

A SCENARIO OF STREET CHILDREN IN LUDHIANA CITY

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Abstract: Children live and work on the street because their parents are poor, they are orphans, or they have run away from home, often to escape abuse. They are invariably malnourished, receive scant education and medical treatment, and are involved in child labour from an early age. The term street children refer to children for whom the street has become their real home. They are not necessarily being homeless or without families, but live in situations without protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults. Street children face difficulties in providing themselves with good sources of food, clean drinking water, health care services, toilets and bath facilities, and adequate shelter. They also suffer from absence of parental protection and security; there is a lack of any kind of moral and emotional support. There are a number of factors that lead children to living on the street. One root cause that has been identified is poverty. 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. Observing the present scenario of street children in Ludhiana city, the study aims to determine the working hours of street children spending in street activities. The study was based on 160 street children aged 9-12 years equally distributed over gender by administering a self-structured Interview Schedule. The study was conducted in different locations of Ludhiana city viz, railway station, bus stand, traffic lights, nearby markets etc. Home based street children was purposively selected by using snowball sampling technique. The result of the study highlighted that that boys usually work for longer duration as compared to girls. Major proportion (46.25%) of street children work for 1-6 hours a day in street

whereas 28.75 per cent children work for 6-9 hours and 25.00 per cent spent 9-12 hours a day to earn their day to day living. Majority of the children (56.25) were hit by motorbike whereas 18.75 per cent of them were hit by car and 12.50 per cent of the respondent were hit by bicycle and fell down from bus respectively. Information regarding children attending school revealed that out of the 160 street children, 54 respondents were attending school. All of the 54 respondents were reported to be attending government school.

Keywords: Children at risk Child abuse, Homeless children, Street children, vulnerable group.

INTRODUCTION

India is home to millions of indigent children. Many of them — all too often illiterate, sick, and malnourished — live in neglect with wretched families who cannot take care of them. Millions more are forced into the work force at the time they should be learning how to read and write. Millions still live in the streets as a result of the loss of their loved ones, the breakdown of their families, or simply because they no longer could endure the abuses inflicted upon them by parents, relatives, and employers. In India, where the staggering economic growth continues to produce scores of nouveau riches, the distribution of wealth has grown increasingly unequal. Such growth has certainly not reduced poverty, which continues to afflict hundreds of millions (Care & Share 1997). India has the largest number of street children in the world. According to the United Nations, there are 11 million street children in India - the highest number in the world. However, independent figures estimate that the number is approximately 20 million (<http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/07/19/314515/study-india-street-kids-faceabuse/>). India has an estimated one million or more street children in each

of the following cities: New Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. There are major difficulties in trying to estimate the number of street children and the magnitude of difficulties they experience as these populations are not adequately covered by national census, educational and health data (Deb 2006). It is more common for street children to be male and the average age is fourteen (Naik *et al* 2011).

Proportion of street children is increasing rapidly in the metropolitan cities in India and the issue of street children has become a serious social problem. Such children are actually in a highly vulnerable state in our society as they learn things on their own from their surroundings since there is no one to teach them and they become the first ones to indulge in all wrong things. They face other risks due to frequent economic exploitation, including working long hours for low wages. Additionally, their education is frequently in jeopardy and they may be either exposed to or directly involved in at-risk situations, such as drug use or distribution, or gang activity. A study by UNICEF also examined the reasons why children may leave the family and found that some have left the family because of ill-treatment by their fathers or stepfathers or after the death of a parent. Others decided to leave in order to avoid parental control or because of the dire economic situation of the family. Still others left simply because they wanted to enjoy more independence from their families (UNICEF 1993). They are involved in various activities such as vending newspaper, food, flowers, begging, ragpicking, etc (Masud *et al* 1997). Due to the harsh environment in which they are forced to survive, street children are often characterized by stubbornness, aggressiveness, apparent selfishness, unstable emotional behaviour, lack of concentration, constant rebellion against authority, mistrust of others, and, sometimes, abusive behaviour towards other children, among other characteristics (Al-Zaqazik University website, www.zu.edu.eg).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (1) To determine the socio-personal profile and working hours of street children while involved in street activities.
- (2) To determine the kind of accidents encountered by street children.

METHODOLOGY

Location

The study was conducted in different locations of Ludhiana city viz, railway station, bus stand, traffic

lights, nearby markets etc.

Sample

The sample comprised of 160 street children aged 9-12 years equally distributed over gender. Home based street children was purposively selected by using snowball sampling technique.

Tools

A self-structured Interview Schedule was administered to study socio-personal profile and the number of hours street children spent in a day and the kind of kind of accident they met during the street activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background information of the respondents

The comprehensive background information of the respondents is presented in Table 1 which pertain to selected variables namely age, gender, native place, birth order, number of siblings, family type, family size, monthly income, education of parents and occupation of parents.

A probe into the native place of the sample children revealed that major proportion (40.00%) of the children belong to Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar (23.14%), Madhya Pradesh (13.75%), 6.88 per cent from Rajasthan and Nepal respectively, Odisha (4.37%), Punjab (3.12%) and Delhi (1.87%). The respondents were equally distributed over gender that is boys and girls (80 each). Furthermore, majority (51.87%) of the respondents in the sample were 11 to 12 years old whereas 48.13 per cent were 9 to 11 years old. With respect to birth order, major proportion (40.00%) of the sample children were first born, followed by second born (25.62%), third born (22.50%) and fourth born (11.88%) and even more than that, more than twenty eight per cent children had five and above siblings, followed by children (28.23 %) with four siblings and 27.50 per cent had three siblings. Only few children (15.62%) were found to be having two siblings. An overview of the family type revealed that majority (74.37%) of the sample children were from nuclear households, followed by joint family (11.87%) and single parent (10.63%). However, few of them were found to be living without parents (3.13%). As regards the family size, major proportion of the children (26.88%) had 7 family members, followed by 6 members (23.12%), up to 5 members (20.00%), 8 family members (17.50%) and even nine and more family members (12.50%).

With respect to monthly income more than thirty three per cent of the families (33.75%) were having income ranging from Rs 3000-4000/month, followed

Table 1: Socio-personal profile of the sample children

Variables	f	%
(n=160)		
Native place		
Delhi	3	1.87
Punjab	5	3.12
Orissa	7	4.37
Rajasthan	11	6.88
Nepal	11	6.88
MP	22	13.75
Bihar	37	23.13
UP	64	40.00
Gender		
Male	80	50.00
Female	80	50.00
Age (years)		
9 – 11 years	77	48.13
11 – 12 years	83	51.87
Birth order		
1 st born	64	40.00
2 nd born	41	25.62
3 rd born	36	22.50
4 th born and above	19	11.88
Number of siblings		
Up to two siblings	25	15.62
Three	44	27.50
Four	45	28.13
Five and above	46	28.75
Family type		
Nuclear Family	119	74.37
Joint Family	19	11.87
Single parent	17	10.63
Without parents	5	3.13
Family size		
Up to five	32	20.00
Six	37	23.12

Variables	f	%
Seven	43	26.88
Eight	28	17.50
Nine and above	20	12.50
Monthly income		
Less than 3000	18	11.25
3000-4000	54	33.75
4001-5000	52	32.50
5001-7000	18	11.25
7001- 9000 and above	18	11.25
Education of parents		
Father (n=150)	f	%
Illiterate	126	84.00
Up to primary	13	8.67
Primary and above (up to X)	11	7.33
Mother (n=153)	f	%
Illiterate	146	95.42
Up to primary	4	2.61
Primary and above (up to X)	3	1.97
Occupation of parents		
Father(n=150)	F	%
Driver	16	10.67
Labourer	72	48.00
Rickshaw puller	17	11.33
Street and vegetable vender	17	11.33
Beggar and ragpicker	19	12.67
Stay idle at home	9	6.00
Mother (n=153)	f	%
Housewife	57	37.25
Domestic worker	50	32.68
Street vender (selling low price items such as tissue paper, eatables, toys, etc)	10	6.54
Beggar and ragpicker	24	15.69

Variables	f	%
Labourer	12	7.84

Table 2: Per cent distribution of street children as per their working hours in street activities

(n=160)

Working hours/day	Boys	%	Girls	%	Total	%	Chi-Square
1-6 hours	25	31.25	49	61.25	74	46.25	12.20**
6-9 hours	19	23.75	27	33.75	46	28.75	
9-12 hours	27	33.75	13	16.25	40	25.00	

**P<0.01

Table 3: Distribution of street children as per the kind of accident they met while performing street activities

(n=16)

Kind of accident	f	%
Hit by Bicycle	2	12.50
Fell down from bus (while begging or selling low price items)	2	12.50
Hit by car	3	18.75
Hit by motorbike	9	56.25

Table 4: Per cent distribution of street children who attend school

(n=54)

Type of school	Boys	%	Girls	%	Total	%
Government school	22	40.74	32	59.26	54	100
Fees/charges						
Exempted	2	9.10	1	3.12	3	5.56
Free Education	4	18.18	12	37.50	16	29.63
Fee paid by the students	16	72.72	19	59.38	35	64.81

by Rs 4001-5000/month (32.50%), Rs5001-7000 and Rs 7001-9000 and above respectively (11.25%). However, some of the children belonged to the family who had Rs 3000 (11.25%), monthly income.

It is evident from the table that majority (84.00%) of the street children had illiterate father while 8.67 per cent fathers were educated up to primary and very few (7.33%) were educated till primary and even

more. Similarly information regarding mother's education also followed similar trend that is more than ninety five per cent (95.42%) of them was illiterate, very few (2.61%) studied up to primary and only 1.97 per cent studied till primary and above. The fathers of the street children were engaged in various occupations for earning their livelihood such as 48.00 per cent were working as labourers, 12.67 per cent were engaged in begging and ragpicking, 11.33 per

cent were rickshaw puller and street or vegetable vendor respectively, 10.67 per cent were working as driver and 6.00 per cent stayed idle at home. Furthermore, mother's occupation revealed that more than thirty seven per cent (37.25%) were housewives, whereas 32.68 per cent were working as domestic workers and nearly sixteen per cent (15.69%) were beggars and ragpickers, 7.84 per cent were working as labourers and 6.54 per cent were working as street venter (selling low price items such as tissue paper, eatables, toys, etc).

Working hours of street children

It could be envisaged from Table 2 that major proportion (46.25%) of street children work for 1-6 hours a day in street whereas 28.75 per cent children

Hence, the working hours were found to be associated with gender of the street children. The findings of the study are supported by Ali *et al* (2008) who stated majority of the children (81%) were males and the average age at beginning life on the street was under 10 years who were working for 8-12 hours daily with an average income of Rs. 40-60 per day. Street children spend most of their earnings on food and recreation. Their parents had low education levels and were either unemployed or employed in unskilled occupations and their social environment has adult males involved in drinking and gambling and in other anti-social, unhealthy practices. In support of the above studies Nigam (1994) found that 90 per cent of street children are working children with regular family ties who live with their families in India, but are on the streets due to poverty and their parents' unemployment. The remaining ten per cent are either working children with few family ties who view the streets as their homes or abandoned and neglected children with no family ties. They survive on the streets engaging in some income-yielding activities, and are also faced with many hazards (Aderinto 2000). Child beggary is prevailing in the cities. The most lucrative ventures for the child beggary are the temples, where people stuffed with godly feeling as the devotees are quickly motivated to part with money in order to earn more blessings. Child beggars are increasingly seen over rail \ foot over bridges and road signals, causing hardship to passengers. In Chennai city around 1500 child beggars are present on full time. Income of the child beggars is more than 60 per cent earning of the normal workers Rs. 30-100 daily. A small per cent of child beggars earn more than Rs. 100 per day (Velayutham 2004).

Kind of accidents encountered by street children

work for 6-9 hours and 25.00 per cent spent 9-12 hours a day to earn their day to day living. Data further revealed that more number of boys (33.75%) spent 9-12 hours a day working in street followed by 31.25 per cent working for 1-6 hours and 23.75 per cent boys were working for 6-9 hours a day. In case of girls, majority (61.25%) of them were found to be working for 1-6 hours followed by 33.75 per cent working for 6-9 hours and 16.25 per cent were reported to be working for 9-12 hours. Thus, it is evident from the table that boys usually work for longer duration as compared to girls. Statistically also there has a strong association between gender of the children and the duration of working. Since the chi-square value was also calculated to be highly significant ($\chi^2 = 12.20$; $df = 2$).

Street children have to face the daily hurdles being on street and they are more prone to accident because they live, work and keep on roaming on the street. Data pertaining to kind of accident met by street children is presented in Table 3 and it was observed that 16 (10.00%) children met with an accident during the work process.

Majority of the children (56.25) were hit by motorbike whereas 18.75 per cent of them were hit by car and 12.50 per cent of the street children were hit by bicycle and fell down from bus respectively. Accident mostly occurred while performing street activities like begging, selling low price items, cleaning cars etc. They had reported of minor injuries like bruises and bleeding due to the accident but none of them reported of being attended by the person who hit them or the spectator. They were taken care by their parents, relatives, siblings or friends whoever they were with them at that moment. Deb & Mitra (2002) in a study indicated that twenty-three children out of 50 (46%) were injured while working on the street. By the nature of their work and lives, they are on their own largely unprotected by adults, and become vulnerable to many dangers and abuses (Teuns 1990).

Street children attending school

Data regarding children attending school is presented in Table 4 and results revealed that out of the 160 street children, 54 (33.75%) children were attending school. All of them (33.75%) reported to be attending government school. It is evident from the table that more number of girls is attending school as compared to boys. Majority of the boys (72.72 %) are studying by paying fees while 18.18 per cent boys were studying in free education and 9.10 per cent boys were reported to be exempted from school fees.

Similarly majority of the girls (59.38 %) were studying by paying fees followed by 37.50 per cent studying in free education and 3.12 per cent girls were exempted from paying fees. Gender discrimination in education is not evident from the result. However, the percentage of boys attending paid school was found to be more than the percentage of girls studying by paying fees. It was further revealed that the fee ranges from Rs 20-60 per month. In contrary to this Saini and Vakil (2001) found that some of these migrated children spend their childhood years working and living on the streets and have no opportunities for play or school. However, education for street and working children in India, programme for children in India has enabled the organization to provide substantial funding and technical support for educational activities in favour of children in difficult circumstances. UNESCO is to play a key role in helping a coordinated policy planning at national, regional and international levels to ensure that all children, with special emphasis on girls and children in difficult circumstances from ethnic minorities have access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality by 2015 (UNICEF 2000).

Kathuria (2007) examined the experience of civic engagement, sense of belongingness to community and adjustment among school versus non-school going street/working children. It was found that both formal and non-formal education system have an impact on the street/working children. Children enrolled in formal education system were reported to have greater adjustment in the context of family and school. Resiliency, well being and future life planning in the lives of school and non-school going street children was studied by Garg (2007) and the results demonstrated the role of the school in overcoming and empowering the children against the risk factors which they witness due to poor economic conditions. Results of all the three variables (resiliency, well being and future life planning) under study were noted to be high for the school going children as compared to non-school going children and children enrolled with non-formal education system. School was thus seen as one of the most important social agency fostering self-esteem in the child. It helps in reduction of the mental and physical disturbances, hence promoting the ability to plan for future and set goals which will be of value for the child. Similarly a comparative study of street and non-street children in South-Western Nigeria to see the Social correlates and coping measures of street-children conducted by Aderinto (2000) revealed that

street-children are mostly males having low-level of education, and come from families with five or more siblings. Parents of street-children commonly had low education and were mainly found in unskilled occupations, leading to contract polygynous marriages which are also often characterized by marital disruption. Street children also left home because of parental/familial reasons, chiefly among which was the inability of their parents to meet with their expectations.

CONCLUSION

The problem of street children is multifaceted and needs to be understood in proper perspective. Street children start working from very early age and they work for long hours and the result of the study highlighted that boys usually work for longer duration as compared to girls. The income generating activities of street children originate because of poverty and accompanying social disorganization. These youths are heterogeneous in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, but the majority comes from families that have been disruptive or dysfunctional in some way. Street children have to face the daily hurdles being on street and they are more prone to accident because they live, work and keep on roaming on the street. They met with different kind of accident like hitting by a bike/car/ bi-cycle or falling down from bus and accident mostly occurred while performing street activities like begging, selling low price items, cleaning cars etc. They had reported of minor injuries like bruises and bleeding due to the accident but none of them reported of being attended by the person who hit them or the spectator. They were taken care by their parents, relatives, siblings or friends whoever they were with them at that moment. During the process parents hardly think of educating their children and an extensive research have shown that education of street children in India is very poor and often non-existent. However, results of the study revealed that some of the children are attending nearby government schools and it was evident that more number of girls is attending school as compared to boys. So, Professional social work intervention strategies are necessary to address their needs and problems. The solution lies in educating these children, and not just education, but imparting quality free education is very much needed for their development.

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