



## Education for Vulnerable Youth: Empowering Street Children

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### Abstract

Who are street children, and what is their level of education? Can they access proper education, and do they have an interest in schooling? Addressing these questions is complex and challenging. On one hand, there's a strong belief that education is a fundamental part of a child's life. However, many street children are unable to access this privilege. For them, survival on the streets takes precedence, often causing their education to be put on hold. Consequently, many find themselves in a difficult situation. Understanding the lives of street children is intricate, particularly when considering how they manage to survive on the streets with limited or no access to education. In light of these complexities, this non-empirical research aims to explore why these children don't attend school. Utilizing an analysis of previous literature it seeks to give definition of street children and offer insights into street life.

**Keywords:** education, street children, empowering, street life

### Introduction

Despite the relative novelty of this phenomenon and the limited available information, it's crucial to recognize that these children are often perceived through a negative lens. Many individuals respond to them with apathy, indifference, and disinterest, further exacerbating their situation and hindering a positive perspective. Understanding their way of life on the streets is equally perplexing. In this context, this paper examines their lifestyle, particularly in relation to education, with the aim of providing comprehensive definitions and dispelling the prevalent negative portrayals of street children. This research offers an objective, well-informed view of their lives, free from sensationalism. The underlying belief is that greater awareness of street children's experiences can foster understanding of their challenges and inspire more empathy and support for their education

### Explain of street children

Defining about is a complex task, considering the relatively recent emergence of this phenomenon and the variations in perspectives across different countries. These children are depicted in a wide array of ways. Consortium for Children Street characterizes them as an invisible segment of the global population, often neglected by religious groups, government authorities, legal entities, and various societal stakeholders. Rr *et al.*, goes further by labeling street children as societal nuisances due to their unruly behavior,

which leads to public unrest. Reza & Henly (2018) <sup>[35]</sup> emphasize life on streets is incredibly harsh, marked by squalor, disease, violence, and poverty, where these children must battle for survival. Kwaku (2019) <sup>[21]</sup> underscores the fact that they not only exist on the streets but also fight for their existence there. Similarly, Engkus & Atwar (2020) <sup>[4]</sup> highlight on street children are often related with disruption, upheaval, and criminal activities, rendering them social outcasts. Their time on the streets makes them socially vulnerable and environmentally exposed. Work in undesirable locations such as under bridges, lots, vacant land, and parking. Mulekya *et al.* (2021) <sup>[25]</sup> take a straightforward approach, defining them as individuals who inhabit the streets. Sanjay *et al.* (2019) <sup>[38]</sup> emphasize that these children live in constant high-risk conditions, lacking protection and defense against various forms of exploitation, abuse, and illnesses. Their lives are continually in jeopardy, and they require proper guidance and direction. Their sole objective is to secure basic necessities on the streets, and with limited access to education, their future prospects remain bleak and challenging.

Ismael (2019) <sup>[16]</sup> conducted a research study focused on street children in Baqubah. His research identified several factors help to the presence of streets children. Societal *et al.* (2021) <sup>[41]</sup> concurred with this perspective, emphasizing how overwhelming poverty and the absence of parental guidance serve as driving forces compelling children to take

to the streets.

Consortium for Street Children made a crucial distinction between the terms "street children" and "homeless children," asserting that these two descriptors are not synonymous. They clarified that not all street children are necessarily homeless. Consequently, children who fall under the category of street children often maintain a connection with their families, even though they toil and socialize on the streets.

A comprehensive analysis of the literature presented an unfavorable and distressing portrayal of street children. This deprivation led to feelings of disillusionment and mistrust of new acquaintances. Even attempts at rehabilitation by non-governmental organizations were met with apparent impossibility due to the profound mistrust these children held toward others. Prasad (2021) <sup>[31]</sup> further noted that these children often evade addressing their issues fully, thereby complicating the prospects for their success in education. Their unconventional and challenging backgrounds create substantial barriers to effective teaching and learning.

Dutta (2018) <sup>[10]</sup> strongly emphasized that streets life is a continuous struggle. Despite living in major cities, street children are not able to enjoy the comfort of urban life. Pratap & Singh (2021) <sup>[32]</sup> asserted that street children are a presence in various parts of the developing world, and their lack of proper protection and adult supervision often results in their ending up on the streets. As previously discussed, their inherent mistrust of adults further diminishes their chances of accessing formal education.

Pratap and Singh (2021) <sup>[32]</sup> further observed that a significant number of street children have minimal formal education and are school dropouts. Consequently, as they transition into adulthood, they face a dearth of employment opportunities. This situation leads many of them to return to the streets, often resorting to delinquent or criminal activities.

### Life on the streets

The various definitions discussed above provide a clear and distressing insight into the challenges and hardships faced by street children on a daily basis. Lucas (2022) <sup>[22]</sup> emphasized the immense struggle street children endure for survival. Taib *et al.* (2022) <sup>[42]</sup> argued that the problems of street children is a societal problem, requiring both government and family intervention. They noted that the disruptive behavior of street children can disturb the peace and tranquility of the community. Understanding the daily experiences of these children on the streets becomes increasingly complex.

It is important to recognize that the term "street" is a part of children's of street lives. It is their way of life, their home, where they meet their basic needs for sustenance, rest, shelter, and recreation. Aptekar and Stoecklin (2014) <sup>[3]</sup> emphasized that street children survive, socialize, and establish friendships on the streets. Reza and Bromfield (2019) <sup>[34]</sup>, and Stephen *et al.* (2016) <sup>[40]</sup>, underscores the association of street children with acts of violence, serious crimes, and social disruptions. Hasrianti *et al.* (2022) <sup>[17]</sup> also attributed the violence these children face from their families as a factor driving them to the streets.

Yahya (2018) <sup>[46]</sup> pointed out that it is not uncommon to

encounter street children at railway and bus terminals, seeking assistance and essential necessities. Some of them turn to clubs and engage in prostitution. They often work in hazardous and unsanitary conditions, jeopardizing their health. On the streets, these children become socially vulnerable and susceptible to their environment. This harsh reality does not create a conducive atmosphere for education, and the possibilities for teaching and learning for street children remain a complex challenge.

These places lack basic sanitation and are full of rodents and other harmful animals that bring disease. Additionally, these children drink water that is not portable and eat food that sometimes spoils. Girls are absolutely helpless and weak. They sleep with different people to gather courage, increase their respect, and earn their living. This type of undesirable behavior, although shocking and repulsive, only escalates the scenario and makes them more vulnerable to further abuse, (Okoeğüele *et al.* 2020) <sup>[28]</sup>. Thus, road traffic remains a major issue, and according to Irawati *et al.* (2021) <sup>[15]</sup>, this brutal and cruel cycle continues to worsen, and street children suffer tremendously.

These children lack adult supervision and face frequent psychosocial, emotional and social problems. They have low self-esteem and feel inferior. They are also likely to contract communicable and infectious diseases. These illegal activities put them in even greater danger. Life on the streets is miserable, difficult and tough. Many of them toil in extremely dangerous conditions to earn a living. Some of them sell stolen goods and beg for small amounts of money at traffic intersections. Life is so bitter, unbearable and severe that some of them eventually exchange sex for money.

Street children are defenseless, vulnerable and at risk, but they have few coping skills to earn a living. Makofane (2014) <sup>[23]</sup> described him as resourceful and cunning. Kwaku (2019) <sup>[21]</sup> also believed that they are resilient and always find ways to deal with adversity. For example, they know about various religious and cultural events and often visit those places to benefit from alms or whatever is distributed.

### Children Position on the Street

Hypothesized that street "children" work exceptionally hard to earn a living. Some of them are in touch with their families. Some people return home from time to time after working on the streets. Others return to the drop-in center intermittently. The "kids" on the streets are slaves and submissive. They have minimal education and poor work skills. Therefore, they do menial jobs and get nominal wages. They clean shops, supermarkets, pharmacies and shops. They sell newspapers or snacks. They wash cars. They work in mechanic shops, stores or groceries. His salary is clearly inadequate and he cannot meet his expenses. Some of them supplement their meager income by indulging in illegal activities like drugs and prostitution.

These are children of the streets, and it is often said that the streets are their home, which they consider their territory. They work on the streets regularly, day and night, they also beg for essential items. They ask the public for money, food, and clothing. Some even engage in theft, while others are involved in prostitution and the sale of illegal drugs.

Street children do whatever it takes to survive. Many of them live in deteriorating physical environments such as bus

stations, markets, ruined shops, and the streets. Besides enduring hunger, they also face psychological, social, and mental risks. They fulfill their needs on the streets: water, food, clothing, and shelter.

Approximately five or six-year-old children who regularly beg on the streets often appear vulnerable and helpless. They can make decisions with minimal effort and can earn money. Their parents are happy to encourage and support such inappropriate behavior, and they have little or no hesitation. As these children mature and show signs of maturity, a completely different scenario unfolds. They often engage in illegal activities and bow to the commands and orders of their new masters. Consequently, they get involved in theft, prostitution, drug dealing, and explicit activities. This is a dangerous cycle. In return for received benefits, they are forced to follow the dictates and orders of their new masters. As a result, they engage in all forms of illegal activities.

Further alleged that some street children are vulnerable to the pressures and demands of drug dealers, pimps, criminals, and pornographers. They make promises of money, food, clothing, and shelter to these children. The lure of making money is very appealing, and they accept illegal practices and submit to their new owners' commands. This is a dire situation that continues. In exchange for received benefits, they are coerced into following the orders and directives of their new owners. Consequently, they engage in theft, prostitution, drug dealing, and explicit activities. This is an alarming cycle that persists.

The situation on the streets for these children is harsh and unforgiving. Some of them resort to theft, beg for meager amounts at traffic intersections, and even sell their own bodies. They have to do whatever it takes to make a living in extremely difficult circumstances. Street children are defenseless, unprotected, and live in danger. However, they have developed some coping skills to survive. Julian (2022) described them as resourceful and sly. These children are aware of the various religious and cultural events and often visit those places to benefit from alms or whatever is distributed. They also receive assistance from various non-governmental organizations and charitable institutions.

The literature presents street children in various ways, but Derivois *et al.* (2019) [9], Raju and Sharmin (2016) [33], Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (2016) [39] suggested that they can be broadly categorized into two main groups: children "on" the streets and children "of" the streets.

Children "on" the streets work tirelessly to make a living. They work daily in harsh conditions, such as cold, rain, and heat, just to support themselves and their families. Some of them are in contact with their families, while others return home periodically after working on the streets. Some also return intermittently to drop-in centers. Children "on" the streets are servile and submissive, often with minimal education and poor job skills. Consequently, they perform menial tasks and receive minimal pay. They clean shops, supermarkets, pharmacies, and stores. They sell newspapers or snacks. They wash vehicles and work in mechanic shops, stores, or groceries. Their income is clearly insufficient and cannot cover their expenses. Some of them supplement their meager income by engaging in illegal activities such as drugs and prostitution.

They start working at a very young age, and often, their

education and social life are frequently compromised, suspended, or permanently impacted. They work, earn money, and continue to survive on the streets. Therefore, education is not a priority for them.

### **Sniffing Glue to Survive**

In the heart-wrenching world of street children, survival often hinges on unimaginable acts of desperation. One of the most harrowing scenes that unfold in this grim reality is children sniffing glue to escape the pangs of hunger and the harshness of their daily existence.

Street children, the invisible victims of our society, find themselves in an unending battle for survival, devoid of the most basic necessities of life. These children roam the streets in search of food, shelter, and a glimmer of hope. Lacking the protection and care that all children deserve, they resort to sniffing glue as a means of temporary relief from the harshness of their lives.

Why do these children turn to such a perilous and damaging practice? The answer is simple: it provides a momentary escape from the relentless hardships they endure. Glue sniffing induces a brief feeling of euphoria and numbness, helping them temporarily forget their empty stomachs and the danger that lurks in the shadows.

However, the consequences of this practice are devastating. Glue sniffing exposes these children to severe health risks, including damage to the brain, heart, liver, and kidneys. It can also lead to severe respiratory problems and even death. Furthermore, this practice perpetuates the cycle of poverty and addiction, making it even more challenging for them to break free from the streets.

Addressing this issue is not a straightforward task. It requires a comprehensive approach involving governments, NGOs, and society as a whole. Providing safe shelters, access to education, and psychological support is crucial to breaking the cycle of glue sniffing among street children.

In conclusion, the sight of street children sniffing glue to survive is a stark reminder of the abject poverty and neglect they face daily. It's a haunting testament to the urgency of addressing this issue and offering these children a chance at a better life.

### **Importance of education**

Education, often considered a fundamental human right, is a beacon of hope for street children. It offers them a path out of the cycle of poverty, exploitation, and despair. Through education, these children gain the knowledge and skills necessary to break free from the streets and build a brighter future.

Cahyani *et al.* (2021) [5] her peers emphasize that education is not merely about imparting academic knowledge; it is a means of instilling confidence, self-worth, and a sense of belonging. Street children, who have endured a life of hardships and rejection, find in education a safe and nurturing environment where they can develop their potential.

Hasan *et al.* (2022) [18] work highlights that education equips these children with the tools to make informed decisions and escape the clutches of addiction, violence, and criminal exploitation. It empowers them to dream of a life beyond the streets and provides the necessary skills to turn those dreams into reality.

Edinyang *et al.* (2020) <sup>[12]</sup>, Anthony and James (2019) <sup>[2]</sup> point out that education also nurtures creativity and resilience, enabling street children to confront life's challenges with determination. By cultivating a passion for learning, these children become more adaptable and open to change, making them less likely to return to the streets once they've left.

Edmonds' research underscores the importance of inclusive and accessible educational programs that address the specific needs of street children. Tailored interventions, such as flexible schedules, vocational training, and psychosocial support, are key to ensuring that education truly reaches these marginalized individuals.

### Obstacles to education

UNICEF (2021) <sup>[44]</sup> stated that approximately 258 million children face significant obstacles in acquiring proper education, and much of this struggle can be attributed to poverty. The International Labor Organization (ILO) mentioned that over three-quarters of all children engaged in child labor are kept out of school. This is deeply concerning, given the recognized importance of education.

Titu and Ika (2022) <sup>[43]</sup> highlighted that street children are often among the less fortunate in society and grapple with numerous challenges in their socio-emotional and intellectual development. Prasad (2021) <sup>[31]</sup> and Datta (2018) <sup>[10]</sup> research findings underscore that educating street children is a complex endeavor. To begin with, there is a lack of adequate infrastructure and resources in most cases to support a conducive learning and teaching process. Prasad (2021) <sup>[31]</sup> also brought to light that children are given school uniforms only once a year, and these uniforms are of very low quality and often ill-fitting. Consequently, street children significantly differ from other students in their school attendance. To complicate matters further, Datta (2018) <sup>[10]</sup> noted that street children actively seek excuses not to go to school. Even when they are in school, their constant monitoring and strict supervision are necessary. When this surveillance is absent, they tend to forget about school and return to the streets. Keeping them in schools, therefore, is an ongoing challenge.

Pratap and Singh (2021) <sup>[32]</sup> conducted research in various regions of Botswana and India. Based on various reports, they concluded that the level of education for street children in both Botswana and India is exceedingly low. Their reports revealed that many boys either never attended school or dropped out after primary education (Hasan *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[18]</sup>. These children were entirely unaware of government-proposed programs and assistance because they were primarily preoccupied with surviving. This complex situation has become even more challenging due to high educational costs, a lack of encouragement and motivation from parents and significant others, inadequate facilities in schools, and the high cost of living. When these factors are combined, neither the process of education and learning nor access to education is improved.

Additionally, Tayyab *et al.* (2022) <sup>[42]</sup> found that street children often believe that they cannot achieve their goals or fulfill their aspirations because they left school early, lacking good grades required for further education. The scarcity of proper education has made it exceptionally difficult for them to obtain suitable jobs and thereby

improve their quality of life and standards.

Adama (2019) <sup>[1]</sup> conducted research in Kenya and found that efforts to provide proper rehabilitation and education for street children have been largely unsuccessful. Some of the highlighted reasons include insufficient funds, a lack of suitable land, delays in appointing teachers, and a shortage of public and government support. Adama (2019) <sup>[1]</sup> also pointed out that improper coordination between non-governmental organizations and the government contributed to the process's sluggishness.

### Conclusion

Creating and creating a clear definition of street children is complex and complicated. It is challenging to even think and look at these children in a positive light. However, using current literature, some facts related to his life have been presented in this paper. It also attempted to highlight the negative perception some people have about street children. This paper carefully highlights some of the problems that children face on the streets. They are toiling, soliciting, selling, using illegal and harmful drugs, prostitution and snorting inhalants or gum. In this way it provided a clear understanding of how street children live. I sincerely hope that this paper will excite the minds so that everyone can fully realize that children are a powerful source of hope and aspiration. They form an important component of the society. There is also a strong belief that all children can learn, and it is essential that they are equipped to learn. Feeling is extremely important because it provides the foundation of life and work.

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