

**CONTRIBUTION OF SELECTED
FAMILY FACTORS TO THE INFLUX OF
STREET CHILDREN IN NAKURU
MUNICIPALITY**

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Introduction

- the presence of street children in Kenyan urban centers began in early 1950s (ANPPCAN, 1994)
- - when the colonial government broke up families by taking men to concentration camps and encouraging others to migrate to urban areas for formal employment leaving women and children in the rural areas. In urban centers, there were few women who provided commercial sex. Single parenthood and the poor living conditions of these commercial sex workers seem to have produced the first lot of street children whose parents were taken to detention camps leaving them to become vagrants.

Statistics

- 1952 - 1962, the police dealt with 1,113 vagrant children in Nairobi (ANPPCAN 1994).
- 1980 - 1990, the urban population in Kenya doubled
- 1992 – estimated 4,000 street children in Nairobi city alone (Ombaso & Munyako, 1992).
- 1995 - estimated 40,000 street children in Nairobi city (ANPPCAN, 1995)
- most of the growth concentrated in Nairobi and Mombasa.
- rural - urban migration increased dramatically
- poor families driven from their homes by
 - landlessness,
 - drought and
 - unemployment.

- A sprawling collection of slum settlements spread over the outskirts of Nairobi,
 - Mathare Valley,
 - Kariobangi,
 - Kibera
 - Korogocho.
- the enormous concern that the phenomenon of street children has generated shown by:
 - The rapid mushrooming of children's homes
 - Many organizations for child support
 - the Child Welfare Society of Kenya,
 - Kenya Medical Women's Association,
 - African Network on Prevention of and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect,
 - Plan International,
 - Save the Child Fund,
 - Church Organizations

Statement of the Problem

- Research done that the number of street children has increased tremendously in Kenyan towns in recent years.
- concern - for them, life is very harsh and risky.
- The family is supposed to play a key role in the welfare, protection and socialization of these children.
- However, the family system could be a militating factor in the problem of street children.
- Studies have not sufficiently focused on the reasons that drive street children from their families to the streets.
- This paper addresses this knowledge gap by focusing on the contribution of selected family factors on the influx of street children.

Objectives

- To determine the types of families the street children lived before going to the streets.
- To establish the economic backgrounds of the source families of street children.
- To identify the forms of child abuse and neglect experienced by street children.
- To determine the role of family counseling and empowerment in alleviating the problem of street children.

Methodology

- **Design** - Descriptive *ex post facto* survey
- **Location** - Nakuru Municipality
 - It has growing number of street children
 - rapid mushrooming of rehabilitation centers.
- **Population** – target population of 3800
 - accessible population was 800
 - There are 8 active rehabilitation centers in the municipality.
 - The managers of the centers participated because they have the information of all the children who join their centers.

- **Sampling Procedures**

- Five rehabilitation centres were randomly selected for the study.
- Simple random sampling procedure was used to select 20 street children from selected centres
- 5 managers were purposively sampled
- **Sample** - 105 respondents.

Instrumentation

- questionnaires were used to obtain data from the children.
- Interview schedule was used to obtain data from the managers of the centers
- The study yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.72

Results

Demographic Characteristics

- The sample comprised 95% male and 5% the female street children
- 97% aged between 10 and 19 years,
- 82% had between 3 and 8 siblings
- 74% had attended formal schooling before.
- 74.2% had been on the streets for 1 and 5 years
- 85.6% did not like staying on the streets.
- 14.4% liked street life

- 51% were partial or total orphans
- 5% did not even know their parents.
- 35% coming from families where both parents are living with their children
- 16% come from families where there is a stepparent
- 31% come from families with a single parent
- 18% lived with their relatives
- 67.1% of the parents are unemployed
- 32.9% were employed
- 73% of the parents could not afford to take their children to school
- 68% of the parents could not provide enough food for their children
- 69% of the parents could provide shelter for their children
- 52% reported that the family house was not enough for all family members
- over 40% of the children go to the streets,
 - lack of food,
 - being beaten and
 - lack of school fees
 - child labour a
 - being orphaned
 - being harassed by stepparents,
 - being isolated
 - parent being a drunkard

Forms of Child Abuse and Neglect

- 64% of the children reported that they had stayed for a long time without food
- 11% had been raped by a father, a step parent, close relatives or caretakers
- 54% experienced beating in their homes
- 58% had been denied educational opportunities
- 36% had been subjected to child labour
- 26% were sent away from home

Role of Family Counselling and Empowerment

- 80% of the managers felt that families could be assisted to solve their family problems through counselling
- 60% of the managers felt that provision of love and care by families could reduce the streets children problem
- 27% of the children showed that one needs to change their bad behaviour at home
- 25% stated that praying God and asking for divine intervention would help
- 21% stated that one should never think of going to the streets as a solution to the problems that they get at home
- 4% of the street children stated that one could seek help from the government if they have problems at home

Summary

This study has established that,

- Most street children come from families where there is a mother and father. Single parenthood is also a contributing factor. Other street children were orphans who lived with their relatives and others lived with stepparents. This implies that these children were not happy in one way or another in the type of family they lived in and this made them go to the streets.
- The major problems experienced by street children in their homes include lack of food, being beaten, harassment by step-parents, lack of school fees, isolation, violence at home, and overcrowding. This makes them look for alternative homes in the streets.
- Most parents of street children are not employed and those employed have low status jobs. This makes it difficult for the parents to provide for their families adequately. Therefore the children go to the streets to fend for themselves. Inability to provide basic needs can therefore be concluded as a major contributing factor to the street children phenomena.

- Parent's drunkenness causes money to be squandered, discipline is neglected, children are mistreated and this causes children to go to the streets. Poor parent child relationship shown by parents failing to show love and affection to their children also made the children feel unhappy at home and therefore go to the streets where they got friends.
- Managers of the institutions agreed that problems in the families could be solved through guidance and counseling. Economic empowerment for the parents of street children was also seen as a way of alleviating the problem of street children. Former street children can also talk to other children who find themselves in similar circumstances.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are as a result of the above conclusions as established in the study.

- Children found on the street should be helped to go home; should also get to know why they left home and deal with the issues. This should also involve teaching the family new skills, behavioral change especially on the part of the parents.
- Social workers can be used in identifying families at risk of providing a home environment unfavorable to psycho-social development in children with a view to focusing on promotive and preventive effort on the families most in need.
- Community based child care services should be initiated so that children can be supported in their own homes instead of being moved to institutions. This would also mobilize the community for advocacy towards protective and prevention of child neglect.
- The right attitude towards family planning should be inculcated in parents to avoid children who eventually get abused and neglected. This requires proper training and through available media; hence proper training of social workers.
- There should be encouragement and support for all efforts aimed at stabilizing the family life and inspiring the social economic environment of the child. Other than their parents, there are living relatives who if helped, can look after these children who are really their family's offspring.
- Sensitization of the general public and law enforcers on the need to understand the problem of street children so as to create an enabling environment even for the children to be rehabilitated and give them emotional support and allow them to exercise their human rights.
- Networking and coordination of all those involved in the work of street children. There is also the need to involve the policy makers so as to have the national outlook and avoid fragmented approaches to the issue.

Suggestions for Further Research

Since the study results point at the family being a major cause of the problem of street children, the following areas should be considered for more research so as to deal with the problem of street children.

- More research should be carried out to determine the causes of family breakdown. This would be with a view to recommending appropriate ways and means of improving the situations in order to help the family unit to remain intact.
- HIV/AIDS is a major contributing factor to orphans; hence research can be done on how institutions can be established to attend to such eventualities so that affected children don't end up on the streets.