

Behaviours of Street Children That Attract the Attention of Law Enforcement Agencies

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Abstract- This is part of a broad research that sought to find out the perceptions of street children on law enforcement agents. This study investigated the behaviours of street children that attracted the attention of law enforcement agencies. Children who live in the streets due to lack of adult figures who give them guidance behave in ways that are against the laws of the country. Such behaviours attract the attention of law enforcement agencies who are mandated by the state to make sure all citizens of the state live according to the expectations of the law. The main research objective was to identify the activities of street children on the streets that attracted the attention of law enforcement agencies. The study used qualitative methodology. A descriptive survey research design was used. The research used interviews and observations to collect data. The sample composed of ten street children selected by purposive sampling in the streets of Harare. The found out that street children were involved in some illegal activities that included consumption of liquor in public places, snatching handbags from unsuspecting women, shoplifting, fighting in public places, intimidating people who will have refused to give them money and speaking obscene words in public.. The research recommends that street children be given life skills so that they do not depend on begging. There is also need for them to be taught ways of peaceful coexistence with other street children and members of the public. Street children have to be conscientised on the dangers of abusing intoxicating drugs and taught ways of containing the vagaries of weather.

Research Question: What activities are engaged by street children that attract the attention of law enforcing agents in the streets of Harare, Zimbabwe?

I. INTRODUCTION

Children who stay in the streets do so without the guidance of adult figures who are cognizant of the expectations of society. They are usually under the leadership of older street child. Beazley (2003) and Kudenga (2016) concur saying in the streets the socialising role of parents and guardians is taken over by older street children who will be in the street. According to Kudenga (2016) these older street children due to their circumstances end up misinforming the young street children as they are also ignorant of various social expectations. This lack of appropriate guidance predisposes street children to perform activities that attract the attention of law enforcement agencies.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Definition of street children

In Zimbabwe The Child Protection and Adoption Act (1996) considers children to be anyone below the age of eighteen. It puts them in two categories which are '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 reached the age of eighteen. This will include a young person who has not yet reached the age of eighteen. This will include a young person.

The concept of '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 concept of asylum seekers who come in large numbers are rare. They were last experienced during the 1980's during the times when there was political instability in Mozambique. This group is not included in the present study.

According to the Inter-Non Governmental organisation report cited in a United nations Journal (UNCHS 2000:73) street children are defined as :-

"Any girl or boy...for whom the street has become his or her habitual abode and or a source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults".

The United Nations (2008) further defined street children as children on the streets who are engaged in some kind of economic activity during the day but return to their family home at night (UNICEF 2008). United Nations (2008) describes children of the street as those children who mostly survive on the street or outside the normal family environment. Glasser, (1994) states that street children include any girl or boy 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. Rede Rio Crianca (2007) preferred to refer street children as children for whom the street is a reference point and has a central role in their lives. In most instances these children have left their homes due to various reasons that include fleeing from abuse or having no one to take after both parents have died. They then spend most of their lives in the street. In the streets they do not have adult figures to look up for guidance and nurturance.

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

Types of street children

Street children are categorised into two groups according to the United Nations definitions. The first type is of children who are homeless, resides in the streets in the urban areas and their source of livelihood are the streets which they sleep and live in. The second type is those who work and live in the street during daytime but return back home at night where they sleep. The second occasionally sleep in the streets, (UNCHS 2000). The congruency between the two definitions from the United Nations is that the children obtain their source of livelihoods from the streets. Rugaranganda (2008) alluded that the street is a source of street children's livelihood. Beazley (2003) cited that street childhood has invariably been seen as a career for the children's survival. These children would be inexperienced from how to run their lives and in turn resort to criminal activities and run cat and mouse games with law enforcement agencies.

Perception of Street Children in Zimbabwe

In both developing and developed countries worldwide the problematic phenomenon being faced by these countries is that of street children. It is threatening these societies and it needs to be addressed, lest it continue to havoc them.

In Zimbabwe children living in the street have threatened the lives of many city dwellers. This is evidenced by a story carried out in one of the local papers, Herald of 8th May 2013 which carried out a story titled 'Hell on Harare's streets. The paper stated that more and more street children continue to pour in the streets of Harare. The paper also indicated that children have turned nasty as they targeted hopeless women, grabbing food and many have been arrested for shoplifting in supermarkets. Some street kids are reported to have targeted women's handbags, phones, jewellery and other personal belongings. The Herald reported that the police were forced to come hard on these street kids as they tried to deal decisively with the problem.

Childline Zimbabwe spokesperson Mrs Patience Chiyangwa called for authorities to address the problem. She encouraged people to desist from giving the street children money. (The Herald, 8th May 2013.) She was quoted saying,

"It is important that members of the public desist from giving cash as this encourages them to stay on the streets. Preferably, if they can have more sustainable solutions to the problem that would be welcome. The more there is a feeling of begging as a lucrative exercise, the more we prolong the problem". (The Herald 8th May 2013)

The phenomenon of street children is widespread in Harare just like in many cities around the world. The law enforcement agents are at task to maintain law and order in the streets, rounding up these children and handing them over for rehabilitation.

Activities of street children on the streets.

Mean jobs

Street children are most evident in large cities, where they work in occupations that bring them into contact with the public, both the local population and foreign tourists. To earn a living street children are engaged in various mean jobs. The range of these mean jobs include begging, collecting rubbish for recycling, scavenging rubbish dumps, shoe shining, flower or magazine and newspaper sales and the less visible petty theft. In some of these occupations children work alone, although they frequently are under the control of adults, older street children or gangs. They engage in these various works with or without knowledge of their parents.

Many working children may be under coercion to deliver a certain amount of money each day. Rugaranganda (2008) suggested that the street is an important source of street children's livelihood. These street children engage in loading and offloading goods from vehicles, cleaning the backyards of supermarkets, herding cattle for some company executives and cutting grass and hedge at the homes of many business executives (Rugaranganda 2008).

The Social Learning Theory helps to explain how street children become involved in these various activities. The younger children copy from their peers on how to survive on the streets. According to Bandura (1997) social learning theory emphasises the importance of observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. Whilst in the street the child easily adapts to the situation by seeing what others are doing and then practising it themselves. Most children come to the street without knowledge of doing some jobs in order to earn a living but as a result of them seeing their peers doing the jobs they end up doing the same. This was supported by the behaviourists in Rukuni (2000) who stated that environment shapes one's behaviour. Street children come to the streets without any skills on begging but merely staying there for a short time one would be a wizard in begging.

A study carried out in Egypt in 2003 reported that children work as vendors, porters, domestic help, or labourers in homes, small restaurants, and other businesses, in order to get money for food. They were paid little for long hours and physically demanding work. In Zimbabwe it is the same situation street children engage in some mean jobs such as wash/guard cars, vending sweets, cigarettes', juice cards, vegetables etc to earn a living. As a result of poverty, these children leave their homes to look for income in the streets and come back home during the night with some money to feed their siblings. Some chose to stay in the streets forever and run away from poverty within their families.

In order to get money easily without working for many hours the girls then resort to prostitution as a source of living.

Prostitution

A research carried out in Egypt in 2004 by Human Rights Watch revealed that some children living in the streets were victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The children in the street at times engage in sex work to survive. The research further revealed that both boys and girls faced rape and sexual assault by men and older street boys. Street children told Human Rights Watch that they rarely reported crimes committed by their peers or adults to the police, fearing reprisals from the others on the street, or punishment by the police. (Human Rights Watch 2003)

From the interviews conducted with various stake-holders that deal with children living in the street cited by Motala and Smith (2003) it was clear that many children living on the streets are sexually active, but this takes on different meanings in different situations. Some children turn to sex with their fellow street dwellers for comfort, protection and a sense of belonging. For others sex is a source of income and material support. The girls reported that they sometimes received food from the boys living on the street and in exchange, some boys expect sex. According to Motala and Smith (2003) only one of the girls in the sample, Gcina, stated that she had been involved in sex work. She said she never went looking for 'clients' but provided sex to men she knows, in return for food. She is usually only given enough food for one day. (Motala and Smith 2003). Makepe (2006) reports that there is a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases for children living in the streets. Makepe (2006) further states that the children living in the streets survive through marginal and illegal activities such as stealing, begging, prostitution and doing odd jobs and they face violence, abuse and aggression from the police, from drunks and also from their peers. In support of this Swart-Kruger and Donald (1994) states that children living in the streets have a greater vulnerability to rape and HIV infection by virtue of living in the streets without parental guidance.

At times children in the street engage in sexual activities whilst they are intoxicated with drugs that they abuse to gain courage.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse, particularly glue sniffing, is widespread amongst street children and is often engaged in as a way of reducing hunger pangs, keeping out the cold and dulling the senses against pain. Motala and Smith (2003) commented that with these 'benefits', however, the inhalation of solvent fumes also has numerous detrimental physical and psychological health impacts, from cognitive effects, which impair educational development to temporary or permanent paralysis. Children living in the streets abuse drugs to gain courage to do illicit things that they do in the streets. They sell drugs to earn some money to buy food and clothing for themselves. Makepe (2006) states that some street children besides abusing drugs, get involved in petty crimes like selling drugs and engaging commercial sex to earn a living.

As a result of misuse of various drugs street children get hungry and would want to eat some food and in turn resort to scavenging in bins or begging for food from the streets.

Scavenging/Begging

Makepe (2006) argued that the principal reason why street children are in the streets is to find food and shelter. These street children get food from dirty bins or from scavenging through dirty food that has been discarded. (Makepe 2006). Ruparanganda (2008) observed that the street children also prepare their own food in the morning when they fail to get enough food from food outlets. According to Ruparanganda (2008) street children have a spirit of oneness, spirit of communalism whereby they put all the monies that they would have sourced for in the streets and buy food and eat together. Street children in Harare seem to know where the refuse bins for all places, the takeaways, supermarkets and restaurants are kept. They get their meals from scavenging in these bins.

Muchini (2001) states that besides begging the other economic activities undertaken by street children include vending, guarding cars, escorting blind parents, car-washing and taxi touting. UNICEF (2003) lamented that street children earn very little from these economic activities and they turn to criminal activities which results in them doing cat and mouse game with the police.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative methodology. It employed the 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. In this case the researchers had direct contact with the street children. It allowed the researcher to choose from a wide variety of instruments and in this research it was the interview schedule.

This research design has the advantage of the researcher being in direct contact with the research participants who were children living in the streets. 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 techniques cannot capture. Data collected using descriptive survey method can be easily summarised and analysed.

This research design has the disadvantage of the researcher becoming carried away when carrying interviews. This occurs when a researcher encounters a case which touches ones heart a case likely to occur when working with street children. This problem was overcome by formulating questions in the interview schedule that were clear to the respondents so that answers required needed no much explanation.

Sampling involves selecting people from the population to represent the entire population, (Polit 2001). Purposive sampling was utilized in this study and the best available people provided rich data on the research questions. Polit (2001) describes purposive sampling as selecting participants with a broad general knowledge on the topic or those who have undergone the experience. The researcher selected ten (10) street children who

resided or operated from the streets of Harare Central Business District. The participants were selected on the basis that they had had contact with law enforcement agencies in one way or another. This could have been by having been rounded up or having been arrested.

The data was collected through the use of a semi-structured interview. McNamara (1999) states that in an interview the interviewer can control the response situation scheduling with the participation of the respondents to be mutually agreeable in time, place and the controlling of the question pace and sequence to suit the circumstances of the situation. Interviews are adaptable and help in creating trust and good rapport with the respondents. Interviews also allow the researcher to probe further there is feeling that the respondent has not given an adequate answer or there is need to explore an issue more deeply. In order not to disturb the flow of questions the data was recorded electronically. Few notes were taken to keep track of the interview.

IV. RESULTS

Activities engaged by street children in the street

The study solicited information on the activities of street children on the streets. The study depicted that forty percent of street children are engaged in vending.

Excerpt 1

"I get money for food from vending. I sell cigarettes and sweets in the street."

Excerpt 2

"I am a vendor. I sell cell phone chargers and iced water on behalf of my employer. I am paid on commission".

Excerpt 3

"I get money from selling mbanje in the street. Sometimes when I do not get any money I sniff glue to quench the hunger. I feel as if I am full after sniffing glue."

Most of the children survived on selling sweets and cigarettes. Thirty percent of the respondents survived on begging. These children said they beg for money from motorists at street intersections.

Excerpt 4

"I get money from well wishers. I beg at robots and intersections. Some give coins while others give me food they will be eating. It is not much but at least I survive."

Excerpt 5

"It is very hard to get places where people can give you money. I beg in restaurants and takeaways. There people are little bit generous"

The study indicated that twenty percent of the respondents relied on the sell and abuse of drugs.

Excerpt 6

"Most people are selling sweets, cigarettes and eggs. It is better to diversify and look for products that are most sought

after. My business of selling mbanje is lucrative. As long as people know I have the product they come and buy. But I have to be very careful so as not to be detected by police."

Excerpt 7

"These days selling cigarettes is no longer profitable. Drugs is the way to go. You are assured of money."

Some of the respondents said they survived on guarding and washing cars.

Excerpt 8

"I am not good at selling. So I depend on washing and guarding cars. At least I am assured of something at the end of the day."

Twenty percent said they depended on scavenging. When they fail to get money through begging or vending they had no choice but to look for food in bins.

Excerpt 9

"These days things are difficult for everyone. If I do not get enough from begging there is nothing I can do besides going to look for food in bins"

Only ten percent of the respondents said they survive on prostitution. Respondent number 3 said,

Excerpt 10

"I get money for food from my boyfriends. They ask for sex and in turn they pay me."

The following table depicts the distribution of the activities of respondents on the streets.

Table 4.2: Activities of street children on the streets.
N=10

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Begging	3	30
Scavenging	2	20
Prostitution	1	10
Wash / Guard Cars	2	20
Vending	4	40
Selling Drugs	2	20
Abusing Drugs	1	10
Theft	1	10

Data obtained in the study revealed that forty percent of respondents survived on vending whilst thirty percent indicated that they engaged in begging. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that they depended on scavenging, selling drugs and wash / guard cars. Only ten percent lived on prostitution, theft, and abuse of drugs.

V. DISCUSSION

This study revealed that forty percent of the children were involved in vending activities. The street children survived on selling various items ranging from sweets and cigarettes to fruits

and drugs. The money they got from these sales was so paltry to the extent that they lived from hand to mouth. It is during vending in the streets that they encountered law enforcement agents who made sure that they were driven off the streets. The municipal police have a department that is mandated to make sure all vending is done is done on designated sites. These are sites where proper ablution facilities have been put and people pay rates to the City Council. Street children move around selling sweets and cigarettes. They do not contribute anything to the City Council and perform their activities at undesignated places like entrances of supermarkets, bottle stores and bus stops. Their activities disturb the owners of supermarkets who will have paid rates and make contributions to the fiscus.

The study exposed that thirty percent of the children survived on begging from the intersections in the city centre. Begging at street intersections left the children vulnerable to being hit by motorists. These findings are similar to those found in a study by Muchini (2001) which indicated that the street children passed through some stages of begging, "First the child must present a pitiful sight; second, the child engages eye contact with the prospect; thirdly, the child persistently follows the prospect down the street. Finally, the child accepts whatever money is given, however small." This practice annoys residents who call for the street children to be removed from the streets as they annoy them. When the street children fail to get something they usually become angry and leave scolding the person who will have failed to part with some money.

This study showed that twenty percent of the respondents earned a living from scavenging, selling drugs, washing and guarding cars respectively. Some of the respondents said they had no option but had to resort to scavenging when they failed to raise money for food through other means like begging and vending. A study by Makope (2006) says these street children get food from dirty bins or from scavenging through dirty food that has been discarded. Ruparanganda (2008) was in agreement when he said, "Street children in Harare seem to know where the refuse bins for all places, the takeaways, supermarkets and restaurants are kept. They get their meals from scavenging in these bins." When scavenging they usually leave the place with litter scattered everywhere. This affects the owners of the bins and local authority staff. They will then try to make sure the if possible the street children do not get access to the bins.

The study revealed that twenty percent dwell on selling drugs to earn a living. Some children even take these drugs in order to quell hunger pangs or the cold nights. When they take these drugs they do not feel the cold neither do they feel hungry. But in some cases these drugs make them feel drowsy and hungry thereby scavenging for food in bins. This was lamented by Makope (2006) when he says "Children living in the streets abuse drugs to gain courage to do illicit things that they do in the streets." Of the interviewed children, some of them said they sell drugs like 'mbanje' (marijuana) in the streets. They get a ready market from other street children or other members of the public. Such activities are illegal and attract the attention of law enforcement agencies.

The study showed that only ten percent survived on theft and prostitution. Some of the children are involved in petty thefts whereby they snatch bags from unsuspecting women and children. Some children even steal from shops and are arrested

for shop lifting. A report in the Zimbabwe Herald of 8th May 2013, exposed that a number of complaints have been received from members of the public to the effect that they were being robbed and at times street children were assisting criminals in committing crimes in the city.

One of the respondents said she engages in sexual activities in order to obtain food. According to a study by Muchini (2000) some children turn to sex with their fellow street dwellers for comfort, protection and a sense of belonging. For others sex is a source of income and material support. There was a similarity with other researches because of the difficult circumstances under which these children survived. The economic situation that prevailed during the study was the same as that of other researches.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

- The findings of the study revealed that street children beg in the streets for survival. They sell drugs and also abuse those drugs. The study discovered that street children engage in prostitution and vending to earn a living. Some street children earn money by washing and guarding cars. The street children are engaged in some activities that are illegal and some that disturb the ordinary people which then attract the attention of law enforcement agencies.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is further recommended that the Government put in place programmes which look and promote the welfare of children living in the streets
- It is also recommended that any violation of the rights of children living in the streets be brought to book and perpetrators prosecuted.
- The street children need to be equipped so that they earn their living by doing activities that are legal.

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