

A Qualitative Exploration of Street Children Life in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the light of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

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Abstract

The number of street children is increasing at alarming rate in the country. The several composite factors drive these children to the street life where they are confronted with the numerous threats. This study proposed to explore the root causes alongside the risks connected with street life. A qualitative study design was used to interview 50 street children from 5 hotspot sites of Peshawar, which includes Haji Camp Adda, Gulbahar, Karhano Market, University Town and Firdous Bazaar. This study is based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory focusing on the quality and context of the child's environment. There are two types of street children available, on and off the Street children. The determinants included strict parenting style, orphan by father, large family size and backing family. The negative attitude of society, physical and sexual abuse, weather conditions, health and hygiene and long working hours are the high rank factors. Such the challenges and exposure adversely affect child personality and development. Constitution guaranteed basic rights of free and compulsory education and a dire need to provide a safe and protected environment with a comprehensive social rehabilitation and reintegration program for street children.

Keywords: Street children; On the Street; Off the Street; Ecological system; Threats.

1. Introduction

Children are the vital assets of any country; they are the forthcoming nations. The fate of a nation depends right on in what way its children are raised to achieve the wants of its society (Bhargava, 2003). Children are that segment of a society who are dependent on others rather than independent (Nasir, Khalid, & Shoukat, 2014). According to The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) “any boy or girl below the age of 18 years is a child”. This fundamental mark based on an age is agreed by the United Nations (UN), which clearly called that population below the age of 18 years around the world will be called children.

Barnett states that street children who apply a significant quantity of their period on the street to arrange food for themselves and families, and are

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ineffectively protected, overseen and look after for by an accountable adult person (Barnet, 2004).

According to UN (1985), street child is any boy or girl for whom the street in the comprehensive perception of the term (containing uninhabited residences, harsh environment, etc.), has become his or her routine dwelling and/or basis of income and who is ineffectively protected, overseen or commanded by mature adults. Based on the different classifications, there are three mutual features derived which are mentioned below:-

- Street children exist or pass a momentous volume of their time on the street.
- The Street has developed their basis of income.
- Generally, they are ineffectively protected, overseen or supervised by sensible adults.

United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) makes a difference between these two terms.

1.1 Children off the streets': involve boys and girls, who live, work and sleep on the street. The Street is considered as their home. It is their main location for nurturing, rising, playing, sleeping and functioning. These children are socialized out of the family and school premises. These children may have rare contacts with family, but find out, accommodation, food stuff and sense of family between their street mates, or they might have totally broken relations with their families and literally animate on the streets. It includes the abandoned children, orphans, and runaways from neglected or abusive families.

1.2 The second group is 'children on the streets' comprises those children who spend a significant quantity of their time in the street settings, maintain family contacts, mostly working and coming back to their abode after the completion of the working day. Their concentration in life is still the home. According to (Ennew, 2003), In 2007 United Nations Children Emergency Funds (UNICEF), explains about children on the streets that are involved in the street, but keep consistent interaction with their families, while children off the street who abide, operate and sleep in the street.

In the Year of 1979, the subject of street children or youth take considerable attention, as the year was acknowledged as the "International Year of the Child". This year outbreak Latin America, and the subject of "street children and youth wandering on the streets" started to highlight.

2. Literature Review

It is an important fact to mention that street children are not a third world phenomenon. The so-called developed countries are also facing the problem of street children. The problem of street children is perceived differently by the countries across the world. In United Kingdom and the United States of America for example, street children are considered as "runaways", who

abandon their abode and remain outside the home during night (Altanis & Goddard, 2004). Street children are called gamin (urchin) in Colombia while in Brazil they are named as chinchas (beg bugs). The Italians called street children as resistoleros (little rebels), Vietnamese called them bui-doi (dust children). Moreover, street children are called as “saligoman” (nasty kids”, in Rwanda “moustiques” (mosquitoes) and “mala pipe” (pipe sleepers) in South Africa (Brink, 2001).

In Pakistan, the official and reliable magnitudes of street children are not available, but the numbers of street children are assessed to be between 1.2 to 1.5 million. Street children are gathered up in the urban parts for the various reasons like family problems, indigence, neglect, common failure and repositioning; violence in schools and homes and lack of the suitable business, training and structure of social welfare (Unicef, 2012). Waghid discussed that globally in the field of child welfare the most distressing and mounting problems is the phenomenon of Street children (Waghid, 2004). Street children are relegated and exposed population have grown-up all around the world (Thapa, Ghatane, & Rimal, 2009). According to Tufail(2005), Street living children are finding the opportunities on roads, polishing shoes, hawkers, washing cars and the great amount of street children is garbage pickers . The word street children, which are usually used for the population of children having an explicit affiliation with streets, but still the term “Street children” is not practical and globally recognized by academics, institutions, researcher, politicians, and other groups and all favoured their own explanations (Tufail, 2005; Sadia, 2007; Thapa, Ghatane & Rimal, 2009). In Pakistan, Possibly the murder of street children would not apparent if Javed Iqbal (The Serial Killer) did not confess the crime of killing 100 children who had left their families. In the city of Lahore, these 100 children are getting hold of sad and the inhuman ending of their life. In case of Pakistan, the problems of street children have never been prioritized and are the very unfortunate and overlooked (Khan, 2007).

The phenomenon of street children indicates the various reasons that lead a child to come to the street and start living On and Off the street. However, the numerous studies have found poverty and parental negligence as the root cause of the problem. Furthermore, some children are also joining the street life due to love for liberty, desperation, while others are due to loss of parents, war, economic instability ; domestic violence; neglect, physical and mental abuse (Nasir et al., 2014).

The indigenous studies revealed, In Pakistan, the majority of Street children are indulged in the various earning activities which included non-skilled economic activities, counting and searching for trash items for recyclable stuffs which they collect for vending to reutilizing plants, shoe polishing, cars washing, begging and serving as waiters at roadside restaurants serving mostly to the clients also belonging generally to deprived sections of the society etc., (Emmanuel, Iqbal, & Khan, 2005).

Moreover, children mostly turn into street when they find no better place than streets to live on (Alam & Wajidi, 2014). A research study conducted by SPARC (2007) suggests that approximately 90 % of children On or Off the street are preys of sodomy, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their elders or older children of their own flocks. The research study further found that street children are mostly using hashish, heroine and glue. Street Working Children generally belong to the disregarded segment of populace including of e.g., Pashtun and Afghans in Islamabad (Ali, Shahab, Ushijima, & de Muynck, 2004).

3. Theoretical Framework

This research study was based on the Urie Bronfenbrenner's 1979, Ecological systems theory. It is an ecological viewpoint which emboldens an individual to understand the holistic environment of a child. The violations of child rights are the outcome of the multifaceted interaction of individual affiliated with the communal, cultural and ecological elements. To know and deal with the rights of children; these aspects must be pondered in terms of their presence and communication at all levels. The focus of the model is the "child" which is surrounded by four levels. The first level is that of the micro-system, including an instant ecological contiguous the child and those people with whom the child interrelates like family, peer, and school. Meso system is the second level, which includes the contact that flow within the micro-system, for example, the relationships between the family and Children's Services, the family and support networks, or the family and the school. The third system is Exo system which defines the structure that does not affect the child directly, but still affects the child's life such as neighbourhoods and school environment. Lastly, the macro system denotes to the communal and cultural atmosphere which all the systems exist like communal and political standard and the legal system.

4. Objectives

The study is based on the following objectives:-

- To understand the demographic profile of street children in Peshawar
- To identify the socio-cultural and economic hurdles responsible for pushing children to live on the streets
- To examine the vulnerability of street children to abuse, violence, and exploitation

5. Methodology

A Qualitative study on 50 street children from five hotspot sites of (Haji Camp Adda, Gulbahar (Lahore Adda), Firdous Bazar, University Town and Karhano Market) were selected using the purposive sampling technique with the help of an interview guide was carried out. The study objectives were explained with an option of voluntary participation and withdrawal from the interview at any stage. Except a few refusals, all the respondents agreed for individual in depth

interviews on the spot in a morning and evening which lasted for 30/45 minutes each.

All the interviews were held without provision of any cash or food remuneration and promises. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The study applied core principles of social work profession which are acceptance, individuality, non-judgemental and confidentiality. The study carried out without any prejudice and preconception based on gender, nationality or caste.

For validation, tool was piloted in 3 street children. There was only slight modification in order and language of the questions. Feedback prior to using it for the core study was also requested.

Interview schedule was drafted in English; however, the interview schedule was interpreted to the local native language i.e., Pushto, and the questions were asked and answered in Pushto. Interview schedule asked about demographic profile, persuading socio-cultural and economic factors drive children to the street life and the multifarious risks associated with street environment. After explaining study objectives and purpose of audio recording, the formal interview was carried out with help of tape recorder and data transcription was applied.

An approval to conduct the study was granted by the ethical review committee of University of Peshawar (UOP), and written as well the informed consent was obtained from all participants.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Demographic features of Street Children

Of the total, forty two (42), were boys and eight the girls. In all, thirty-three children were in an age range of seven-twelve years and seventeen were in the range of thirteen- eighteen years. Majority of the participants (twenty-nine) were Pakistani. The street occupied by both, On and Off the Street children with the majority (thirty-seven) of them were Onn the street children.

A large proportion of children were illiterate and never attended school, whereas a small number had received primary schooling, whereas only fourteen children attended the above primary levels. A small number had also received religious (Quranic) education.

The Parents alive status showed that twenty-seven street children, both parents were alive, followed by eight orphaned by father, six orphaned by mother, additionally five fathers got the second marriage similarly three mothers got the second marriage whereas just one child was orphan by both parents. Furthermore, the head of the family status revealed that, thirty-one Street children father was the head of a family, whereas mothers as the head of the family represented by eight numbers, while eight Street children leading the family and two families headed by other family member. Majority of the children family size was between five-six and above seven members. Furthermore, half of the participants have their own abode as followed by the rented houses and living with uncles. Moreover, street children were involved

in the various earning occupations leading by sixteen scavengers, seven auto workshops, five selling water, three selling fruits, two selling tissue papers and seventeen were involved in other categories which include begging, shoe polishing, car washing, collecting eatable stuff from garbage points and tea shops. The daily income proportion illustrates that nine children were making daily income between 100-150 rupees, similarly, eleven were earning 150-200, whereas thirteen children earning touches 200-250 and seventeen children were making greater than 250 daily.

6.2 Street Life Span duration

Street life seems to be excited, full of enjoyment; liberty and exposure to the urban metropolis. Street involved children consist of the different family's backgrounds. On the street children including fresh, minor and adolescents involved from 5-8 years. The study traced the history of street involvement. According to the findings, majority of the children were involved for many years. Respondent No. 10 occupied the street life from last 8 years. Similarly, respondent no 21 and 22 were the siblings working for the last 8 years. Whereas, a few children joined 1-2 years back. On the other hand, a few of the children just joined street life. Respondent no. 40 added that just 2 months back, he comes to the street settings. Similarly, respondent no. 28, joined a month ago.

The street life required daily hours to make money. Three levels of timeframe were noted. Some of the children revealed working for 6-8 hours, whereas majority disclosed 8-10 hour's daily and the several involved for more than 10 hours. In this concern, the respondent no. 01 discussed that he accompanied by a sibling on working premises on a main hotspot location. Similarly, the respondent no. 05 shared that all 7 siblings were involved in street earning. The respondent no. 44 comes to the street during school vacation. Furthermore, a Respondent no. 33 comes for collecting eatable during lunch and dinner times.

6.3 Driving factors

The study explores the multifarious pushing factors of street life, similarly, the respondent no. 37 described:

My Parents always behaved rudely, using an abusive language, physical violence and labelled me with worthless child. Such the behaviour keeps me disturbed and decided to bunk school.

“Majority of the children provides justification for joining street because of poverty, large family size, to support the family, orphan status, family breakup, and parents' the second marriage, harsh behaviour of parents and uncertain prospects of future.”

The respondent no. 09 discussed father's the second marriage and separation were the causative factors that push me to start earning and support mother and siblings. Moreover, the respondent no. 23, added that Afghan

refugees have large family size and parents are fond of money pave the ground for sending children to the street occupations.

The respondent no. 14, added that he was dropout from school 7 years back to support family, further stated that now how can I continue the schooling when my family relies on my daily income. One of the respondents who were involved in scavenging shared, that for the last 2 years along with three siblings working on the street asked by parents to go and make money.

Furthermore, one of the respondents shared:

“Father’s negligence and harsh behaviour motivates me to get rid of and enjoy the freedom and liberty of street life with money in hand to be spent on self needs. The family is the primary social institution for protection and development of a child.”

Additionally, the respondent No. 47, explains that 2 years back his mother died, and father got the second marriage with non-acceptance approach of step mother paved the way toward street. Currently, I am institutionalized at protection centre with mechanic skills for earning. Besides, the respondent no. 19, father had medical complications and to meet daily bread needs and decided me to join the street.

The respondent No. 28, was a regular student attached with peer group of drugs user. In the beginning, he tried it for fun, in order to get dependant and resulted in school dropout as well to meet drug requirements, therefore; he joined street. The street was perceived to be an easy way of making a handsome amount.

Accordingly, the respondent no. 03, revealed his friend circle shared street life freedom which fascinates me to try it. The respondent No 12, stated that Corporal punishment added with a long distance of school also noticed as the causative factors.

The respondent no, 35, discussed far flung school location make our arrival late and teachers punished and abuse us for being late.

6.4 Street Life Experiences

The mainstream society perceived street children unsocial, futile with no future, drug user, theft, pick pocketer and speaking lie. Similarly,

“The respondent No. 11, described multiple associated threats such as physical abuse, violence, negative societal attitude and hideous appearance.”

This finding is in conformity with international and indigenous findings discoursed; an exposure to sexual abuse, harassment, physical violence, abusive language from shopkeeper and security guards at entry points of market, adda and hotels and so forth.

“The majority participants discussed fear of kidnapping, sexual and physical abuse which left a lasting effect on the child personality

added with easily availability of drugs without any check and balance”.

Off the Street children perceived to be involved in sexual abuse and the respondent No. 48, was a runaway child started a conductor job in a local van and spending the night within van, and were sexually abused. Local hotels and drivers offer sexual opportunities.

In this study, children were looking for safe and uninterrupted sites of under construction building, home, shop or market. Moreover, scavenger and garbage collector were offered a night stay at selling point and reported sexually abuse from shop owner. A large number were searching for covering premises during harsh weather and reported sexual exploitation.

The respondent No. 43, was accompanied by elder street child and who offered an edible, took me to the cinema and park. Meanwhile, I was tried to be harassed for his spending, and I was left with no option further he said.

6.5 Street children Perception of Protection, Welfare & Rehabilitation

The study findings illustrate the respondents' explanation of protection and the majority discussed prevention from physical violence, sexual abuse, exploitation, neglect, stigmatisation, hatred feelings and police misbehaviour. The respondent No. 17, was started with shoe-making and expressed the protective with a presence of elder brother on the nearest site. Moreover, welfare was explained as the provision of cash, food and non-food items and some expressed to leave the street, join the school, educational stipends, vocational training, family assistance from government and philanthropist.

Some of the children asked for the establishment of protection institutes to provide the vulnerable children with free care, welfare facilities and to rehabilitate, economic uplift of family's, parental counselling, social awareness and acceptance of this folks like own children. Government needs to arrange educational and protection system to responds immediately to the new street inhibitors, rescue services and family reintegration.

6.6 Awareness regarding rehabilitation institute

There were children as institutionalized for rehabilitation, but unfortunately after discharge turned to the street life. Whereas, some were motivated to quit street life, enrolled at school and spend time with family. Moreover, some respondents were attending non-formal educational institutes for a limited hour and come back to street. Many street children were not aware of institutional mechanism.

Children with institutional experiences showed a satisfaction on services of formal and non-formal schooling, recreational and psychosocial counselling, but newly enrolled children were not welcomed by senior children who want to be a leader of the group. The way forward toward rehabilitation, children expressed interest in education, parents were reluctant on their quieting and drove them into the street life. Four respondents were an

anxious about post discharge life when government and family are not interested in education and rehabilitation.

Though the institutional framework exists but the number of street children are increasing exponentially.

“One of the institutionalised respondent No. 31, stated the comfort and satisfaction on provided services but expressed concerned on temporary timeframe of the institution”.

Similarly, the respondent No. 18, discussed his experienced at the government welfare home and raised question on rehabilitation process, with the provision of food and basic tailoring skills towards reintegration. According to the respondent No. 8, government needs to establish the protection centres at hotspot sites to mobilize, educate and protect from numerous associated threats.

A number of children were not aware and the part of any protection institute. This group includes fresh street joiner not aware of the severity of street threats. The respondent No. 10, working on car washing shop and not aware of welfare institute.

“Similarly, the respondent No. 16, working on auto mechanic shop comes in a morning and returned in evening was not aware of any institutional setup”.

The respondent No. 29, discoursed the restriction policies kept them away to outreach any institution which place the limitations on freedom and liberty.

6.8 Linkages and familiarity with criminal Group

The general perception depicts linkage with criminal gang and performed illegal activities. There are some of the children parts of these outfits whereas the majority was not even aware of such groups.

The respondent no. 13, added: there were the various gangs operating in the city and I remained the part of it for some times. I was member of a pick pocketer group operating in the various locations. In initial stage, a senior group member trained us, then; I successfully operate for a while, but once a child was caught up by local community and beaten severely, which drives me to keep aside from this job and continued with my street earning. Similarly, the respondent no. 02, answered, he was offered to join a drug smuggling group and will be paid a handsome amount for delivery to customer within the city, but due to police fear I refused to perform this job.

“One of the respondents stated, In Peshawar, the various gangs are operational such as drug seller, smugglers, wine delivery, pick pocketers, beggars and theft groups. Street children were of the viewpoint that gang hired them as they portrayed a picture of sorrow, dirt, innocent and poverty which society and law enforcement agencies not suspect to be involved in such activities”.

Additionally, it was observed that cinema locations had small tea bar, where children of the different age groups were accompanied by older members, were utilized for the delivery of drugs and wine, alongside these spots are socially acceptable and safe locations for some of the children were provided with accommodation facilities. These sites were misused for sexual exploitation, dealing of smuggling, delivery of illegal items, robbery etc. On the other side, fresh street children joiner or some seniors into the street were not coming across with this business. This group were aware of mafia but limit themselves with daily earning and stated that mafia and gangs were indulged in illegal actions, making black money, exploiting children and society for self-benefit only.

A few fresh street joiners commented that we don't aware of such group neither wants to face or deal them. Some of the children were guided by parents to keep aside from adults, unknown person and limits their selves to the street earning and that's enough.

6.9 Role of the family and Society

The phenomenon of street children has the prevalent proof of weak family role which drives children to the street life. The study confirmed large family size, harsh parents' behaviour and orphan status was a common pushing factor towards street thriving. It was shared by the respondent no. 08, with a dream to be a doctor, but parents asked to support income. During morning, I feel sad watching school going children and wish to be a regular school boy and parents were supposed to meet my educational responsibilities.

In continuation, the respondent no 30, shared about the second marriage of father leaves us alone with no earning hand to fulfill needs of siblings and mother which is the core responsibility of my father to look after the needs and provides with education and recreational facilities. Poor conditions of a family were one of major factors behind the phenomena. When a large family size and poor conditions combined, and it makes the difficult meet daily bread requirements and at the end children were asked to move to the street earnings. It was observed that parents' the second marriage also contributed toward children moving to the streets.

Majority of the children expressed that it's the prime responsibility of the family to keep the children within the boundaries of abode and arrange provision of basic requirements and facilities. They wish to be a regular school going children and play their favourite game, but the weak familial relation and responsibility weaken the situation and at the end victim were the child. The Overall society regards street children with distrust. The outset is that a dirty child is always a petty thief, beggar and the child of a commercial sex worker should face even worse accusations. These groups of street children are disregarded, and this affects the social and psychological growth. Similarly, employers use them for low-priced labour, frequently abusing them physically and emotionally.

“One of the institutionalized drug addict respondent expressed his full confidence and motivation to rebuild his life, kept aside from bad activities and contribute towards family income, but I am afraid of social acceptance and adaptation within local community and stoppage of stigmatize wording of “Charsi/Nashiyi”. It was expressed by almost all street children that societal behaviour and response was the negative as a cumulative. Children were perceived and labelled with bad names translated in native Pushto language like “lofar, badamala, ghlagar, harami, Kunyan”.

Similarly, the respondent no: 03, explained, after spending 5 years on the street at the various locations, I come across with the extreme bad response from our society, these people considered street children like garbage : they responded in a way we were only thieves or sexual toys. We were not treated, and behave with tenderness, affection and love. The society not even asked to offer some assistance or protection from evils. Street children, whether it institutionalizes or non-institutionalizes shared societal adverse attitude towards them. Street children stated that even the security guard of the markets; factories and adda don't even allow our entries to the locations. When approached shops, received the physical abused and calls of no entrance to the shops.

Street children rarely received any sort of assistance or affection from societal members which was very occasional in numbers. Children expected protection from a society, the positive behaviour, accepting and understanding the situations of street children. The society needs to be cooperative, affectionate and intervene in rebuilding and reintegrating the lives of street children. A society needs to establish a voluntary forum for the protection, welfare and rehabilitation of street children.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

During the field visits, further; hotspot sites were identified with involvement in scavenging, labouring, garbage collection at pando road, shaheed abad, afridi abad, akhun abad, gujar abad, ring road and Charsadda road. The majority of street children want to get rid of street life and reconnect with a routine schooling, family environment and recreational activities followed by strengthening family economic system and societal attitude. There were a few children- want to carry on their street life and feel the satisfied with it. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has an exclusive legal and institutional framework, but a need of the serious political well is required towards implementation and strengthening of Child Protection & welfare commission, child protection units and commitment from civil society, and family is of utmost importance.

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