

The Effectiveness of Support Services available for the Street Adolescent in Harare

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Abstract- This study is part of a broad research that sought to establish the counseling needs of adolescent street kids and in Harare Central Business District. This paper looks at the effectiveness of support services available for the street adolescent in Harare. The representative sample drawn comprised of 40 street kids who were receiving some assistance from four non-governmental organizations and 8 officials from the organizations. A qualitative descriptive survey was used to guide the methodology. Data was collected using questionnaires and structured interviews for officials and the street kids respectively. Qualitative data analysis with descriptive statistics was used in the presentation and analysis of data. The study found out that those organizations that offered support services concentrated on providing food, recreation, education and blankets. The personnel who were involved in counseling the street did not possess the relevant counseling qualifications. The study concluded that the support services were not effective in the long run as the organisations focussed on the symptoms of the problem. There is need for the organisations that deal with street kids to give more emphasis on empowering the children to take charge of their lives instead of making them depend on handouts. In addition the organizations need to be advised to take in employment people who have some counseling qualification to work with these children or encourage the present ones to acquire counseling qualifications.

Index Terms- street kids, support services non- governmental organisations, counselling, counselling needs

I. INTRODUCTION

Children who live in the streets survive outside the confines of the home where there are parents who provide nurturing and guidance. It is unusual and out of the norm for a child below the age of majority to be found living alone fending for himself or herself. The phenomenon of children living in the streets is a recent one in Zimbabwe. It surfaced only after the advent of independence. According to Muchini and Nyandiyamba-Bundy(1991) municipal by-laws were so ruthlessly applied that they would not tolerate the slightest signs of loitering which is characteristic of street kids. In support Grier (1996) states that in Zimbabwe during the colonial era, it was impossible for children to work in the streets as the municipal by-laws restricted this and were strictly and brutally enforced. This was a time when there was a lot of repression and suppression of the indigenous people such that they were forbade to be found at certain places like the city centre unless they were on duty. The City of Harare has

witnessed a rapid increase in the number of adolescent street children in the last few years. This interrogates the effectiveness of support services given to adolescent street children by non governmental organizations.

1.2 The Research Question

How effective are the support services given to adolescent street children by non-governmental organizations in Harare?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of street kids

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 two categories comprise of children “of” the streets and completely lost contact with their families and relatives. These ones sleep and depend entirely on the streets. Children “on” the streets are those who are still maintaining contact with their families. Children “on” the streets can be divided further into those who come into the streets daily to beg and do odd jobs going back to their families at the end of their day and those who work in the streets and periodically visit their families (Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003).

The Child Protection and Adoption Act (1996) of Zimbabwe consider children less than eighteen years in two categories 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 attained the age of eighteen years. In this study the term child is going to be considered as any person who has not attained the age eighteen, it will therefore include a young person.

The concept ‘street children’ and/or ‘street kid’ 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 come in large numbers was last experienced during the times when there was instability in Mozambique in the 1980’s. This group of children is not included in the present study.

However, 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 the 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. When under the age of eighteen children are therefore 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 legally be responsible for the needs of these children.

2.1 Effectiveness of present support initiatives

Numerous initiatives had and were still being implemented in an effort to try and address the problem of street children. The Zimbabwe Government had The Department of Social Welfare that was mandated to oversee the implementation of the Children’s Protection and Adoption Act. This Act had provisions that guaranteed proper maintenance of children and set up procedures of what should be done if a child was being neglected. It seemed that despite the law being present there were children who were still being neglected as manifested the increasing number of street kids and no one was prosecuted for breaking that law. It therefore called for vigorous advocacy programme in order to safeguard the children’s rights.

The department of social welfare was practically under siege as a result of perennial underfunding and mass exodus of qualified and experienced social workers in the face of growing social problems orphans and vulnerable children. These factors had compromised its capacity to coordinate, supervise and implement child welfare programmes and service delivery in general (Zadzagomo,2009).

There were also non-governmental organizations like Oasis Zimbabwe, Streets Ahead, Girl Child Network, Shelter Trust, Mbuya Nehanda Training Institute and various church organizations that have made initiatives to assist the street children.

Oasis Zimbabwe was an organization that basically looked in the welfare of disadvantaged children. It equipped them with skills in tailoring, carpentry, computers and agriculture as part of their social responsibility and supported the government’s efforts to improve the lives of street children and orphans. It also ran the Tanaka project for street girls and imparted to them self-help skills (Dhemba, 2008).

Shelter Trust was a welfare organization that catered for the welfare of pregnant girls. It gave them temporary shelter and prepared them for delivery and tried to reconcile the pregnant girls with their families especially the father of the unborn child. It also provided support for desperate women in their homes. This organization was trying to address the symptoms of street children (Attwood, 2009). There was need to actually empower the child so that when she faced a similar problem in future she would be in a position to make a beneficial decision.

Mbuya Nehanda Training Institute operated as a home for street kids and other destitute children by giving them education and accommodation. Children were encouraged to take part in

the farming projects of the institute, which helped to feed the children. The organization had suffered from chronic financial problems and from time from time had been short of food and other necessities for the children.

The Presbyterian Church provided an informal school and a feeding programme for young street children in the city centre and study group for older children in the Mbare suburb. The church urged the street children with incentives for the children to reform by offering scholarships to study at prestigious schools like Prince Edward and Churchill to those who would have performed well at the grade seven examinations. This was a very noble programme especially where they made grade seven street-kids compete for an educational scholarship as this would be an effort to empower the street kid.

Streets Ahead was a non-governmental organization that helped destitute children to become spiritually, physically and financially self-sufficient. It operated as drop in centre providing children with washing facilities, cooking and recreational facilities. It also operated a base for educational and training programmes. It operated an outreach programme where visits were made to the streets and newcomers were identified and efforts made to reunite them with their families. The outreach workers also assisted the street children get access to medical facilities (Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003). The programme tried to address the problems of the street kids and only fell short in empowering the street kids so that they were in a position to leave the streets and go and live independent lives on their own.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design. This method was used as the researchers felt it was the most ideal for the study. The descriptive survey research designs are defined by their methodical collection of standardized 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 survey represents a probe into a given state of affairs that exists at a given time. The sample comprised of ten randomly selected children from each of the four purposively selected organizations that deal with street children. The organizations 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 researchers visited into two groups of boys and girls and then randomly picking five children from each group who would participate in the research. The sample of those who work with children was purposively selected so that at each of the four organizations one participant came from the administration and the other came from field workers. These deal directly with the street children. Questionnaires were administered to the officials while the street children were interviewed. In order to ensure obtaining reliable and valid results a pilot study of the questionnaire and the interview guide was conducted at SOS Children’s Home in Waterfalls. SOS Children’s Home keeps children who will have been identified by the Ministry of Social Services in the streets to be too young and are then kept in a family like setting. Qualitative data analysis with descriptive statistics was used to present and analyse the data.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic data

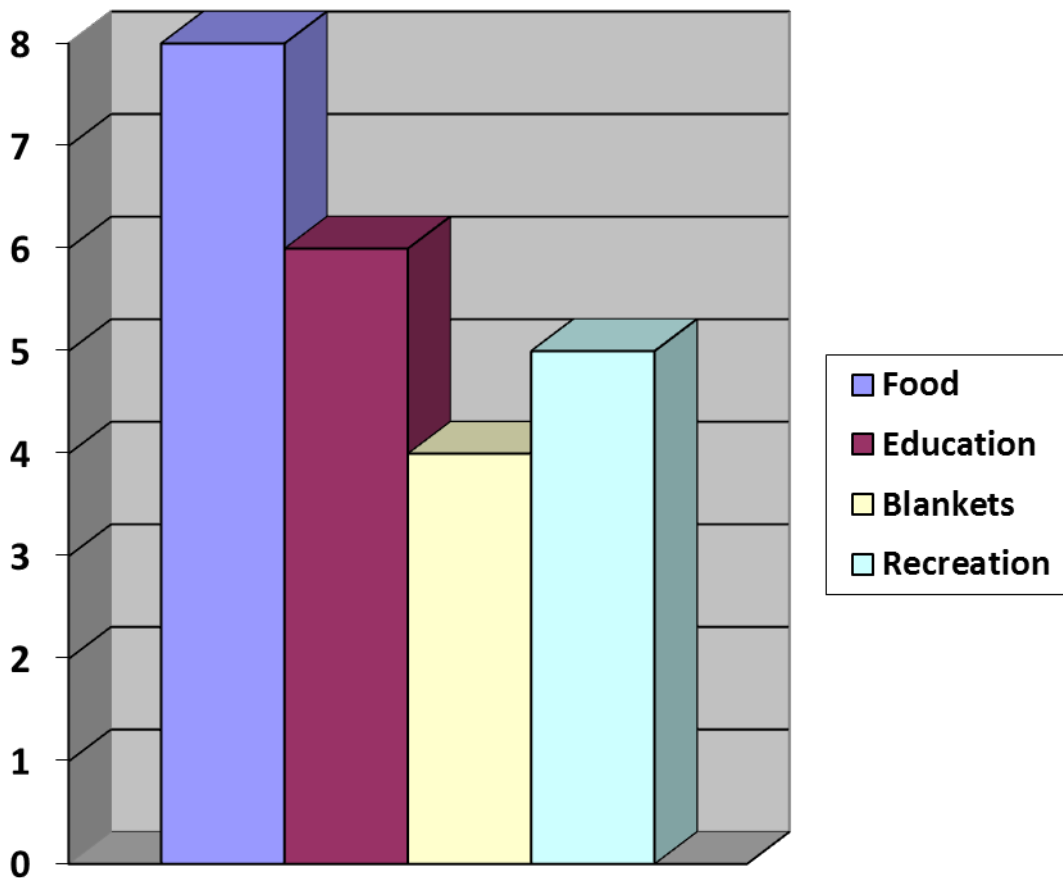
Table 1. Response Rate

Group	Proposed Number	Actual Number
Organisation Officials	8	8

Street Children	40	40
Total	48	48

All the questionnaires given to officials were completed and collected on the day interviews with street children were being carried out. All the street children identified to participate in the interview responded to all questions asked by the researchers.

Figure 1. Services Provided by Organisations



The organizations are mostly involved in providing food handouts to the children and providing some education. The education ranges from being given some training in activities like candle making and soap making.

Table 2. What Organisations are unable to do.

Type of Problem	Male	Female	Total
Giving street children pocket money	3	4	7
Securing a safe sleeping place	4	4	8
Protect from arrests from ZRP and Municipal Police	3	2	5
Protecting them from street bullies	2	2	4
Changing public perception on	1	2	3

street kids			
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The results show that it is beyond the mandate of the organizations to give street children pocket money, secure safe sleeping places and stop the Zimbabwe Republic Police from arresting the street kids when found loitering as this required other initiatives for their implementation. Very few felt it was not possible to change public perceptions on the street kids. In addition only 4 thought it was not possible to change the behavior of bullies.

Table 3. Street Kids Hopes for the Future

Future Hope	Males	Females	Total

Start own business	5	6	11
Get a decent job	3	8	11
Successful person	2	3	5
Professional like teacher, lawyer or doctor	1	1	2
Revive their rural home	2	0	2
Grand Total	15	25	40

Most of the street children hoped to start their own businesses maybe this is due to the vending activities they do. They also hoped to get decent jobs and work in town. Very few hoped of becoming professionals may due to the fact that they are aware of their educational limitations. Girls still have hope to raise a decent family though this was expressed by few boys.

Table 4. Assistance Required Achieving the Hopes

Type of assistance	Males	Females	Totals
Go to school	5	8	13
Get seed money	3	3	6
Get professional training	2	3	5
Get a good job	3	8	11
Get premises to conduct business	2	3	5
Grand Total	15	25	40

The results show that most street children left school not out of choice but due to circumstances beyond their control and would like to continue with their education. The children still have hopes of living successful lives expressed by their hopes of getting some professional training and good jobs. Some still think if they get seed money to start businesses they would be able to get out of the streets.

V. DISCUSSION

The organizations were involved in providing the street kids with food (100%), education (75%), recreation (75%) and blankets (50%). The organizations faced limitations that the street kids said they wanted which included being provided with places to sleep, stopping the police from arresting the street kids, giving the street kids some pocket money and protecting the street kids from bullies.

The organizations were focusing on the symptoms of the problem of street children. The tackling of the root of the problem required the involvement of every member of the community which seemed to be beyond the mandate of the organisations. There was need to conduct empowerment programmes so that the street kids would decide on their own how to improve their lives. In the study it was found that 40 out of 40 (100%) of the street kids were never consulted on the type of assistance they required. The organization officials agreed with the street children as 6 out of 8 (75%) said the street children were never consulted on the type of assistance they would want to receive.

The study found out that the street kids had bright expectations about the future. The children hoped to be able to get decent jobs(28%), start own businesses(28%), and become

successful(13%). To get to these positions the street kids had some idea on what they should do. 33% of the street children knew that they had to go to school and wanted to be provided with opportunities to learn through going back to school. 28% said they wanted to be given assistance to get jobs. It is clear that when consulted the children were quite clear on what needed to be done so that their problems were solved.

Numerous initiatives had and were still being implemented in an effort to try and address the problem of street children. The Zimbabwe Government had The Department of Social Welfare that was mandated to oversee the implementation of the Children’s Protection and Adoption Act. This Act had provisions that guaranteed proper maintenance of children and set up procedures of what should be done if a child was being neglected. It seemed that despite the law being present there were children who were still being neglected as manifested the increasing number of street kids and no one was prosecuted for breaking that law. It therefore called for vigorous advocacy programme in order to safeguard the children’s rights.

The department of social welfare was practically under siege as a result of perennial underfunding and mass exodus of qualified and experienced social workers in the face of growing social problems orphans and vulnerable children. These factors had compromised its capacity to coordinate, supervise and implement child welfare programmes and service delivery in general (Zadzagomo,2009).

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) There is need for the organisations that deal with street kids to give more emphasis on empowering the children to take charge of their lives instead of making them depend on handouts.

(ii) The organizations need to be advised to take in employment people who have some counseling qualification to work with these children or encourage the present ones to acquire counseling qualifications.

(iii) There was need for the organizations to consult the street children on the type of assistance they need so that they provided them with assistance that is relevant to each particular street kid.

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