the care of such a person, it is believed that the "evil ability" of the caregiver is passed onto the child and he or she automatically becomes evil. Again, some children who are exceptionally brilliant in school, "special children, are tagged as evil, and their peers sometimes believe that that particular child can tap into the knowledge of the other children for themselves.

5.18 Causes of Child Rights Abuse in the Sempoa Township

When respondents were asked what the causes of child rights abuse in the Sempoa township are, they were able to come up with 5 reasons, which they believe are the major causes of child rights abuse in the Sempoa township. The reasons include: illiteracy, occupation of parents/guardians, cultural beliefs of the people, lack of parental care and financial difficulties/poverty.

The major form of child abuse in the town is physical abuse, where pain is inflicted on children through kicking, caning, and knocking on the head, among others. Secondly, there is child labour, where children are exploited for economic gain. Among other forms of child rights abuse discovered by this research are: labelling children as evil, expulsion of children from school, sexual violence/abuse, emotional abuse, child marriage, deprivation of food and shelter and child neglect. The perpetrators of these acts against the children in the Sempoa Township are the school teachers of these children, elders in the town, their parents or guardians and their peers. The causes of such forms of abuse realised in the Sempoa Township include: financial difficulties/poverty. Because of the low income that parents get from their businesses, they cannot afford some necessities for their children and it leaves them with no choice but to take actions that will, in turn, hurt these children. Illiteracy on the part of the town people about child rights is another cause of child rights abuse in the town. Again, the lack of parental care, where these children are not getting the amount of attention they need from their parents, leaves them exposed to a lot of abuse in the town. Also, the occupation of parents/guardians is another cause of child rights abuse, where parents/guardians include their children in work they

do, for example, farming, fishing and hunting, which, to them, requires no qualification for their children to join. Finally, are the cultural beliefs of the town people about the right way of raising their children, which might even conflict with the right way to raise a child, determined by the law? Finally, are there ways by which child rights abuse in the Sempoah township can be alleviated? Three solutions were discovered by the findings of the research. They include: public education on the part of the government, media, and the institutions mandated to enforce child rights in the country. Also, they argue that those institutions charged with enforcing child rights should be strengthened enough in logistics and human resources to enable them to carry out their duties effectively. Finally, they argued that the perpetrators of such acts of violence against children must be arrested, prosecuted and punished severely to deter others from committing such acts in the future.

6. Conclusion

Child rights abuses are prevalent in society, even though statutory and customary laws prohibit these violations. It has been proven over the years that child rights abuses occurred and still occur very often in societies, and children in the Sempoah township in the Kwahu East District are no exception. Generally, child rights abuse or violation undermines several rights such as the right to education, the right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, including sexual abuse, the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, the right to educational and vocational information and guidance, and the right to protection against all forms of abuse. For every institution to perform to maximum expectations, it requires resources to do so. The prevention or protection of child rights can only be realised if the institutions charged to do so, for instance, the CHRAJ and the DOVVSU, are well-equipped to function properly. Due to the non-availability of resources, the activities of these institutions, including child rights promotion programmes, are obviously undermined, as the officers' desire to achieve their target is thwarted. The awareness of child rights has been created by the very existence of international laws and treaties all over the world. But more effort needs to be put in place by the government and its ministries, and also the organisation tasked to prevent and protect such violent acts against children.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, certain recommendations are drawn that will help governments and child rights organisations in the country to carry out their functions effectively.

For the child rights institutions in the county, for instance, the CHRAJ and DOVVSU, to work effectively, they must be fully resourced with finances, logistics, and personnel and current knowledge and skills on the job to enable them to function properly. The DOVVSU of the Ghana Police Service and the CHRAJ, in partnership with the Kwahu East District Assembly and other NGOs that are concerned with child rights,

as well as media institutions, should carry out and/or intensify public education to sensitise people in the community on child rights prevention, promotion, and protection. It must collaborate with other institutions that are into child rights promotion as well, and they should embark on advocacy, education and awareness programmes targeted at parents, especially to prevent child rights violations. The DOVVSU of the Ghana Police Service, CHRAJ, and Social Welfare Department, in collaboration with school authorities in the Kwahu East District Assembly, should track child rights violations. They should identify and track abusive parents/guardians and other perpetrators. Perpetrators of such acts must also be punished to serve as a warning to others who engage in child rights abuses. The Ghana Police Service of the Kwahu East District should track child rights violations through case surveillance. They should establish community surveillance teams and use them as key informants to track abusive elders, parents and peers of children abused in the Sempoa town. They should also provide their key informants with the necessary resources, and protection should be given to them; and also, their identities should be kept a secret. The DOVVSU of the Ghana Police Service in the Kwahu East District should also work together with other human rights institutions to provide guidance and counselling sections for victims of child rights abuses.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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