

Society and Life among the Street Children: With Special Reference to Agra Cantt Railway Station

Abstract

Being the biggest developing country and fastest growing economy of the world, our society is facing several socio-economic challenges. The challenge of street children is one of the serious problems in contemporary Indian society. We have achieved a lot on economic and political fronts in recent years, but on the social front a lot has needed to be done. Although, the phenomenon and problem of street children is worldwide and more severe in third world countries and yet little is known about the numbers or the conditions of street children in which they live. This study tries to address socio-economic issues, challenges and life of the street children living on Agra Cantt railway station.

Keywords: Street Children, Urbanization, Bagging, Railway Station, Night Shelter, Harassment.

Introduction

India is the biggest democratic developing country in the world with more than 122.12 crores population (Census of India, 2011). Still now most of its population is living in countryside. Because of the rapid process of urbanization in Indian society, the size and number of cities is increasing very fast. Indian society as a whole is passing from a transitional phase. A large section of population is migrating from country sides to urban areas. Inefficient housing facilities, unemployment and poverty, these urban areas become hell for some of the families and children. This new socio-economic and demographic atmosphere affects not only the children but whole urban society. The child's personality, growth and maturation are affected by a variety of forces- hereditary, somatic cultural and particularly interpersonal ones (Sadock, Ruiz and Sadock 2000). Human personality consists of a collection of behavior that has been acquired through the ongoing, reciprocal interaction of personal and environmental factors. The social learning that occurs through modeling-one person displays the behavior to be learned and another acquires behaviors by observation-produce personality and behavior. The external environment is having much impact on character molding and personality development.

Street Children

UNICEF defines street children as children for whom the street has become his or her habitual source of livelihood; and also who is inadequately protected, supervised as well as directed by responsible adults (quoted in Srivastava & Shareef 2009) as anyone under the age of 18 who either lives or works on the street.

There are 3 types of street children:

Street Living Children: These are children who live alone on the street, public/open spaces or night shelters. They may have run away from their family and have no responsible adult who looks after them.

Street Working Children: These are children who spend a majority of their time working on the street or in public spaces but return either daily or occasionally to their families.

Children of Street Families: These are children who stay with their family but live on the pavement/street, public places and are homeless (Life on the Street).

Street children are deprived children who get on to the streets to make a living and are mostly those who are deprived of almost all the rights entitled in the 1989 United Nation's Convention the Rights of the child (Zweegers, 2010).

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UNICEF estimated about 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world. 14 years later UNICEF reported that the latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million. And even more recently, "The exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world. It is likely that the numbers are increasing". Street children may be found on every continent in a large majority of the world's cities: Kenya: - 250,000-300,000, Egypt: - 200,000- 1 million, India: - 18 million, Vietnam: - 23,000, Brazil: - 1-10 million, Russia: - 1-3 million, Germany: - 10,000, USA: - 750,000- 1 million.

In India, there are 18 million street children according to UNICEF (quoted in Reddy, Kumar and Raju: 2014). A study in India found that 65.9% of the street children lived with their families on the streets, out of which 51.84% slept on footpaths, 17.48% slept in night shelters and 30.67% slept in other places including flyovers and bridges, railway platforms, bus stop, parks, market places etc. 68% of these street children were abused either by parents or both.

Approaches to Understand the Phenomena of Street Children

Livelihoods approach: Any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and/or sources of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults (Inter-NGO, 1985).

The Family relationship approach: "Working children who return to families at night, independent street workers, children of street families, and children who have broken off all contact with families (Lusk and Rizzini, 1995).

Common behavioral problems noticed in street children are habitual problems like nail biting and thumb sucking, problems of eating like food refusal, over eating, anorexia and vomiting, sleeping problems like nightmares, somnambulism, scholastic problems like repeated failure, school phobia and reading disabilities, personality problems like fear, anger, and jealous, antisocial behaviors such as stealing, lying etc.

Challenging behaviors should be addressed and corrected when children are young because problem that are not resolved by the midpoint of school often become exceedingly resistant to change.

Street Children in Agra

Agra is a world tourist city with a population of more than 15 lakh of which male and female are 845,902 and 739,802 respectively (Census of India, 2011). It has world famous monuments including Taj Mahal, Fort, Buland Darwaja and Dayalbagh Temple. It has more street children population in comparison to its neighborhood cities. The number of street children has increased in the last few years in the city. There is not even distribution of these street children in all areas of city, these are centered in some clustered of the city. Most of these are at Mahatma Gandhi Road and its different crossings, Taj Mahal, Cantt Railways Station, Interstate Bus Terminal, Raja

Ki Mandi Railway Station, Rawali Temple, Mankameshwar Temple, Rambagh Crossing and near Taj Mahal and Agra Fort etc.

Review of Literature

Malhotra, Malhotra, Singh, Garg & Ingle (2007) in their study provided an insight into the pattern of tobacco use among the street children of Delhi. The study did show that all the boys were purchasing tobacco product and these products continue to be widely accessible to minors.

Celik and Baybuga (2009) in their study explored the verbal, physical and sexual abuse experienced by children working on the street in Ankara, Turkey. The result indicated that verbal, sexual and physical abuse has negative effect on children working on the streets.

Reddy, Kumar and Raju (2014) in a study conducted at children homes of different cities of Andhra Pradesh shown that the prevalence of substance abuse is alarming high among street children in Andhra Pradesh. Children were used to take substances like tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, inhalants to get relief from pain and to get confidence.

Uddin, Sarma, Wahed, Ali, Kaoehlmoos, Nahar and Azim (2014) in a study of street children aged 5-12 years of Dhaka city of Bangladesh shown that street children of Bangladesh are highly vulnerable to HIV. Urgent attention of policy makers is required to undertake and implement services addressing issues related to sexual health and drug abuse to prevent the possible epidemic of HIV among this group of population.

Srivastava and Shareef (2016) conducted a study to assess the different types of abuse to the residing in the urban areas of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh and showed that average child had two major expenditures- food and addiction and entertainment to some extent.

Sheppard (2016) in an empirical study based on participatory observation find out that street children are hired to carry weapons, sell drugs, collect extortion money, commit political violence and conduct contract killing. They did all, what they can do to survive on the street.

Dutta (2018) in a study of 100 street children of Mumbai revealed that extreme poverty was the primary cause for the increasing number of street children. Lack of awareness among illiterate parents kept most of the children from school attendance. Children who are living with their parents had better access to health care facilities. The research paper also revealed that how child faced harsh realities in early age?

Kapoor, Mohanty and Balappanavar (2019) in a study based on questionnaire based survey of 147 street vendors of Delhi revealed that most of the food vendors were found to be tobacco use.

Ayuku, DeLong, Makori, Sang, Tarus, Kamanda, Shah, Apondi and Wachira (2019) in a cross sectional study in the city of Eldoret capital of the country of Usain Gishu in Kenya shown that prevalence of HIV among street children was 4.1 percentage and it was four time higher in females than males.

Research Questions

The research questions of the study are as follows-

1. What are the causes of being street among the street children of Agra City?
2. What are the main activities in which street children engaged in Agra City?
3. What is the impact of being street in the street children of Agra City?

Research Methodology and Design

The researcher has adopted descriptive design to describe the research problem 'Society and Life among the Street Children: With Special Reference to Agra Cantt Railway Station'. Although, there are around 34 street children at Agra Cantt railway station, yet there number rises and falls every

day, every week and every season. The unit of the study is street children staying at or around Agra Cantt Railway station. For the collection of required information which was needed for research questions, interview-schedule was prepared.

Data Collection

In the present study, both types of data have been used. Primary data were collected from the respondents with structured interview-schedule. Primary data were collected from the respondents in the months of January and February 2019. Secondary data were collected from the different books, journals, news papers and other documents.

Findings of the Study Data Interpretation

The major findings of the study derived from the data collection through interview-schedule from the street children are as follows:

Table: I
General Information of the Street Children

Age Wise Distribution of Street Children				Native Place Wise Distribution of Street Children			
S. No.	Age (in years)	Frequency	%	S. No.	Native Place	Frequency	%
1	Ut to 7	4	13.33	1	Local	7	23.33
2	7-9	4	13.33	2	Rajasthan	5	16.66
3	9-11	6	20.00	3	M. P.	8	26.66
4	11-13	8	26.66	4	Bihar	5	16.66
5	13-16	8	26.66	5	Other States	5	16.66
6	Total	30	100.00	6	Total	30	100.00
Caste Category Wise Distribution of Street Children				Religion Wise Distribution of Street Children			
S. No.	Caste Category	Frequency	%	S. No.	Religion	Frequency	%
1	General	3	10.00	1	Hindu	18	60.00
2	O.B.C.	14	46.66	2	Islam	9	30.00
3	S.C.	6	20.00	3	Christians	-	-
4	S.T.	1	3.33	4	Others	-	-
5	Not Known	6	20.00	5	Not Known	3	10.00
6	Total	30	100.00	6	Total	30	100.00
Family Wise Distribution of Street Children				Gender Wise Distribution of Street Children			
S. No.	Family	Frequency	%	S. No.	Gender	Frequency	%
1	Nuclear	14	46.66	1	Male	17	56.66
2	Joint	3	10.00	2	Female	13	43.33
3	Not known	13	43.33	3	Trans Genders	-	-
4	Total	30	100.00	4	Total	30	100.00
Day Activities Wise Distribution of Street Children				Night Staying Wise Distribution of Street Children			
S. No.	Day Activities	Frequency	%	S. No.	Night Stay	Frequency	%
1	Bagging	15	50.00	1	With Family	11	36.66
2	Playing	3	10.00	2	With Friends	6	20.00
3	Working	4	13.33	3	On Station	5	16.66
4	Collection of Old Articles	5	16.66	4	At Any Place	6	20.00
5	Others	3	10.00	5	Not Known	2	6.66
6	Total	30	100.00	6	Total	30	100.00

As the table shows that most of the street children living on Agra cantt railway station are above the age of 10 years, they are from Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Most of them are Hindus and OBC and Schedule Caste category. They have their nuclear families but a leading number of them do not know about their families and they spend night with

friends, railway station and at any places like roads, train compartments and in Verandahs of the governmental buildings. If we observe gender wise distribution of street children, most of them are male but female street children are in neck to neck fighting. Most of these street children are engaged in bagging.

Table: II
Economic Status of Street Children

Personal Earnings Wise Distribution of Street Children (Daily)				Sources if Earnings of Street Children			
S. No.	Earnings (in Rupees)	Frequency	%	S. No.	Earnings	Frequency	%
1	Nil	4	13.33	1	Working	9	30.00
2	Up to -30	4	13.33	2	Bagging	8	26.66
3	30-50	4	13.33	3	Selling of goods / Articles	9	30.00
4	50-80	6	20.00	4	Dependent on Kins / friends	2	6.66
5	80 & >	12	40.00	5	Dependent on Family	2	6.66
6	Total	30	100.00	6	Total	30	100.00
Income They Give				Their Major Expenditures			
S. No.	Income they Give	Frequency	%	S. No.	Major Expenditures	Frequency	%
1	Keep Self	7	23.33	1	Food	8	26.66
2	Give to Parents	8	26.66	2	Clothing	6	20.00
3	Give to Kins	6	20.00	3	Medicines	5	16.66
4	Friends	4	13.33	4	Entertainment	5	16.66
5	Others	5	16.66	5	Others	6	20.00
6	Total	30	100.00	6	Total	30	100.00

If we observe the earnings of street children, we find that most of the street children are earning Rupees 80 or < per day, these earnings are mainly from bagging money from passengers and other commuters, selling goods and articles and working on station such as cleaning vehicles and train

compartments, helping in lifting luggage, singing and dancing in front of passengers etc. The income earned by the street children is given to some other such as friends, kins and others. Who are these others? The answer of this question is mystery.

Table: III
Life of the Street Children

Have You Regular Medical Check Up?				Have You Ever Substance Use?			
S. No.	Regular Medical Checkup	Frequency	%	S. No.	Substance Use	Frequency	%
1	Yes	5	16.66	1	Yes	18	60.00
2	No	8	26.66	2	No	5	16.66
3	Frequently	6	20.00	3	Frequently	5	16.66
4	Never	11	36.66	4	Never	2	6.66
5	Total	30	100.00	5	Total	30	100.00
Type of Substance Use				From Where They Get Substance?			
S. No.	Substance Types *	Frequency	%	S. No.	Where They Get Substance?	Frequency	%
1	Alcohol	14	46.66	1	Shop	8	6.66
2	Tobacco	21	70.00	2	Friends	8	26.66
3	Gutkha	23	76.66	3	Parents	3	10.00
4	Smoking	19	63.33	4	Others	4	13.33
5	Others	10	33.33	5	N.A.	7	23.33
6	N.A.	7	23.33	6	Total	30	100.00
Substance Used By Males*				Substance Used By Females*			
S. No.	Substance Use	Frequency	%	S. No.	Substance Use	Frequency	%
1	Alcohol	12	70.58	1	Alcohol	2	15.38
2	Tobacco	13	76.47	2	Tobacco	8	61.53
3	Gutkha	14	82.35	3	Gutkha	9	69.23
4	Smoking	14	82.35	4	Smoking	5	38.46
5	Others	6	35.29	5	Others	4	30.76
6	N.A.	3	17.64	6	N.A.	4	30.76

Can You Freely Live on Station or Platform				Are You Moved Out From Station by Police / Other Authorities			
So. No.	Freely Live on Station or Platform	Frequency	%	So. No.	Moved Out	Frequency	%
1	Yes	3	10.00	1	Yes	26	86.66
2	No	23	76.66	2	No	2	6.66
3	Sometimes	2	6.66	3	Sometimes	1	3.33
4	Cannot Say	2	6.66	4	Cannot Say	1	3.33
5	Total	30	100.00	5	Total	30	100.00
Do You Face Physical Harassment?				Do You Face Economic Harassment?			
S. No.	Physical Harassment	Frequency	%	S. No.	Economic Harassment	Frequency	%
1	Yes	22	73.33	1	Yes	25	83.33
2	No	3	10.00	2	No	2	6.66
3	Cannot Say	5	16.66	3	Cannot Say	3	10.00
4	Total	30	100.00	4	Total	30	100.00
Do You Face Mental Harassment?				Do You Face Sexual Harassment?			
S. No.	Mental Harassment	Frequency	%	S. No.	Sexual Harassment	Frequency	%
1	Yes	26	86.66	1	Yes	5	16.66
2	No	2	6.66	2	No	20	66.66
3	Cannot Say	2	6.66	3	Cannot Say	5	16.66
4	Total	30	100.00	4	Total	30	100.00

*included / multiple responses

As it is observed from table III that the street children living on Agra Cantt railways station do not have any medical checkup. Almost all of them have substance use such as tobacco, Gutkha / Pan Masala, Alcohol, smoking and some of them are habitual of drugs addiction. The rate of substance use among male street children is higher than the female street children. They get it from their friends, shops and some others. Most of the street children did accept that they cannot live freely on the station or the platform and a number of attempts have been made to remove them from the station and platform by the police and railway authority. Most of the street children accepted that they had faced physical, economic, psychological and sexual harassment.

Summary and Conclusion

The study found that in fast growing economy like India the problem of street children is very serious. Problem of street children is the result of poverty, fast and unplanned urbanization and disorganized family. They are living on the railways stations for earning livelihood because they have no means of earning, they do not have family or they do not know about their families. There may be some rackets which may use such children for bagging and other criminal activities (without proper information and data we cannot say definitely) because a number of children are living with some other persons. They pass their time with playing with coins like gambling. They are used to all the evils like smoking, drinking and tobacco chewing, these things are easily available to them through their friends or through invisible others. These unknown are invisible agents in this whole chain of the problem. These street children are highly vulnerable to physical, economic, psychological and sexual harassment therefore,

urgent attention is required to undertake the issue and problem of street children.

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