

Street children: lost joys of childhood

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted in the slum areas of Hisar City, Haryana and a sample of 60 street children engaged in various activities like rag picking, child labour and beggary was taken randomly. Self prepared questionnaire was used to collect the data on different aspects such as education, income, caste and class, living conditions and psycho-social aspect of children the children were personally interviewed. The results indicated that majority of the respondents (78%) were Hindu with low income group and living in a kaccha house with large family. They had no knowledge of medical facilities and even not availing medical facilities. The children not only lived in a harsh, rejecting and uncaring environment, but also had no facilities for a better future.

Key words : Street children, Childhood, Slum area

Children are the most important assets of a country but large number of cities has experienced rapid urbanization and population growth. The over populated country like India failed to create facilities for children for proper development, care and education due to the reason most of the children can't enjoy their childhood. Street children form a significant proportion of the population with their soiled sack hung over their young shoulders engaged in dreadful job. Some of them roam in the market places gathering bits of paper, plastic, rag, and anything that they can collect and which can be sold. Children works as shoe shiners, unauthorized porters, station hands, vendors, helpers at the parking lot, agent for anti-social elements.

In Mumbai nearly 61% children were involved in scrap collection and the main reason behind street children was poverty and starvation, orphans, destitute and ignorance (Manimekalai and Kunjamal, 1999).

Poverty, unemployment, low and uncertain income, large number of dependents, little or no skills of entrepreneurial abilities, lack of capital or productive assets are the factors under which children had to work for their as well as family survival (Kumar, 1999). In keeping above views in mind the present study was conducted to find out the causes, consequences and factors responsible for street children.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in the slum areas of Hisar City and a sample of 60 street children engaged in various activities like as rag picking, child labour and beggary was taken randomly. Data were also recorded

on factors such as education, income, caste and class, living conditions and psycho-social aspect of children. Self prepared interview schedule was used to collect the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Table 1 regarding the personal profile of respondents, it was found that 66 per cent were male while 34 per cent were female. Majority (92) of the respondents were migrants, mainly from the neighbouring states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, though some of them had also come from far off states Bihar. With regard to their religion 78 per cent were Hindus and 12 per cent belonged to other communities. When respondents were categorized according to their family income, it was found that majority of them (87 per cent) belonged to families with earnings in the range of Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000 per month. The family income, along with the size of families, which was generally large, indicates that the per capita income was very low and 88 per cent of the beggars lived in a kaccha house while only 12 per cent lived in a partial pucca house. All of them had no facilities for toilet or bathing and living in unhygienic conditions with inadequate food having only set of clothes even 73 per cent of them were not availing medical facilities. Regarding educational background it was found that majority (97% of the children were illiterate. For endurance of street children, there should provision of food, shelter and protection of them against violence and others forms of abuse, Belman (2000).

Table 2 regarding psychosocial aspects of respondents indicated that a literacy among street children that 76 per cent of them reported that they had no interest

Sr. No.	Variables	Percentage
1.	Gender	
	Male	66
	Female	34
2.	Occupation of children	
	Beggary	47
	Rag picking	36
	Shoe polishing	11
	Unauthorized porters	6
3.	Religion	
	Hindu	78
	Other	12
4.	Monthly income	
	500-1000	87
	1000-15,000	13
5.	Native place	
	Migrants	92
	Haryana	8
6.	Housing condition	
	Hut	82
	Kachcha	18
7.	Education	
	Illiterate	97
	Literate	3
8.	Toilet facilities	
	No	100
	Yes	0
9.	Medical facilities	
	Not availing	73
	Availing	27

in studies while the 20 per cent of them had no money to spend on education but if given a chance, they would like to study. The remaining 4 per cent gave no comments. Therefore, there seems to be a definite link between child beggars and illiteracy. Nearly 87 per cent of the children hold a pessimistic view towards life and look towards the darker side of life. They relied on factors like luck for their future. They believed that even if they made efforts and worked hard on some other work, it would not improve their present conditions. There is considerable evidence that persons who live in conditions of disorganized family, poverty and social rejection are likely to express feelings of hopelessness and a sense of resignation and fatalism. They believed that their powers are too limited to have a favorable influence upon their future, and hence adopt a pessimistic view (Coopersmith, 1967). Majority of them

Sr. No.	Psycho-social factors	Percentage
1.	Inclination towards studies	
	No interest in studies	76
	Interest in studies	20
	No Comments	4
2.	Attitude towards life	
	Optimistic	87
	Pessimistic	7
	No Comments	6
3.	Occupation of family members	
	Engaged in same occupation	98
	Engaged in other work	2
4.	Attitude towards beggary	
	Bad and heinous	28
	God gift	60
	No Comment	12
5.	Knowledge about health facilities	
	Yes	78
	No	17
6.	Attitude towards medical facilities	
	Lack of free medical facilities	57
	Negative attitude of physician	25
	Wastage of time	18
7.	Problems faced by street children	
	Bullied by gang leaders	33
	Municipal official and police	27
	Social rejection	40

(98 per cent) have an average either 2-3 family members engaged in the same activity. Most of the respondents (68%) think that child beggary is neither a sin nor a curse as they get so much money without doing any type of work. They believe beggary not to be a crime but as a god-gift but 28% respondents said that it is very bad and heinous practice and should be removed from society as early as possible. But on seeing their present conditions none is willing to employ them and hence they are bound to this heinous practice once and for all. Nearly 4 per cent of the children gave no comments.

Majority (78 per cent) of the children said that they had no knowledge of medical facilities. Even if they had knowledge they did not any spare money to spend on their health. With regard to attitude towards medical facilities 57% respondents viewed as they had no provision for free medical facilities like medicines, checkups and different clinical tests. While some others (18 per cent) consider it to be a wastage of time because during that time that they could earn their livelihood for a better life for themselves and for their family members. Others 25

per cent said that even if they go to a doctor for physical check up, the doctor would not look after them properly on seeing torn clothes and shattered physical appearance. most frequent problem faced by child beggars was that the people do not socially accept them. Most frequent problem faced by 40% street children were that the people do not socially accept them. Hence a sense of rejection and fatalism prevails in all of them. For their social problems they think these to be because of their low status which results in inferiority complex in them. According to Veale *et al.* (2000) Life circumstances place the street children at physical and psychological risk.

While 27% street children had problems with the police and municipal officials, objected to their begging and worked under the constant fear of being picked up by the municipal officials and taken to a remand home. Kala Rani (1998) suggested that Govt. and voluntary organization should provide ways and means of ameliorating the distress of these one crore children because this is duty of them..

The numerous (33) children who complained that the local dada of gang leaders who bullied them and after ask for share in the money which they begged or earned. According to Kumar (1997) reported that the social problems associated with street children as insecurity, existence of deprived group, delinquency and criminal behaviour and exploitation of girl children and wastage of human resources.

Conclusion:

The present study was conducted in the slum areas of Hisar City. A sample of 60 street children engaged in various activities like rag picking, child labour and beggary was taken randomly. Majority of the respondents (78%) were Hindu with low income group and living in a *kaccha* house with large family. They had no knowledge of

medical facilities and even they were not availing medical facilities. The children not only lived in a harsh, rejecting and uncaring environment, but also had no facilities for a better future.

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