

# Appropriateness of Counselling Given to Street Children By Non-Governmental Organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe

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**Abstract-** This is part of a broad study that sought to investigate the appropriateness of counselling being given to street children by non-governmental organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe. This paper looks at the types of counselling given to street children in transition to independent living as adults. A qualitative descriptive survey was used to guide the research methodology. A purposive sample of organizations that work with street children based on visibility in dealing with street children participated in the study. Officials of non-governmental organisations who have direct contact with street children and street children who received some assistance from the non-governmental organisations were randomly selected to participate in the research. A pilot study was carried out on officials of non-governmental organizations and street children that did not participate in the study. Forty street children and twenty officials of non-governmental organisations participated in the research. The study found out that 87,5% of the officials of non-governmental organisations thought the counselling they were giving was quite appropriate for transition to adult life for street children while 45% of the street children thought the counselling they were receiving was appropriate, 30% thought it was inappropriate and 25% was undecided. The study found out that the street children were satisfied with the counselling they received regarding how to relate to senior members when at a workplace, relating to their age mates, working with older people, asking for forgiveness and uniting with family members. The study recommends that the street children be consulted on the type of counselling they require so as to meet their needs. There is also need to rope in other stakeholders especially those who are likely to absorb the street children to assist the non-governmental organisations in counselling the street children.

**Index Terms-** street children, skills, non-governmental organisations, counselling, independent living.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Children normally are supposed to grow up within the confines of the home where they receive nurturing and guidance from adult figures like parents and guardians. When the child leaves the home and decides to make the street the home means something has gone wrong within home environment or regarding the child's way of thinking. Normally children fear even to go outside the home at night but if they take decisions to make the streets their home then there is need for serious interventions to be made. The interventions that are made should

aim at counselling the children so that adopt acceptable ways of behaviour within the societies that they live. The street children need to be engaged so that they engage in ways that do not threaten the members of the community who in some instances have developed an aversion towards them. This aversion is due to the manner that the street children conduct themselves. The street children need to be counselled so that they are able to relate to all who interface with them in a way that promote coexistence. This paper interrogates the appropriateness of counselling being given to street children by non-governmental organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe.

### 1.2. The Research Question

Is counselling services given to street children by non-governmental organizations in Harare, Zimbabwe appropriate for transition to independent adult life?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. DETAILED DEFINITION OF STREET CHILDREN

Research distinguishes between two different groups of street children. The classification is basically based on the degree of contact between the child and his or her family. The first category of street children comprises children 'of' the streets. These are children who have completely lost contact with their families and relatives. These street children sleep and depend entirely on the streets. The second category of street children comprises children 'on' the streets. These are children who are still maintaining contact with their families and relatives. Children 'on' the streets can be further divided into those who come to the streets daily to beg and do odd jobs and go back to their families at the end of the day and those who work and live on the streets and periodically visit their families (Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003).

Muchini (1994) notes that there are 'children of the street' who maintain links with their family members though there are others who have totally severed family connections. The degrees to which the filial linkages are maintained differ for different children. Some of the children know where to find their relatives and family members but deliberately avoid or distance themselves from them. The quality of the contacts also differs. Some of the children visit their relatives during important holidays like Christmas, Easter and Heroes.

It is at times hard to make a clear distinction between children 'on' the street and children 'of' the street as Muchini (1994) found that at times children 'on' the street included those who sometimes slept on the streets when things are not fine at

home or when the conditions are 'too good' in the streets. In his study, Muchini (1994) discovered that children 'on' the street gradually became children 'of' the street and are thus on an initiation phase. UNICEF (2001) found that the majority of Zimbabwe's street children are 'of' the street and not 'on' the street. The study found out that the majority (56.9%) of the 260 street children interviewed were children 'of the street' who worked and slept on the street. The study found out that (31.4%) were children 'on' the street who performed various types of work in the street during the day and went to their homes at night. The study found that (11.8%) who slept both on the streets and their homes were showing that they were on the transition stage to becoming children 'of' the street.

Zindi and Nherera (1999) define street children as youngsters (often aged between three and eighteen years) who hang out and sleep on the streets mainly due to poverty. Konane (1989) notes that street children are those for whom the street, more than their family, has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults. Swart (1998) claims that street children referred to children who have made the city streets their place of abode and source of livelihood. She further puts the street children into two categories which are 'push outs' or 'throwaways' and 'runaways'.

Swart (1998) cites the distinction made by the United States Senate subcommittee on juvenile justice which claimed that 'push-outs' or 'throw-aways' are children who have been abandoned or orphaned and for whom their relatives and the local community do not wish to take responsibility. With the AIDS pandemic still raging on there are numerous such children in Zimbabwe as the few remaining adult population becomes overburdened by the orphans that are being left behind. Push-outs or 'throw-aways' are children who may also come from intact homes of origin but who have been rejected or forced to leave, frequently by step-parents. Children who come under the category of 'run-aways' are those children who are seeking an escape from poverty, brutality, neglect or being laden with responsibilities beyond their coping capabilities and their families appear to be glad to have gotten rid of them. Run-aways do not always depict delinquency or emotional disorder. It could be a cry that something painful is happening or a sign of health seeking surface. In this study the distinction between 'run-aways' or 'throw-aways' is not taken seriously as the emphasis is on the appropriateness of counselling given to the street children by non-governmental organizations in Harare in Zimbabwe.

The Child Protection and Adoption Act (1996) of Zimbabwe considers children as those less than eighteen years in two categories of a child and a young person. A child is considered to be any person under the age of sixteen years and includes an infant. A young person is considered to be any person who has attained the age of sixteen but has not yet attained the age of eighteen years. In this study the term child is going to be considered as any person who has not yet attained the age of eighteen. This will include a young person.

The concept 'street child' according to Michaleon (2006) encompasses any child or adolescent under the age of eighteen who works and or lives in the street alone or with his or her family or asylum seekers who are technically homeless and without support. In Zimbabwe the phenomenon of asylum

seekers who came in large numbers was last experienced during the times when there was instability in Mozambique. These days a few asylum seekers who are usually in transit to look for better opportunities in South Africa from The Horn of Africa may be seen. This group of children is not included in the present study.

In the present study the concepts of 'street children' or 'street kids' are used to mean the same as was adopted by Rialp (1991) at The Inter-Non Governmental Organisation Conference in Switzerland which regarded them as boys and girls who have not yet reached adulthood for whom the street has become their habitual abode and or source of livelihood and who are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults. The concept and definition will apply to both categories of children discussed above. In the context of this study, boys and girls who have not yet reached adulthood, mean those children who have not yet attained the age of eighteen, which is the legal age of majority in Zimbabwe. Those under the age of eighteen are legally considered to be minors and should be dependent on adults for most of their needs. These adults could be parents, relatives or other people who can be legally responsible for the needs of such children.

### 1.3. APPROPRIATE COUNSELLING

Counselling is rather difficult to define due to the diversity of the profession. Gladding (2000) cites The American Counselling Association that regards counselling as the application of mental health, psychological or human development principles through the cognitive, affective, behavioural or systemic intervention strategies that address wellness, personal growth or career development as well as pathology. George and Christian (1981) define counselling as an individualised and personalised assistance with personal, educational and vocational problems in which all pertinent facts are studied, analysed and a solution is sought often with the assistance of specialists, community resources and personal interviews in which the counsellee is empowered to make own decision. Counselling has to be done in a systematic way with the counsellor carefully studying the facts that brought about the problem at hand. This implies that the counsellor should be a professional who has received some training on particular principles to apply when faced with a problem where counselling is needed. It dismisses the application of 'one method fit all approach'. The counsellee should experience improvement in his or her condition. Appropriate counselling should take into consideration the personal and individual circumstances of the counsellee so that eventually the counsellee is empowered so as to be able to make a decision on his or her own without being coerced. The counsellee should actually own the solution to his or her problem after being appropriately counselled.

The phenomenon of street children has attracted a lot of attention because people are worried by the way these children live. Some of the people in society actually fear the children in the streets while others feel pity for them as they realize that leaving the children in the streets without assisting them will create future problems. The Herald of 6 February 2011 carried a report that pointed out that the public was worried by the behavior of the street children as they tended to be violent when begging for food and money. The report quotes a motorist who had his car's headlights smashed by a mob of drunken street

children after he had said he had no money to give them. In the same report one woman was quoted as saying that she was shot by the street children using a catapult when she had said that she had no money to give them.

Swart (1988) in a study on the community's perceptions on street children in Hillbrow, Johannesburg found out that people were angry, resentful or revulsed. They accused the street children of pestering for money and being violent when one had said there was no money to give to them. In a similar study in London, Boyden and Holden, (1991) found out that the community saw the street children as being ill-mannered, directionless and being a sore in the city. Kariuki (1999) in a study in Kenya found out that people turned their heads the other way as a sign of disapproval when they met street children.

Hsu (1993) found out that the community thought the children in the streets were being schooled into becoming future criminals. They believed that street children were a security threat to the community and deserved no sympathy especially those who had had nasty encounters with them. The community attributed their belief to the street children's behavior when they had failed to get what they wanted. The street children's over-reliance on drugs and the fact that most of the time they acted without guidance from an adult figure.

Appropriate counselling has to include both the community and the street children. The community has to be equipped with facts that led these children to be on the streets. At times they are in the streets due to reasons beyond the children's control. The street children in Harare have to be equipped with skills so that they conduct themselves in a humane way and use acceptable ways of gaining survival. They need to be properly equipped so that they make judicious decisions and are able to participate meaningfully in the country's economy and developmental programmes.

#### **1.4. IDENTIFYING RELEVANT NEEDS**

Children who live in the streets have needs that are peculiar to each one of them. There are common problems that led each of the children to leave their homes to come to the streets. The problems were perceived individually and needed individual attention. According to Ennew (1994) the reasons included poverty, abuse, neglect and revolting against authorities at home. Aptekar (1988) prescribed micro programmes dealing with street children individually. There is need for the intervention strategies to be person centred. They should address the needs of each street child and services should aim at developing the individual child holistically. There is need for these projects to be appropriate to the needs of each of the street children.

Most non-governmental organisation have programmes that involve the provision of food, clothes handouts and education. In a study in Guatemala by Swart (1990) found that malnutrition was not a major problem for the street children in that country. Swart (1990) found that 73% of the street children in Latin America needed emotional support in the form of attention, affection and understanding while food and shelter were accorded lower priority. The Government of Guatemala embarked on a huge project that involved the construction of shelter of the street children. Unfortunately less than 20% of the street children utilised the shelter on completion. Unicef (2001) noted that street children should be involved in identifying their

needs and in working out the intervention strategies that will result in addressing the actual problems faced by the street children. This implies that each street child has to be studied individually and a solution found to address her or his problems. Non-governmental organisations have education as one of the services they offer to street children. At times the street children are reluctant to attend the offered lessons. In most cases the curriculum will be the same for every child who comes at the premises of the organisation. Article 28 of UNESCO (1994) Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education states that curricula should be adapted to children's needs, not vice-versa. Schools should therefore provide curricula opportunities to children with different abilities and opportunities. Each of the street children needs to have a curriculum that prepares him or her for the future properly crafted so as to address the particular needs of that child.

Article 30 of UNESCO (1994) Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education states that the acquisition of knowledge is not a matter of formal and theoretical instruction only. The content of education should be geared to high standards and needs of the individuals with a view to enabling them to participate fully in development. Teaching should be related to pupils' own experience and to practical concerns in order to motivate them better. Each child needs to be properly assessed so that his or her strengths and weaknesses are taken into consideration so that appropriate instruction is given to enable the street child to positively contribute to the development of the country and realise his or her potential.

#### **1.5. INVOLVING THE RECEIPIENTS OF COUNSELLING**

In most cases solutions to the problems of street children are drawn without the involvement of the street children. Chirwa and Wakatama (2000) note that the intervention programmes are less effective because they have been designed by adults, based on research and perceptions of adults. The street children are not involved in the dialogue which involves solving their problems. This results in suspicion on intentions between the street children and the civil society as no information is communicated to the children, yet, they are the ones experiencing the problem directly. Although Article 12 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child states that children should have a say in decisions that affect their lives, society still fails to take the opinions of the children seriously. The case becomes worse if the opinions happen to contradict with those of adults, worse still if the children concerned are street children who are seen as unworthy of making any valuable contributions. The street children are already viewed as deviants who are not capable of making any constructive contributions.

Bourdillon (2000), is of the opinion that if researchers are to devise strategies to improve the situation of the street children, they need first to listen to them and acquire some of the children's knowledge. There is need to allow the children themselves to have a voice for they know the reason why they are living and working in the street. In most instances the children are not consulted and solutions are just imposed on the children without giving the children a chance to say their side of the story.

McCartney (2008) says counselling work is usually ineffective because the targeted beneficiaries rarely come alive as participants in the stages where decisions are made. They are regarded as individuals who have no emotions, wishes, opinions and ability to participate in solving their own problems, hence, they are made passive recipients of handouts. This eventually results in the process of assisting the people and failing to empower the beneficiaries due to non-involvement in the project planning. McCartney (2008) attributes this failure by the responsible authorities to listen and to know the recipients of their services as underrating the strengths of the street children in knowing things that are important to them.

The need to listen to the opinions of street children is of particular importance so as to avoid working with assumptions and opinions made by adults. It is usually assumed that the projects or solutions that work for adults automatically work for younger people. Yet the process of assisting is incomplete if the people do not listen and seek to understand those they intend to help. Street children usually respond to this by resisting attempts by government to help them because the policies are just planned and imposed on them without being consulted. Chirwa and Wakatama (2000) note that the intervention programmes are less effective because they are designed by adults, based on research and perceptions of adults.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design. This method was used as the researcher felt it was the most ideal for the study. The descriptive survey research designs are defined by their methodical collection of standardised information from any representative sample of the population (Christensen, 1994). In addition, this research design suits the context under which the present study was taken as the descriptive survey represents a probe into a given state of affairs that exists at a given time. It therefore means that direct contact was made with the individuals whose characteristics, behaviours and issues were relevant to the investigation under study. It allowed the researcher to choose a wide variety of instruments. The study was qualitative in nature and the data to be sourced had to be descriptive rather than quantitative.

This research design has the advantage of the researcher being in direct contact with the research participants. The direct contact affords the researcher to be able to observe other information like non verbal cues in the form of voice tone and facial expressions that quantitative designs cannot capture. Data collected using the descriptive survey method can be easily summarized and analysed.

This research design has the disadvantage of the researcher becoming carried away when carrying interviews. This problem was overcome by formulating questions in the interview schedule that were clear to the respondents so that answers were required needed no much explanation.

The sample comprised of ten randomly selected children from each of the four purposively selected organisations that work with street children. The organisations were selected due to their visibility in dealing with street children. The children were selected by dividing the children who were present on the day the researcher visited into two groups of boys and girls and then

randomly picking five children from each group who would participate in the research. There were twenty male street children and twenty female street children who participated in the research. The sample of those who work with children was purposively selected so that at each of the four organisations one participant came from the administration and the other four came from field workers. These dealt directly with the street children. There were twenty officials of non-governmental organisations who participated in the research. Qualitative data analysis with descriptive statistics was used to present and analyse the data.

### IV. RESULTS

**Table 1: Composition of Research Participants N= 60**

Category of Participants	Male Street Children	Female Street Children	Organisation Officials	Total
Number	20	20	20	60

In the study there were 20 male street children, 20 female street children and 20 officials from non-governmental organisations.

**Table 2. Type of Counselling Given By Non Governmental Organisations (n=16)**

TYPE OF COUNSELLING	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Relating to other street children	16	100
Officials at the institutions	15	93.75
Police	12	75
City Council Officials	12	75
Relatives	10	62.75
Parents	12	75
Agreed Work Goals	16	100
Future Career	15	93.75
Public	10	62.75

100% of the officials reported that they counselled street children on issues that related to proper relations with other street children and working to complete agreed work goals. 93.75% (15) of the officials of non-governmental organisations reported that they counselled street children on relating well to officials of the non-governmental organisation and on their future careers. 75% (12) of the officials of non-governmental organisations reported they counselled street children on relating to their parents, city officials and the police. 62.75% (10) of the officials of non-governmental organisations reported that they counselled the street children on matters relating to their relatives and the public.

**Table 3. Appropriateness of counselling given to street children according to Non-Governmental Officials (n=16)**

Is counseling being given appropriate	Number	Percentage
Yes	14	87.5
No	2	12.5
Total	16	100

87.5% (14) of the officials of non-governmental organisations regarded the counseling that they gave to street children to be appropriate to meet their future challenges. 12.5% (2) of the officials of non-governmental organisations thought that the counselling was not appropriate to enable the children to confront their future challenges.

**Table 4. Type of counselling received according to street children (n=40)**

Type of Counselling	Yes	No
Relating to senior people at a workplace	40	0
Relating to children of their age	40	0
Relating to older people	40	0
Relating to ways of asking for forgiveness	40	0
Relating to uniting with the family	40	0

100% of the street children reported that they received counselling about relating to senior people at workplaces, ways of relating to children of their age, relating to older people, asking for forgiveness and re-uniting with their family members.

**Table 5. Appropriateness of counselling being given to street children according to the street children (n=40)**

Appropriateness of counselling given by NGOS	Number	Percentage
Yes	18	45
No	12	30
Undecided	10	25
Total	40	100

45% (18) of the street children thought that the assistance they were getting from the non-governmental organisations would assist them in entering the professions that they wanted to do in the future. 30% (12) thought the assistance they were getting was not enough to assist them get into the professions that they preferred. 25% (10) were not sure whether the assistance they were getting would assist them in getting into the professions that they preferred.

**Table 6. Reunification Success (n=16)**

Reunification success	Number	Percentage
Yes	16	100
No	0	0
Total	16	100

100% (16) of the officials of non-governmental organizations had made successful reunifications of some street children with their families. On further probing they noted that some few children who had been reunited with their families especially those that involved step parents found their way back into the streets mostly due ill treatment.

**Table 7. Problems likely to be faced by street children according Non-Governmental Organisation Officials (n=16)**

Type of Problem	Number	Percentage
Birth certificates	9	56.25
Identity Documents	8	50
Shelter	10	62.75
Physical abuse	12	75
Sexual abuse	16	100
Sexual Transmitted Diseases	15	93.75
HIV /AIDS	16	100
Criminal Activities	15	93.75
Employment	14	87.5

100% (16) of the officials of non-governmental organisations were agreed that sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS were problems that were likely to be faced by the street children. 93.75% (15) of the officials of non-governmental organisations reported that street children are also likely to face problems of being involved in criminal activities and sexually transmitted diseases. 87.5% (14) officials of non-governmental organisations reported that street children were going to face problems of employment. 62.75% (10) of the officials of non-governmental organisations reported that street children were likely to face problems of accommodation. 56.25% of the officials of non-governmental organisations reported that the street children were likely to face problems of birth certificates. 50 % (8) of the officials of non-governmental organisations reported that the street children were likely to face problems of identity documents.

**Table 8. Challenges likely to be faced by street children according to the street children. (n=40)**

What challenges are you likely to face in future?	Number	Percentage
Employment	35	87.5
Food	24	60
Clothes	16	40
Shelter	31	77.5
Finishing school	25	62.5
Finding their family members	26	65

87.5% (35) of the street children regarded their future employment chances as the major challenge they are likely to meet. 77.5% of the street children regarded shelter as their next major challenge. 65% (26) of the street children regarded finding their family members as a challenge. 62.5% (25) of the street children regarded finishing school as their next major challenge. 60 % (24) of the street children regarded finding enough food as

a challenge they are likely to meet. 40%(16) regarded clothes as a challenge they are likely to meet in future.

## V. DISCUSSION

The street children were given counselling in matters that covered most aspects of life where they were likely to meet problems. The officials reported they counselled the street children in matters relating to harmonious co-existence with other street children, keeping and achieving work goals, their future career and proper relations with the various officials. The areas that the street children were counselled were related to problems that they were experiencing and those that they were likely to face in the future. The street children were counselled on how to relate to the police, their relatives.

The officials wherever possible tried to unite the street children with their families. In all the non-governmental organisations that took part in the study they had reported cases where they had succeeded in reuniting some street children with their families. The outreach officers kept contact with such children and closely observed whether there was no possibility of recurrence of the conditions that had initially led the child to go to the streets.

The street children were satisfied that they were receiving counselling that related to harmonious co-existence with other people. All the street children that were receiving counselling from the non-governmental organisations reported that they received counselling regarding relating to senior people at workplaces, older people in general, people of their own age and asking for forgiveness.

87.5% of the officials thought that the counselling that they were giving to street children was appropriate to meet their future challenges. The other 12.5% thought the counselling was not adequate as they preferred the children to be given individual attention and to have specific programmes prepared for each child. 45% of the street children thought that the counselling they were receiving was adequate in meeting their future challenges. 30% said that the counselling they were receiving from the non-governmental organisations was not appropriate as they wanted to be assisted so that the police would not give them problems and in the case of some who had been ill treated at their homes they wanted the culprits prosecuted. 25% of the street children were not decided on whether the counselling they were receiving was appropriate in solving their future challenges as they thought some of their problems were beyond what the non-governmental organisations could do. This could be due to the fact that 100% of the street children reported that they were never consulted on the type of counselling that they required. If they had been involved in deciding the type of counselling that they required more street children could have been satisfied with the counselling they were receiving.

There were some similarities in what the officials of non-governmental organisations and the street children perceived to be likely challenges they were going to meet in the future. The street children have employment as the major problem they are likely to meet with 87.5% of the children reporting it as a challenge. A similar percentage (87.5%) of the officials of non-governmental organisations also reported that street children were likely to face problems of employment. This may be due to

the fact that the street children are in the street due to failure to make ends meet and they regard employment to be the main relief to their problem. The other similar problem between street children and officials of non-governmental organisations is shelter which is reported by 77.5% of the street children and 62.5% of the officials of non-governmental organisations. However the problems that are regarded by 100% of the officials of non-governmental organisations which are sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS do not appear on the list of challenges by street children. This may be due to the differences in the ages of street children and officials of non-governmental organisations. The officials of non-governmental organisations also report criminal activities as some of the challenges the street children are likely to face. Some of the challenges mentioned by officials of non-governmental organisations but not mentioned by street children maybe because the street children have not experienced much in life are sexually transmitted diseases, birth certificates, physical abuse and identity documents. There is need for the street children to receive counselling in these areas.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

(i)The study recommends that the street children be consulted on the type of counselling they require so as to meet their needs.

(ii) There is also need to rope in other stakeholders especially those who are likely to absorb the street children to assist the non-governmental organisations in counselling the street children.

(iii) The children need to be equipped with skills on how to handle situations that may lead them to contract sexually transmitted diseases as they seem to be blind of the possibility of contracting them yet they are really exposed.

(iv) There is need to approach relevant authorities to help facilitate the street children acquire identity documents.

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