

THE PROBLEM OF STREET CHILDREN: CASE STUDY OF SARGODHA CITY

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Abstract

Children who live and work on the streets or work in commercial situations at a young age, are subjected to gross injustice and are frequently neglected by national law, despite the fact that our own country has signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. 45.4% respondents are 4-11 years and 54.5% are 12-18 years old. 13.6% respondents families are less than 5 members, 79% respondents are 5 to 11 and 4.5 are 12 and above family size. 85.4% respondents are migrants and 14.5 are local. 10% respondents live at home and 90% live on streets. 20.9% respondents attended school and 79% are not. 88.18% respondents are happy more on streets than their home while 11.81% respondents are not happy on the streets. 11.8% respondents wanted to give up drugs, 20.9% want to do work, 17.2% want to start their own business, 11.8% wants to do nothing, 10% don't know what to do, 1.8% wants to help children 17.2% wants to get education and 9.0% wanted to become group leader of their group.

Introduction

The phenomenon of street children is rapidly becoming one of global epic proportions. Ten years ago, UNICEF estimated that over 30 million children worldwide work and/or live in the streets, for circumstances usually beyond their control, and often without family support. Current estimates of street children worldwide number in the hundreds of millions (*Street Children, 1992; Easton et al, 1994; G. Papagiannis, personal communication, 1996*). If war refugees are included, such as those from Bosnia, Rwanda, or Somalia, the figure may be even higher. Estimates in the early nineties for Latin America alone are 40 to 50 million, and in India 44 million. The levels of street children are expected to continue increasing with the rise in population, labor migration, and urbanization, and with continued decline in economic conditions and increases in poverty and deterioration in family relations (*Blanc, 1994*).

Street children are not limited to the developing world. Perhaps every industrialized country has its runaways and orphans. In nineteenth century Europe street children were written about in the famous novels *Oliver Twist* and *Les Miserables* (*Agnelli, 1986*). In the mid-1800's articles appeared in newspapers and about "street Arabs" (*Williams, 1993, p. 831*). In *Nobody's Child*, Christina Noble (1994) describes how her life as a street child in mid-twentieth century Ireland led to her work with street children in Vietnam. More recently, in the United States declining economic conditions in the 1980's and subsequent homelessness increased the number of street children (*Blanc, 1994*). In my own brief experience working with minority children and young adults at an inner-city recreation center in the Northeast United States, I found that many of the center's clients were involved in street life to some degree (*Hemenway, 1991*). At least one young man lived on the streets. Finally, in parts of the former Soviet Union the increase in poverty from economic collapse has contributed to the conditions that give rise to the emergence of street children.

Problems faced by street children are overwhelming. In addition to living and working in environments that are generally harmful to their well-being, street children face problems such as hunger, lack of adequate shelter, clothes, and other basic needs, as well as lack of (or limited) educational opportunities, health care, and other social services. Approximately 75 percent of all street children live at home, but the remaining 25 percent spend all or most of their time on the street. These latter children, in addition to suffering from the problems mentioned above, are also victims of drug addiction, general exploitation, criminal acts, sexual abuse, and sometimes frighteningly high levels of violence.

Although traditional assistance programs and social services attempt to meet the needs of street children, many children still remain outside of the "institutional box" and "fall through the cracks". In fact, as the widely publicized murders of street children in Brazil indicate, interventions concerning the street children problem are sometimes frighteningly dehumanizing.

Data sources and Methodology

110 respondents were selected from the universe by the use of snow ball sampling. The techniques used for the collection of data were interview schedule.

Results and Discussion

Results show that 45.4% respondents are 4-11 years and 54.5% are 12-18 years old. All respondents are boys because girls are not in streets in Pakistan. Above table shows 13.6% respondents are living in the joint family system. 67% Nucleus Family System and 19% are from the broken family System. 13.6% respondents families are less than 5 members, 79% respondents are 5 to 11 and 4.5 are 12 and above family size. 85.4% respondents are migrants and 14.5 are local. 95.7% respondents migrated with their Parents and 4.2% migrated with their friends. 10% respondents live at home and 90% live on streets. 20.9% respondents attended school and 79% are not. 7.2% respondent's family income is less than 1000, 78% are 1001 to 3000 and 14.5% have more than 3000 income. 73.6% respondents are in contact with their families and 26.3% are not. 39% respondents mentioned lack of affection as the reason for leaving home, 24.5% respondents left their homes due to school/madrasah violence, and 36.3% left due to eco-financial problems. 14.5% respondents were living on the streets for less than a year, 45% for 1 to 3 years, 22.7% for 4 to 6 years and 17.2 for more than 6 years. 88.18% respondents are happy more on streets than their home while 11.81% respondents are not happy on the streets. 11.8% respondents wanted to give up drugs, 20.9% want to do work, 17.2% want to start their own business, 11.8% wants to do nothing, 10% don't know what to do, 1.8% wants to help children 17.2% wants to get education and 9.0% wanted to become group leader of their group. (for more details see annexure)

Conclusion and Policy Options

110 respondents were selected from the universe by the use of snow ball sampling. The techniques used for the collection of data were interview schedule. Street children are more likely to initially prefer practical skills education required for day-to-day survival but may opt for more formal/non-formal education on growing older. Community mobilization strategies to develop monitoring/ early warning systems to identify children at risk of taking to street life and provide them with the alternatives. Development of viable alternative income generation for at-risk families. Creation of a non-threatening environment to facilitate children's participation. Improvement in networks and monitoring mechanisms to share information and experience and to evaluate progress being made.

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Annexure

Table 1: Age

Age	Number	Percentage
4-11	50	45.4
12-18	60	54.5
Total	110	99.99

Table 2: Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Boy	100	100
Girl	-	-
Total	100	100

Table 3: Family Structure

Family Structure	Number	Percentage
Joint	15	13.6
Nucleus	74	67.2
Broken	21	19
<i>Total</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>99.8</i>

Table 4: Family Size

No. of Member	Number	Percentage
Less than 5	15	13.6
5 to 11	37	79
12 and above	5	4.5
Total	110	97.1

Table 5: Are you migrated?

Place	Number	Percentage
Yes	94	85.4
No	16	14.5
Total	110	99.9

Table 6: With Whom

With whom	Number	Percentage
Parents	90	95.7
Friends	4	4.2
Others	-	-
Total	94	99.9

Table 7: Where do live in Sargodha

Living	Number	Percentage
At home	11	10
Unknown	-	-
On streets	99	90
Others	-	-
Total	110	100

Table 8: Attended school

Attended school	Number	Percentage
Yes	23	20.9
No	87	79.0
Total	110	100

Table 9: Family Income

Family Income	Number	Percentage
Less than 1000	8	7.2
1001-3000	86	78
More than 3000	16	14.5
Total	110	94.9

Table 10: Are you in contact with your family?

Contact with family	Number	Percentage
Yes	31	73.6
No	29	26.3
Total	110	99.9

Table 11: Reasons for leaving home

Reason	Number	Percentage
Lack of affection	43	39
School/Madressah Violence	27	24.5
Eco-Financial Problems	40	36.3
Total	110	99.8

Table 12: How long have you been living on streets?

How long on streets	Number	Percentage
Less than a year	16	14.5
1 to 3	50	45.4
4 to 6	25	22.7
More than 6	19	17.2
Total	110	99.8

Table 13: Are you happier on streets as compared to your home?

Happier on Streets	Number	Percentage
Yes	97	88.18
No	13	11.81
Total	110	99.9

Table 14: Future Plan

Future Plan	Number	Percentage
Give up drugs	13	11.8
Do work	23	20.9
Don't know	11	10
Nothing	13	11.8
Own business	19	17.2
Help children like me	2	1.8
Group leader	10	9.06
Get education	19	17.2
Total	110	100