

Review

A Study on Street Girls Children of Karachi: A Situation Analysis

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Abstract

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The last century has witnessed great turmoil for the humanity. The growing poverty and increasing wealth for few only thus creating extreme frustration and sense of disparity among the masses all over the world, poverty pushes children from poor families on to the streets in order to survive the phenomenon of street children in multi-faced. The combination of family, economic, social, emotional and political factors or stresses plays an important role in the situation over the past few years; the world has witnessed an increase in the number of children on the streets, to an extent that today the numbers have reached epidemic proportions. Poverty, physical and mental abuse, negligence and family problems are major factor that leads to take refuge in the streets. However once out of their own, they have very little chance of finding assistance and encounter dangers and excesses that are sometime fatal to them hurt, sick and deprived of everything from prostitution because an easy way to earn more money. The girls living on the street are the most striking example of the failure of family system and social policies universally all children lack power toward off abuse and exploitation, but street children are even more vulnerable because they do not have parents to protect them, while absolute poverty nullifies any possibilities of protection either by the community or by the state. Researcher wants to identify and analyze the problems faced by the street girls in Karachi through this study.

Keywords: Exploitation, Problems, Street girls, Vulnerabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The term refers to any person under the age of 18 (UN-Child Right Convention-A1) while the term street children UN (UNICEF 1990) define as:

“Street children as girls and boys for whom the streets has become their home or source of livelihood, and who are invade quarterly protected or supervised by responsible adults”.

UNICEF (1986) divides street children in three types;

- i. Children on the street: children have worked on the streets because of their families need the money to survive.
- ii. Children in the street: children from poor families who sleep on the street some come from unprivileged parts of

the country into the mega cities other have runaway. Some of those are children abandoned at a very early age who have no or little knowledge of their families.

iii. Children of the street: orphan and abandoned children whose parents have died because of illness or way or to whom simply impossible to look after their children.

There are two additional facts that warrant attention in defining street children. One is the range of their genders, which is overwhelming made in the developing world and equally split between male and female in the developed world.

First time the phenomenon of street children has been

documented in 1848 states that

“Concerning abandoned children there is a general complaint that they are now a day’s exposed more to dogs than to kindness.”(Boswell, 1988). By 1992 there were at least 7 million homeless children in Russia due to the devastations from World War 1 and the Russia civil war . (Ball, 1996)

The reason of this phenomenon are varied, but are often related to domestic, economic or social disruption including, but not limited to poverty breakdown of homes and or families, political unrest, agricultural, sexual or physical or emotional abuse, domestic violence, turned away by pimps or internet predators, mental health problems substances abuse and sexual orientation or gender identity issues. (Barry, 2010).

Street children are an urban phenomenon Hundreds of millions of children today live in urban slums, many without access to basic services. They are particularly vulnerable because of the stresses of their living conditions.

UNICEF estimated 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world 14 years later UNICEF reported. The latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million 8 (UNICEF 2002) and even more recently the exact numbers of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens millions across the world. It is likely the numbers are increasing. (UNICEF, 2006).

The World Bank estimates that 45 % of the world population is forced to live with less than \$1 a day, of whom almost 50% are children. UNICEF (2012).An estimated 1.2 million children are on the streets of Pakistan. (UNICEF, 2005). Throughout the world in different countries and regions the phenomenon of street girls is not new as it has been in practice from generations to generation. The problems and challenges the girls face on the street are multiple and complex. The biggest problem they face, as told by the girls themselves, is shelter. Importantly shelter is not as significant for the boys as it is for the girl. (Tigist, 2010)

Similarly, the problem of street girls is much more marginal than that of boys. The girls have seen on the streets are often from street families or are coming there daily for selling and begging. In some cases domestic violence, sexual abuse, neglect and rejection are just some of the factors pushing girls to serve their family relationships and set free themselves from situations of violence and extreme vulnerability.

Objectives of the study

1. To know about the demographic background and the living standards of girls

2. To identify the factors which are supporting girl children living on the streets
3. To study about the educational status and knowledge.
4. To acquire about their experience about any technical work.
5. To identify the general health problems and their access to adequate health care.
6. To know about the reasons of working on the streets.
7. To find out the extent of substance abuse.
8. To discover about the prevalence of abuse, violence and sexual harassment amongst girls.
9. To understand about their awareness regarding HIV/AIDS knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

It was an exploratory and survey based research study. To finalize the universe of the study, first of all researcher identified the location where the groups of street girls hired or worked. On the basis of above criteria commercial areas of Saddar, Teen Talwar, Gulshan -e - Iqbal, Gulistan -e- Johar, Nazimabad and University Road were selected. As far as population was concerned it was consisted of all girls who had been working and living on the street during last 30days and had minimum contact with their families.

Sample

Girls of relatively young age groups were not able to comprehend several questions therefore exclude them from the study. Finally girls aged between 10-18 working / living or spending maximum time on the street and agreed to participate in data collection process were selected. Finally 115 girls were included in the sample.

Instrument

Data was collected through structured questionnaire together information on demographic living condition, characteristics, education, knowledge, and general health status, reason of working living on the streets, prevalence of abuse, violence, sexual harassment and awareness regarding HIV/AIDS prevention amongst street girls.

Procedure

Interviews took place in April and May 2013. Interviews was conducted during the day, in Urdu language, using the English questionnaire as a guide. Street girls were identified by the interviews using criteria such as appearance and assessment of their actions begging/

selling etc. selected street girls and shopping areas were also used to help identify additional street girls.

Data validation

Literature reviews, key informant interviews, individual interviews, focus group discussions and field visits to observe the street children, were all used in an attempt to validate the information using various sources.

Analysis of data

The total sample of street girl children considered represented a cross-section of different ethnic groups and religions.

1. It clearly emerges from Table no :1 that most of the girls found on the streets were Punjabi 26.6 % followed by Urdu speaking 20.7%pushto 16.3% and Sindhi 14.8%.majority of them was Pakistani 86.2 % where as 7.4% were Afghanis as well. It was found that 29.1 % of them are working in the streets since 1 year and 26.1% of them under the age group of 11-13 years followed by 28.1 % the age carder of 8 -10 year, whereas 31 % from 16-18 years age category.

2. Reasons which they had given of working on streets primarily were poor conditions of family (74.9%) secondly no one else was there in family to earn 21.7%. Also few 6.4% simply worked due to their family traditions and earn money to support their fathers who mostly are addicts.

3. Speaking about their family's demographics it was found that most of their family's lives in huts 49.3%slums 48.3 and few 20.5% also live on streets without shelter.

4. The information about family lifestyle when explored, it was found that such young girls found deprived with the need of love, security and recognition. A considerable ratio of girls working on streets belonged to the families where unstable or bad relationships was found between the parents it was absence of a caring relationship and lack of attention at home that usually precipitated the choice or forced acceptance of street life.

5. Quite surprisingly and disheartening, lot of girls were found married 26.1% most of them were of the ages between 16-18 yrs. and been married 5 or more years 11.3% or 3-4yrs. 7.4% and even for 1-2 yrs. 5.4%. Their husband who works 20.2% was mostly vendors. Those who were married also had children 23.2% and as they had not been married quite since long so they found having 1-3 children at an average 19.2% and most of them were satisfied with their life. Married girls working on the streets consistently proved it.

6. Regarding their academics, it was found that most of them never had attended any school 80.3% and could not be able to read or write 86.2 % where as those could they only could read 1.5 % and some could both read

and write also 7.9%.Those who attended school till primary level 17.2% whereas 1.5 attended religious schools (madrasa's).

7. Apart from academics when they were asked that they had some kind of technical education, quite a few responded in YES 27.1%. Skills that they had were sewing 11.8% embroidery 7.4% making stuff toys 2% or even pottery making 1.5% making Gajras 3.9% and Rilly 0.5%.

8. When asked whether they were interested in learning any kind of technical work majority replied in YES 57.6 %.

9. Their physical profile could be drawn as such that most of them found having three meals a day 65% or twice 31% few also 3.9% only have once in a day. Most of them bought their meals from hotels 28.6 % or begged 21.2% from their houses 17.7 %or even gets as alms 9.9%.

10. Question regarding whether they had suffered from any major illness since 30 days it was found that mostly 42.9 % did, and major were fever 16.7 % abdominal pain 7.4% skin diseases 3.9%, typhoid 3.4% followed by headache, pneumonia, weakness or even female specific disease at an average of 3% each. The treatment which they usually seek was mostly from general physician 21.7 % some went to hospitals 9.9% and quite a few did not consult any one.

11. While information related to financial conditions were taken their source of income was asked, most of them were vendors and engaged in selling small items like tissue papers, hand towel, kitchen cloths, flowers etc51.7% whereas a majority engaged in begging 25.7% involved in commercial sex exploitation 1.47%. Girls reported about multiple source of earning in which there were some vendors who also begging 1.9% beggars who were also involved in commercial sex exploitation of child 1.97% and vendors 0.49% as well.

12. Most of them 46.3% work for 6-8 hrs per day; few 26.1% were for 3-5 hrs whereas quite few 25.1% found working for more than 8 hrs. After working for such long hours usually 52.2% earned less than Rs.100per day, few 32% reported earning around Rs.100-150, some 10.8% earned Rs.151-120 and very few 4.9% earn more than Rs.250 it was found that majority 74.9 % gave money to family so not spending it so personally. Those who spend some amount, they usually spend it on clothes and accessories 23.2% or on food 19.2% or even on some kind of entertainment 3.4%.

13. When information regarding substance drug use was collected it was found that almost 39.9% use them. When asked about the kind of substance or drugs it was shared that they use chewing tobacco 17.7% grinded fresh tobacco leaves (naswar) 11.3% cigarettes 7.9% nutmeg 5.9% and even few use glue and opium (chars) 3.4% each. These drug substances either bought from shops 36% or friends supplied them 2.5%. It was found that at an average majority spend Rs.10-50, 27.6% daily on these drug substances, some spend Rs.50-100 30%

others Rs.100-150 23.3 % and few even spend Rs. 150-200 per day on such drugs substances 2%. Another important point need to be mentioned here that girls who admitted taking drugs belonged to commercial sex appeared to have feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and guilt.

14. Information about physical and physiological violence. When asked whether they had faced any kind of physical violence at work most of them 73.4% replied in YES. And it was mostly found in shape of beating 48.8% hitting and pushing 24.6%. The kind of harassment, tease touching 45.8% push to go through with sex for 18.2 % teasing/ humiliation 13.3%. When the information was gathered about risky practices and knowledge about HIV/AIDS it was found that, quite a high percentage face the danger of sexual assault 22.2%. Alarming attempt for assault was made on them, they mostly fell under the age group of 9-11yrs 7.4%, sometimes at 6-8 yrs. 5.4% sometime even so going as less than 6yrs. 3% whereas few also were of 12-14 4.9%, however a number of girls 12.8% was found engaged in commercial sex exploitation. Quite disheartening, majority of them were found unaware about HIV/AIDS 90.6%. Those who knew about it they mostly believe it was due to sexual intercourse 8.4% even very correctly said it was not using condoms 1.5%. They also knew that safe sexual intercourse could help in controlling HIV/AIDS 8.9% or even though avoiding blood transfusion 1%. Surprisingly and quite depressing that most of them not interested in getting HIV/AIDS knowledge 58.6%.

DISCUSSION

Pakistan like other parts of the world is also going through with the same trend marginalization of girls' child. In the most of eastern families, a daughter is viewed as reliability and she is conditioned to believe that she is inferior and subordinate to men.

Clearly, there are an increasing number of girls living on the streets of Karachi. There are many push factors which include poverty, poor socio-economic etc., parental mortality, exclusion from education and lack of support structures are the main drivers behind children ending up on the streets. During the period of data collection it was observed that there are some groups of people or organization offering services to girls living on the streets. Girls leave their homes because death of their parents, remarriage of their mother which ends up in facing physical abuse or sexual harassment by their stepfather, if father remarries they are tortured by their step mother, some leave home because they are ill-treated, are sold, or thrown by their parents because of superstitious beliefs or because their parents hate daughters are illegitimate, want to be independent and without constraints or because of the poverty, parents are addicts, due to harassment, sexual exploitation are just

some of the factors pushing girls to sever their family relationships and fend for themselves in situations of violence and extreme vulnerability. A girl arriving alone is vulnerable her disorientation makes her easy to spot. This Study showed that the respondent of the present study are facing a lot of insecurity while in the streets. For example, most of the respondents state lack of food, shelter and clothing and harassment as their major problems. Furthermore, the results of the study highlighted that the streets are dangerous and nearly all respondents reported having experienced some form of victimization. These girls experience specific problems related to adolescent female development and reproductive health. On the streets, risks are considerable with unplanned pregnancies poor nutrition and hygiene, violence, sexually transmitted diseases, no shelter, and the possible use of drugs. They do want to talk about what has befallen. Only after frequent personal encounters and much persuasion do these girls begin unveiling, little by little, the truth. These girls mull over their awful they start chewing betel, smoking, glue, sniffing and taking drugs. They end up believing these practices are their reason for living.

They may engage in sexual activities for money or simply to survive. They are vulnerable to sexual transmitted infections, including HIV, substance use including glue sniffing, illegal drugs and alcohol.

Some of these girls, who live on the street used drug to diminish hunger cols, emotional pain or to help them sleep or stay awake. Repeated use of these drugs can cause physical and psychological problems. When intravenous drug are used the additional risk of contracting HIV, hepatitis and other diseases exists. Collective all these characteristics make these girls more vulnerable to unintended pregnancy and poverty and lack of education and job skills also make them more vulnerable to all kinds of exploited.

Limitations

Following are the min limitations which might have an effect on this study, due to:

- Some girls being motivated to lie because they do not want to share their issues and reasons for living at street to the researcher.
- Lack of evidence based records with regard to the actual number of girls living on the street; the problem could have been exaggerated or under reported.

CONCLUSION

Although rapid economic development and urbanization change the role of girls and young females and give them some freedom and equality but still they are deprived of their rights and exploited at different stages of life. Such

economic development and urbanization results in influx of female as child, young as adult and becoming an important part of the machinery but still not enjoys the independent individual identity of that machinery. A part of their low status in the society their illiteracy and un-skill create further hurdles on their way towards a secure and respectable status and future. This vicious circle keeps on going further adding agonies in their lives. An effective and immediate government measures can improve the situation. Most of the work done by individuals or NGO's but despite their positive efforts, the challenge is much greater.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This problem is deep rooted and has multiple dimensions. The solution of this problem is highly dependent on knowledge-based decision-making of the government and non-government sectors positive response to deal this situation. There is a need to evaluate the shortcomings in the legislative framework, gaps in policies, and the need to align practice and theory with the requirements.

This study recommended following suggestions and policy planner can draw lessons to plan and provide better services.

1. Children who are deprived of family environment should have a healthy or secure access to appropriate forms of alternative care like day care centers, shelter home or counseling centers.
2. Support families of street girls and vulnerable girls train in parenting without any gender discrimination through counseling and parent's education should be improves. Also provide them help to enhance their financial resources and provide support needed to enable poor families to educate their children.
3. Communities and families need to be sensitized to understand their roles and responsibilities with regard to taking care of children in society especially vulnerable children.
4. Provide sufficient information to the girl children regarding rights, sexual relation, reproductive health, personal hygiene, consequences of drugs and HIV/AIDS.
5. Community program should be designed and implemented in such a manner that caters the issue of gender biases, safety and security, health and hygiene, education and skill development, and or linkage to all such organization who could be of any help in building positive environment for discriminated and marginalized group (girls).
6. Strengthen families and communities as primary safety nets through grass root work with families. Special emphasis should be made on skill development training programmers. This would help them to earn a better livelihood under family's care.
7. Provide them specific protection and services

including legal, recognition of their rights, protection from discrimination, harassment, and exploitation and also provide friendly services to children in need.

8. Strengthen capacity of government to deliver services, ensure quality, mobilize resources and make resources available through available through public-private partnership.

9. Awareness raising programmers through special talk shows magazines, walks and training workshops on sanitation and also establishes counseling rooms, protection center, care and support system, skill training and rehabilitation centers.

10. A code of conduct for child care workers should be developed, monitored, and enforced. Efforts to ensure a child friendly juvenile justice system in Pakistan respectful of children rights need to be continued.

11. Government should establish a proper set-up or institutional support to the street girls' children with the help of Philanthropists effort should be made to establish *safe shelter in the city*, if the services are established the problem of living could be minimized through counseling and other supportive mechanism (Equip the girls with life skills training and access to education.)

12. There is a need to promote effective inter-sect oral co-operation between government, civil society and all stakeholders in order to overcome this problem.

13. A strategic plan should be made with the help of all stake holders.

14. It is proposed that enhanced the monitoring the situation of street girl children with the help of law enforcement agencies.

15. It is the need of the day to develop guidelines for a strategy and plan of action on this issues .it is strongly suggested that polices should be planned to ensure that street girl's children's rights are protected if they are living on the streets in form of a group with a minimum standard of living.

End Notes

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