



# Caring for 'parentless' children: An exploration of work stressors and resources as experienced by caregivers in children's homes in Ghana

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**Introduction.** The experience of stress by workers has negative impacts on their health and productivity. However, work resources can have neutralizing impacts on the effects of stress on workers depending on their availability and the extent to which workers are able to identify and utilize them. The theory of salutogenesis advances this argument with its central concept of sense of coherence arguing that the neutralizing impacts of resources manifest through individuals' sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness of the situation and environment. From this theoretical standpoint, we explored the stress-resource relationship and its implications in a work context where the lives of vulnerable children depend on the health, wellbeing and productivity of their caregivers.

**Method.** We used a qualitative approach with phenomenological design with the aim of capturing participant lived experiences regarding stressors and resources on the job. Data collection involved participant observations, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews in that order. Forty-one caregivers from two Children's Homes participated in the study. We followed Attride-Sterling's (2001) Thematic Network Analysis approach to synthesize the textual data using NVIVO 10 software.

**Results.** It emerged that aspects of the work environment that were identified as stressors also tended to be resources for caregivers. These included the children, issues related to child rights, the job itself, the work environment, institution-community relations and relationships between caregivers and their own families. Caregiver faith and intrinsic motivation stood out as the primary resource upon which caregivers draw to cope. Most importantly, caregivers' sense of coherence (SOC) of their work situation manifested through their understanding of sources, patterns and consistency of stress in their jobs (comprehensibility), awareness of available resources to draw on (manageability) and their tendency to derive meaning in their work through religious faith and personal motivation (meaningfulness).

**Conclusion.** We conclude that employee caregivers face immense stress in their jobs but they have a sense of coherence of the work situation that keeps them motivated and willing to engage the stressors. Interventions that target further strengthening this sense of coherence would contribute to caregiver successes on the job.