

LIFE EXPERIENCES AND MEDIA INFLUENCE IN STREET CHILDREN - A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Street children are the outcome of complex interplay of various psycho, socio-economic issues. The risks of children living street life are great and their vulnerability to exploitation is enormous as they have difference in living as compared to rural and urban children. Life conditions, inclusive of parenting and experiences on streets are crucial factors that molding children from street. Apart from the latter the effects of media is a unique challenge in the context of high technological advancement in the society on to these children. The current research is concerned about the media influences on children from street who are receiving main streaming through the Government school. The current research tries to answer the importance of media, favorable and conflicting attributions on media, self-comparison with other children and street experiences by the adolescents. A qualitative study with Unstructured interviews identified many themes and sub themes revolving around their sexuality concerns which were aroused through the information received by Medias like cell phone, TV, Movies etc. Other important concerns are academic, behavioural problems, peer group influences and parenting.

Key words: Media, Sexuality, Parenting, Life experiences, Street children

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INTRODUCTION:

“At first glance it looks as if he has drawn himself selling goods on the street, the hat apparently incidental. But his explanation is different. The box contains rotten fruit, he says. He is wearing a hat to hide his face because he is ashamed to be seen eating such a bad food.....” (Ennew, 2003).

A real life case depiction of an adolescent who was living on the street draws attention to the poor life conditions on the street. The United Nations - defines of street children as any girl or boy for whom the street including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc. in the widest sense of the word has become his or her habitual abode and source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults (Koller and Hutz, 2001; Aptekar, n.d). World Health organization (WHO) classifies street children according to four categories: Children who live in the street, Children who have left their families and reside in the street, hotels, shelters, or abandoned places; Children living in protection centers or orphanages, who are at risk of becoming homeless; Children who have weak or insubstantial relations with their families, and whose circumstances force them to spend the night outside their homes Parenting (Defense for Children International Palestine Section, n.d).

In 1989, UNICEF estimated 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world (De Benítez Sarah T, 2007). The largest number of street children in the world is seen in India. India also has a huge at-risk young population with 40% being under the age of 18 years (Sinha-Deb, Atul Ambekar, and Tripathi, B. M., 2009). Adolescence is crucial part of life period and often what has formed as foundation will go long way shaping the life. In most developmental stages especially early and middle adolescents are stage of

dependency on the caregiver. An adolescent need to be lead as they are not still grown up as matured individual. Parenting is challenging task and it is increasingly difficult as there is going to be advancement in society. There is increased demand for parent to teach dos and don'ts. The parents who are living in main stream society have access to minimum awareness than the parent or caregiver who is not in the main stream. Such as children from the street are given in to the different circumstances, atmosphere and parenting are the matter of concern.

The review of the previous studies was carried related to understanding the life of street and working children. One of the research conducted at old Delhi in 2002, on 100 children identified them as belonging to lower socio economic status. They were vulnerable of various types of abuses like physical, sexual, and suppressed. More than half of the respondents were harassed by Government Railway Police (GRP), and Railway Protection Force (RPF). More than half of children stated that the police demanded or snatched money from them. The children also had tried smoking cigarettes, more than 60% respondents used drugs regularly and they identified even peer group is involved in the same (Sinha-Deb, Koushik, Atul Ambekar, and Tripathi, B. M. 2009). Puri, Eshaan (2009) enumerated the life circumstances that causes life in street are like Broken families/poor or large families/step parent, Out of schools, Migrant/dislocated families, living in slum/streets, Migrant families suffered due, famines/ natural disaster. Further these circumstances lead the children and people into look for very meager livelihood like performing of Rag picking and selling Porter, domestic work, helper in services and manufacturing processes, Begging, shoe polish these further causes Loss of childhood, Malnutrition and unhygienic appearance, Drug/inhalant addict, Deterioration of values and morals, Pick pocketing, thefts, Loss of personal development.

Need for the current research:

The review shows the gap in understanding the life on street special reference to the adolescence from psychosocial perspective, to understand the effectiveness of main streaming, perceived parenting and understanding the media's role in their life.

METHOD:

The current study aimed to understand the importance of media, street experiences, perceived parenting by the adolescents.

Research concerns:

What consequences does living/working in the streets have for these children's lives: what are the specific problems that the street children face? What are their urgent needs and what are their aspirations? What are their life experiences before and after the education?

- How is the parenting is been perceived by the children who lived on street?
- How is their exposure to media?
- To explore the sexuality aspects.

Research design: An Exploratory study

Sample and procedure: Convenient sampling of 3 children (girls) was selected. Participant's parents who lives in street, Children who had experiences of begging in recent past, Knowing of Kannada language, age between 8 – 11 years were included. Obtained consent from the parent i.e., mother who consented orally to provide the children for interaction.

Semi structured interviews and unstructured interviews were conducted to elicit the details. The data was thematically analyzed (Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke, 2006) and themes and sub themes were documented.

FINDINGS:

The findings been discussed as various themes

Life experiences:

The queries related to the life experiences resulted sub themes of before and after coming to the school, academic scenario and peer group. Participants were able to acknowledge that they felt that they have been able to read, write and wear school dresses which were always missed.

"I used to walk on the street, use to see children walking or going in car with nice uniforms. I knew that I will also wear uniform one day".

The day routine would look like that they would go on begging based on mother's instruction. They also expressed mother would prescribe a target of earning per day. There was very strict instruction that they need to earn by begging. All the children in family could go for begging however, If the child is older as compared to the sibling they had a bigger target to achieve which was definitely anxiety provoking and child would worry thinking "How I am going to achieve that big money". Money earning, counting, begging could be considered as informal education?

'People would scold us, that – do you have parents?'

'Can't you go to school?'

'You should earn and eat'

Currently their routine is to get up in the morning, prayers and breakfast followed by that regular class, lunch, games, chit chat with classmates and taking care of younger children.

Academic scenario and peer group:

When directly asked about academic issues they said there is no problem when given examples for type of difficulties in education. Children agreed of having difficulty in memorizing, writing, understanding as well as deficits in proper study methods. Participants revealed they have lot of friends. They do have fights and discrepancies, however they find it is good. They never compare with each other. They do not seem to understand the concept of 'comparing oneself'.

Perceived parenting:

All the three children were monitored by the mother. There is a less important has been noticed to the father's role in their life.

'My father lives elsewhere he is married to someone else'

'I don't know about my father'

'If I do any mistake my mother will beat me'

The narratives of children shows that the mothers followed authoritarian role and at the sometimes appears to be democratic. She allows them to decide at the same time she also leads. She also decides good and bad. However over the discussion children are recognized as assets who also contribute for their lively hood and earning before they enroll to the school. Along with the maintaining of the house often the woman goes to collect alms in order to supplement the earning of family members. The begging is always the last resort and frequently a choice to make money. It is noticed that they never have fixed job pattern. Mother who lives in street goes to help in building construction, fetch things at hotel, clean at hotel, and assist in shop by sweeping or mopping, rock quarry, scavenging, work as domestic help alas the begging in different areas. As the bread winner if they fail to meet the demand of expenditure compels them to send their children for begging. By which they get money and things for daily utility. Single handed parenting also been documented in Lalor's study in 1999.

Media :

Despite been lived in poverty conditions all the three children revealed they have sufficiently had utilized the mobile phones and TV. They revealed the parent have given them phones to attend the calls. Where in only one girl had access to Radio as they had one at home. Movie been randomly picked by them. They decided on the movie based on the college goers' choice. If the children saw more the students and more times of visit that would determine their decision. The theatres are not big cinemas or multiplexes rather conventional theaters. One among the three children could manage seeing the whole movie three times. And the other reported of having seen 10 times in a month prior to their admission to the school. Earning and entertainment mutually influences and reinforces the child's behavior. It is might be imitational behavior by observing the older adolescents that a child from street seeks to watch movie.

"Phone always used to be there at home and I always used to answer. I would tell my brother, sister and mother that who had called"

All the children have opinion that radio, TV, phones are important to have communication. Phone connects people in different places. TV and radio gives information

about other places. The amount of information that they can follow is cannot be commented. However, there is no parenting at the movie watching in theatre or neither handling the phones.

Sexuality :

Girls did follow the instruction given by mother and often they heard mother saying girl child should arrive home very soon. So, the gender role prescription is given by mother. Beyond that when delved on how the movie influences? Children remained indifferent about the influence. All the three girls never followed any character comes on Movie and TV shows. Mother and the older people at the living space would object them to watch certain shows telecasted in T.V as they would say not meant for children.

‘No! I do not do anything after watching’

Conclusion:

Street children have arrived from the houses where the mother acts as a decision maker. A Street forms the most vulnerable place for children to undergo verbal abuses and victimizes them for child labor. It prevents them from having life appropriate for their age. They need to be helped by not only main streaming and also there is greater need for spreading the awareness in parents who live in streets. Main streaming helps child to educate self, get peer group, accentuates the socialization, gives satisfaction, happiness and self-esteem. There is an immense need for the psychologists to conduct long term studies with bigger sample size, explore their familial conditions and formulate the prevention measures and develop suitable rehabilitation model for the sustainable overall development of the adolescents.

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