

Socio-Economic Situation of Street Children in Bahir Dar Town

Amare Sahile *
Sinkinesh Taklearegay **

Abstract

The main concern of this study was to investigate the major reasons for street children in Bahir Dar town to end up on the street. A total of 75 street children (65 males and 10 females) were selected using stratified random sampling method from three kebeles of Bahir Dar town. Structured interview, both open ended (12 items) and close ended (11 items), and observation were used to collect data. Qualitative and quantitative data were used to provide information about the socio-demographic characteristics (family background). In addition street children's current status and their future visions were analyzed and summarized using percentage. The data obtained revealed that 62.7% migrated from other and rural areas to Bahir Dar while 37.3% of them were born and grow up in the town. The data revealed that the majority of the children were from economically poor families. Poverty, family death and disagreement within the family were the main reasons for coming out to the street, accounting 46.7%, 30.7% and 17.3% respectively. The main sources of income are carrying goods, selling items such as chewing gum, cigarettes, sugarcane, tissue paper, lottery tickets, shoe shining, begging and washing cars. The main problems they encountered were being beaten by older street children and police, their money and properties snatched away, suffer from malaria and other diseases, suffer from hunger, and lack of sleeping places. Finally, based on the findings conclusions and recommendations were forwarded.

* Lecturer, Bahir Dar University, Department of Pedagogical Sciences. P.O. Box 124 E-mail, amsalomi1979@yahoo.com

**Undergraduate student in the Department of Pedagogical Sciences in 2006

Introduction

Background

While the saying is that "children are the future", it is clear that children are also the "present". The future depends on their healthy development today. They are the most vulnerable, the most resilient and the most precious groups in society. In many cultures around the world, children are considered a gift and a means for parents to secure their own futures. In traditional African societies, children are to be protected and supported, and assisted to reach their full potential. Despite these ideals, however, children are often subject to abuse, exploitation and violence from those who are meant to protect them: the state, their families, their teachers and their employers. Instead of being treated like a gift, some children are treated like a burden to be abused, kicked around and silenced (Zuberi, 2005).

Street children are perhaps the most vulnerable group in any society. They have few advocates, can wield no political strength, and regardless of official views, are generally regarded by low-level officials at best as nuisances to be tolerated, and at the worst as little more than vermin. The general public is also likely to have a low opinion of street children due to the latter's perceived laziness and involvement in crime. Furthermore, the cultural values attached to children undermine and sometimes violate their rights. In addition, the attitudes among the community at large and the law enforcement agencies in particular do not provide nurturing and supportive environment for children to exercise their rights properly. These and many

other socio-economic and cultural factors have led to abuse, neglect and maltreatment of the street children (Taylor et al., 1996). The phenomenon of street children has become an integral feature of the urban landscape in many parts of the world. In most third world cities, they are the shadowy presence that fills the background of daily life, doing odd jobs, scavenging for food, begging and stealing. Street children have been a focus of attention for aid agencies and governments for little more than 20 years. The issue first appeared as a major concern in the wake of the International Year of the Child in 1979 (Taylor et al., 1996).

In 1992, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that there were 80 million street children throughout the world. Over the past three decades the number of street children has swelled into millions in Latin America, Africa and Asia, where their presence is ubiquitous and growing. In recent years, the problem of street children has worsened throughout the world due to increasing family separations and conflict resulting from urbanization, economic crisis, political change, civil unrest, wars, as well as natural disasters and epidemics. According to Ali et al. (2004) current UNICEF estimates put the number of street children at 100 million: 40 million in Latin America, 30 million in Asia, 10 million in Africa and the remaining 20 million in Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia. Although most of these children live in third world countries, all industrialized countries have their share of street children. The number of street children in the USA may be as high as 2 million. The Australian government estimated the number in Australia to be 25,000. For Germany

and the Netherlands, the estimate is 4000 and 7000 respectively. Canada estimates street children to number approximately 150,000, while the UK estimate is around 77,000. It is projected that by the year 2015, 53% of the developing world population will live in cities and at least every fifth inhabitant will reside in urban slums or shanty towns, which will have an increasing number of children and youths, further resulting in more and more number of street children.

A profound study of street children in Ethiopia is well documented in the works of Zenebe (1996). His investigation underscored the nature and magnitude of the problem of street children in Ethiopia as a whole. He tried to show the distribution, ethnic composition, reason for coming out to street, schooling, types of jobs they were involved in, delinquent behaviour, measures taken by police on delinquent children, educational status of parents or guardians, parents income and parental future aspiration of their children were the areas the study treated.

Like wise a survey study conducted by Tedla (1996) also focused on the situation of children in especially difficult circumstances and over all condition of these children in Ethiopia. The study mainly focused on the perception of the magnitude or significance of the problems of different categories of children especially with difficult circumstances and level of public awareness in Ethiopia.

The issue of street children is one of the fast growing social, health and economic problems in Ethiopia. UNICEF estimates that there are more than 150 thousand street children in the country. In Addis Ababa alone the

number was estimated to be 40,000, of which approximately 10,000 are children working and living in the streets with no care or support. The remaining 75% or 30,000 are children on the streets who earn their living in the streets and go home to their families, relatives or friends. The majority of these children are living in conditions of severe deprivation that place them at both physical and psychological risk. Inadequate nutrition, long working hours and exposure to aversive weather conditions and physical abuse while on the street, endanger their development (UNICEF, 2000).

According to a projection made by the Central Statistical Authority (CSA) of Ethiopia in 2004, the total population of Bahir Dar town is estimated to reach 153,293 and children below the age of 18 comprises 47.89 % of the total population of the town. Following the urbanization and dynamism of Bahir Dar town and high prevalence of poverty, significant proportions of the community in general and children in particular experience a multitude of socioeconomic and cultural problems. There are a number of intricate problems that reinforce each other and affect the lives and well-beings of children in particular and the community as a whole in the town. According to Labour and Social Affairs Bureau of Amhara Region a significant number of children in the town work and live on the street without adult care and protection. It is estimated that there are as many as 5,000 children leading street life in Bahir Dar town and as many as 12,000 children find themselves at an extremely high risk of becoming involved in street life.

Statement of the Problem

The view that care, protection, and upbringing of children should be the duty of their parents is a traditional perspective. Such a belief is predicated on age-long traditions and norms of societies that children must be properly socialized at home and at school to prevent them from engaging in antisocial or improper behaviour. However, these socialization and nurturance functions of the family are becoming difficult as rapid urbanization, widespread poverty, and economic depression continue to affect major parts of the world. As a result, many parents are unable to give adequate care and attention to their children (Aderinto, 2000).

In the past two decades, migration due to wars, natural disasters and environmental degradation has led to crowding of the cities. Rural migrants have moved to informal settlements in the urban peripheries. Due to the economic crisis, however, the fabric of cities has not been able to absorb their presence in an increasingly pressurized landscape. Inadequate family incomes have forced children and adolescents into seeking employment in the informal economy. This has resulted in a rise in the number of street children (Ali et al., 2004).

Moreover, the fast population growth, the migration of people from rural areas to urban areas, the inaccessibility of social services like health, education and job opportunities, the prevalence of drought and famine, illiteracy and HIV/AIDS have negatively affected the major portion of the population in general and the lives of the children in particular. In this regard, the problem of street and other vulnerable children is becoming a

worldwide phenomenon since these children exist in every part of the world (Baybuga and Celik, 2004).

In Ethiopia, being one of the developing countries in the world, the majority of its population is forced to lead a life below poverty line as a result of the existing socioeconomic problems. Poverty, rapid urbanization, drought and famine, ethnic conflict and destabilization of families have left millions of children without proper care and protection. Simultaneously, the extent of child labour is increasing due to poverty and social, economic, and political crises. Children between the ages of 9 and 13 and even younger ones are engaged in different economic activities on the street (UNICEF, 2000).

The issue of street children is a matter of great concern to most people around the world. However, very little is known about the causes of street children, apart from the fact that it occurs in all countries, whether rich or poor, stable or unstable, and that it is extremely difficult to eradicate. This problem is prominent in Bahir Dar town owing to its rapid urbanization, dynamism and high prevalence of poverty. Thus, this study is undertaken against this backdrop. The major objective of this paper is to find out the major causes of street children with special reference to Bahir Dar town. To do this the following leading research questions were formulated.

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of street children in Bahir Dar town?
 - 1.1. What does the schooling profile of street children in Bahir Dar town look like?
 - 1.2. What is the family background of street children in Bahir Dar town?
 - 1.3. What relationships exist between street children and their family in Bahir Dar town?
2. Why do street children in Bahir Dar town end up on the street?
3. What are the major sources of income of street children in Bahir Dar town?
4. What are the main problems faced by street children in Bahir Dar town?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will serve as base line information for governmental and non-governmental organizations that work on street children in taking necessary interventions on the causes and problems of street children in Bahir Dar town.

The study helps organizations that are studying street children and problems they are currently facing. The results of this study also serve as starting information for researchers who would like to undertake further studies on

street children in Bahir Dar town. It would also be used for comparison of related studies in other parts of Ethiopia.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the socio-economic situations of street children in Bahir Dar town, Amhara Region, Northwest Ethiopia.

Specific objectives of the study are:

- To investigate the socio-demographic characteristics of street children in Bahir Dar town.
 - To assess the schooling profile of street children in Bahir Dar town,
 - To assess the family background of street children in Bahir Dar town, and
 - To examine the relationship of street children and their family in Bahir Dar town.
- To examine why children end up in the street in Bahir Dar town.
- To assess major sources of income of street children in Bahir Dar town.
- To assess main problems of street children in Bahir Dar town.

Delimitation of the Study

This study was delimited to the socio - economic situation of street children with particular reference to Bahir Dar town. Moreover, all issues of street children were not included and emphasis was given to the socio-economic situation of street children.

Literature Review

Who are Street Children? : An Overview

During the early 1980s in Latin America the late Peter Tacon pioneered the term street children. Although there is no widely accepted definition of street child, it refers to a diverse group of young people dislocated in various degrees from family, school and community, who tend to work, congregate and/or live in inner city areas (Ali et al., 2004). It includes children who might not necessarily be homeless or without families, but who live in situations where there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults (Aptekar, 1994). Street children are the casualties of economic growth, war, poverty, loss of traditional values, domestic violence, physical and mental abuse. Every street child has a reason for being on the streets. While some children are lured by the promise of excitement and freedom, the majorities are pushed onto the street by desperation and a realization that they have nowhere else to go (WHO, 2001).

In many countries, street children are named after their main survival activities; for example, vendors (Dakar, Lusaka and Manila), street gangs (Stuttgart), juvenile prostitutes (Stuttgart, Manila). What is obvious is that street children are poverty-stricken and their needs and problems are a result of wanting to meet basic needs for survival. Street children go through the struggle of providing themselves with basic necessities such as food, shelter, health and clothing. Providing targeted interventions that meet the

needs of street children requires an understanding of who they are, what they need, what they do and how they can be identified (WHO, 2001).

The typology of street children is a broadly accepted categorizing system which identifies three types of street children: children at risk, children on the street, and children of the street. The largest group in this typology is the "children at risk" category. These are the children of the urban poor and they form the reservoir from which street children emerge. "Children on the street" come to the streets to work in order to supplement their families' income, and they will return home to their families at night time. A significant number attend school on a part time basis. Worldwide, these children perform similar tasks: they shine shoes, wash and mind cars, sell lottery tickets, magazines and newspapers, carry goods, and peddle cigarettes and chewing gum. Extreme poverty has forced them to become at least partially self-supporting (UNICEF, 2000).

For "children of the streets," the street is their main living place. Family ties may exist but are remote and their former home is visited infrequently. A subcategory of street child in the UNICEF typology is that of "abandoned children." This category includes orphans, runaways, refugees, and others who have no contact with significant caregivers. In terms of lifestyle and daily activities, abandoned children are very similar to children of the street. They are distinguishable in that all ties with family have been severed, either through death, displacement or abandonment. Children of the street, on the other hand, have occasional contacts with their families. Of all street children, the category of the street and abandoned is the smallest. Only an

estimated 5% to 10% of street children belong to this group of children of the street. These children are more likely to make their livelihood by illegal means. They become premature adults and develop behaviour patterns which can be summarized in a rejection of authority, aggressiveness, an absence of limits, independence, and lack of affection. They are also characterized by problems with drug addiction, alcoholism, delinquency, prostitution, and moral and physical abuse (Lalor, 1999).

However, this classification is too rigid because it does not correspond to the realities found in most big cities. Street children do not form a homogeneous group, nor do their life circumstances remain constant. Besides the natural transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, children may be represented in one or more of the three categories listed above at different times of their lives and careers in the streets. Many alternate between home and street life (Aptekar and Heinonen, 2003).

Gender

Worldwide, there is a higher incidence of street boys than street girls. Lalor (1999) reported that 90% of the young street workers engaged in vending or service occupations in Asia were boys. In Columbia, the street child population is 75% male and 25% female. Like the rest of the world, the majority of street children in African countries are actually street boys. In Zimbabwe, 95% of 520 children interviewed were boys, as were 84% of Angolan street children, 76% of Ethiopian street children, 70% of Zambian street children, and nearly 100% of Sudanese street children (Veale and Don'a, 2003).

According to UNICEF report of 1993, in Ethiopia, street boys and girls constitute an estimated 75% and 25% of the street child population respectively. However, the true incidence of working girls may be hidden by the nature of their work, which tends to be less visible than the work of street boys. For example, females may work as maids in bars, back street hotels, and private houses. Street boys, on the other hand, typically engage in more visible activities such as car washing, shoe shining, and peddling (Lalor, 1999).

The worldwide trend of relatively fewer street girls than street boys might be explained by the position of the female child in rural peasant life. In Nepal, for instance, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) analyzed the contribution of women and children to both household and agricultural activities. Females were found to work more than males in all age groups and it was the family's dependence on girls' labour at home and in the fields which was responsible for females' lower rates of school enrolment. It is reasonable to speculate that girls are prevented from working on the streets for similar reasons. In urban areas too, girls are more valuable to households as they are engaged in looking after children and helping with chores, thereby freeing the mother to work outside the home (Veale and Don'a, 2003).

A further explanation for the fewer number of street girls when compared to street boys may be parental fears regarding the dangers of street life to females. In a study of 23 families of Ethiopian street children, it was reported that parents were concerned and worried about the dangers

associated with working on the street. In addition, the preponderance of boys on the street has been linked to socio-cultural factors (Lalor, I 999).

According to Lalor et al. (1996), cultural gender norms are also influential. In Sudan, where street children were almost exclusively male, it is considered inappropriate for girls, according to Muslim culture, to wander unaccompanied in the streets of Khartoum. In a study of street children in four regional towns in Ethiopia, the smallest proportion of street girls were encountered in the town with the largest Muslim population. Also in Ethiopia, street girls employed a self-imposed nightly curfew to avoid sexual attack, where the average age of first experience of rape of street girls that had experienced sexual abuse was 13.8 years. In Kenya, boys are socialized to become independent at a young age while girls are encouraged to stay at home; families also refrain from sending girls to the street because of sexual abuse (Aptekar, 1994).

Age

The majority of street children worldwide are aged between 10 and 14 years. Before age 10, parents appear to loath allowing the child to enter the harsh world of the street. Also, children younger than 10 are not as capable of competing for the kind of work street children do. Once engaged in street life, the child's street "career" is often terminated by his or her changing appearance, as he/she grows older. By about 14 or 15 years of age, adolescents are beginning to lose their appeal to passers-by. This is particularly true for those who survive by begging. Before that time (adolescence), the children are considered cute, which contributed to their

success at begging for alms. But as they grow, the image changes, they are perceived as thugs and treated accordingly. When street children reach puberty, they become street people. Thus, the age profile of street children appears to be a function of the nature of the demands of street life (Lalor, 1999).

The age profile of African street children varies between countries. It was found that the mean age of 76 Kenyan street children was 12.6 years. Of 520 Zimbabwean street children, 60% were 14 years or older. In Mauritania, the average age of street children was 14.2 years. In Sudan, 60% of street boys were aged 13 years or over. In Ethiopia, it is estimated that approximately half of all street children are less than 12 years of age. The average age of initiation to street life is approximately 11 years. As in many developing countries, children under 16 years constitute 50% of the entire population (Veale and Dona, 2003).

Family Relations and Structure

In general, reports indicated that street children have good relationships with their families. For example, 90% of Colombian street children had occasional or regular contact with their family. Of the 200,000 children who work regularly on the streets of Lima, Peru, only 6,000 (3%) actually live on the streets. According to Aptekar, only 16% of Kenyan street children had no known family to contact and the remainders were in the care of at least one parent or a grandparent (Aptekar, 1989; Aptekar, 1994).

This being said, street children do tend to come from atypical families. In San Jose, Costa Rica, 78% of a sample of street children came from families

with a single parent or no parent. In Juarez it was reported that only 44% of the street children lived with two parent families, 20% lived with their mother, and the remaining 36% lived with relatives or with other children on the streets. Only 7% of street children in Kingston, Jamaica had two parent families (Lalor, 1999).

With respect to the family structures of African street children, there is some evidence that the profile of street child families may be atypical within countries. In Sudan, the incidence of polygamy was higher among families of street children than was the statistical societal norm. In Angola the proportion of female-headed families of street children at (41%) was higher than the norm for female headed households of 29% in urban areas. In Kenya, while in the slums of Nairobi, nearly two-thirds of the households are headed by unmarried women, 85% of street children are of female-headed families (Veale and Dona, 2003). According to UNICEF (2001), out of 270 street children interviewed, orphans formed a significant part of the street children population in Rwanda. Based on self-reports of the children, 33% of street children reported both parents were dead and therefore were double orphans, 27% were paternal orphans, and 7% were maternal orphans, 11% did not know the whereabouts of their parents.

The UNICEF survey of 1,000 Ethiopian street children revealed that only 23% of the samples live with both parents. The bulk of the remaining children come from families where a spouse has been widowed (32%), divorced (12%), or separated due to circumstances (typically war) (7%). Nine percent of the children were orphans. In spite of these varied family

backgrounds, most street children have not broken contact with home. Over 80% of street children (from a sample of 1,000) visit their family everyday, suggesting that most Ethiopian street children are still integrally linked with their families. A similar profile emerges from survey of 69 girls of the street in Addis Ababa. Only 16% of the sample arrived on the streets from a two-parent household. The largest number (30%) came from a female headed household. The remainder had either been orphaned or had previously lived in a wide variety of domestic situations, such as living with stepparents, mothers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbours, and adopting families (UNICEF, 2000).

Problems of Street Children

Beatings and Murder

Street children are subject to assaults and beatings and murder. In Addis Ababa, 26 of the 28 boys reported having been beaten on the street. For girls, the most likely cause of beating is when they refuse sex to boys. For boys, the beatings are a regular occurrence, happening a number of times a week for 15 of the 26 boys interviewed in Addis Ababa. These beatings are often very serious. Broken bones and stabbings are very common, even in this relatively small sample.

Lalor (1999) examined in some detail the victimization experienced by street children in Addis Ababa. Interviews with street boys revealed that being beaten is a weekly occurrence for approximately one third of the sample. More than half reported being "regularly" physically attacked on

the streets, frequently severely. Injuries from stabbing, slashes from razor blades, fractured skulls, and broken bones were quite common even among this small sample. Such injuries are most often inflicted during fights with other street boys. Disputes typically arise over "rights" to work in a particular area or perceived insults.

As in many countries, the police are often responsible for the beatings which street children experience. In Ethiopia, the police of the Derge regime were responsible for savage and brutal treatment of street children. Amongst the relatively small number of interviews reported, there are a number of explicit examples of torture including beatings with sticks, resulting in lost teeth, severe bruising, fractured skull, stabbings, electric shocks applied to the feet. During the early life of the present regime, harsh methods were also adopted to control crime. In an effort to establish civil order and control crime, the EPRDF shot thieves on sight, for example, and their bodies were left on display. Anecdotal accounts suggest that it is reasonable to assume that some street children were shot in this way (Lalor et al., 1996). It was reported that in Latin America, in 1986, two street children were killed on average, every day and by 1993, this figure had risen to an estimated four children being killed a day. In Brazil, because street children are increasingly blamed for the rising crime rate in Brazil's cities, an average of four in a day were killed in 1993, and the Human Rights Watch, America estimated that 5,000 children were murdered in Brazil between 1988 and 1991 (Lalor, 1999).

Sexual Assault

According to Lalor et al. (1996), the fear of sexual assault mainly by other street boys is very real, particularly among younger boys in Sudan. By contrast, in Ethiopia, there is no evidence of sexual victimization of street boys or by anyone else. This may be due to the widespread incidence and acceptance of heterosexual prostitution that provides a more conventional outlet for sexual gratification. However, widespread evidence does emerge of sexual victimization of street girls in Ethiopia, mainly by street boys. Of the 32 interviewed, 21 girls had been sexually attacked. Those girls who were not attacked were either too young (that is, not sexually mature), already pregnant or had a child with them. Thus, one can conclude that sexually mature street girls are subject to a high risk of sexual attack.

Of the 21 girls who were sexually attacked, some reported having been raped. For many girls, this had occurred a number of times, the perpetrators usually being a group of drunken street boys. The average age of the girls' first experience of rape is 14.25 years. Of the total of 32 girls, 7 had been pregnant. One of these was due to rape, one was due to prostitution, two to legitimate marriages (traditional type early marriages) and three were due to relationships where an older boy took in the girls as "wife". In all three of these latter cases, the boy severed contact with the girl when she became pregnant. The average age for these seven girls becoming pregnant is 15.8 years. The reason street boys give for raping girls is that they have no money to pay for prostitutes and also that they can be certain that a girl who

is not a prostitute will not have any venereal diseases or AIDS Lalor et al. (1996)

Sexual solicitation occurs widely. Twenty-two of the 32 girls had been asked to act as prostitutes either by bar owners or by private individuals requesting their services. The 10 girls not solicited were either sexually immature or had a child. On the basis of the interviews, an estimated 40-50 percent of street girls resort to prostitution at some point.

Labor Exploitation and Theft

Theft is an ever-present feature of street life. According to Lalor et al. (1996), of the 64 children interviewed in Ethiopia, 44 (or 69 per cent) reported having had things stolen from them. For the younger, more vulnerable, children this seems to be a daily occurrence. The risk of theft is such that children develop strategies to avoid carrying money on their person. They may pay rent in advance (many street children, particularly girls, sleep in the relative security and comfort of rooms or houses which are let for a small fee), or leave their money with someone they trust. The most likely offender is an older street person.

There is another sense in which street children may be robbed: non-payment for work done. Typical work carried out by street children is working on taxis (shouting for customers and collecting fares), shining shoes, washing or minding cars, and carrying goods. From the above, it is clear that there is widespread exploitation of working children. They are the most vulnerable sector of the labour force and this fact is frequently abused by those making use of their services. In the face of this abuse the children are, largely,

helpless. The majority of the children interviewed in Addis Ababa reported having been cheated out of earnings. Most children to whom this had happened reported it happening "frequently" (Lalor et al., 1996).

According to Ali et al. (2004), street children in Pakistan live in a hazardous environment where they are exposed to abuse and maltreatment from parents, who force them to work and beat them if they do not bring home money and from police, who abuse them by harassing, beating, and even taking away their daily earnings. Out of 108 street children interviewed, 61% declared having been harassed and physically abused by the police or had their daily earnings snatched away and 36% mentioned that they felt they over-worked and got paid less. Although the children felt dissatisfied with the circumstances in which they had to live and operate, their need for employment and earning was so great that any work for any wage was a better alternative to starvation.

Other Problems

Street children have a greater burden than other poor children who are supervised by adults. They lack basic resources to sustain a healthy living. They usually have no financial means to buy decent clothing (which may be necessary in cold places), and no money to buy food, which is crucial for their development. Because of the costs of services most street children cannot afford to go to school. Even where schools are free, many children cannot afford to go to school, buy uniforms, shoes and books. Street children live in places where they are not adequately protected from the environment. They rarely have access to facilities that they need for hygiene

and sanitation, such as toilets and clean and safe water supply. They are therefore more vulnerable to health problems resulting from poor sanitation (WHO, 2001). For example, in Pakistan, according to Ali et al. (2004), out of 108 street children 60% had attended school at some time, but almost all had left school or were unable to continue with their schooling. The main reason given for leaving school was poverty. Only 27% of the children were able to get three meals a day, 63% were having two meals, while 10% reported having very irregular meal patterns. Toilet and bathing facilities were accessible to only 33%.

When the community makes plans, it does not take in to consideration the street children's plight. Street children tend to be excluded from participating in most of the activities and facilities of other children. This is one reason why street children often do not have access to medical, educational, recreational, and vocational resources. They face problems such as lack of vaccinations: poor health, illiteracy and they cannot acquire skills needed for finding jobs (WHO, 2001).

Stigmatization is another problem of street children. The society usually perceives street children as difficult children who are out there to cause trouble. In general the public thinks that street children are uncontrollable and violent, have substance use problems, have no morals, have lost all the ability to feel emotions such as love and that they turn into terrorists and revolutionaries. They tend to be unsympathetic to the street children's plight. This negative attitude may be a result of the society's inability to care for its people (WHO, 2001).

Stressful past in the children's life may also impose a psychological and mental problem on street children. Many situations and events that pushed these children on to the street in the first place (like natural disasters, man-made disasters, exploitation and conflicts) may have a lasting impact on their well-being. For example, the family conflict that pushed the child on to the streets continues to deprive the child of emotional and material support for years afterwards. When the child has his or her own baby, neither the new parent nor the baby will have the benefit of the previous generation's support (WHO, 2001).

Street children in some large cities move frequently from district to district or between cities. Sometimes they do this by choice, but at other times they are forced to move to hide from the police, welfare authorities, gangs, and drug syndicates. This type of lifestyle leads to problems of social isolation and loneliness and difficulties in developing emotional attachments to special individuals (WHO, 2001).

Delinquency of Street Children

A frequent observation has been the increasing involvement of street boys in theft, as they progress through adolescence. While younger boys mainly practice petty theft such as stealing food from shops/markets, older boys may become involved in more confrontational crimes such as pick-pocketing and robberies. Inevitably, such activities bring street children in to contact with the police or other security forces. They are frequently viewed as a threat to society, as delinquents or criminals (Lalor, 1999).

Lusk (1989) outlined a three-stage typology of delinquency development in Columbia. A “pre-gamine” is a pre-adolescent child who lives at home but spends part of his time on the streets in order to supplement family income. While on the street, he is likely to engage in petty theft when the opportunity arises. A “gamine” is an adolescent with looser family ties and he spends more time on the street, even sleeping there. Typically, this type of youth lives with other gang members in a rented room or flat and may be self-supporting through illegal activity. Finally, the “largos” are the older adolescents who have fully taken on the street life and ethic. They are enmeshed in hardcore street life, and are likely to develop in to adult criminals.

In Ethiopia, the "career" of street boys would also appear to be marked by a gradual intensification of delinquency. For example, UNICEF found that twice as many boys in the 13-15 year age group self-reported stealing compared to boys imprisoned and are more likely to chew khat, drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes at ages 16-18 than at ages 11-15. Broadly speaking, street boys can be divided into two categories. Specifically, the older child who steals money or resalable items in order to support expensive habits such as drinking, chewing khat or smoking; and the younger child who steals either food or money to buy food. The latter category is a considerably larger group. However, there exists in Addis Ababa a small hard core of delinquent street boys who steal, rape, fight, beat up younger children, drink to excess, and use prostitutes (Lalor, 1999).

Reasons for Coming to the Streets

Children come to the streets for a variety of reasons: to find work, to escape family disharmony and as a result of becoming displaced or orphaned. For example, a study of Colombian street children found 36% of the children had left home due to extreme poverty, 27% due to a search for adventure recorded and 32% were there because of abuse in the home. Thus, we can see that poverty alone is not the only reason for going to the streets. Abuse in the home is also reported as a significant factor (Aptekar, 1994). According to Pauze and Fournier (2005), the families of street children appear to be more affected by intra-family conflicts than those of non-homeless adolescents, leading to a lack of support, care and affection between family members. Parenting approaches also appear to be deficient in terms of the supervision and support provided and in addition, more street children appear to have experienced negative events during childhood, such as parental separation, new family configurations and placement in alternative homes.

According to a research conducted on 50 homeless youth in Los Angeles, the majority of the participants depicted physical abuse (59%) and intense familial conflict (59%) as primary factors underlying their decisions to leave home. Approximately 75% of participants were raised in a single parent household for much of their childhood and nearly all described experiences of adapting to changing configurations in the household introduced by a re-marriage or domestic relationship. Both abuse and family conflict were often attributed to parent's substance abuse (30%), differences

with respect to personal style (e.g. clothing, hair colour and cut, body piercing, etc.), religious beliefs (8%), sexual orientation (6%), and educational performance (12%) (Hyde, 2005).

In Ethiopia, nearly 60% of children living independently on the street are out of home because of family disharmony or due to being orphaned or displaced. This reason was given by only 5.8% of children who work on the streets, but who return home at night. This clearly indicates an important difference between these two different types of streets children in order to make money, while children of the street are more likely to come to the streets because there is nowhere else for them to go (Lalor, 1999).

Interviews with a sub sample of 69 girls of the street in Ethiopia revealed that abuse at home was an important variable in choosing to come to the streets (Lalor, 1999). The perpetrators of this abuse were reported as mother (11 cases), stepmother (10 cases), and stepfather, aunt, father, and uncle (1 case each). These instances of abuse included quarrelling, nagging, over-work, under-feeding, and physical beatings. It is interesting to note that the majority of girls who reported being abused at home experienced this abuse at the hands of women: mothers and stepmothers principally.

Methods

Participants

It is estimated that there are about 5,000 street children living in the seventeen Kebles in Bahir Dar town. In this study data were collected from street children working or living in three Kebeles (Kebele 03, Kebele 05, and Kebele 11). According to the information obtained from the Labor and Social Affairs Bureau of Amhara Region, of all the Kebeles in the town, Kebele 03, kebele 05 and Kebele 11 were identified to be places where there are a large number of destitute families and where the concentrations of street children are high. Therefore, taking this fact in to account, the three Kebles were selected for the study using purposive sampling technique. Some 1,500 street children live in Kebele 03, Kebele 05, and Kebele 11. Out of 1,500 street children 75 street children were included in the sample. From each Kebele 25 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling method. The participants were contacted for three days. On each day only 25 respondents were interviewed in the afternoon immediately after lunch time near the bus station. This place is selected because most of them meet after they have done their daily jobs obtained or not.

Instruments

The instrument was adapted from UNICEF (2000). In this study, structured interviews consisting of both open-ended (about 12 questions) and close-ended (about 11 questions) were employed to collect information from the street children using local language. The contents of the items included in the interview consist of socio-demographic characteristics of the street

children such as age, sex, ethnicity, religion, educational level or schooling, family background, the relationship they have with their parents, reason for coming to the streets, socio-economic status (where they are living, their source of income, school status', substance abuse, sexual behaviour, major problems they encountered so far), and their future aspirations. The interview items were evaluated by field experts to retain face validity.

In addition to the structured interviews, systematic observation was conducted in the selected Kebeles where the street children spent much of their time working, searching for food, playing, and where they sleep in the night. Data were also collected through interview with Labour and Social Affairs Bureau of Amhara Region and Forum for Street Children (the two organizations working on street children) about the current number of street children; the major cause of street children; measures taken and activities performed to alleviate the cause of child-streetism and to solve problems of street children in the town.

Procedure of Data Collection

In this study, regarding legality issues and ethical considerations, a formal letter was written from the Department of Pedagogical Science, Bahir Dar University to Labour and Social Affairs Bureau of Amhara Region. In addition, discussion was made with the administrators of the Kebeles so that they understand the aim of the study and cooperate towards its accomplishment. Moreover, each respondent (participant of the study) was asked for his/her consent, verbally, to participate in the study, after the aim of the study and the importance of information obtained from him/her for the study were explained.

Data Analysis

After the data were collected, quantitative data were tallied, categorized and analyzed using percentage. The collected data, after being analyzed and summarized, provided information about the socio-demographic characteristics of the street children: family background, major causes of street children, their socio-economic status and their future visions. The analyzed and summarized data were presented in tables, graphs or charts for easier and better understanding.

Results

The major objective of this study was to investigate the socio-economic status of street children in Bahir Dar town. The data collected from street

children using interview and direct observation of the investigators are presented below.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the street children in Bahir Dar

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Sex | | |
| Male | 65 | 86.7 |
| Female | 10 | 11.3 |
| Age (in years) | | |
| 6 – 10 | 11 | 14.7 |
| 11 – 15 | 54 | 72.0 |
| 16 – 18 | 10 | 13.3 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| Amhara | 72 | 96.0 |
| Agew | 2 | 2.7 |
| Tigray | 1 | 1.3 |
| Religion | | |
| Orthodox | 69 | 92.0 |
| Muslim | 6 | 8.0 |
| Place of birth and growth | | |
| Bahir Dar town | 28 | 37.3 |
| Out of Bahir Dar town | 47 | 62.7 |

As indicated in Table 1, of all the 75 street children interviewed, 65 (86.7%) were males and 10 (13.3%) were females. With regard to gender distribution of street children, of the total of 10,000 street children 75% were males and 25% were females (Zenebe 1999). Globally, there are more street boys than girls. According to Lalor (1999), 75% of street children in Colombia were boys. As in the rest part of the world, the majority of street children in Africa are also street boys. Veale and Dona (2003) reported that 84% of Angolan street children, 70% of Zambian street children and nearly

100% of Sudanese street children were boys. In Nigeria, according to Morakinyo and Odejide (2003), of the 180 street children interviewed, 174 were males (96.7%) and six (3.3%) were females. The relatively fewer number of street girls than boys might be because of the nature of their work which tends to be less visible than that of boys. The contribution of females in household and agricultural activities in Ethiopia has given them less chance to go out; and parental fears regarding the dangers of street life to females can possibly be the reason for having fewer females in this sample group.

The age of the majority of the street children in this sample (72%) ranges from 11 to 15 years while 13.3% were above fifteen years and 14.7% below eleven years. A study conducted on street children of Ethiopia (Zenebe, 1996) indicated that in a sample group the age distribution of street children the highest concentration (38.4%) belong in the age group of 13-15 out of which 29.34 % are males and 9.09 % were females; 34.17 % belong in the age group of 10-12 years out of which 24.99% were males and 9.18 % were females. According to Lalor (1999), the age of the majority of street children in the world was between 10 and 14. Veale and Doña (2003) reported that the age profile of African street children varies from country to country. For example, of 520 Zambian street children, 60% were 14 years or older; the mean age of Kenyan street children was 12.6 years; and in Ethiopia approximately half of all the street children are less than 12 years of age. One can understand from the above data that our country's street

children are younger in chronological age than those in other African countries indicated above.

Almost all of the street children were Amhara by ethnicity and Orthodox Christians by religion, accounting for 96% and 92% respectively; 47(62.7%) of the children migrated from urban and rural areas surrounding Bahir Dar town because of different problems. while 28 (37.3%) were born and brought up in Bahir Dar town. Concerning ethnic composition of street children, Zenebe (1996) revealed that 45%, 18% and 15.5% were Amhara, Oromo and Gurage, respectively. Boys constitute the highest number in all ethnic groups. With regard to the distribution of street children, population profile in different towns of Ethiopia (Zenbe 1996) showed that 45.93 %, 6.89 % 4.59%, 4.59%, 4.02 % are found in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Harar, Nazareth, Dessie and Shashmane respectively.

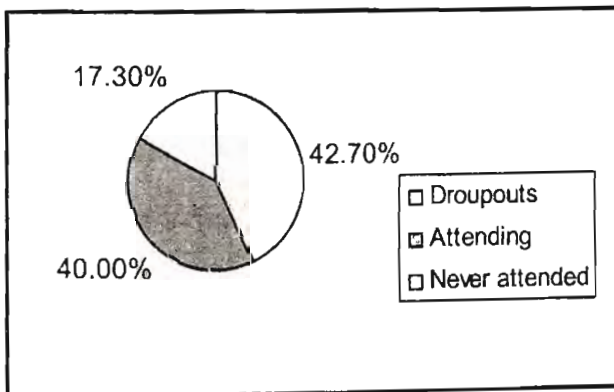


Figure 1. Schooling profile of street children in Bahir Dar

With regard to schooling profile, the study revealed that only 30 (4%) of the street children were attending school and the remaining were either dropouts (42.7%) or never attended school (17.3%). Since most of the street children were self-dependent and living under poverty, they could not afford to buy uniforms, shoes, books and other school materials to attend school even where schools are free. Ali et al. (2004) reported that out of 108 street children in Pakistan 60% had attended school at some time, but almost all had left school or were unable to continue with their schooling because of poverty.

Table 2. Family background of respondent street children in Bahir Dar

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Occupation | | |
| Farmers | 26 | 34.7 |
| Traders | 22 | 29.3 |
| Daily labourers | 8 | 10.7 |
| Beggars | 6 | 8.0 |
| Domestic workers | 6 | 8.0 |
| Government employees | 4 | 5.3 |
| Others | 3 | 4.0 |
| Family size | | |
| 1-5 | 26 | 34.7 |
| 6-10 | 49 | 65.3 |
| Parents alive | | |
| Living together | 15 | 20.0 |
| Divorced | 11 | 14.7 |
| Total | 26 | 34.7 |
| Parents dead | | |
| Father | 16 | 21.3 |
| Mother | 12 | 16.0 |
| Both | 21 | 28.0 |
| Total | 49 | 65.3 |
| Reasons for death of parents | | |
| Diseases other than HIV/AIDS | 28 | 57.2 |
| HIV/AIDS | 8 | 16.3 |
| Famine/drought | 5 | 10.2 |
| War | 3 | 6.1 |
| Accidents (car, murder, etc.) | 3 | 6.1 |
| Unknown reasons | 2 | 4.1 |

As indicated in Table 2, the parents of the interviewed street children were engaged in farming (34.7%), minor trades (29.3%), daily labour (10.7%), begging (8%) and domestic work, like servants, guards, etc. (8%). The occupational status of the parents of the street children in the town indicate that they came from poor families and the low economic status of the family could force the children to the street in search of job to support the family and/or to lead their own life. Regarding family size, the majority of the street children (65.3%) were from parents with family size of six or more and this is another burden for family's failure to fulfil the basic needs of their children, leading them to street life.

Only 15 (20%) of the street children came from parents living together. Parents of 11(14.7%) respondents were divorced; 21 (28%) of the street children reported both parents were dead (double orphans); 16 (21.3%) were paternal orphans; and 12 (16%) were maternal orphans. According to the report of Lalor (1999), 78% of street children in San Jose came from families with a single parent or no parent and only 7% of street children in Kingston, Jamaica had two parent families. According to UNICEF (2001), out of 270 street children interviewed in Uganda, 33% reported that their parents were dead, 27% were paternal orphans, and 7% were maternal orphans. In another report UNICEF (2000) revealed that in a survey of 1,000 Ethiopian street children, only 23% of the children lived with both parents and the remaining children came from families where a spouse was divorced, widowed or both parents were dead.

Table 3. The relationship of street children with their family in Bahir Dar

| | Frequent | Parent |
|--|-----------------|---------------|
| Freedom when with parents | 50 | 66.7 |
| Didn't feel free | 25 | 33.3 |
| Discussion with family on issue concerning the children | | |
| Always | 37 | 49.3 |
| Some times | 15 | 20.0 |
| Not at all | 23 | 30.7 |
| Reaction of parents when children commit offences | | |
| Beat | 34 | 45.3 |
| Advice | 32 | 42.7 |
| Indifferent | 9 | 12 |
| Ever away from parents before coming to street | | |
| Yes | 15 | 20.0 |
| No | 57 | 80.0 |
| Current relation with parents | | |
| Living together | 16 | 21.3 |
| Infrequent visit | 14 | 18.7 |
| No relation at all | 45 | 60.0 |

As indicated in Table 3, the children were asked whether they felt free when they were with their parents; 50 (66.7%) of the street children responded that they felt comfortable while only 25 (33.3%) reported that they did not feel free with their parents. Moreover, 50% of the children responded that their families discuss with them rarely when decision is made on issues concerning the children. Lack of freedom and making decisions on issues of the children without their participation is a contributing factor to move to the street. In addition, 45.3% of the street children reported that whenever they committed an offence their parents used to beat them and this also pushed the children to leave home and go away.

The majority of the sample street children (78.7%) were children of the street, 45 (60%) do not have any contact at all with their family and 14 (18.7%) visit their families infrequently and the street is their main living place. The remaining (21.3%) were children on the street who come to work on the street to supplement their families' income and return home to their families, at night. This result is in contrary with the global trend where not more than 10% of street children are children of the street (Lalor, 1999). Aptekar (1989) also reported that 90% of Colombian street children had occasional or regular contact with their family, and of 200,000 street children in Lima, Peru, only 3% live on the street. In Kenya, only 16% of the street children had no known family to contact and the rest were in the care of at least one parent or a grandparent (Aptekar, 1994). The reason behind high number of children of the street in this study could be due to the fact that the majority of the children were orphans.

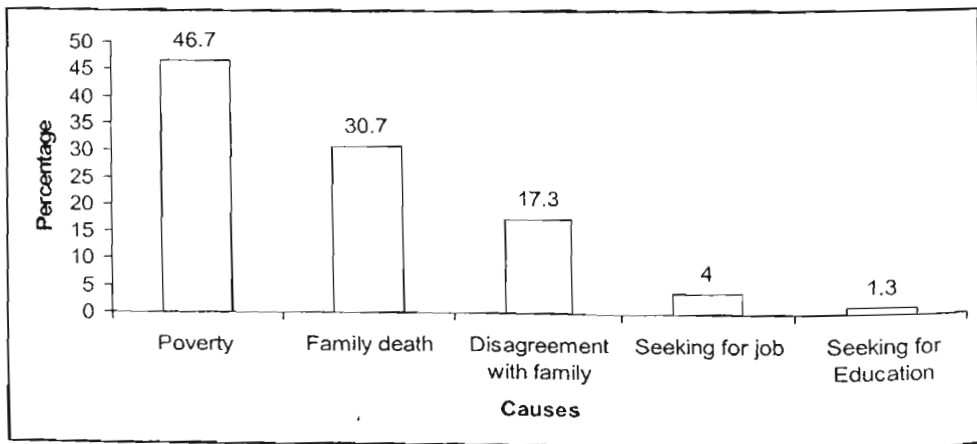


Figure 2. Major reasons for street-life in Bahir Dar

As indicated in Figure 2, the response obtained from the respondent street children depicted that poverty; family death and disagreement with family were the main reasons for coming to the street, accounting for 46.7%, 30.7% and 17.3%, respectively. Only 4% and 1.3% of the street children mentioned seeking job and education, respectively, as their main reasons for coming to the street. Local study conducted at national level (Zenebe, 1996) showed that economic problems, family dishonesty, friends' influence, loss of parents and desire to support families were reasons for involvement in street-life. According to the information from Forum for Street Children, divorce of parents, drought, low income and parents' death because of HIV/AIDS were the main reasons for ending up on the street. Similarly, Labour and Social Affairs Bureau of Amhara Region mentioned poverty, family disharmony and parents' death as the main reasons for children to come to the streets. Similar causes were also reported in other parts of the world. Aptekar (1994) reported that 36% of Colombian street children had left home due to extreme poverty, 27% due to family disharmony and 20% due to physical abuse and 10% for adventure. Paule and Fournier (2005) as noted by Hyde (2005) revealed that the families of street children were more affected by intra-family conflicts than those of non-street children, leading to lack of support, care and affection for their children. In a research conducted on 50 street children in Los Angeles, USA, physical abuse and intense family conflict were mentioned as the primary factors for the decision of the children to leave home.

According to Lalor (1999), nearly 60% of children of the street in Ethiopia are out of home because of family disharmony or due to being orphaned or displaced, while this accounts only for 5.8% of children on streets.

Table 4. Main sources of income of street children in Bahir Dar

| Jobs | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| Carrying goods | 23 | 30.7 |
| Selling (chewing gum, cigarettes, sugar cane, tissue paper, etc.) | 18 | 24.0 |
| Selling lottery tickets | 9 | 12.0 |
| Shoe shinning | 9 | 12.0 |
| Begging | 7 | 9.3 |
| Washing cars | 6 | 8.0 |
| Others | 3 | 4.0 |

The majority of the street children responded that they are engaged in carrying goods (30.7%) and selling items such as chewing gum, cigarettes, sugar cane, tissue paper, etc. (24%). Other sources of income reported include selling lottery tickets (12%), shoe shinning (12%), begging (9.3%) and washing cars (8%). Zenebe (1996) revealed that the majority of street children in his sample group were carriers or messengers, shoe shiners, car washers, taxi boys or “woyala”, peddlers and news paper sellers. According to UNICEF (2000), street children perform similar tasks worldwide, including shoe shinning, washing and mending cars, selling lottery tickets, cigarettes, chewing gums, magazines and news papers.

Table 5. Main problems of the street children in Bahir Dar

| Problems | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Beatings | 23 | 30.7 |
| Being snatched | 23 | 30.7 |
| Illness | 8 | 10.0 |
| Sexual victimization | 6 | 8.0 |
| Being jailed by police | 3 | 4.0 |
| Hunger | 2 | 2.7 |
| Lack of sleeping place | 2 | 2.7 |
| Nothing | 6 | 8.0 |

As shown in Table 5, the respondents were asked about major problems they faced on the street. The children responded that they were beaten by older street children and the police (30.7%); their money and properties were snatched away by older street children (30.7%); they suffered from malaria and other diseases (10%); they were jailed by the police (4%), suffered from hunger (2.7%) and lack of sleeping place (2.7). Six of the street children (8% of the girls) reported that younger street boys sexually victimized them. Only 6 (8%) reported that they did not face such problems and they were among children on the street.

Lalor et al. (1996) reported that in Addis Ababa, 26 out of 28 street boys reported to be beaten on the street when they refused money demanded by older street boys. Of the interviewed 31 girls 21 had been sexually attacked and those who were not attacked were either too young, already pregnant or had a child with them. Sixty nine percent of the street children reported

having things stolen from them. According to Ali et al. (2004), out of 108 street children interviewed in Pakistan, 61% reported having been harassed and physically abused by the police or their daily earnings snatched away.

The street children were asked whether they were involved in delinquent acts; only few responded that they were involved in drinking (17.3%), khat chewing (12%), cigarette smoking (10.7%), theft (9.3%) and sexual practice (9.3%). The investigators believe that most of the street children are involved in such practices. Lalor (1999) reported that younger street children steal food or money to buy food, while older children steal money or resalable items to support bad habits such as chewing khat, smoking and drinking. Even at times they are involved in more confrontational crimes such as pick-pocketing and robberies which make them to be viewed as a threat to the society and bring them into contact with the police and other security forces.

Asked whether the children aspire to come out of the street life, 66 (88%) responded that they wish to come out of street life and 9 (12%) said they don't want to come out of street life mainly not to depart from their friends and to enjoy the freedom in street life. The majority of the street children who responded wanting to come out of street life said that they wish to come out of street life through support of organizations (71.2%) and only few said that they wish to come out of street life through hard work (18.2%), through education (7.6%), and by returning to family (3.0%). The Labour and Social Affairs of Amhara Region reported having made some street children use scholarship opportunities (those older than 18) and sent

them abroad for adoption (those between 7 and 18 years of age). Despite this attempt the contribution of governmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations in solving the problems of street children is below their expectation and streetism continues to be a great problem.

In spite of the discussion made to find out the socio-economic-situation of street children in Bahir Dar town, this study has limitations; all issues related to street children were not addressed comprehensively because of shortage of time, other workloads, and budget constraints. This study, therefore, helps to initiate other researchers in the area to study the problem in a more comprehensive manner.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study the following conclusions were drawn:

- As in other parts of the world, there is high incidence of street boys than street girls in Bahir Dar town.
- The age of the majority of the street children ranges from 11 to 15 years and most of them migrated from urban and rural areas surrounding Bahir Dar town.
- Most of the street children were either dropouts or never attended school and only few were attending school.
- In this sample group most of the street children were from divorced family, or were double orphans, paternal orphans or maternal orphans.
- The occupational status of the parents of the street children in the town indicate that they were from poor families and the low economic status of the family could force the children to the street, in search of job to support the family and/or lead their own life.
- The majority of the street children (78.7%) do not have any contact with their family or families and the street is their main living place.
- Poverty, family death, and disagreement with family were the main reasons for street children in the town for starting street life.
- The street children in the town are engaged in carrying goods, selling items (such as chewing gum, cigarettes, sugar cane, tissue paper, etc.), selling lottery tickets, shoe shining, begging and car washing as their main job as most street children do elsewhere in the world.

- Most of the street children were suffering from beating by older street children or police, they were sexually abused, their money and properties were snatched away by older street children and they suffered from illnesses, hunger and lack of sleeping place.
- The majority of the street children aspire to come out of street life through support of governmental and nongovernmental organizations, rather than by their own effort.

Recommendations

On the basis of the results of the study the following recommendations were forwarded:

- The study indicated that the main reasons for street children in the town to end up on the street were poverty, family death and disharmony between the children and their family. Thus, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and other concerned bodies should try to improve the economic status of such families, and educating them on the rights of children and on family planning. Only few street children got access to education, hence concerned governmental bodies and nongovernmental organizations should create conducive environment that enables the children to go to school.
- Most street children have developed harmful habits such as smoking, khat chewing, drinking, and theft. Organizations working on street children and other responsible sectors should educate them on the social, economic and health impacts of such delinquent practices, which would otherwise be potential risk for the children and the society at large.

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