

# A scenario of street children in Ludhiana city

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Received: 20.01.2014; Revised: 03.04.2014; Accepted: 20.04.2014

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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, they 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. 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 aimed 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 were purposively selected by using snowball sampling technique. The result of the study highlighted that boys usually work for longer duration as compared to girls.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Children at risk, Child abuse, Homeless children, Street children, Vulnerable group

■ **HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER** : Sharmila, Khwairakpam and Kaur, Sukhminder (2014). A scenario of street children in Ludhiana city. *Asian J. Home Sci.*, 9 (1) : 122-127.

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 and 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 number 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](http://www.zu.edu.eg)).

**Objectives:**

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

**RESEARCH METHODS**

**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 were 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 accident they met during the street activities.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the present study as well as relevant discussions have been presented under following sub heads:

**Background information of the respondents:**

The comprehensive background information of the respondents is presented in Table 1 which pertains to selected

<b>Table 1: Socio-personal profile of the sample children (n=160)</b>		
Variables	f	%
<b>Native place</b>		
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
U.P.	64	40.00
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	80	50.00
Female	80	50.00
<b>Age (years)</b>		
9 – 11 years	77	48.13
11 – 12 years	83	51.87
<b>Birth order</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> bom	64	40.00
2 <sup>nd</sup> born	41	25.62
3 <sup>rd</sup> bom	36	22.50
4 <sup>th</sup> born and above	19	11.88
<b>Number of siblings</b>		
Up to two siblings	25	15.62
Three	44	27.50
Four	45	28.13
Five and above	46	28.75
<b>Family type</b>		
Nuclear family	119	74.37
Joint family	41	25.63
<b>Family size</b>		
Up to five	32	20.00
Six	37	23.12
Seven	43	26.88
Eight	28	17.50
Nine and above	20	12.50
<b>Monthly income (Rs.)</b>		
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
<b>Education of parents</b>		
Father	f	%
Illiterate	136	85.00

Table 1: Contd.....

Up to Primary	13	8.13
Primary and above (up to X)	11	6.87
Mother	f	%
Illiterate	153	95.63
Up to Primary	4	2.50
Primary and above (up to X)	3	1.87
<b>Occupation of parents</b>		
Father	F	%
Driver	16	10.00
Labourer	72	45.00
Rickshaw puller	17	10.63
Street and vegetable vender	27	16.88
Beggar and ragpicker	19	11.87
Stay idle at home	9	5.62
Mother	f	%
Housewife	57	35.63
Domestic worker	57	35.63
Street vender (selling low price items such as tissue paper, eatables, toys, etc.)	10	6.24
Beggar and ragpicker	24	15.00
Labourer	12	7.50

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 belonged to Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar (23.14%), Madhya Pradesh (13.75%), 6.88 per cent from Rajasthan and Nepal, 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 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 while around twenty six per cent children (25.63%) belonged to joint family. 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 by Rs. 4001-5000/month (32.50%), Rs. 5001-7000 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 Table 1 that majority (85.00%) of the street children had illiterate father while 8.13 per cent fathers were educated up to Primary and very few (6.87%) 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 (95.63%) of them were illiterate, very few (2.50%) studied up to Primary and only 1.87 per cent studied till Primary and above. The fathers of the street children were engaged in various occupations for earning their livelihood such as 45.00 per cent were working as labourers, followed by 16.88 per cent who were engaged in street and vegetable vending, beggar and ragpicker (11.87%), rickshaw puller (10.63%), driver (10.00%) and around six per cent (5.62%) stayed idle at home. Furthermore, mother's occupation revealed that more than thirty five per cent (35.63%) were housewives and working as domestic worker, while 15.00 per cent were beggars and ragpickers, 7.50 per cent were working as labourers and 6.24 per cent were working as street vendor (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 of older children (11-12 years) usually work for longer duration as compared to younger because they scored higher mean score as compared to younger children (9-11

Working hours	Age wise distribution of street children			Gender wise distribution of street children		
	9-11 years (n=77)	11-12 years (n=83)	Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)	Male (n=80)	Female (n=80)	Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)
	Mean± S.D.	Mean± S.D.		Mean± S.D.	Mean± S.D.	
1-6 hrs	0.58±0.50	0.35±0.48	2.97**	0.38±0.49	0.55±0.50	2.21*
6-9hrs	0.52±0.88	0.63±0.93	0.75	0.68±0.95	0.48±0.86	1.39
9-12hrs	0.47±1.10	1.01±1.43	2.64**	0.86±1.37	0.64±1.23	1.09

\* and \*\* indicate significance of values at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively

years). Statistically also significant differences were found in 9-12 hours working hours ( $Z=2.64, p<0.01$ ) which indicated that older children work for more hours as compared to younger children and 1-6 hours ( $Z=2.97, p<0.05$ ) which showed that it was more of younger children who were working for lesser hour.

Further probing into gender differences revealed that girls work for lesser hours compared to boys. Statistically also significant difference was found in 1-6 working hours. Thus, it is evident from the table that it was boys of older age group (11-12 years) who worked for longer duration.

The findings of the study are supported by Ali *et al.* (2008) who stated that 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 were 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 were 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:**

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 are 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. 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 and 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 are presented in Table 4 and results revealed that out of 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 were

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
<b>Fees/charges</b>						
Exempted	2	9.10	1	3.12	3	5.56
Fee paid by the students	4	18.18	3	9.38	7	12.96
Free education	16	72.72	28	87.50	44	81.48

attending school as compared to boys. Majority of the boys (72.72 %) were studying in the school which is free for all while 18.18 per cent boys were studying by paying fees and 9.10 per cent boys were reported to be exempted from school fees. Similarly majority of the girls (59.38 %) were studying in free of cost followed by 37.50 per cent studying by paying fees while 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 ranged from Rs. 20-60 per month. 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 were mostly males having low-level of education and came 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 socio-economic 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 meet with different kind of accidents like hitting by a bike/car/ bicycle 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 has 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 are 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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