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### Exploring the problems faced by school going and non-school going street children

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#### Abstract

Like all other children, street children have the basic right to develop, survive and thrive. A street child in India is someone "for whom the street has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults. Due to various push or pull factors they come to live on the streets and take on the full responsibilities of caring for themselves, including working to provide for and protecting themselves. Though street children do sometimes bind together for greater security, they are often exploited by employers and the police. With the objective to identify the problems faced by street children of Lucknow city, the present study was conducted at various crowded places of Lucknow city, Uttar Pradesh, India. The sample for the study was identified using snowballing sampling technique. The final sample comprised of 100 street children (81 boys and 19 girls) 6 to 12 years old. Result reveals that majority (82.60%) of the school going street children were boys while only 17.39 per cent girls attended school. It is evident from the data that the major proportion (47.0%) of the children were under 8-10 years followed by 10-12 years with 35.0% and a mere 18.0% under 6-8 years. Lack of access to basic medical facilities was the problem faced by majority (84.0%) of the street children in their day to day lives while the problems experienced by them while being on street were asking for explanation for being on street by the passer-by as reported by 48.0 percent children followed by Scolding (30.0%) and 22.0 per cent children reported that they were even abused verbally while being on street.

**Keywords:** homeless children, street children, underprivileged group, working child

#### Introduction

Children are growing upon the street, live in a condition of chronic poverty and social exclusion with difficulties often compounded by a lack of support and protection from city authorities and the police. Young people rely on their own resources and initiative to survive and meet basic need for food, shelter and safety. Many children on the street are eating from garbage bins, and sleep with little clothing and are abused by others, these situations can result in dissociation. Street children lack proper capabilities to secure a decent job; they face torture, depression, insecurity and other problems while living on the street. This has a detrimental effect on development and often has serious psychosocial consequences. The term street children itself has almost disappeared from the welfare and analytical literature, which now uses different appellations to refer to street children and other underprivileged groups. Children themselves of course, are still on the street, easily visible in the great majority of urban centres. What has been called the global or "worldwide phenomenon of street children" (Panter & Brick 2002) [19].

Majority of us are blessed because when we return home from schools, colleges or offices, there is a family waiting for us who takes away our tiredness. But all are not that fortunate. Many children in India are deprived of this feeling of family and home. We celebrate every occasion but wonder how street children spend their life and celebrate festivals. They spend their entire life near bus station, railway station, markets, on footpaths, streets etc. Though a well-structured data and number is not available but it is estimated that India has more than 472 million street children in India under the age of 18 year. 1 to 4 children of School-going age is out of school in our country -99 million children in total dropped out of school (Census

2011).

While the distinction between children “on the street” and “of the street” has been useful, some overlaps and grey areas still remain. Some children “of the street” may have been abandoned and rejected by their families while others may have left their families due to prevailing circumstances. Muchini (2014) <sup>[15]</sup> noted that in a “sense they abandoned the family”. Other children may stray and wander the streets, becoming involved in street activities with other children.

Muchini (2014) <sup>[15]</sup> also notes that there are also “children of the street” who maintain links with family members while others have totally severed family connections. Some “children of the street” may visit their mothers staying with “step-fathers” once in a while or may visit other siblings and, return to their street “homes”. The degrees to which filial linkages are maintained also vary for different children. The quality of contacts also differs. The same can be said of “children on the street”. Children classified as “on the street” include those in the grey area, who sometimes sleep on the streets and sometimes sleep at home. This category also includes those staying with distant relatives and those who stay with employers. Thus, categorising street children into only two categories may cloud the continuity of the children connecting with their families.

UNICEF (2006) - Street children is a term for children experiencing homelessness who live on the streets of a city, town or village. Homeless youth are often called street kids and street youth.

India has an estimated one million or more street children in each of the following cities: New Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. Owing to unemployment, increasing rural-urban migration, the attraction of city life, and a lack of political will, India has developed one of the largest child labour forces in the world. These floating children are often subject to discrimination, beating/torture and sexual harassment (Gupta, 2005) <sup>[7]</sup>.

Definition of a Street Child by UNICEF, “...any girl or boy... for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults”. Female street children are sometimes called gamines, a term that is also used for Colombian street children of either gender. Francise Remington (1993) <sup>[22]</sup> said that over 120 million children live in the cities and towns of South Asia. Denied their rights, enshrined in the CRC and deprived of basic services, many of them suffer extremely from exploitative and violent conditions. Muchini (1994) <sup>[14]</sup> noted the problems associated with the last part of the widely accepted definition of street children: “... and who are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults”. He observed that this part fails to acknowledge the role played by children in shaping their own destiny. This part reflects society’s perception of a child as someone who must live within boundaries delineated by adults. It might be possible that more and more parents are unable to adequately protect, supervise or direct and provide for their children. The result is that children assume some of the roles that were originally considered parental roles.

Street children in India are frequently exposed to abuse and extortion because they have no social status and no adults to protect them, street children identify being physically threatened and intimidated by adults as the one factor that contributes most to the misery of living on the street. The primary cause for this treatment is the views that the police

and general public hold toward them: most scorn them and react to them with hostility (Sharmila and Kaur, 2014) <sup>[23, 24]</sup>.

The term “street children” and its various mutants such as “street kids”, “street boys”, “parking boys”, “carwashers”, “teenage beggars”, “street bums”, “children on their own” refer to a complex phenomenon. The term stirs emotions and focuses on the “problem”. It is a problem whose manifestations are seated in several causal factors. The reasons that causes children to come to street includes poverty, dysfunctional families, urbanisation, the apartheid legacy, migrant labour system and their quest for freedom (Le Roux, 2001). These factors weaken or break the bonds that a child should have to society which, according to Hirsch’s Social Bonding theory, include attachment to prosocial others and institutions (parents, teachers and peers), commitment to conventional actions (education), involvement in conventional activities (sports) and belief in values and norms (Özbay & Özcan, 2008).

A study by Aronowitz (2015) <sup>[1]</sup> showed that caring and competent teachers could promote positive development in learner by believing in their learners, potential, coaching learners to set high expectation, making learners feel valued and competent, and encouraging them to envision the future. Vulnerable learners, including street children, who feel supported by positive adults avoid trouble at school, get good grades, and pursue future success. Social support that teachers, friends and parents can provide positively relate to school engagement. Levels of school engagement are higher in school with adequate support structures, challenging curricula, caring teachers, peer acceptance, consistent goals and a school community that fosters belongingness. According to Rajan Saxena (2006) - Lifestyle refers to the beliefs, attitudes, interests, and opinions that an individual has about himself, his family, and the world (p. 173). It is - a concept that refers to alternative ways of living, usually conspicuous through values and modes of consumption (Scott & Marshall, 2005, p. 365). In another words - lifestyle refers to the physical, mental and spiritual actions of a man on a day-to-day basis (Jain, 2007) <sup>[20]</sup>. Street children are among the most physically visible of all children, living and working on the roads and public squares of cities all over the world.

### Objective

- To explore the problems faced by school going and non-school going street children.

### Materials and Methods

#### Locale of the study

The study was conducted in various locations such as Rajnikhand, Ruchikhand, Alambagh, Aminabad, Charbagh, Dubagga, railway station, bus stand, and other crowded places of Lucknow city, Uttar Pradesh, India.

#### Sampling Procedure

The sample for the present study was selected from various crowded places of Lucknow city and the sample comprised of 100 street children aged 6-12 years. Snowball sampling technique was used to identify the sample.

Snowball sampling (or chain sampling, chain-referral sampling, referral sampling) is a nonprobability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Thus, the sample group is said to grow like a rolling snowball.

### Tools and Technique

**Self- structured interview schedule:** A self-structured interview schedule was administered to identify street children who are attending school and to explore the problems faced by them in their day to day lives and while being on street.

**Results and Discussion**

**Table 1.1:** Per cent distribution of respondents as per school going and non-school going street children

Total no of street children	School going street children (N= 46)		Non-school going street children (N= 54)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
100	38 (82.60)	8 (17.39)	43 (79.62)	11 (20.37)

Table 1.1 shows the per cent distribution of respondents according to school going and non-school street children and it was evident from the data that major proportion (54.0%) of the street children were not attending school while (46.0) per cent were attending school even though they engaged in street activities while not in school. Looking across the gender on school going children it was found that majority (82.60%) of the school going street children were boys while only (17.39) per cent girls attend school. In contradiction to the above result, a study on the scenario of street children conducted by Sharmila and Kaur (2014) [23] reported that more number of

girls were attending school as compared to boys. However, majority of the boys (72.72 %) were found to be studying by paying fees while (18.18) per cent boys were studying in free education and (9.10) per cent boys were reported to be exempted from school fees.

**Table 1.2:** Distribution of respondents according to age

Age of children	Total (N=100)	School going street children (N=46)	Non-school going street children (N=54)
6-8 years	18 (18.0)	12 (26.08)	6 (11.11)
8-10 years	47 (47.0)	18 (39.13)	29 (53.70)
10-12 years	35 (35.0)	16 (34.78)	19 (35.18)

Table 1.2 highlights the distribution of respondents according to age. It is evident from the table that the major proportion (47.0%) of the children were under 8-10 years followed by 10-12 years with (35.0%) and where (18.0%) under 6-8 years. A similar trend was followed in both school going and non-school going children. A major proportion (39.13 %) of school going children was in 8-10 years while (34.78) per cent was in 10-12 years and (26.08) per cent children were in 6-8 years. Similarly, among non-school going children majority (53.70%) were in 8-10 years followed by 10-12 years with (35.18%) and 6-8 years with (11.11%) children.

**Table 1.3:** Per cent distribution of street children according to problems faced by them in their day to day life

Problems faced by street children in their day to day life	School going street Children (N=46)		Non-school going street children (N=54)		Total (N=100)
	Boys N=38	Girls N=8	Boys N=43	Girls N=11	
Lack of access to basic medical facilities	30 (78.94)	6 (75.0)	40 (93.0)	8 (72.72)	84 (84.0)
Poor health and vulnerability	18 (47.36)	3 (37.5)	30 (69.7)	6 (54.54)	57 (57.0)
Lack of protection	15 (39.47)	5 (62.50)	30 (69.7)	9 (81.81)	59 (59.0)
Lack of social ties and network	24 (63.15)	4 (50.0)	11 (25.5)	4 (36.36)	43 (43.0)
Poor sanitation	26 (68.42)	5 (62.5)	25 (58.1)	8 (72.72)	64 (64.0)
Substance abuse	15 (39.47)	0 (0.0)	22 (51.1)	2 (18.18)	39 (39.0)

**(Multiple response)**

Table no. 1.3 highlights the problems of street children which they faced in their day to day lives and it was reported by majority (84.0%) of the children that lack of access to basic medical facilities was the problem faced by them, followed by poor sanitation (64.0%), lack of protection (59.0%), poor health and vulnerability (57.0%), Lack of social ties and network (43.0%) and Substance abuse (39.0%). A similar trend of response was found while looking upon the problems faced by school going and non-school street children as the main problem was lack of access to basic medical facilities as stated by majority of the children. However, further probing the data in gender wise it was found that among school going street boys majority (78.94%) of the boys reported that lack of access to basic medical facilities was the major problem, followed by poor sanitation (68.42%), lack of social ties and network (63.15%), poor health and vulnerability (47.36%). Equal proportion (39.47%) boys stated that lack of protection and substance abuse were the problems they have to face in

their day to day lives. Similarly, among girls majority (75.0%) cited lack of access to basic medical facilities as their problem, followed by lack of protected and poor sanitation as reported by an equal proportion (62.5%) of school going street girls. Fifty per cent girls reported lack of social ties and network as their problems. None of the school going street girls was found facing the problem of substance abuse. Looking upon the day to day problems of non-school going street children it was found that majority (93.0%) of the boys reported lack of access to basic medical facilities as their problem followed by Poor health and vulnerability and Lack of protection as reported by an equal proportion (69.76%) of non-school going street boys, Poor sanitation (58.13%) Substance abuse (51.16%) and Lack of social ties and network (25.58%). However, among non-school going street girls majority (81.81%) of them reported that they feel the lack of protection, followed by Lack of access to basic medical facilities and poor sanitation as reported by an equal proportion (72.72%) of street girls, Poor health and

vulnerability (54.54%), Lack of social ties and network (36.36%) and even 18.18 per cent girls reported that they faced the problem of substance abuse. However, a study on the daily lives of street children in Khartoum Sudan with intervention recommendation conducted by Kudrati *et al.* (2008) revealed that approximately half of children were 14 years old or younger, and their daily life focused on eating,

sucking glue, soaked rags obtaining money and sometimes movies or games. Many children valued their freedom and relatively abundant food on the street. Girls had fewer work opportunities and primarily obtained money through begging and sex work. Children belonged to same sex group of common geographic origin shared food and shelter. Most girls had a boyfriend who financially assisted and protected her.

**Table 1.4:** Per cent distribution of children as per problems faced by them while being on street

Problems faced by children while being on street	School going children (N=46)		Non-school going children (N=54)		Total (N=100)
	Boys N=38	Girls N=8	Boys N=43	Girls N=11	
Ask for explanation	20 (52.63)	4 (50.0)	20 (46.51)	4 (36.36)	48 (48.0)
Scold	10 (26.31)	2 (25.0)	15 (34.88)	3 (27.27)	30 (30.0)
Abuse verbally	8 (21.05)	2 (25.0)	8 (18.60)	4 (36.36)	22 (22.0)

Data presented in table 1.4 highlights the problems faced by street children while being on street. It was reported by (48.0) percent children that they were asked for explanation for being on street by the passer-by followed by Scolding as reported by (30.0) per cent children and (22.0) per cent children reported that they were even abused verbally. Looking upon the gender differences among school going and non-school going street children as per problems faced by them while being on street data further reveals that among school going street boys majority (52.63%) of them reported that they were asked for explanation either by the passer-by or policeman, followed by scolding (26.31%) and abusing verbally (21.05%). Among girls too majority (50.0%) of them stated that they were asked for explanation while equal proportions (25.0%) were scolded or abuse verbally. Similarly, among non-school going street it was found that major proportion (46.51%) of boys were asked for explanation followed by scolding (34.88%) and abuse verbally (18.60%). However, in case of girls an equal proportion (36.36%) reported that they were asked for explanation and abuse verbally while (27.27) per cent stated that they were scolded.

### Conclusion

Street children are a part of vast population of children worldwide who live in and faced various challenges such as lack of basic medical facilities, poor health, and lack of protection, lack of social ties, poor sanitation, and substance abuse by parents in their day to day life. The study reveals that majority of the street children were under 8-10 years and majority of them were not attending school. It was also found that the children were facing various problems in their day to day lives such as lack of access to basic medical facilities, poor sanitation, and lack of protection, poor health and vulnerability, Lack of social ties and network and Substance abuse. Study also reveals that the children were asked for explanation for being on street by the passer-by while some were scolded or even abused verbally. The absence of a normal life is an endangered lifestyle for square and problematic street children, entangled with myriad prediction and tensions. Homeless and street life is extremely harmful to children.

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