



# **Social work and informal alternative care: An exploratory study**

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# Outline

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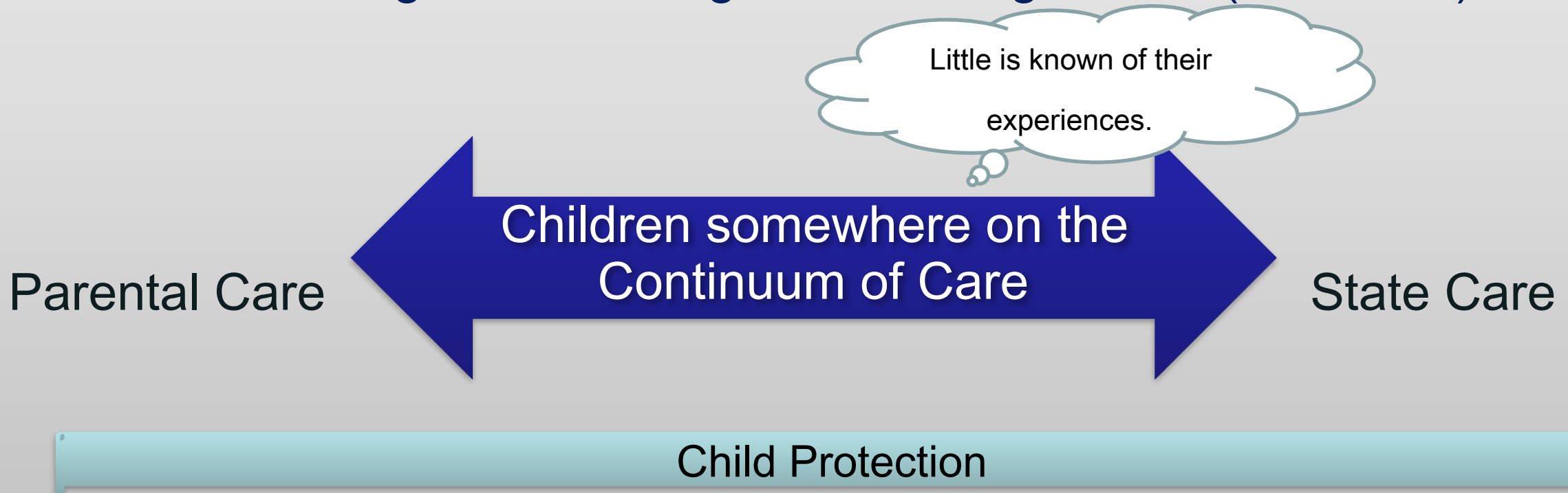




- ❖ This presentation draws on findings from the study:
- ❖ An exploration of the phenomenon of children living in informal alternative care  
(Heyman, S & Malan, H)
- ❖ This study is part of the Masters in Social Work (MSW):  
Child Protection  
North West University,  
Potchefstroom Campus.

# Definition: Informal Alternative Care

- Children living in informal alternative care are without parental care and live with relatives or family friends without State involvement in selecting or monitoring those arrangements (UN, 2010).



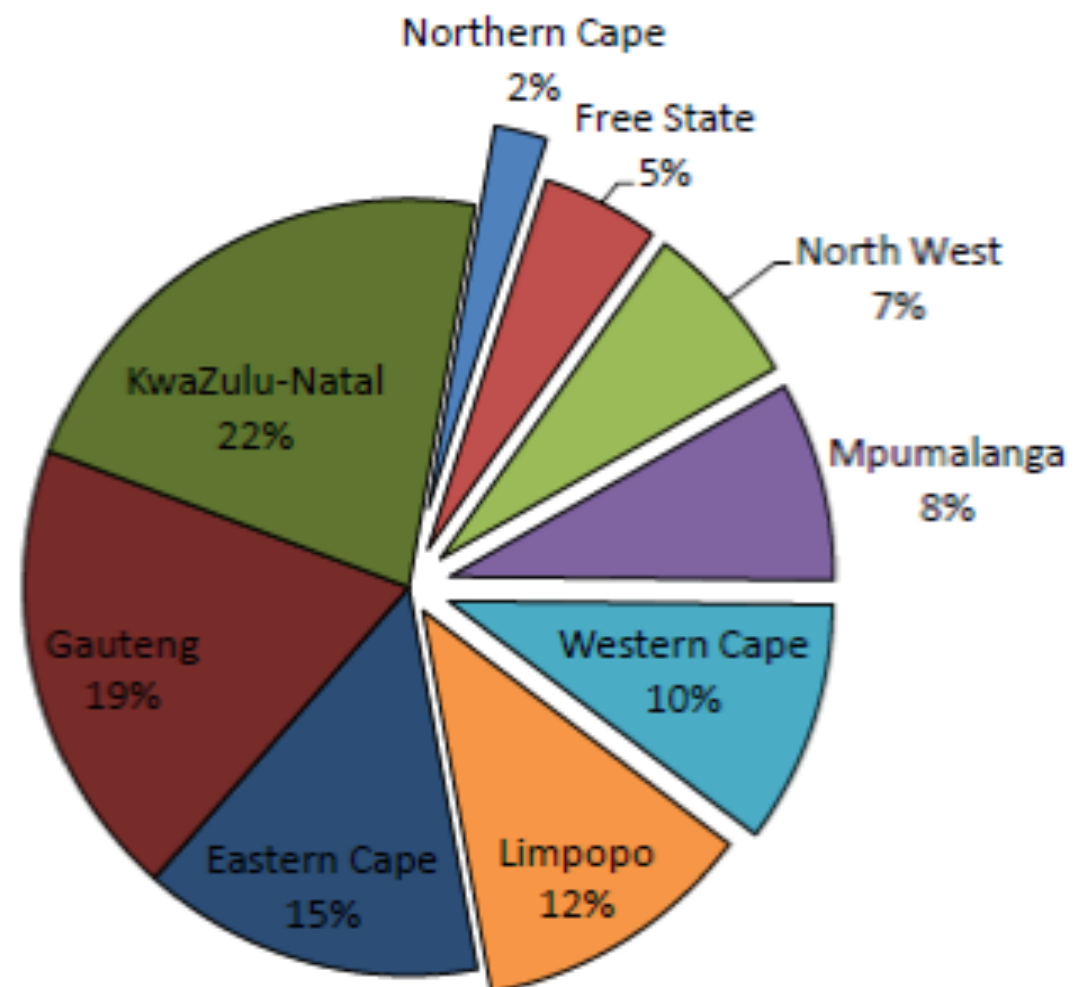
# Background

- Informal placement happens all over - even if parent/s are alive.
- Also part of child care in industrialised countries - indigenous groups: Native American tribes of US, Maori of NZ & Aborigines of Australia
- African contexts - communities traditionally collectively raised children –Ubuntu
- African indigenous belief: “it takes a whole village to raise a child”
- a shared responsibility of the community, the child belongs to the community - “ngwana ke wa setshaba”.
- If parent/s passed on- extended family /community members cares for the child
- Informal family arrangements still exist, especially rural communities –relatives care for OVC without legal placement or legalized solutions: adoption or kafala.

# Child demography

- 1 million children born every year
- 18.5 million children in South Africa
- KZN, Eastern Cape & Limpopo carry almost half of country's child population

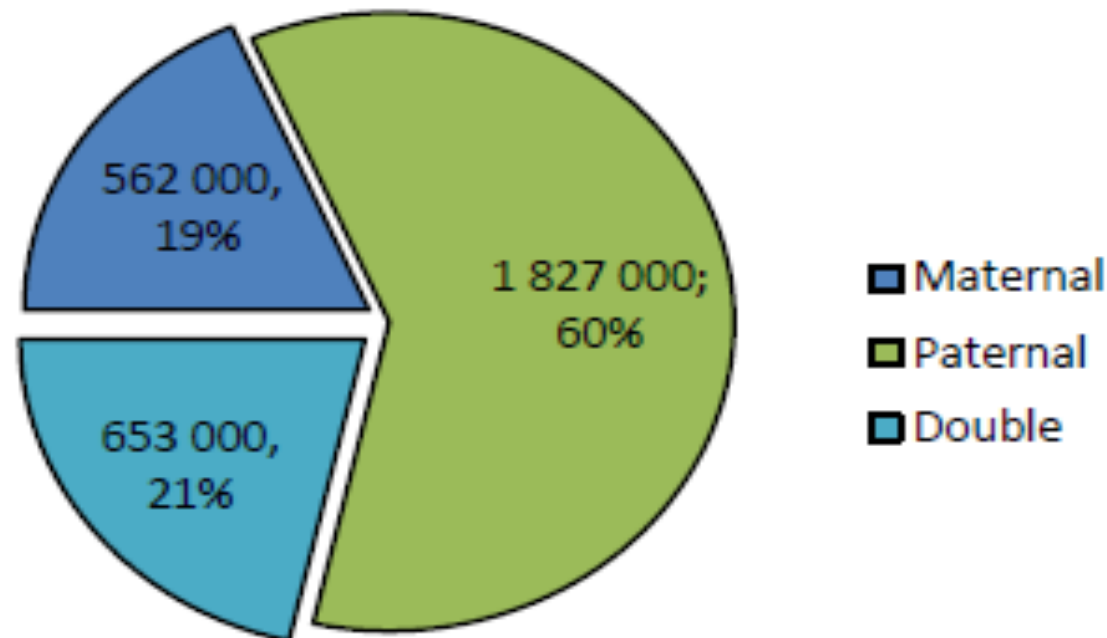
**Child population across provinces**



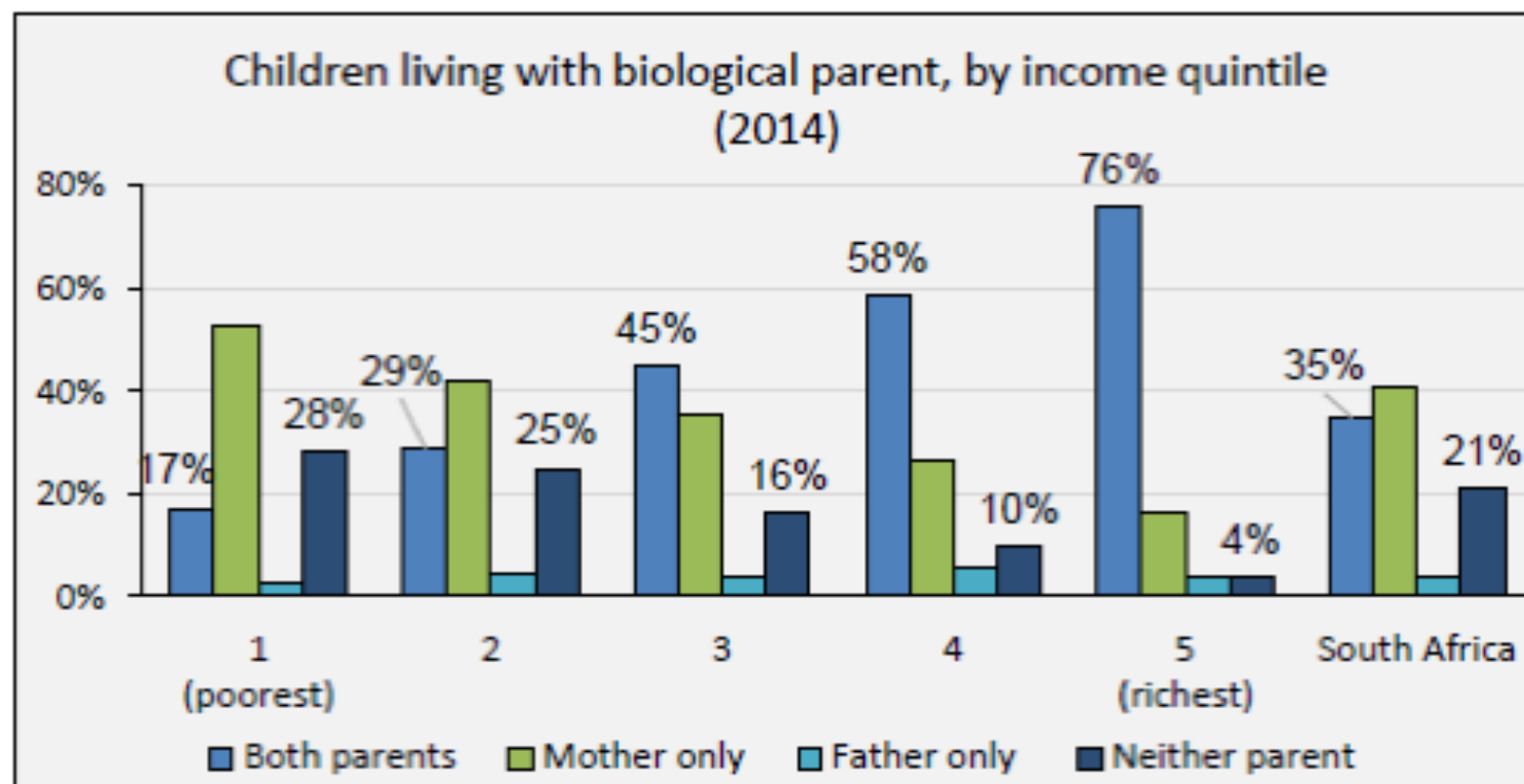
# Number of orphans

- 3 million orphans in South Africa, 60% paternal orphans
- Between 2002 – 2014, roughly half of all orphans have been located in KwaZulu-Natal & Eastern Cape provinces
- Gradual decrease in orphaning rates in recent years
- 79% of all orphans are resident in the poorest 40% of households

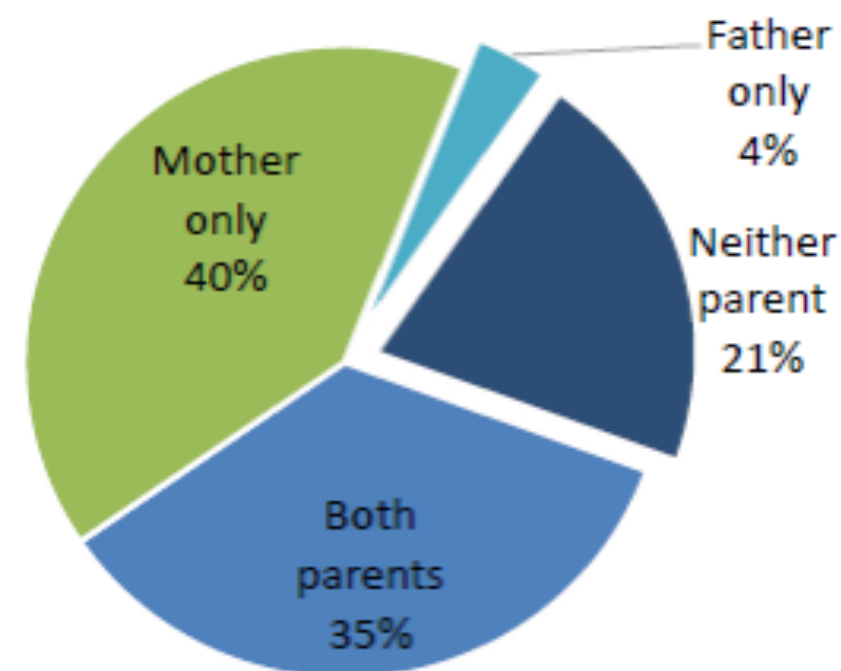
Number & proportion of orphans



- 40% of children live with biological mother
- 3.7 million children live with neither parent.



Proportion of all children living with biological parents



17% of children in the poorest 20% of households live with both parents



# Reasons for informal alternative care

Factors for child's placement with relatives/friends:

- Migratory work
- Location of a secondary or better schooling
- Poverty & Inability to provide for their children
- Poor health status and/ death of parents
- Limited knowledge on legalities such as custodial issues
- History of “kin-keepers” and extended families
- Fear of having grandchildren taken by child welfare
- Mistrust of formal systems and foster parent role
- Belief that children will be taken from their care
- Enter care role at time of crisis

# Rationale for the Study

- All children are **entitled** to care and protection
- In SA “Informal alternative care” is not regulated by DSD and not covered in the Children’s Act (38 of 2005) – even if this placements happens on a continual basis.
- Scarcity of data complicates child care and protection in line with the UNCRC and the United Nations Guidelines on Alternative Care.
- Limited /no systematic, data collection on children living in informal alternative care – little is known of their experiences.
- Roby (2011) recommended:
  - need for targeted research related to children in informal care;
  - develop national policies for children in informal alternative care

# Research Goals

- ❖ Explore **views of social workers** regarding informal alternative care.
- ❖ Views regarding **actions taken during informal alternative care** and how do these actions support informal alternative care arrangements.
- ❖ Recommendations **for practice guidelines** for effective management of informal alternative care.



# Research method and sample

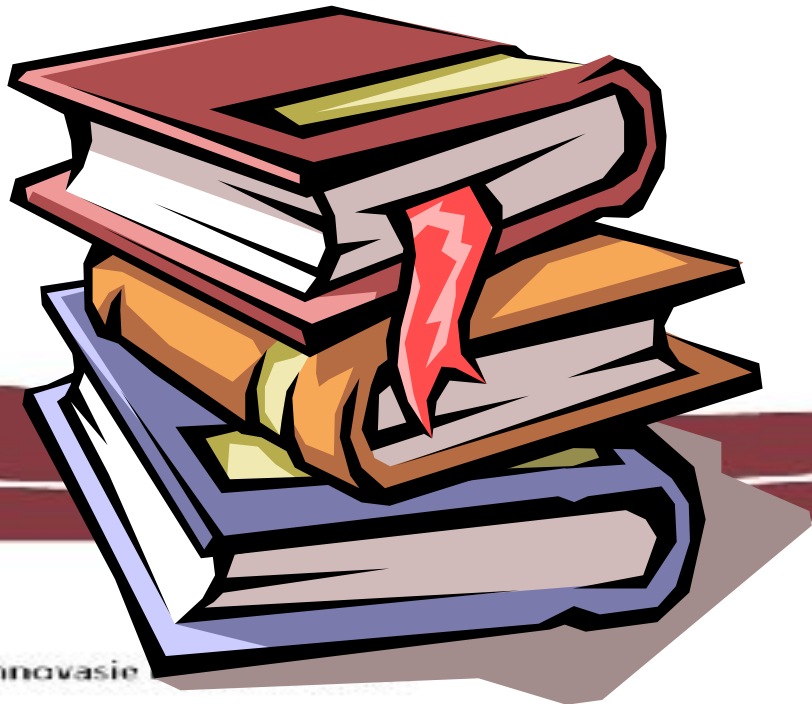
- Sample, purposively identified
- Consists of social workers (with working experience of at least 3 years in informal and formal alternative care)
- Data collected qualitatively
- Through two focus groups
- Pre-selected questions explore:  
views of participants with regard to interventions on informal alternative care
- The analysed data – transcribed & thematically coded







# Literature Review



# Types of **alternative Care**

## Children deprived of parental care



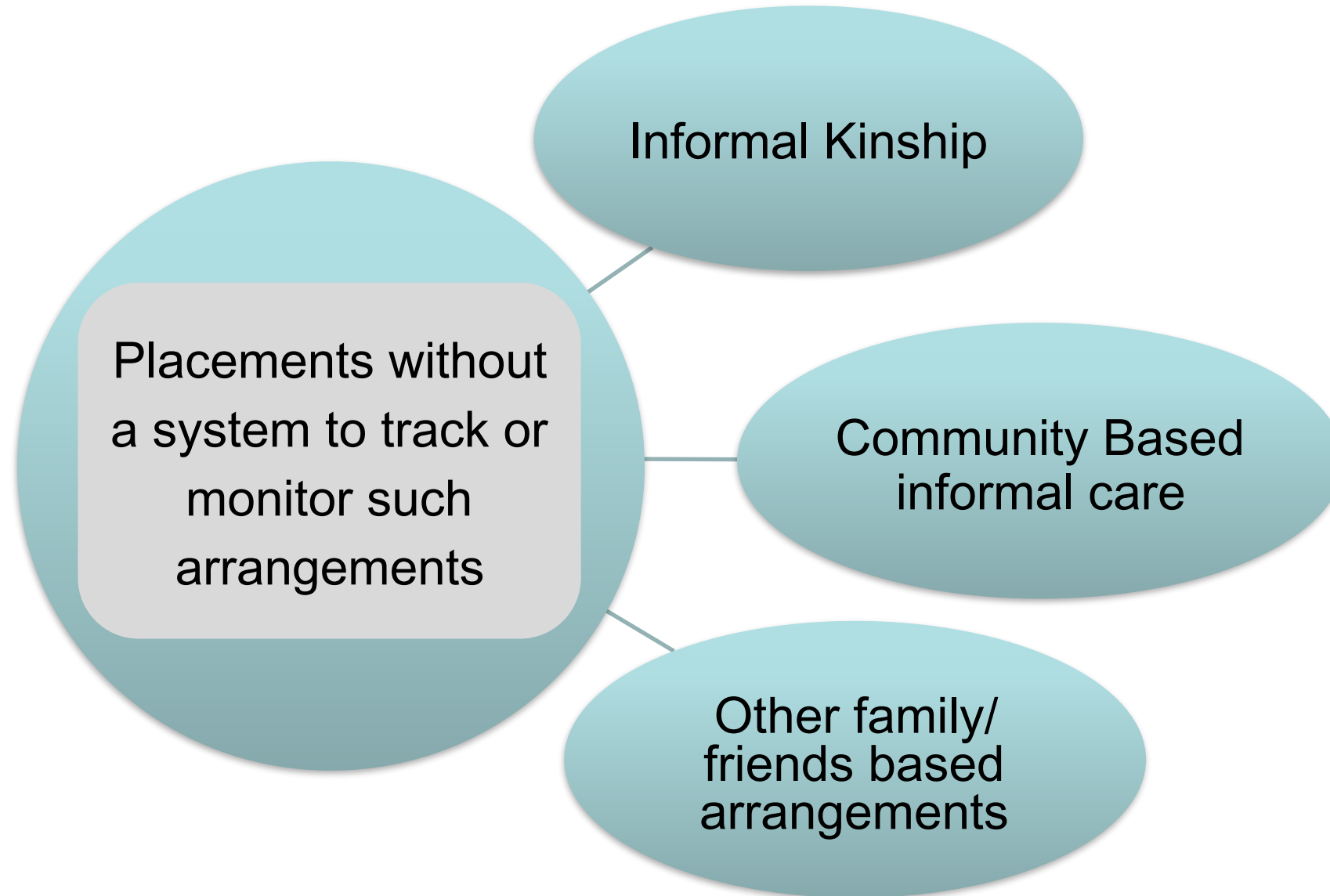
### Formal care

- Legally / judicially ordered
- Physical custody of child
- Foster care within a family (kin and non-kin)
- Group home care
- Residential care of any kind – (public or private)

### Informal care:

- No state involvement - outside legal and supportive mechanisms of the Government
- Private arrangement - initiated by parent/s or child
- Child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis
- By relatives or friends
- (informal kinship care)

# Types of **informal** alternative Care (p13)



# Informal Kinship Care

Benefits	Risks related to informal kinship care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Preserve contact with family</li><li>• Help maintain identity</li><li>• Decrease trauma, distress &amp; grief of:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Separation from parents</li><li>➤ Relocation</li></ul></li><li>• Reduce possible multiple placements</li><li>• Expand capacity for self-sufficiency, ongoing support throughout life,</li><li>• Children &amp; relatives provide mutual care and support (Namibia Foster Care Report)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lacks regulation &amp; Access to services</li><li>• Experience economic, social &amp; personal difficulties</li><li>• Poverty:</li><li>• Overextension of already struggling households</li><li>• Health &amp; nutrition disparities: Health status unknown – no health care without legal custody</li><li>• School attendance: kin carers may have trouble enrolling children in school</li><li>• Abuse, neglect and exploitation</li><li>• Disparate treatment within the household</li></ul>



# Community-based informal care

Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community groups identify child in informal care and provide assistance</li><li>• Maintain relationships with biological families</li><li>• Develop in a family environment and learn culture-appropriate skills</li><li>• Cost-effective &amp; maintain community ties</li><li>• Conducive to family reunification</li><li>• Lack of research data to confirm or counter these beliefs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No research on impact of community-based informal care</li><li>• No kinship ties/obligations - risk of abuse, exploitation, lower education</li><li>• Used as household servants</li><li>• Non-kin placement may cause shame to birth family, strain relationship between child/ parents/ siblings.</li><li>• Communities exert cultural norms &amp; standards as control mechanism</li><li>• Children of social minorities, sex workers or with disabilities may not receive optimal care in community</li></ul>

# Other family-based care arrangements

Benefits	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can maintain family ties with extended families</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lacks regulation and access to CP services</li><li>• Limited State involvement, or not at all</li><li>• Living in kin or non-kin households away from communities - servants</li><li>• No remuneration – Are fed, clothed &amp; housed receive old household items</li><li>• Rarely attends school or learn a trade</li><li>• Paid domestic workers better protection than kin children, both doing similar work</li></ul>

# Informal alternative care in different countries

1

## England

Children's Act of England outlines regulations to:

- assessment
- monitor priv. placement

Notify social services if child lives with someone else, more than 28 days

7 days of notification  
child services assess the suitability of placement

2

## Liberia

- Parents, kin, community or child welfare arrange care agreements
- Families/communities identify carers
- Combined decision - Social services manage, supervise, support placements
- Placements temporary, short-or long-term
- Informal caregivers - no training required
- Stay in/near own community
- Remain in contact with family

3

## Namibia

- No court involvement
- Written agreement on rights and responsibilities
- Court order if agreement cannot be reached
- Notify local authorities
- Financial support
- Carers receive support from community child CW
- SW provide support if needed
- Local Namibian authorities - safeguarded welfare of children privately fostered

SA children's courts do not acknowledge the role of informal alternative caregivers

Paper from Children's Institute (2002:216) recommends relatives caring for children:

- have access to a communication channel to confer parental responsibilities to them;
- consent to medical treatment / permission for an operation;
- capacity to apply for state financial assistance on the behalf of children
- should involve an initial once-off investigation, ordered by a child and family court.

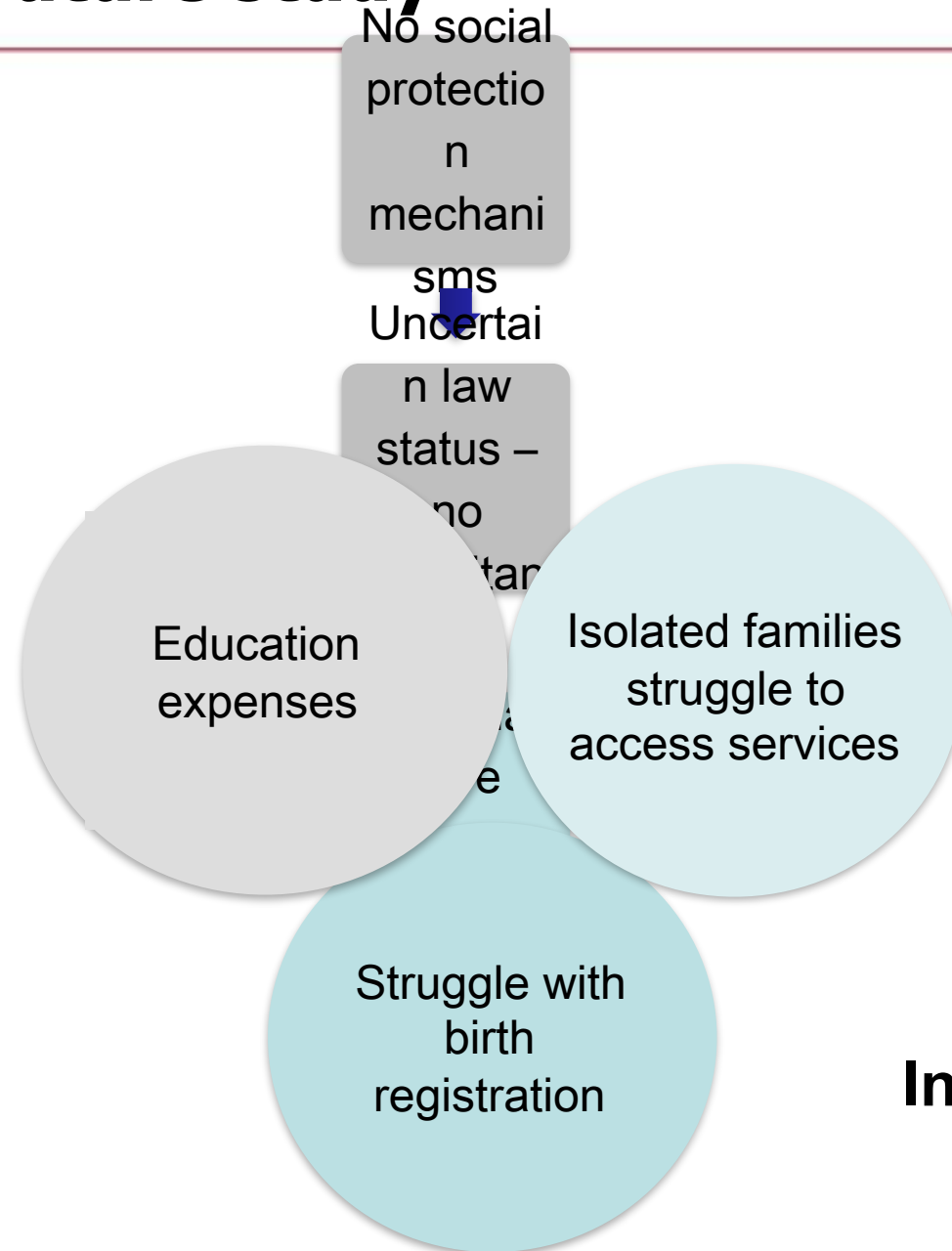
All above countries – except South Africa – mandate families to notify specific welfare organisations when making private arrangements.

Recommendations were not implemented and policies not adapted  
Social workers not aware of recommendations of the commission

Social workers need guidelines regarding informal placement to enhance services to children & families, without overburdening the foster care system

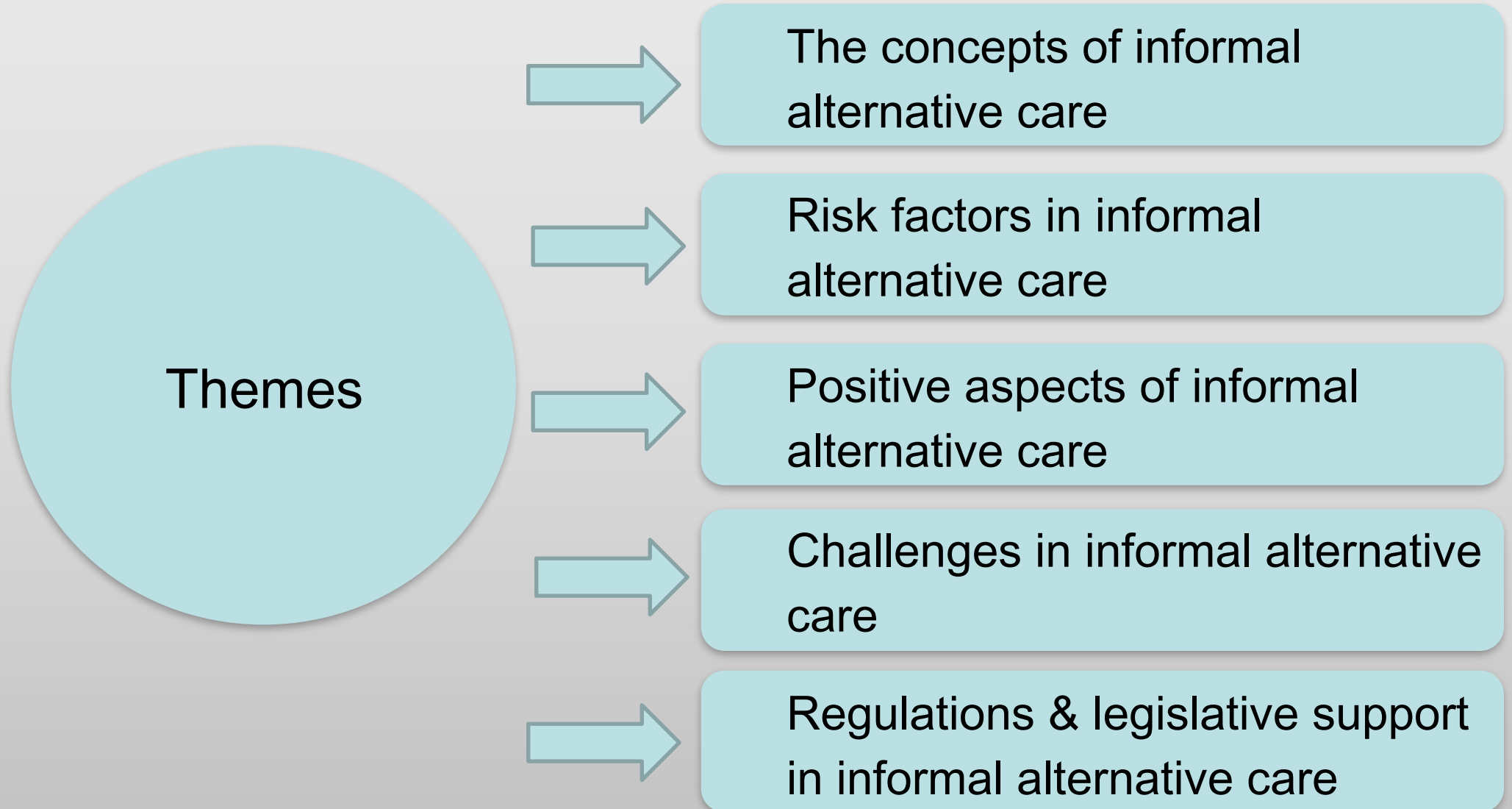


# Findings from literature study



**Informal alternative care**

# Findings from the focus groups



# Theme 1: The concept of Informal alternative care

• **Sub-theme 1:**  
Arrangements by  
family members

• **Sub-theme 2:**  
Involvement of social  
workers

• **Sub-theme 3:**  
Arrangement through  
tribal council  
involvements

- “Parents arrange informal placements – they see an affidavit as a legality”
- No guidelines – results in absence of good practice – social workers use own discretion placing children
- “Informal care does not always involve social workers – with disruptions social workers are involved to assist parties to reach an agreement”
- Due to no legal process - roles & responsibilities of parents & informal carers - unclear
- Tribal authorities arrange informal alternative care
- With family disputes they re-enforce or adjust initial agreements as they see fit.

## Theme 2: Risks factors of Informal alternative care

### •Sub-theme 1:

No screening of potential kinship family

### •Sub-theme 2:

Effects on children

### •Sub-theme 3:

Financial implications

- Risks due to its informal status - lack screening of carers
- “the mere fact that there was no screening done, puts that child more at risk.”
- Attachment between child and carer – severe trauma when child is removed
- “... multiple placements are less if children are placed with families” –
- some children are “passed around” among extended families – cause trauma
- “the most prevalent risks - socio-economic factor most instances poverty is prevalent”



# Theme 3: Positive aspects of informal placements

## •Sub-theme 1:

Quick solution

## •Sub-theme 2:

Needs of the children

## •Sub-theme 3:

Reduce child-headed households & foster care backlog

- Quick solution to address the child in need of care
- “Short cut and quick fix”
- Family members of at-risk children usually steps in while social workers investigate matters
- “the reassurance is – something was done, the child was secured –the situation stabilised for the moment.”
- “family or neighbour placement, less trauma –child remains in familiar safety net, strangers might pose more risks..”
- “informal placements reduce children living on the street/ child headed households”
- “reduces backlog of formal placements – more

# Theme 4: Challenges of informal placements

## •Sub-theme 1:

Burden on informal carers

## •Sub-theme 2: Role change of biological parents

## •Sub-theme 3: Non-compliance

## •Sub-theme 4: Abandonment of children

- Caring for children - responsibility and burden on carers.
- No form of protection for carers - their role not acknowledge
- Lack of legal status can cause personal difficulties, emotional and psychological stress
- Informal kinship carers receive less support than formal kinship
- Biological parents can become alienated from children
- “the family may be selfish, won’t let child visit parents”
- “Without social work supervision - caregivers can manipulate or victimise parents - “they fail to care for children / not “fulfilling” their responsibilities”
- Parents can take child back if placement is not formalised - even if not in the child’s best interest.
- “With guidelines in place, children in informal care better protected”
- “If they don’t want to struggle with the child they abandoned them”

# Theme 5: Legislative matters

## •**Sub-theme 1:** Legislations

## •**Sub-theme 2:** •Interpretations of social workers

## •**Sub-theme 3:** Involvement of stakeholders

- Every child has a right - Government duty to draft policies, legislation and regulations to assist informal alternative care
- Governments should recognise the role informal care plays, and take adequate measures to support and supervise its provision
- Children's Act, 38/2005– no mention of informal alternative care
- No guidelines - Social workers use own discretion – cause strain
- “Children's Act - family group conferences & other lay forums –keep cases of children out of the formal system”
- Family conferences -families make decisions - autonomy is enhanced & independence encouraged –
- Informal carers not regarded as legal guardians – children can be denied access to critical services – medical, education
- “Children experience uncertain law status - not entitled to inheritance”
- Child protection is a collective task

# Recommendations



# Recommendations for Practise Guidelines

**Children should have a legal guardian**

**Policies Government's responsibility**

**Nat Plan of Action for OVC should include informal alternative care**

## **Recommendations for Practise Guidelines**

**Agree on responsibilities**

**Notify local authorities**

**Family Conferences & Tribal Councils**



# Recommendations for Social Workers

**Avoid informal  
care placements**

**Parental care  
programmes & support  
to reunified families**

**Data base of  
screened care  
parents**

## **Recommendations for Social Workers**

**Educate communities  
on informal care**

**Involve families &  
tribal councils**

**Carers apply according  
(Ch.3) Children's Act,  
responsibilities clearly  
outline**





# Thank you

Protecting the safety and  
wellbeing of children and  
young people

## Questions???





# Providing the policy framework for alternative care

- Demonstrating a commitment to children's rights
- Providing a range of care options to meet children's needs
- Implementing rigorous processes for assessment, planning and review
- Ensuring complaints mechanisms are in place
- Setting standards for staffing formal care services and facilities