Causes and Consequences of Streetism among Street Children in Harar City, Ethiopia

Sofiya Endris*, Galata Sitota

Haramaya University

Corresponding author: Sofiya Endris, E-mail: sofiyaendris50@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the life of Harar City street children. In view of that, the following research questions were forwarded; what are the major causes that make children leave their homes for the streets? Do street children use psychoactive substances? What type of psychoactive substance do street children use? Based on these basic questions, descriptive survey design including quantitative and qualitative data gathering approaches were employed. Questionnaires and interviews were thus used to solicit information from 57 street children. The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation and frequency whereas the data gathered through interview were analyzed through narration. As the Study revealed, the major causes which forced children to runaway are ranging from escaping abusive parental punishment followed by poverty, hate of step parents to parental alcoholic behavior. Benzene sniffing, smoking, chewing chat, use of plastic are some of the substance abuse street children have commonly used. Even some of them also reported as if they have already begun using marijuana and hashish pretending to stand with hunger and cold. The research also distinguished as there are two types of street children. These categories include the street children who have completely lost touch with their families and relatives and entirely live on the streets and street children who have contact with their families. The study recommends how to properly address street children's socio-economic and psychological problems. For further studies, it is also recommended that research should be undertaken to explore the role of streetism in psychological wellbeing of street children.

Key words: Children, Street-ism, Harar City

INTRODUCTION

For children's healthy growth and development their physical, psychological and social needs must be fulfilled. If parents, families, community and society fail to provide these vital needs, it upshots negative consequences in the short and long terms of children's development over time. Violent conflicts, severe socio-economic crises like displacement, distraction of normal life, and separation from family and/or community are crucial factors in causing lifelong effects on children (Action for the Rights of Children [ARC], 2001).

Children should be provided with adequate care, protection and guidance that promote their positive emotional health and well-being especially at early ages by parents or other caregivers. Parents and communities have to play significant role in protecting and caring for children. Every home and community should inculcate culturally relevant skills, attitudes and ways of smart thinking in children (ARC, 2001). Despite the fact that the period of childhood is the time when children are totally dependent on their families in need of basic service and even for survival, in our today's modern world especially in developing countries many children are left alone on account of losing their parents for

sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV ADIS, famine, conflict, war and so forth which finally end up children's life in the streets.

UNICEF categories street children as children of the street and children on the street based on the children's street-life involvement. Children 'of the street' are children who are homeless, work, and sleep or live most of the time on the street without family support and children on the street are those who are mainly engaged in the street for economic activities but have relations with their families (UNICEF, 2006).

Many researches indicated that Streetism of children continues to grow dramatically worldwide. Most of these children work and live in streets of big cities of the developing countries. More than half, 650 million, of the world's 1.2 billion people living in poverty are children (Lindenberg, 2001). Due to the abandon and hidden nature of streetism, it is difficult to estimate the accurate number of street children worldwide, and estimates often vary from one source to another. In 1987, UNICEF estimated that over 50 million world children are exposed to street life, spending part or whole of their time in city streets working, begging or engaged in oth-

er illicit and criminal activities in their attempt to adapt to street life (Barnen, 1998).

After 11years, it was reported that the number of street children worldwide ranges from 30 million to 170 million. Other nongovernmental organizations estimated that there are 100 million children at risk (OMCT &SCF, 2000).

Sub-Saharan Africa often comprises the leading lines of the world's fastest urbanizing region of the developing countries. This urbanization trend is also regarded as a critical contributing factor for streetism. On the basis of this contextual feature, it is proven that authorities in Africa are experiencing significant levels of streetism (Urban Management Program [UMP], 2000). Ethiopia is one of the least developed countries of the world. The country is a host of tremendous problems, such as famine, population pressure, poverty, political instability, environmental degradation, lack of proper health service, illiteracy, poor sanitation, unemployment, underemployment, ethnic conflict, war, displacement, migration, HIV/AIDS and what not. It is estimated that 60% of the population live below the poverty line (MOLSA, 1992; cited in Abebaw, 2003). Therefore, it is easier to presume the fate of children in such a country. As with the global picture on street children, the data on street children in Ethiopia is very limited, and studies and reports on the subject have come up with varying estimates; therefore, it is very difficult to find the exact number of children living on the streets of Ethiopian cities. A report by CRDA estimated that approximately 200,000 children were working and living on urban streets, of which 150,000 reside in Addis Ababa (2006).

Besides social and biological impacts of life in the streets on children's over all development, its psychological impacts are also countless. For example, according to Jane and Maria (1996), the psychological consequences life in the street resulted in: lowself-esteem, lack of confidence, self-hate, feeling of outcast, unworthy, unloved and unlovable, and feeling degraded and violated are some of them. Therefore, it is worthy to study the causes of streetism of street children.

The world has seen an increase of children's streetism. The extent and nature of streetism of children is possibly one of the most serious social problems in urban areas of the developing world. Children have fled homes throughout history and for a number of social and individual reasons. The dimension, nature and reasons are depending on the economic, political, and social well-being of a nation, cultural and traditional settings, institutional interventions and the level of social harmony and peace (Veale, 1996). Like in many least developed countries, the growing number of street children is one of the most serious urban social problems facing Ethiopia today. In the country children form a sizeable segment of the population. Children aged below 15 accounted for 48.6% of the total population in 1994 (CSA, 1995). It was then estimated that about 27 million children between the ages of 5 and 15 lived on the streets in Ethiopia in 1994.

Various experts proposed risk socio-economic factors which are promoting children's streetism from diverse dimensions. Accordingly, mass streetism of children has been intimately linked with social network instability, poverty and ensuing rural-urban migration (MGLSD, 1999). Broken family

is taken by various experts to be the major causes for streetism (Gobena, 1994). He also points out that family disruption is prevalent among families with poor economic conditions. The urbanization process involves rural-urban migration. The migrant families overwhelmed with multiple adversities are unable to support their families in which case children are forced to join street life for better chance of survival (Eade, 1995). Family breakdown; urban poverty and migration are brought forth as militating factors which precipitate children to the street. Family institutions are pertaining to a lot of disorder. As a research study highlighted majority of children do not have stable, married biological and caring families. Many families are separated from their children and let children to struggle for survival by themselves including income generating. Many families are also predominantly characterized by loss parent, alcoholism and domestic violence (Kopoka, 2000).

Psychoactive drug abuse can cause a social and health problem that may have developmental effects on social, physical and mental of the abuser especially if they are children. Even though psychoactive substance abuse can cause these serious problems, many street children are involved in harmful use of psychoactive substances like chewing 'chat'. This habit can lead to excessive intake; increase the chance of misbehaving, violence, unprotected sex and unwanted pregnancy. Over time, the continued use of substances can lead to complications such as brain and liver damage (WHO, 2000). In support of this idea, Kibron (2008) reported that the majority of street children who took intoxicants were children 'of' the street. Kibron (2008) also reported that the majority of street children take any intoxicant such as smoking, alcohol drinking, benzene sniffing, chewing chat and the like pretending that it adds something to their lives or to cope with hard conditions on the street. The same study also showed that, the types of psychoactive substances street children use can be many and varied from place to place.

Harar city is one of the ancient cities in Ethiopian. Despite the fact that the emergence of this city was traced back to the 7th century, emerging as the center of Islamic culture and religion in the Horn of Africa, its development is not as expected due to different factors. However, the status of the city doesn't hold back stranger flooded to the city because among Ethiopians Harar city is considered as *small Ethiopia* since different ethnic groups live together peacefully which deemed to attract many migrants including children for diverse reasons. Therefore, the problem is worth studied for the following justifications:

First, with the continued growth of the town, there has been a growth in the number of children evident on the Harar city streets. Therefore, it is worthy to understand the reasons and motivations those compelled a child to leave home.

Second, there is no recent and accurate statistics to ascertain the exact number of children in Harar city. Although unofficial estimates put the number of street children in the town at more than 3000, no research has been directed to examine the circumstances of street children in Harar city. Thus, given abovementioned justifications and other related factors, the problem is worth studying. Hence, this study will be intended to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of streetism?
2. Do street children use substance abuse? What type of substance abuse they use?

METHODS

The aim of this study was to investigate the pushing factors of streetism for children living on the streets of Harar city. Descriptive survey research design was chosen for the present study. The design was selected because it is appropriate to explore facts as they are, without over exaggeration and/or simplification (Mcmillan and Schumacher, 2004 as cited in Yalew, 2013). In addition, it is very important design to gather data from large number of participants with a short period of time. Besides this, to find out the essential information, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were employed.

This section describes, among others, the study site, sampling techniques, instruments of data collection, and procedure of data collection followed by methods of data analysis.

Description of the Study Site

Harar, one of ancient and most popular cities in Ethiopia, is found in the eastern extension of the Ethiopian Highlands. The city is named after Harari People – locally known as '*Adere*', the ethnic group, once upon a time, represented nearly 100% of the population with in Jugol Walls which were built between the 13th and 16th centuries and Harar is best known for. It is 522 km east of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Harar is situated at elevation 1,885m above sea level. According to the Central Statistical Agency, in 2005, the City had an estimated ethnically diverse population of 122,000: Harari, Amhara, Oromo, Somali, Gurage and so forth. The population was composed of 60,000 males and 62,000 females.

From the late 16th century to the 19th century Harar City was functioned as a major commercial centre which linked Ethiopia, the entire Horn of Africa, Islamic trade routes with Arabian countries and the outside world through its ports. Harar Jugol, the ancient walled city, has been recognized by UNESCO as world cultural heritage site since 2006. It is sometimes known in Arabic as "the City of Saints". This city is also considered as "the fourth holiest city of Islam" with 110 mosques and with and 102 shrines (Wikipedia, 2017).

Harar started to be attractive especially due to its advantageous geographical location and political importance. It is a long-standing city-state connects both the interior and the coast, and developed into a successful commercial center which was established as an autonomous administration in1647. Between the first census conducted in 1884 and the last census conducted in 2007 the Harari population increases 300% due to changes in political boundaries and definitions. The 2007 definition divides the region into two as rural Harari (population, 84047) and urban Harari (population, 99368) for a total of 183,344 people.

As for population diversity Harar spans a variety of religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups. In the city, the largest of the population (69%) reported themselves as adherents of the Islamic religion, followed by Orthodox Christianity which makes up around 27% of total the population. Of Harar's population 52.3% is Oromo. The other major ethnic groups are the Amhara 32.6%, and Harari 7.1% and Guragies 3.2%. Harari and Afan Oromo are used as the first and the second official languages respectively. According to the 1994 census, 71.2% of the population was Muslims, 38.2% was Orthodox Christian and 0.9% was Protestants, 0.55% was Catholics and 0.1% was followers of other religious groups.

A cash crop product like chat (khat) is the dominant income generation for a number of habitants in the city. We can describe Harar City as the symbol of smallest Ethiopia because its population spans a variety of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Now days, Harar city is one of the fastest growing cities in Ethiopia which attracts many adults including children to the city from the rural area around the city and from other neighborhood cities.

According to a study published by the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey 2011, Harari Region men's literacy rate is 22.4% while the literacy rate for women's who are in reproductive age (15-49) is 30.3%. Pertaining to smoking cigarette the survey also included that the highest rate for men who smoked cigarettes is 26.6%. Looking at chewing chat (Khat) in Harari Region also indicates that the highest percentage of women who chewed is 39.2% while the rare of men who chewed is 81.9%.

Sampling and Sample Size

The study involved children living in the streets of Harar City. In order to draw participants for the study, since streets children are scarcely distributed in the city and difficult to find them together at one place purposive sampling technique was employed. Consequently, tracery data collections were made and in such a way that data were saturated after having data from 62 participants. Indeed, to ensure equal participation of both sexes, sex differences were cautiously entertained. Accordingly, 23 female and 39 male street children participated in the study. Indeed, analysis was made based on complete data collected from 57 participants.

Procedure of Data Collection

Before the actual data was collected information gathering activities were conducted, especially to pinpoint the places where street children gathered round. And then, since some of the street children are incapable of reading and writing, three data collectors were employed to facilitate data collection process. Before actual data collection were made a five-hour orientation on how to effectively facilitate data collection processes were given to employed data collectors. Then, data collectors were deployed to the place where street children gathered around in number. Following this, one-to-one communication was made between data collector and participants.

First of all, purpose of the study was briefed to the participants. Then, they are asked for the consent of participation to the study and oriented about the purpose and confidentiality of their response. In addition, the respondents were encouraged to respond honestly to all items. Finally, data collection was made as needed.

Instruments of Data Collection

Questionnaire and interview were employed for data collection. Here questionnaire and interview questions which were developed and employed for the same purpose by previous researchers were adapted and used. In order to check the viability and the competence of the questionnaire and the interview, experts from three different areas were requested and suggested for some improvements; based on their suggestions the instrument was refined and was prepared for data collection. Before the actual data collection, the instruments were translated into local languages; i.e., Afan Oromo and Amharic. Finally, local language version of the instruments was employed to collect the data.

Method of Data Analysis

A blend of both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods was made. The data collected through interviews were analyzed through narration whereas data collected through questionnaire were analyzed employing descriptive methods of data analysis such as frequency and mean were employed by using SPSS (version 20).

Findings

This part deals with obtained findings based on data analysis. The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Following summarization of respondents' background data, descriptive statistical methods were employed as to summarize the descriptive data.

Background of Participants

Background of participants is summarized in Table 1.

As can be indicated in the Table 1, 61.4 % male and 38.59% female street children were represented in the study. As regard to the place of origin, 45.6% from rural and 54.4% from urban were participated in the present study. With respect to family type they came from before streetism, 14% with their both mothers and fathers, 10.52% with their only mothers, 19.29 % with their only fathers, 24.56% with their step mothers, 21% with their step fathers and 10.52% with their relatives.

Reason Behind Children Leaving Home

As the major objectives of the study is to learn the reason behind why children left home for street lives, focus group discussion and guided interview were made and the obtained result summarized as follows in Table 2:

With pertaining to street life initiatives, among street children participated in the study 24.56% of them reported that they have left home in escape of their parental punishment followed by 21% no food to eat at home, 19.29 % hate of their step mother, 12.28% father – mother conflict and 3.5% born on the street and nowhere to go respectively. From this we can easily discern that the major cause children left home for street life are: Escape of their parental punishment, no food to eat at home and hate of their step mother are some of them.

In support of this idea, interview conducted with 7 and 11 years old children summarized as follows respectively:

> *My father is an alcoholic. He always comes home drunk as if sobering is impossible even for a day. He usually beats us especially my mother without any wrong doings. Since I couldn't cope up with these mannerisms, I left home and have begun leading my life on the street. (Participant 1)*

The above respondent's narrative frames that parents' alcoholic and abusive behavior is one of the vital causes for a child to leaving home to the street.

> *My mother is dead and the woman my father married treated me badly, so I run away from my home and my hometown three years ago and began living on the street. (Participant 2)*

Table 1. Respondents' personal data

Variables	Categories	No	Percent	
Sex	Male	35	61.4	
	Female	22	38.59	
	Total	57	100	
Place of origin	Rural	26	45.6	
	Urban	31	54.4	
	Total	57	100	
Family type they came from before streetism	With their both mothers and fathers	8	14.03	
	With their only mothers	6	10.52	
	With their only fathers	11	19.29	
	With their step mothers	14	24.56	
	With their step fathers	12	21.05	
	With their relatives	6	10.52	
	Total	57	100	
Age	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
	5	17	10.5	1.12

As can be seen from the above narrative, death of parents and abusive behavior that occur in home and family particularly by step parents led to a significant level of children streetism.

Street Children's Sleeping Arrangement

To elicit data on sleeping arrangement of street children, guided interview was organized and the obtained results were summarized in the Table 3 as follows:

Table 3 depicts the places where street children sleep. Though they stayed out during the day, 36.8% of the respondents reported they slept with their family, 42% slept on the street, and 14% with their relatives.

On our way to assess the life situation of street children, we learned that street children also used diverse substance abuse pretending to overcome different problems. Thus, this section presents substance abuse street child use.

Psychoactive Substances used by Street Children

Regarding the psychoactive substance abuse used by street children, information secured through interview and focus group discussion revealed that almost all the informants stated that they were addicted to at least one type of psychoactive substance. Accordingly, substances that were dominantly used by street children included sniffing benzene and glue, smoking, chewing chat, using plastic. Some of the informants also stated that they had already begun using marijuana and hashish in their attempt to cope with hunger, loneliness, fear and/or cold. Pertaining to the above idea, some of the children described what substance they used and why they used it.

Table 2. Street life initiatives

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
1. No food to eat at home	12	21
2. Father- mother conflict	7	12.28
3. Escape of their parental punishment	14	24.56
4. Hate of their step father	9	15.78
5. Hate of their step mother	11	19.29
6. Born on the street and nowhere to go	2	3.5
7. Peer pressure	2	3.5
Total	57	100

Table 3. Sleeping arrangements of street children

Place where they sleep	Frequency	Percentage
1. With their family	21	36.8
2. On the street	24	42
3. With their relatives	8	14
4. Other	4	7
Total	57	100

For example, one child said:

Most of the street children in this area including me sniff benzene and glue, chew "chat" and smoke cigarette on a regular basis because it gives us pleasure and it helps us cope with cold, hunger and fear. (Participant 1)

As participant 1 mentioned pertaining to the types of drug abuse, benzene, glue, cigarette and chat are particularly being used by the street children in Harar City in order to cope with street life crisis. Another 13-year-old female participant sadly revealed that she uses substance:

I live my life on the street. I don't have family and friends ... so benzene sniffing and chewing "chat" are the closest thing that I've had ... they are my friends, strength and inspiration. (Participant 2)

The other important factor which participant 2 indicated in the above narration is that street children experience loneliness and depression, so they try to cope with them through substance abuse.

DISCUSSION

With regard to street life initiatives, in line with the expectation of the researchers, the obtained result evidenced that escape of abusive parental punishment followed by poverty, hate of their step-mothers and fathers, father-mother conflict, and parental alcoholic behavior are the major causes forcing children to leave home. Research results showed that these kinds of social factors were crucial drivers of children from their homes into the streets. In support of the present findings, Gobena (1994) showed that family breakdown, urban poverty and migration were crucial factors which drive children to the street. Many children run away to the streets to avoid violence and ill treatment in the family (Kopoka, 2000).

During the study, the informants revealed the psychoactive drugs that they often use commonly which include benzene and glue sniffing, smoking cigarettes, chewing "chat", and plastic. Even some of them reported that they have already begun using marijuana and hashish pretending to overcome different problems they face like hunger, cold fear and loneliness on the street.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study showed that, escape from abusive parental punishment followed by poverty, hate of their step mother and father, father-mother conflict, parental alcoholic behavior are cited as the major causes that lead children to leave home for street life. Street children have made their sleeping arrangements with their family followed by on the street and with their relatives respectively. Benzene sniffing, smoking, chewing chat, using plastic are some of the substance abuse street children have commonly used. Even some of them also reported that they have already begun using marijuana and hashish pretending to resist hunger and cold. Based on these results the following recommendations can be made:

1. Orientation and training should be given to parents of street children particularly to single and step-parent

families on how to treat their children with warmth and affection so that their children do not escape from home.

2. Governmental and non-governmental organizations should work on the conditions which are essential to make parents of streets children economically independent to prevent children from escaping from home.

3. Psychologists need to provide life skill training particularly to street children so that they could go back home and lead their normal lives like others.

4. Further research needs to be conducted on the role of streetism in psychological wellbeing of street children.

REFERENCES

Abebaw M. (2003). *A special form of child abuse: using children for begging and its psychosocial effects on the behavior of children* (Unpublished MA thesis), Addis Ababa University.

Barnen, R. (1998). *Survey on Street Children-Selected Areas in Addis Ababa*. Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

CRDA (2006). *Supplementary Report of NGOs on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa.

CSA (1995). Statistics Abstract.

Eade, D. & Williams, S. (1995). *The Oxfam Handbook of Development and Relief* (Vol. 1). Oxfam. UK.

Gobena, D. (1994). *Comparative Study of Development on Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances and Normal Children-unpublished* (MA thesis), Developmental Psychology. AAU.

Jane, W. and Maria, T. (1996). *A Right to Happiness: Approaches to the Prevention and Psychosocial Recovery of Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation*. Geneva: BICE.

Kopoka, A. (2000). The Problem of Street Children in Africa: An Ignored Tragedy. Paper Presented at *The International Conference On Street Children and Street Children's Health In East Africa*, Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania. April 19th - 21st April 2000.

Kibron, B. (2008). *Life in the streets of Adama: The situation of street children in a fast growing Ethiopian town* (Unpublished MA thesis), Addis Ababa University

Lindenberg, M. B. C. (2001). Going Global-Transforming Relief and Development NGOs. Kumerian Press, Inc.

MGLSD (1999). Practice Guidelines for Work with Street Children in Uganda.

OMCT (2001). Report Concerning the Application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: committee on the rights of the child 29th Session - Geneva, 8-26 January 2001

OMCT & SCF. (2000). Children, Torture and Power: The Torture of Children by State and Armed Opposition Groups. Save the Children, London.

SC-Sweden (2003). Children's Rights in Ethiopia, A Situation Analysis SC-Sweden & Federal Supreme Court juvenile justice project office – Ethiopian law and the convention on the rights of the child. Addis Ababa.

Action for the Rights of Children [ARC] (2001). UNHCR. Geneva

Urban Management Program [UMP] (2000). Street Children and Gangs in African Cities

UNICEF (2006). Excluded and Invisible: The State of World Children. New York.

Veale (1996). An Empirical and Conceptual Analysis of Street Children in Sudan and Ethiopia (PhD dissertation), University of Cork, Ireland.

Wainaina, J. (1981). *The 'parking boys' of Nairobi*. African Journal of Sociology

WHO (2000). Working with street Children: A Training Package on Substance Use, Sexual and Reproductive Health Including HIV/AIDS and STDs. Geneva

Yalew, Z. (2011). Practices, challenges and prospects of provision of kindergarten Education attachment with Government programme (MA Thesis), AAU https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street_children_in_Ghana