

The Unique Circumstances of the Life of Street Children

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Abstract

Because of their unique circumstances, it is uncommon to describe street children positively. Their world is demoralizing, dispiriting, and disenchanting and their future appears formidable and arduous as society habitually rejects, scorns, and despises them. Their unique circumstances refer to their situations which are always unusual. Since they are considered, they habitually accept that they are inferior and worthless. Their unique situation is somewhat paradoxical. While they are citizens who have equal rights and opportunities the latter is oftentimes unattainable, and their situations are unequal. This author argues that the dignity of these children must be recognized and respected. They are normal human beings who find themselves homeless because of convoluted circumstances. It is complex to comprehend their peculiar situations and the reasons why they are homeless. This study addresses their unusual way of life so the public can be more aware of their various circumstances.

Keywords: Street Children, Homelessness, Rehabilitation, Inclusive Education, Inclusion, Illicit Substances, Violence, Poverty, Diversity, Equity, Equality

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Introduction

This author firmly affirms that although street children are marginalized, they can be rehabilitated and contribute to society. This is very contentious because discrimination against them is so pervasive that it is almost impossible to eradicate and see their good. A review of the literature indicated that there is a dearth of information about their unique circumstances. Thus, this non-empirical research offers a comprehensive review of the various idiosyncrasies of these children. The research question guided this research. Can street children make a valuable contribution to society? This paper is structured under the following three headings: Street Children: An Overview of Their Lives, Street Children: Obstacles They Encounter Daily, and Street Children: their Unique Circumstances. The methodology is offered, and the results are discussed.

Literature Review

On the one hand, street children appear to be very resilient, and robust. They are violent, they also steal, commit crimes, and take harmful substances. On the other hand, they constantly experience tremendous affliction and tribulation. Endris and Sitota (2019) opined that they feel inferior and have diminished self-concept. Unsurprisingly, they suffer from depression, anxiety, and trauma, which then may lead to substance abuse and a risk of committing suicide. Hence, they are the most vulnerable in society because they habitually face rejection and repudiation. On the streets, they encounter several obstacles. Poverty is a major cause of their presence on the streets. Being homeless, they are susceptible to all types of hardships: domestic violence, physical and mental abuse, or sexual abuse and drug abuse. Lalor (1999) stated that they also suffer from malnutrition, chronic drug addiction, and communicable diseases. Because of these peculiar circumstances, they are desperate, demoralized, and disheartened. Their unique situations make life unbearable and meaningless because there are few

alternatives. Chimdessa (2022) surmised that they lack freedom, have limited education, and experience challenges with health. Their bizarre situations make them defenseless. People of goodwill could make their space more friendly and accommodating by providing them with the essentials for life. While their situations are grotesque it is not impossible to transform. It is against this impenetrable background that this research was conducted.

Street Children: An Overview of Their Lives

Formulating a single consistent description of street children is compound because various organizations and countries use several definitions to refer to them. This indicates that globally there is a lack of concurrence on the term, which differs among several institutions. It is also arduous to quantify them because they are unknown to government officials. They are also transient because they do not want to be found since they are terrified of figures of authority who could beat or imprison them. Unsurprisingly estimates fluctuate according to the methodologies and definitions used in socioeconomic, political, or other conditions. This means that current methods of defining and counting street children are often unreliable and incomplete. Chimdessa (2022) mentioned that globally street children have been under-represented in all spheres of life. What is clear is that the literature presents them negatively. For example, Ghosh (2022) posited that many street children are ignorant of their basic human rights, which include satisfactory access to social and health services, the need for education, and protection against exploitation.

Purnomo and Suryono (2023) noted that street children are homeless, excluded, and alienated from society. Street life is harsh and miserable because they are treated without care and affection. Purnomo and Suryono (2023) further argued that they live in woefully inadequate and unacceptable conditions and are branded as a nuisance. Similarly, Lyn (2021) opined that street children are impoverished and destitute, and endure a miserable life. They have no fixed abode or job and are discriminated against by society. Due to this peculiar scenario, they are susceptible to all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Lyn (2021) also noted that they consider the streets as their dwelling place. Miller (2023) claimed that street children are always portrayed in an unfriendly manner and are marginalized and ostracized. In addition, Quainoo (2020) and Salihu (2019) indicated that they always wear filthy clothing, walk barefoot, and engage in selling almost anything to survive. Some scavenge the garbage heaps and do menial tasks in restaurants and pubs, others work as cleaning toilets, washing vehicles, shining shoes, or selling and using illicit substances. A review of the literature noted that since the streets are their dwelling place they inevitably receive national and international public attention, which of course is always derogatory and discriminatory. This only contributes to their already existing pathetic state. According to Lyn (2021) and Ghosh (2022), this misanthropic attention is unhelpful since it festers public outrage and resentment toward these children. In addition, law enforcement officials are encouraged to forcefully remove them from public spaces (Lyn, 2021).

It is still uncertain why children are homeless, but Aluko (2021) and Parveen (2019) argued that violence, abuse, torture, abandonment, neglect, and poverty are some of the principal causes of their presence on the streets. Parveen (2019) and Salihu (2019) surmised that unemployment, family breakdown, child abuse, and neglect also make them homeless. They live on the roadside and in public places such as markets, subways, and bus stations, sell items, or beg for money and food (Abate et al., 2022; Adebayo & Olaogun, 2019; Joshi, 2021; Malindi and Molahlehi, 2020). Mention must be made of this distinctive and paradoxical scenario. On the one hand, they can be seen almost everywhere in most major cities, at traffic signals, crowded marketplaces, near restaurants, and even at places of worship. On the other hand, they remain invisible, constantly ignored and disregarded by everyone (Parveen 2019). According

to Azzam et al. (2021), these inappropriate images undeniably illustrate the harsh and brutal reality of street children.

Due to poverty, homelessness, or abandonment, these children are forced to live on the streets and engage in illicit activities as a means of survival. They are often forced into exploitative and risky predicaments, and susceptible to abuse, neglect, and criminal behavior. Their daily life is marked by the struggle to earn a meager income, living on the fringes of society. Azzam et al. (2021) also explained that while it is admirable that these children continue to survive in dispiriting situations, it is important to address the root causes of homelessness so they can be provided with better opportunities, meaningful education, and satisfactory support to experience a different life.

Street Children: Obstacles They Encounter Daily

Street children face numerous hindrances daily. Some of them are the absence of love, care, and attention. Their education is limited, and they are unaware of their rights and privileges. They feel inferior and do not have a connection with their families and are denied the protection and the comforts of family life. They are susceptible to exploitation, whether it is physical, mental, sexual, or economic (Dankyi & Huang, 2022; Hasan & Chaitee, 2022, Mekonen et al., 2020; Msangi, 2017). They are also exposed to health hazards, and chronic communicable diseases, and are vulnerable to malnutrition, hunger, and unsanitary conditions (Deb et al., 2020; Jariego, 2021). Economic exploitation is particularly prevalent, as employers often pay them inadequate wages or extort their labor. Mention must be made that girls are at a higher risk of sexual exploitation since they are constantly harassed by their male counterparts and even police officers.

Due to a lack of trust in law enforcement, many cases of abuse are not reported, and the perpetrators are unpunished. It is understandable why these children are intimidated and coerced into illicit and illegal activities such as prostitution, begging, and drug peddling (Amoah & Nyamekye, 2022; Ewunetie et al., 2022; Odoyo et al., 2019). This situation is further exacerbated by the regular harassment and extortion from police officials and figures of authority. It can be concluded that street children are prone to adopting anti-social behaviors and felonious habits. According to the literature (Kaiser & Sinanan, 2020; Mia & Islam, 2021; Ramaswamy & Seshadri, 2020), these children lack basic education and proper parental guidance, which causes them to develop unacceptable habits such as using illegal substances and consuming alcohol. Some also engage in villainous activities like theft, drug peddling, and pickpocketing. They are persistently confronted with psychological, social, educational, and emotional challenges, while being completely unnoticed and forgotten by the public, and are regarded as a nuisance.

This continuous neglect by the public and figures of authority consistently exacerbates and embitters this scenario. Concrete, holistic, and meaningful efforts must be made to properly confront homelessness, and provide these children with ample care, protection, education, and opportunities for a better standard of living. Thus, it is almost impossible to address their distinctive scenarios. According to Kertati and Cristiani (2022), children who are homeless are a source of community concern since they are believed to be dangerous and impede movement on the streets. Since most street children are young, their parents allow them to roam the streets without supervision, and this makes them vulnerable. Vameghi et al. (2023) also noted that because street children are ostracized, they experience severe violations of their rights and face multiple deprivations. Similarly, Ally and Paul (2022) mentioned that street children are susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation. Kaplan and Çuhadar (2020) surmised that children

become homeless and engage in unsatisfactory labor due to various factors, such as family feuds, socioeconomic conditions, peer pressure, and bullying.

Karami et al. (2017) identified several conditions that make them homeless. Some are dire financial constraints with families, appalling poverty, and unemployment, as well as cultural, social, and family factors like migration, war, and lack of parental guidance. They also mentioned that individual, biological, and psychological components also play a role, including personality traits, mental capacity, and societal ostracization. Karami et al. (2017) proposed two approaches to address the issue of street children. The Preventive which restrains them from becoming homeless, and the Corrective which focuses on improving their conditions by reintegrating them into their families and communities. Setyowati et al. (2023) pointed out that there is a lack of effective regulations to address the problem of street children. They also stressed the need to accept and understand the importance of rehabilitating these children.

Street Children: Their Unique Circumstances

It is undeniable that street children face many unique circumstances. Some of them are poverty, lack of resources, limited education, exposure to violence and extortion, poor health, and exclusion from the community. Baba (2024) affirmed that poverty is a global phenomenon that devastates street children. It is also complex, multi-pronged, and multifaceted and is anchored in the economic, social, and political spheres of life. According to Poulsen et al. (2019) and Muda et al. (2022), poverty among children does not only consist of the lack of money. It is multi-dimensional, and it is manifested in multiple ways like deprivations from essential needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Handayani et al. (2024) opined that homeless children are synonymous with poverty and poverty creates an increase in street children.

According to proper educational services are pivotal to the welfare of children and since street children form part of society they must not be deprived of this privilege. They further noted that many of them are undocumented live in dire poverty and lack funds. In addition, Sulaiman et al. (2024) argued that some of them experience tremendous difficulties with their personality and antisocial behavior, prohibiting them from being educated. Although there are hurdles Cahyani et al. (2021) affirmed that education is essential for proper survival. They also noted that it empowers people to increase their abilities and thus, attain their goals and aspirations. They further added that education ought to be profitable and cater to the needs of all students, even street children. Hasan et al. (2022) supported this view and claimed that education is fundamental and ought to be compulsory for all, even street children.

While education is a driving force, they are unattainable for street children due to acute poverty, increased violence, and issues about being homeless. The Unicef (2021) stated that more than one-third of all children who engage in child labor are excluded from school. This is quite alarming when one considers that education is important, but Titi and Ika (2022) stated that street children form part of the less fortunate in society and they experience many difficulties in psychosocial, emotional, and intellectual development aspects. The research findings by Prasad (2021) and Dutta (2018) demonstrated that trying to educate street children is convoluted. In the first place, most of the educators lack proper working facilities and equipment that foster the teaching and learning process. Prasad (2021) also highlighted that children are given clothes and school uniforms once a year, but these clothes are very cheap and do not last and some of the children do not even get the correct sizes. Thus, there is a marked difference in appearance between street children and other students. To compound this scenario, Dutta stated that street children look for every excuse not to attend school. Even while they are at school they need to be constantly supervised and heavily monitored. When this

surveillance is absent, they often forget about school and return to the streets. Thus, it is a perpetual battle to keep them in schools.

A Closer Look at Street Life and Street Culture

The term “street” does not exactly convey the same meaning for street children as it does for the public (Aptekar & Stoecklin, 2014). It is instructive to mention that the word “street” forms an integral part of life for street children. It is their world, their environment; their way of life, their abode (Aptekar & Stoecklin 2014). They make friends and join different gangs merely to survive on the streets. They also socialize, have their meals, and sleep on the streets. A review of the literature, by Makofane (2014), Nega et al. (2021), Reza and Bromfield (2019), Sorber et al. (2014), and Stephen and Udisi (2016) recognized the plight of street children. They stated that street children are always associated with acts of being socially susceptible and vulnerable to their environment; both as causes and victims. In almost every part of the world, there is a growing presence of street children. Darragh (2019) stated that globally these children experience a poor quality of life which is often marred by violence.

Research in Bangladesh by Reza and Bromfield (2019) revealed that street children are exposed to all types of abuse and extortion. Their findings also mentioned that street children habitually perform: “3-D” jobs dirty, dangerous, and demanding. These children do not possess a permanent residence or have a comfortable place to lay their heads. Hence, it is not unusual for them to dwell and sleep in abandoned shops, stores, cinemas, and derelict marketplaces. Some even live in bus terminals, railway stations, and under bridges. These places are not hygienic and are riddled with rats and other animals that could spread disease. They drink water from the drains and use public bathrooms and toilets where available. It is important to note that some girls, because they are more vulnerable, often spend their nights with security guards. This type of behavior only compounds their peculiar scenarios and makes them susceptible to further abuse (Okoequale et al., 2020). In this way, the distinct scenarios of the life of street children are compounded. Irawati et al. (2021), this vicious cycle continues, and street children suffer considerably.

In general, culture denotes customs, habits, and beliefs. It provides tradition and information that narrates how certain events were carried out in the past. Akande (2009) affirmed that certain customs and beliefs can help to explain events that have occurred in the past. Customs can help to make the social adjustment of what to expect and how to behave in each situation. Akande (2009) opined that several factors help to form various cultures, and the environment is one such area. For example, people who live in rural areas where there are often vast expanses of fertile soil typically become farmers and cultivate the land. Cooperation by all residents is often required for the successful cultivation of crops. Thus, it is not unusual for farmers to be seen working together, tilting the soil, irrigating the land, or reaping the harvest. Those who do not conform would not be good co-workers. As a result, Akande (2009) argued that socialization depends on such responsibility cultures emphasize conformity and concludes that the realities of an environment create the condition for the development of cultural, socializing, and behavioral patterns.

Street children dwell in an environment of hostility. They are neglected by members of the public and they often lack proper parental guidance. Ehsan et al. (2017) and Eriksen and Bwambale et al. (2021) claimed that people raise children differently. Children who are brought up in a warm, supportive, and caring environment usually turn out optimistic and well-adjusted. However, those who are raised in a cold, indifferent, uncaring manner and are subjected to frequent punishment and abuse are pessimistic. They perceive themselves as inferior and do not like themselves. They are usually unresponsive and adjust poorly to changing

circumstances. Ayenew et al. (2020) mentioned that by trying to appreciate street culture, people realize that ideas and understandings can be found in collective life through anthropological fieldwork. Such work is interpretive, and evocative and raises many questions.

The telling of stories and the creation of myths can help people perpetuate a certain opinion about a particular culture and its lifestyle. This point of view may not always be purely negative. This is so because words, stories, myths, music, paintings, and objects are considered symbols. Symbols encode meanings and help people recognize culture (Asante & Nefale 2021). Rituals facilitate changes and certain rituals carried out by street children orient them to street life and are easily identifiable. They wear earrings, have tattoos over their bodies, smoke, swear, have a filthy appearance, practice “free sex” and use lurid gestures and slang. Street children whose very manner of dressing does not conform to that of mainstream culture are perceived as outsiders. Street children who use unconventional language are sometimes regarded as outsiders from the mainstream culture. Street children are often regarded as uncouth. They are troublemakers and delinquents. Therefore, the public may not be able to identify with those who live on the streets. They may experience great difficulty in trying to comprehend street culture that may appear peculiar to them.

Methods

Apropos data was obtained through contemporary studies, methodical review, and meta-analysis. This was further complemented by secondary information from the internet from May 2024 to November 2024. Some of the sources included various databases. EBSCO is an outstanding facilitator of academic research of e-journals, magazine subscriptions, and eBooks. APA PsycArticles offers comprehensive peer-reviewed scholarly and scientific articles on psychology and related fields. APA PsycInfo, a vital tool combines a wealth of content with precise indexing so researchers can easily source. SCOPUS gives numerous peer-reviewed literature and web sources on a variety of academic subjects. The Web of Science is a research platform that provides access to many scholarly literature, citation indexes, and other resources. In addition, a thorough hand screening of relevant journals was conducted, including the International Journal of Inclusive Education, Exceptional Children, Educational Research and Reviews, International Social Work, International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, and Child Abuse and Neglect. To maintain the focus and achieve the objectives of this non-empirical research, specific terms such as street children, homeless, stigmatization, labeling, prejudice, abuse, illicit substances, and poverty were utilized in the search. Thus, this research employed careful investigation and analysis techniques, including text criticism, critical examination of biographical studies, and narrative analysis. The research question that guided this study was addressed. Can street children make a valuable contribution to society?

Limitations

While this study contributed to an understanding of the unique circumstances of street children there are some limitations. The method relied on personal observations, integrative literature, reflection on contemporary issues, and the authority and experience of various authors. It was not anchored in practical observation and first-hand experimentation. Since there was also no empirical data, the arguments presented are more susceptible to criticism. In addition, this research may have overlooked relevant studies because it was not possible to capture all the information from online databases. It is suggested that more fieldwork and the inclusion of the actual voices, experiences, thoughts, and opinions of those who work with street children could be done. In this regard, future studies could incorporate non-empirical and empirical methods, embracing both the scientific field and the research outcomes being analyzed.

Result and Discussion

Support of Street Children

Very often programs are mounted to rehabilitate street children and there is no consultation with them. Although they are deprived and neglected, they are humans and form an integral part of society and thus, they need to express their concerns. This researcher proposes that these children must be allowed to express themselves. Their voices must be heard because they are the ones who can best explain what they are experiencing. After all, it is their life, and they ought to make decisions that they deem appropriate and describe their unique circumstances. When they are given a voice, they are motivated to think, and this builds their self-esteem and accentuates cognition.

Giving street children opportunities to speak liberates and emancipates them from the conventional and authoritative attitude that certain members of mainstream society may hold toward them. Although they are vulnerable, they are quite capable of making their representation. Many street children think that mainstream society is oppressive and intimidating, and they do not trust them. Thus, street children must be given a voice. Having a voice is the only way they achieve freedom. When this opportunity is denied, they internalize their disenchantment and become frustrated. They tend to become more withdrawn from society, resentful, and aggressive. Some of them harbor this disenchantment and the resulting pain, fear, confusion, negative self-esteem, and low expectations further compound their unique circumstances. When listening is achieved meaningful programs suited to their needs could be implemented.

Building relationships and bonds with street children can be accomplished by playing games, helping them with tasks, and learning their language. This leads to providing basic care such as food, clothing, and shelter. Educators could teach them proper life skills, and explain their rights, and the dangers of using illicit substances. Depending on their circumstances, some of these children can be educated in mainstream classrooms. Others can be accommodated in vocational training. These children could be given legal aid, health care, and social services. This program could be extended to include the wider community, parents, and government officials.

Conclusion

It must be noted that the bizarre scenarios of these children cannot be easily addressed. Rehabilitation and giving them meaningful education seem to be a possible solution. However, this process is convoluted and complicated to attain because these children are marginalized, ostracized, and stigmatized for life. Their scars are deep and cannot be easily removed. They are constantly discriminated against, and therein lies the unique circumstances. In this regard, the public ought to be fully cognizant of the fact that all children are a source of hope and could be a major element for the development of a better society, nation, and indeed a better world. This research explored the peculiar scenarios of street children and tried to justify the need for them treated as equal citizens. At the same time, it mentioned the complexity of attaining this objective. This process is not easy. It is demanding, challenging, and time-consuming. Therefore, government institutions, stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and all those interested in the welfare of children should always engage in meaningful and regular dialogue. In this way, they can ascertain and appreciate the urgent need to assist these children.

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