STUDY OF THE OCCURRENCE OF STREET CHILDREN IN RWANDA. A CASE STUDY OF RUBAVU CITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the occurrence of street children in Rubavu city. The study seeks to assess the occurrence of street children in Rwanda but is guided by Rubavu city as a focal center. Research aimed to to assess the occurrence of street children in Rubavu city of Rwanda with specific objectives of establishing factors (causes) contributing to an increased number of street children in Rubavu city, discovering problems associated with street children in Rubavu city and finally to find out measures to combat the problem of street children in Rubavu city. The researcher used primary and secondary data during this research study; Primary data collection involved questionnaires, interview guides, observation checklists, and Focus Group discussions. This reseach used a cluster sampling technique and Data was entered and analyzed in SPSS software. The researcher collected data from the street (street children and other related street personnel), Community Development officers, and Government agencies using a structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data from key informants. To collect the Secondary data, the researcher used a review of documents. This research used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version16.0 was used for quantitative data and also used a thematic analysis for qualitative data analysis. This research showed that 58.7% of respondents stayed with their parents. The results showed that 41.3% of the respondents stayed with stepmothers before street life. 58.7% of the respondents indicated that their parents were not employed, so they hardly had anything to rely on for survival. The researcher noted that 30.4% of the respondents indicated that their parents are domestic workers. This research showed that 26.1% of the respondents were treated well by their parents. In recommendations, we

recommend the government of Rwanda to develop alternative educational initiatives for the urban poor children. Schools for such children must consider some parents' inability to afford fees and uniforms. Non-formal education programs should be introduced where street children, primarily the bigger children, could be taught practical subjects such as building, carpentry, or agriculture.

Keywords: Occurrence, Street Children, Parents

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1 Background

The concept of street children refers to all boys and girls below the age of 18 years, for whom the street in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings and wastelands, more than their family; having become his, her or their habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by a responsible adult (Black, 1992). Street children are a common problem that has been occurring worldwide for a long time. In the context of Nepal, the issue of street children has emerged as a significant social problem. Unfortunately, the change in the political. Many children come from structurally disadvantaged homes where poor living conditions result in many difficulties. Parents' loss through death, abandonment, family conflict, or housing shortage may force children onto the streets. In many cases, the move to street life is an adaptive response to the stress and severe oppression experienced by families living in a conflict society. Thus, moving to the streets often represents a desire to take control of one's life and displace old values and conditions with new ones (Hickson and Gaydon, 1989).

Many visible and invisible factors are associated with the homelessness of children. Some of the main factors are family breakdown, poverty, natural and artificial disasters, physical and sexual abuse, exploitation by adults, urbanization and overcrowding, etc., which, in fact, force them to spend their life on the street (Ibid). According to the swart the street child phenomenon is directly linked to rapid industrialization and urbanization with the concomitant breakdown of extended family ties: "Harsh or neglectful treatment of children by their families frequently derives from parental depression, anger, anxiety and frustration at life circumstances" (Swart 1998, p.34).

1.2 Problem statement

The increasing number of street children has become rampant, and the management of rehabilitation policies is non-existent; as a result, it has turned into a national and universal concern due to various including family factors, economic factors; social and political factors that have lead children leave their families. However, the government of Rwanda and Non- government organizations have taken some initiatives to combat the increased number of street children by taking them to rehabilitation centers. However, according to Wakhu (2012), the effectiveness of rehabilitation interventions on street children's social status is non-existent, to a large extent, not challenged by internal or external elements. The difficulty of these children is thus left in their own hands or on some few effective Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who are limited by their functions and resources to deal effectively with the situation. Although street children interventions keep mushrooming, the number of street children is also rising (Morangi, 2013). Therefore, this instigated the researcher to gain an insight to conduct research on the occurrence of street children in Rubavu city in Rwanda to identify causes and problems for their running away from their original families.

Most urban centers in Africa struggle with increased street families, which have become a common phenomenon and a menace in the centers. In Rwanda, the number of street children seems to grow at an alarming rate despite the efforts of the government to rid them of the streets and rehabilitate them. Charitable institutions and community-based organizations have continued to partner with the government to improve the livelihood of street families and relocate them. Despite these intensive efforts, the number of street children is rising in most urban centers in Rwanda, especially in Rubavu city. However, we have topay attention to reasons as to why the number is increasing day by day. Therefore, the research will establish the need to gain an insight to assess the occurrence of street children in Rubavu city of Rwanda, focusing on the leading causative factors.

2. CRITICAL REVIEW

The study's first objective was to assess factors contributing to the increasing number of street children in Rubavu city. The variables investigated included social causes, economic causes, political causes, family causes, and other causes. In addition, specific responses were sought on occurrence of street children in Rubavu Town, factors leading to the increasing number of street children in

Rubavu city, and whether street children have parents, whether street children stay with their parents, who they actually stay with, whether their parents are employed, knowledge on the kind of work being done by their parent, knowledge on how street children treated by the parents /guardian, learning on the contact the street children have with the parents,how often does the street children contact his/she reaches the parents, knowledge on whether respondent's (street children) parents are alive, understanding on the relationship of the parents themselves, learning about why street children leave their home, learning about when street children left his/her home or place of origin, knowledge on period spent on street,knowledge on whether street children work, knowledge on the type of work done by street children, knowledge on factors influence street children to the kind of work, knowledge on how much street children collect/earn,knowledge on whether street children deserve sufficiently for survival, knowledge on street children's saving culture and what the income is used for.

The findings showed responses on knowledge about whether street children have parents. Although out of 46 respondents involved in the study, 21(45.7%) the respondent agreed that they had parents. In contrast, 25(54.3%) of the respondents did not have parents about the operational definition; street children find themselves on the street because they lack parental guidance and care. The findings mean that street children are increasing due to child neglect by the parents.

The findings showed that the response on whether parents of street children are employed. Out of 46 respondents detailed study, 19(41.3%) indicated that their parents are employed, whereas 27(58.3) revealed that their parents are not used. The findings, therefore, to a more significant extent, support that Latin American Street children gravitate to the street out of economic necessity. In Kenya, economic factors were also cited as the primary factor pushing children to the streets (Wainaina, 1981). Poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood. Impoverished children often grow up as poor parents who bring up their own children in poverty (UNICEF, 2005). Crucial support for this cycle was a belief in a cultural inheritance of poverty. It was held that there was a distinct culture of poverty, which shaped people's attitudes to work and relief. Unless they were properly motivated, it was felt that paupers would be unable to improve their situation, and their attitude to work and welfare would be passed on to their

children (Scott, 1994). However, research shows that most parents seem to replicate the basic parenting style they experienced as children (Chen *et al.,* 2001). The findings also showed that the response kind of work done by the parents of street children. Out of 46 respondents involved in the study, 11(23.9%) indicated that their parents are farmers, 14(30.4%) revealed that their parents are domestic workers, 7(15.2%) indicated that their parents are porters/drivers, then 5(10.9%) of the same respondents revealed that their parents are business women/men. In contrast, 6(13.0%) showed that they don't know the kind of work done by their parents, and 3(6.5%) did not specify the type of work done by their parents. Therefore, the views of respondents whose parents are domestic workers dominated the study more than those who did not specify. The analysis put variation into consideration.

The findings showed responses on whether conflicts and violence contributed to an increased number of street children. Out of 20 respondents involved in an interview, 16(80%) respondents said yes, while 4(20%) of the same respondents said no, respectively. It means that the views of those who said yes dominated the study. The findings therefore support a survey by Hussein (1998) in Cairo about street children and violence revealed that street children are faced with violence almost every day of their life. Violence usually takes place through three main channels: i.e., violence with small children groups, either by peers or by older street children, especially when they get drowsy and under the effect of the substances they consume; violence from the surrounding community through other people on the streets who tend to exploit them or by the community itself as a reaction to their existence in particular settings and areas where their presence is not appreciated; violence while working by their ten employers or through other peers working in the same place such as; selling items in the streets in areas where other people or children exercise control. Violence typically ends in cuts and bruises to the children since it often entails fights. Children usually carry razor blades to defend themselves in case others attack them.

3. Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are based on the research questions leading to the study's main purpose. First, the study sought to establish factors contributing to the increasing number of street children in Rubavu city; it was found that the majority of the street children are from families who are dysfunctional; as more families

break, the number of street children is on the rise in the town. Children who don''t have parents find the streets as a convenient place to be as there is no one to care for them, and they resolve to fend for themselves in the urban centers. Second, poverty has forced many children from the slums to migrate to the streets in search of food; most of these children are of school age but are unable to attend school because of poverty. The study findings show poverty has propelled many children from the slums in Rubavu city to drop out of school and now are found in the streets begging. Thirdly most people who have been displaced from their homes because of the rampant violence, especially during general elections and conflicts, do not have where to stay, and some have ended up in the streets. Rubavu city was one of the most affected towns during the 2007-8 post-election violence, which saw many people left homeless and forced others to join street families. The majority of the street families are those who were displaced from their homes as back in 1992 when tribal clashes occurred, and this situation seems to be aggravated as almost in every general election are displaced due to violence related to elections. Skill training for street children, along with guidance and counseling, is also considered valuable measures to develop a sense of self-reliance in the street children.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The government of Rwanda must come up with alternative educational initiatives for the urban poor children. Schools for such children must consider the inability to afford fees and uniforms for some parents. Non-formal education programs should be introduced where street children, specially the bigger children, could be taught practical subjects such as building, carpentry, or agriculture. Organizations working with children need to step up their work with communities, educating them to identify the signs of child abuse and encouraging them to tenaciously protect their children by establishing and supporting functional child protection committees, where children themselves are represented. Besides, some of the street children should be sponsored by the government as well as development partners in technical skills where they can acquire hands-on skills like carpentry, electrical installation, and building construction. Itwill make them self-sustaining and therefore live settled lives.

Street children should be resettled back to their homes by transporting them to their destinations and after that teach them soft skills like weaving and agriculture

so that they can earn some money to improve their livelihoods as they live settled life. They are arresting and remanding some undisciplined street children into child remand homes so they can reform and become successful citizens. Some of the street children that have resorted to pick-pocketing should be identified and remanded so that they are reformed into responsible citizens.

Correction and rehabilitation centers should be set up nationwide; these will help with some reform, especially for those using drugs like marijuana. Many rehabilitation centers should be set up even to pick up children neglected by their mothers so that they do not turn into future street children.

Through the Child Welfare Forum and other initiatives, the government and non-governmental organizations are urged to formulate intervention programs to combat child labor. It is because child labor requires a multi-pronged approach involving different institutions in addition to the government's efforts.

Communal education should be paramount; public sensitization and education on entrepreneurship skills to old street children to do small business for a living other than prostitution. Indeed, some of them have started small businesses like selling roasted ground nuts, maize, and other street items like stationery and clothes. Some have participated in sanitation.

Programs must focus on family tracing and re-unification since this is a best practice. Street children and other children in difficult circumstances need to be cared for within the context of their families and culture. Strategies for intervention need to consider ways of strengthening families'" responsibility for their families." Children should be placed in institutions only when there is no reasonable alternative and children are never detained with adults. There is a need to establish a national network of all organizations for service providers working with street children who will support the various city and town networks for service providers to street children, and with an appropriate collaboration with other neighboring countries.

Acknowledgement

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