

# Institutional Based Care Programs and Wellness of Vulnerable Children in Kenya: A Case Study of House of Hope, Molo

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## ABSTRACT

The study was driven by the need to address concerns about adequacy of institutional-based care programs in providing the best care for vulnerable children, particularly in fostering their holistic well-being through guardian empowerment and foster care and adoption. This research aimed to examine the effect of institutional-based care programs on the wellness of vulnerable children in Kenya, focusing on the House of Hope in Molo. The study was guided by two key objectives: to evaluate the effect of guardian empowerment programs on the wellness of vulnerable children and to determine how foster care and adoption affects their wellness. A descriptive research design was employed. The target population consisted of 180 participants, including members of staff, caregivers, and local community members associated with the institution. A sample size of 90 participants was selected using a purposive sampling technique, ensuring that individuals with relevant experience and knowledge were included. Data was collected through structured questionnaires designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information and analyzed using SPSS version 26. The findings revealed a significant role of Guardian Empowerment Programme, with high scores for crisis management (Mean = 4.55), reflecting the institution's proactive approach. However, areas like resource availability (Mean = 3.34) and training in best practices (Mean = 3.05) suggest opportunities for improvement. Additionally, foster care and adoption programs were rated highly for their contributions to emotional support (Mean = 4.38) and stable environments (Mean = 4.39), with integration across these services achieving the highest score (Mean = 4.55), underscoring the importance of comprehensive, collaborative models. The study concluded that well-structured institutional care programs significantly enhance the well-being of vulnerable children, especially through integrated models that combine guardian training with foster care and adoption services. It highlights the need for collaborative stakeholder efforts, improved resource allocation, and continuous caregiver development. To ensure sustainable care, institutions should adopt a holistic approach involving mentorship, partnerships, transparent processes, community engagement, and supportive legislation.

**Keywords:** Institutional-based care, Vulnerable children, Guardian empowerment, Foster care, Adoption, Child wellness, Molo, Kenya.

## INTRODUCTION

The well-being of vulnerable children in Kenya has been a longstanding concern, prompting ongoing reforms in institutional-based care (IBC) programs. Traditionally, institutional care has offered immediate shelter and protection for children facing neglect, abandonment, or abuse. However, growing evidence indicates that prolonged stays in institutional settings can negatively affect emotional, cognitive, and social development (Gibson & Edwards, 2021). As a result, there is a paradigm shift toward integrated care approaches that incorporate both institutional and family-based solutions.

Central to this shift is the empowerment of guardians and caregivers who assume the critical role of nurturing children either within or outside institutional settings. Guardian empowerment programs are increasingly being

implemented to enhance the capacity of caregivers through structured training in child psychology, trauma-informed care, nutrition, and child protection. These programs equip caregivers with skills to support children's psychosocial, educational, and behavioral development while also addressing emotional challenges stemming from trauma (Johnson et al., 2022; Smith & Patel, 2020). The provision of peer support networks and access to mental health services has further proven effective in mitigating caregiver burnout and improving the quality of care (Lee et al., 2021).

Empirical studies reveal that children placed in well-monitored family-based environments generally exhibit better developmental and psychological outcomes than those retained in long-term institutional care (Gibson & Edwards, 2021; Miller & Clarke, 2021). Consequently, institutions such as House of Hope in Kenya are increasingly adopting hybrid care models that integrate guardian training, temporary foster placements, and long-term adoption frameworks.

To realize sustainable transformation, institutional-based care programs must prioritize continuous caregiver capacity building, secure adequate resource allocation, and foster strategic partnerships with stakeholders. This includes collaboration with government agencies, community structures, and private actors, all of whom play a role in promoting holistic child development. Supportive legal frameworks and community engagement are equally essential in enabling a comprehensive, child-centered care system that meets the evolving needs of vulnerable children in Kenya.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the critical role of institutional-based care programs in supporting vulnerable children, concerns remain about their effectiveness in promoting the holistic well-being of these children in Kenya (Chege & Ucembe, 2016). Many institutional facilities continue to face challenges related to caregiver capacity, limited integration with alternative family-based care options, and gaps in long-term child development support (African Child Policy Forum, 2023). These shortcomings often hinder the ability of such programs to provide stable, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate environments for vulnerable children. While numerous studies underscore the importance of transitioning from purely institutional models to more integrated approaches, including family-based care, there is limited empirical evidence examining how components such as guardian empowerment, foster care, and adoption influence the overall wellness of children within institutional settings (Munthali et al., 2014). In particular, the lack of trained caregivers and sustainable community-based support networks has been cited as a barrier to achieving meaningful outcomes for children in care.

This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining the effects of institutional-based care programs on the wellness of vulnerable children in Kenya, with a specific focus on guardian empowerment and family-based alternatives like foster care and adoption. The findings aim to inform policy and practice by identifying interventions that enhance child well-being and by offering strategies for strengthening the design and delivery of institutional care programs.

### **Objective and Research Questions**

The general objective of this research was to investigate the effect of institutional-based care on the wellness of vulnerable children in Kenya, with a specific focus on House of Hope, Molo. The study sought to answer the following research questions: i. To what extent do guardian empowerment programmes affect the wellness of vulnerable children in Kenya; and ii. How do foster care and adoption affect the wellness of vulnerable children in Kenya?

### **Justification and Implication of the Study**

This study is significant as it examines the impact of institutional-based care programs—specifically guardian empowerment and foster care/adoption on the wellness of vulnerable children in Kenya, using House of Hope in Molo as a case study. With the growing number of vulnerable children resulting from poverty, HIV/AIDS,

and family breakdowns, many are placed in institutional care facilities. Understanding the effectiveness of such care models is crucial for informing policies and interventions that ensure children's physical, emotional, social, and cognitive well-being. Given the limited Kenya-specific research in this area, the study provides much-needed context-sensitive insights that can guide both local and national child welfare strategies.

Additionally, the findings of this research hold practical value for policymakers, caregivers, and child welfare institutions by identifying best practices and areas for improvement in institutional care. By assessing how programs like guardian empowerment and family-based alternatives contribute to child wellness, the study supports the development of more sustainable and child-centered care models. It also aligns with global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), advocating for every child's right to grow in a nurturing, family-like environment. Ultimately, the research contributes to the broader effort of strengthening child protection systems in Kenya.

Furthermore, beyond the Kenya context, the implications of this study extend to the wider African child protection context, where many countries face similar challenges of poverty, family disintegration, and limited state capacity to provide alternative care. Lessons from House of Hope can inform continental policy dialogues on strengthening family-based care, reducing over-reliance on institutionalization, and promoting community-driven child protection systems. The evidence generated can support African Union frameworks such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, contributing to harmonized approaches across the region. Ultimately, the research adds to a growing body of knowledge that not only strengthens Kenya's child protection system but also provides a model that can inspire reforms and innovations in child welfare across Africa.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study was conducted at the House of Hope in Molo, Kenya, focusing on its institutional care practices and their impact on the wellness of vulnerable children. It targeted children residing in the facility, staff members, and relevant stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of the institution's operations. The research was geographically limited to Molo and used a representative sample selected based on accessibility. While the study offers valuable insights, its findings may not be generalizable to other institutions. Data access limitations due to privacy concerns were addressed through official approvals, including a university introductory letter and a NACOSTI research license. The research was carried out over a one-year period, from June 2024 to May 2025.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter covers the review of literature related to the current study. The literature was analyzed in order to determine what exists in relation to the field of research and to identify gaps that exist, thereby justifying the need to conduct the study in order to fill those gaps.

### **Guardian Empowerment Programme and Wellness of Vulnerable Children**

Guardian empowerment programmes are increasingly viewed as vital in institutional-based care, as they equip caregivers with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to foster the wellness of vulnerable children. Training in areas such as child development, trauma-informed care, nutrition, and legal rights is generally associated with improvements in both caregiving quality and children's outcomes. For instance, Ayaya and Esamai (2019) and Kamau and Nderitu (2022) demonstrate that trained guardians are more effective in promoting children's health and emotional stability. Yet, the effectiveness of training alone is contested. While some studies find clear benefits, others argue that without addressing systemic barriers such as high child-to-caregiver ratios, inconsistent stipends, and lack of material resources, training has limited impact (Wekesa & Otieno, 2021). This suggests that empowerment is a necessary but insufficient condition for improving child outcomes, and that structural support acts as a moderating factor.

Another area of convergence in the literature is the recognition that caregiver well-being mediates the relationship between empowerment and child outcomes. Empowerment programmes that incorporate

mentorship, peer support, and psychological care tend to produce more resilient and consistent caregivers, thereby promoting children's emotional well-being and social development (Omondi & Wambui, 2021; Njeri & Wanjiru, 2022). However, not all programmes achieve this. Evidence shows that one-off workshops without follow-up support often yield short-lived or negligible effects, as caregivers quickly revert to prior practices under stress (Oloo & Ndegwa, 2020). Thus, while empowerment is widely celebrated, its sustainability depends on continuous professional development, reflective supervision, and psychosocial supports for caregivers.

The role of legal literacy presents another area of debate. Otieno and Kamunya (2019) emphasize that training in legal frameworks enhances guardians' ability to safeguard children's rights and report abuse, creating safer environments. Conversely, other studies caution that stronger gatekeeping, if not balanced with family-strengthening measures, can unintentionally delay reunification or increase placement instability. These mixed findings illustrate a key tension between protecting children through legal empowerment and ensuring that legalism does not undermine relational stability.

A further point of divergence concerns the measurement of outcomes. Studies relying on self-reported data from caregivers tend to highlight significant improvements in child well-being following empowerment initiatives (Ayaya & Esamai, 2019; Njeri & Wanjiru, 2022). By contrast, research employing standardized child development assessments or long-term follow-up often reports more modest effects, raising questions about the durability and generalizability of programme impacts (Oloo & Ndegwa, 2020). This methodological inconsistency complicates direct comparisons across studies and points to the need for more robust, longitudinal evaluations.

In summary, the literature broadly supports guardian empowerment as an important mechanism for improving children's wellness in institutional settings. However, there is less agreement on the extent and durability of these benefits, with outcomes shaped by systemic supports, the inclusion of psychosocial services, and the balance between legal protection and placement stability. The contradictions highlight critical gaps in context-specific evidence, particularly in resource-constrained environments such as Kenya, where the sustainability of empowerment depends not only on skills training but also on broader systemic and cultural factors.

### **Foster-Care and Adoption and Wellness of Vulnerable Children**

Foster care and adoption are central interventions in promoting the holistic wellness of vulnerable children who cannot remain with their biological families. These care models provide nurturing, stable, and emotionally supportive environments that are essential for children recovering from neglect, abuse, or abandonment. Foster care, though temporary, offers individualized attention from trained caregivers who can respond to each child's psychological, social, and developmental needs. Evidence suggests that consistent foster placements reduce trauma-related symptoms, enhance emotional regulation, and foster healthy cognitive and social development (Moses et al., 2021). Adoption, by contrast, ensures permanency, granting children a lasting sense of belonging and stability that contributes to improved emotional, academic, and social outcomes (Johnson et al., 2020).

Research further demonstrates that adoptive families who receive continuous support, including counseling, mentorship, and trauma-informed care, are better positioned to address the evolving needs of children (Thompson & Lee, 2022). Such families often invest in enriching experiences that foster emotional growth and academic progress, leading to higher educational achievement and fewer mental health challenges. Additionally, culturally responsive practices in foster care and adoption are critical for strengthening identity formation, self-esteem, and social integration, particularly in multicultural contexts (Kamau & Nderitu, 2022). Johnson et al. (2020) also highlight that children's academic success within foster and adoptive families depends not only on placement stability but also on access to educational resources such as tutoring and mentorship programs. Access to mental health services is equally important, as it helps children build resilience, mitigate anxiety, and reduce behavioral problems (Kamau & Nderitu, 2022).

Foster care and adoption, when effectively supported, play a transformative role in enhancing children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social well-being. Their success is reinforced through comprehensive

caregiver training, regular mental health services, and cultural sensitivity initiatives. To maximize impact, policymakers and child welfare institutions should strengthen systemic support structures, streamline adoption processes, and ensure foster placements remain stable and nurturing. Ultimately, a collaborative approach that integrates family-based care with educational, psychological, and cultural dimensions is indispensable for enabling vulnerable children to thrive beyond institutional care.

## Study Gaps

Despite growing interest in institutional-based care and child wellness, significant gaps remain in understanding how specific interventions such as guardian empowerment and family-based alternatives like foster care and adoption impact the well-being of vulnerable children in the Kenyan context. While global studies have largely focused on the general effects of institutional care, there is limited empirical research that isolates and evaluates the contributions of these individual components, particularly within localized settings like House of Hope in Molo. Moreover, existing literature tends to generalize findings across diverse socio-cultural environments, failing to capture the nuanced challenges and successes unique to specific institutions. This study addresses these gaps by offering a focused, context-specific analysis of how guardian empowerment programs and foster care/adoption influence the holistic wellness of children in institutional care, thereby contributing practical insights for policy development and program improvement in Kenya.

## Conceptual Framework

Mugenda and Mugenda (2019) defines a conceptual framework as a cohesive set of theories that explain the functioning of a specific phenomenon and its related elements. It provides a basis for comprehending the causal and correlational relationships among various aspects, such as events, ideas, observations, principles, information, and interpretations within a study. For instance, it illustrates the connection between independent variables and the dependent variable. This study examined several key variables that are essential for understanding the influence of institutional care on vulnerable children's wellness. These included guardian empowerment programmes and foster care and adoption as the independent variables, while vulnerable children's wellness was the dependent variable.

Guardian empowerment is hypothesized to enhance child wellness by equipping guardians with the skills, resources, and psychosocial support needed to provide stable and nurturing environments. This aligns with the first research objective, which seeks to examine how empowering guardians contributes to the well-being of children under institutional care.

Foster care is positioned as a critical variable influencing emotional stability, security, and belonging, particularly for children transitioning from institutional settings. By offering temporary but family-like environments, foster care addresses immediate psychosocial needs while reducing the adverse effects of long-term institutionalization. This reflects the second research objective, which evaluates the impact of foster care on children's well-being.

Adoption, as a more permanent intervention, is conceptualized as strengthening long-term wellness by ensuring children's integration into stable families that can meet their developmental needs over time. Adoption not only promotes psychological and emotional security but also fosters identity formation and social integration. This links to the third research objective, which investigates the effect of adoption on vulnerable children's overall development.

The integration of foster care and adoption within the institutional framework is also emphasized, as their complementary roles ensure both immediate and sustainable solutions for child protection. The combined approach enhances wellness outcomes by creating pathways from temporary support to long-term stability, addressing the fourth objective of assessing the holistic contribution of care models to child wellness.

Ultimately, the framework illustrates that guardian empowerment, foster care, and adoption programs individually and collectively serve as key levers for improving the well-being of vulnerable children. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based insights for strengthening child protection systems and aligning institutional practices with national and global child welfare policies.

**Independent Variables**

**Dependent Variable**

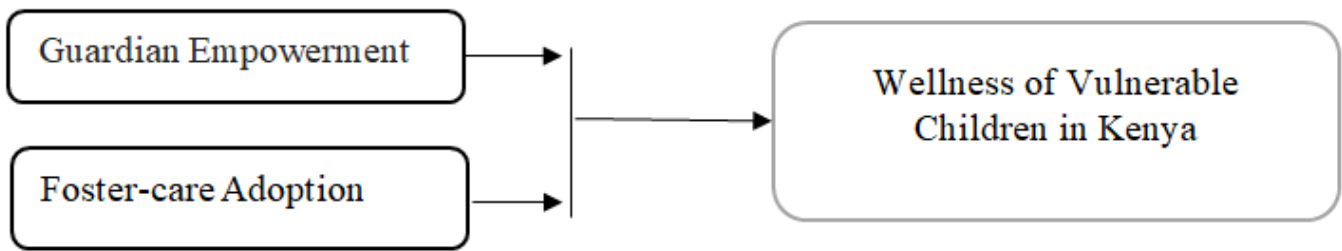


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive research design to provide a detailed account of institutional-based care at House of Hope, Molo, without manipulating variables. The design allowed for the collection of rich data on the wellness of vulnerable children within their natural caregiving environment. It was particularly useful in capturing the experiences of both caregivers and children, highlighting care processes and outcomes. Overall, the approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how different care programs affect children’s well-being.

**Target Population**

The study targeted a population of 180 individuals connected to House of Hope in Molo, Kenya, including 100 staff members, 20 caregivers, and 60 local community members. These groups were selected for their direct and indirect involvement in the care and well-being of vulnerable children. Staff and caregivers contributed insights on daily operations and caregiving practices, while community members offered perspectives on reintegration and support. This diverse population enabled the collection of rich, context-specific data essential for assessing the impact of institutional-based care on child wellness.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

The study employed a sample size of 90 respondents, representing 50% of the total population, in line with Mugenda and Mugenda's (2019) recommendation for reliability. The sample was proportionately distributed among staff (50), caregivers (10), and community members (30) to ensure balanced representation and minimize bias. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals with relevant experience in child care at House of Hope, while snowball sampling helped reach knowledgeable but hard-to-access participants. This combination enhanced the quality and depth of data collected for the study.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Data for this study was gathered using a structured questionnaire employing a 5-point Likert scale to capture participants’ views on variables such as guardian empowerment and foster care and adoption. A pilot study involving 10 participants from Riziki Children’s Organization in Nakuru County was conducted to test the questionnaire’s clarity, reliability, and validity. Expert reviews confirmed the tool's validity, while Cronbach’s alpha scores above 0.7 for all variables indicated strong reliability. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the university and a NACOSTI research permit to ensure ethical compliance and institutional access. Three trained research assistants facilitated the administration of the questionnaire, helping maintain data integrity and participant trust. This structured and ethical approach ensured that the collected data was reliable, valid, and representative of the respondents’ true experiences.

## Data Analysis and Presentation

The study employed entirely quantitative methods to analyze the collected data. Survey responses were coded, cleaned, and processed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used, while inferential analysis involved correlation and regression techniques to assess relationships between variables. Data was visually presented through tables, charts, and graphs. A regression model was developed to evaluate the impact of four independent variables guardian empowerment programmes, and foster care and adoption on the wellness of vulnerable children. The final regression equation was:  $Y = 1.220 + 0.631X3 + 0.748X4 + \epsilon$ .

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings on how guardian empowerment programmes influence the wellness of vulnerable children. Guardian empowerment initiatives are designed to equip caregivers with essential skills, knowledge, and resources to effectively support children's emotional, social, and physical development. The study sought to evaluate the extent to which such programmes impact the overall well-being of children in institutional care settings, particularly at the House of Hope in Molo.

### Guardian Empowerment Programme and Wellness Vulnerable Children

The study established that the Guardian Empowerment Programme at House of Hope, Molo, has a significant positive impact on the wellness of vulnerable children by enhancing the caregiving capacity of guardians. The program was widely endorsed by participants, with most components receiving high mean scores (above 4.0), indicating strong agreement regarding its effectiveness. Specifically, the program was found to improve guardians' ability to provide adequate care ( $M = 4.28$ ) and offer support for emotional and psychological needs ( $M = 4.28$ ), suggesting that it equips guardians with vital skills needed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. The crisis management component was particularly effective ( $M = 4.55$ ), reflecting the program's emphasis on preparing guardians for urgent caregiving situations.

While the program was overall rated as effective ( $M = 4.25$ ), certain areas revealed opportunities for enhancement. The materials and resources provided were considered only moderately effective ( $M = 3.34$ ), indicating a need for increased resource allocation to support guardians in delivering quality care. Additionally, the relatively low mean score ( $M = 3.05$ ) for knowledge of best practices in child care and development suggests the need to strengthen this component of the training. This gap highlights the importance of incorporating more comprehensive and pedagogical content into the curriculum to build guardians' capacity further.

In conclusion, the findings affirm that the Guardian Empowerment Programme significantly contributes to improving the wellness of vulnerable children by enhancing the preparedness and confidence of guardians. The program's practical training, especially in crisis management and emotional support, stands out as a key strength. However, to maximize its impact, there is a need to invest in more resources and expand training on child development best practices. Strengthening these areas will ensure guardians are better equipped to provide holistic, long-term support, ultimately improving the overall well-being of children under their care.

### Foster Care and Adoption and Wellness of Vulnerable Children

The study set out to examine the effects of foster care and adoption on the wellness of vulnerable children and established that both services significantly enhance children's emotional, psychological, and long-term well-being. Respondents rated the quality of foster care highly ( $M = 4.49$ ), underscoring its role in providing emotional support and stability. Adoption also received positive evaluations ( $M = 4.27$ ), particularly for its structured and transparent processes, which facilitate smooth transitions and sustainable adjustment for children. Emotional support through foster care ( $M = 4.38$ ) and stability in adoption ( $M = 4.39$ ) were recognized as critical for promoting children's mental wellness and resilience.

The integration of foster care and adoption programs was rated even higher ( $M = 4.55$ ), pointing to the strength of a collaborative model that combines temporary and permanent care pathways to deliver holistic support for children. By linking the short-term nurturing environment of foster care with the long-term security of adoption, this approach enhances wellness outcomes ( $M = 4.41$ ) and reduces the disruptions often associated with disjointed interventions. Institutions such as House of Hope, Molo, illustrate the value of aligning these care strategies to promote consistent and sustainable child development outcomes.

However, the findings also highlight the importance of analyzing the cultural, social, and systemic factors shaping the success of these programs. Culturally, the adoption of non-kin children remains sensitive in Kenya and many African societies, where lineage, inheritance, and clan-based kinship ties strongly influence acceptance of fostered or adopted children (Mbiti, 2019; Kyalo, 2021). Such norms can limit the scalability of adoption programs, despite their proven effectiveness in promoting stability. Socially, stigma associated with childlessness and adoption may also deter families from participating, creating a gap between policy ambitions and community realities (Wambua, 2020).

Systemically, the capacity of child protection systems to support foster care and adoption remains uneven. Limited funding, bureaucratic delays, and insufficient training of social workers often hinder program efficiency (UNICEF, 2021). Furthermore, legal frameworks governing adoption and foster care, while aligned with international standards such as the UNCRC, sometimes lack effective implementation and monitoring at community levels (Save the Children, 2022). These systemic barriers underscore the need for institutional reforms that streamline processes, build trust among communities, and ensure accountability in foster and adoption placements.

In conclusion, the success of foster care and adoption programs in enhancing the wellness of vulnerable children depends not only on their structural design but also on their cultural acceptance, social perception, and systemic support. Strengthening these dimensions can transform foster care and adoption into sustainable child protection strategies across Kenya and the wider African context. Institutions must therefore move beyond programmatic delivery to embed these services within culturally sensitive, socially supportive, and systemically efficient frameworks to maximize their impact.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Guardian Empowerment Programme and Wellness of Vulnerable Children**

The findings of the study revealed that the Guardian Empowerment Programme at House of Hope had a notable positive impact on the wellness of vulnerable children. Most respondents acknowledged that the training initiatives significantly enhanced their capacity to meet the emotional and psychological needs of the children. High ratings were recorded for skills development in areas such as crisis management, basic child development, and trauma-informed care. These results are in line with findings by Njoroge and Wambui (2022), who reported that caregiver training improves the overall caregiving environment and child well-being in institutional settings. However, while the training content was found to be useful, the study also noted concerns about the adequacy of resources and materials provided to guardians, with respondents rating these moderately. This aligns with Njiru and Kanyiri (2023), who indicated that limited resources often hinder the effectiveness of such programs. The study therefore recommends that institutions invest not only in educational components of empowerment programs but also in material and logistical support to maximize their effectiveness in promoting the long-term wellness of children.

### **Foster Care and Adoption and Wellness of Vulnerable Children**

The study showed that foster care and adoption programs had the most significant influence on the wellness of vulnerable children among the variables analyzed. Foster care was recognized for providing a nurturing, emotionally supportive environment that helped children develop a sense of security and belonging. Adoption, in particular, was praised for offering permanent family integration, contributing to stable developmental outcomes. These findings support the research by Murphy and Greer (2023), who emphasized that integrated foster care and adoption systems lead to better emotional and psychological outcomes for children



transitioning out of institutional settings. Furthermore, respondents acknowledged the transparency and procedural clarity of adoption processes at House of Hope, although they also identified the need for improved follow-up and post-adoption support. The positive results are consistent with studies by Smith and O'Connor (2021), who found that children in structured family-based care exhibit lower levels of anxiety and improved resilience. As such, the study recommends continued investment in foster care and adoption programs, along with enhanced post-placement support to sustain child wellness outcomes beyond institutional care.

## CONCLUSION

The study on institutional-based care and the wellness of vulnerable children at House of Hope, Molo, underscores the significance of structured programs such as guardian empowerment and foster care/adoption in meeting the complex needs of vulnerable children. The guardian empowerment program was found to be instrumental in enhancing caregiver competence, particularly in emotional support and crisis management, though gaps in training on child development and limited resources remain challenges. Simultaneously, foster care and adoption were shown to provide critical emotional and long-term stability, with foster care addressing immediate needs and adoption offering permanent solutions. The integration of these programs creates a continuum of care that supports children's psychological well-being and development. However, improvements in adoption transparency, post-placement support, and policy coordination are necessary to strengthen outcomes. Overall, the study highlights the need for sustained investment and collaboration to ensure the holistic wellness and future stability of vulnerable children.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that House of Hope strengthen its guardian empowerment programs by expanding capacity-building efforts to include practical skills such as parenting, child development, and financial literacy, supported through workshops, mentorship, and access to external resources like counseling and social services. Additionally, the foster care and adoption processes should be streamlined for greater transparency and efficiency, with improved post-adoption support services and public awareness campaigns to encourage broader community participation. Collaborating with stakeholders and advocating for policy reforms will further institutionalize these programs as key strategies in Kenya's child welfare system.

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