

A STUDY TO INVESTIGATE THE FAMILY BACKGROUND OF STREET CHILDREN AT LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

The family plays a vital role in the life of the children. The family should provide every child not only food, clothing and shelter but also with love, affection and a sense of emotional security. The paramount objective of the present study is to shed light the family background of the street children. The study is conducted in the city of Lahore which first time highlighted the cruel incident of serial killing of street children in the history of Pakistan. The field based, exploratory type of study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of research and strengthened from data collected. Observation and a structured interview schedule were used as tools for data collection from the field. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used for the purpose of interpretation of the results. The results of the research show that the majority of street children belong to large size rural families and had joint family system. The research also presents that the street children had low family income status and majority of them had uneducated mothers. The research also depicts that the majority of street children parents were alive and living together while their mothers were dominated in their parents relationship. The research reveals the dire need of initiating a nationwide micro credit program with the cooperation of public and private efforts especially in the remote areas to eliminate the vicious cycle of poverty. The research also recommends that Government and NGOs should devise training program on parentage skills which are necessary to improve the stander of parentage in Pakistan.

Key Words: *Street children, Family, Relationship, Family income, Joint family system*

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INTRODUCTION

Street Children are the unwanted gifts of economic growth, war, poverty, lost of traditional values, domestic violence, physical and mental abuse. Every street child has a reason for street life, while some children are deceived by the promise of excitement and liberty; the majority is pushed onto the street by the desperation and realization that they have nowhere else to go. If the problem of street children is explored at the inner level, it would not be futile to say that poverty and parental negligence lies in the background of the street children and their needs and problems are a result of wanting to fulfill basic needs for survival. The enigma of street children demands and requires an understanding that who they are, what they need, what they do and how they can be identified and can be solved by our sincere practical efforts.

It is estimated that there are 10 to 100 million street children in the world today ¹. These children live a transitory life style and are vulnerable to inadequate nutrition, physical injuries, substance use and health problems including sexual and reproductive health problems. Some street children are “on the street” which mean they still see their families regularly and may even return every night to sleep in their family homes. “Children of the street” on the other hand, have no home but the street. In present research, children of the street are focused.

Though over the last many years, the matters of street children are coming in to limelight but much more is needed to do especially with regard to Pakistan where CRC is not more than a sacred document to which nobody can touch.

Being the signatory of UNCRC, the state is accountable about the survival, development; protection and participation of children whether they are on the street are not. In Pakistan, it is even indigestible to mention over here that no serious effort is being done to collect the statistics related to street Children or even to have know how of the life, they are leading in the streets right now. Pakistan is also confronting the problem of street children like many other countries. No statistics are available related to street children in Pakistan. It is just estimated that 10,000 street children are present only in the city of Lahore ².

In Pakistan, street children are deprived of their basic needs and rights. They have limited access to social services. Being separated from their families they are deprived of parental care, guidance and love which are significant factors in the healthy development of a child. They are at the mercy of criminals, police drugs addicts and smugglers. Unhealthy living environment, lack of proper food, shelter and basic health services make them vulnerable to different types of diseases including sexually Transmitted diseases (STDS) and HIV/AIDS, exploitation and abuse. They are heavily into substance abuse, glue being the cheapest and the most accessible of all the substances. They are socially rejected and look down upon by the society due to which they develop negative attitude towards society which has lifelong effect and some time force them to indulge in anti social activities ³. (Spark2007).

It is quite true that the world is encountering with a lot of challenges i-e Poverty, misery, and instability. These issues have erupted the most critical issue that is of, “Street Children”. These street children are deprived of their basic human rights. In some cases, they do not find the guidance of their parents to be best nurtured children of the society. Their circumstances compel them to be on the street.

As Waghid proves that the Street children phenomenon is an alarming and escalating worldwide problem representing one of the more pressing issues in field of child welfare. "No other global child welfare problem is as significant as the loss of human potential experienced by millions of children who are being reared outside of the institution of family and education in the often perilous street environment ⁴".

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are following.

1. To know about the personal profile of street children.
2. To know about the family background of the street children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much ink has been spilt down about the definition and explanation of street children by the people present in various walks of life. The definition about street children came to the boundary of knowledge of the layman in 1990. The definitions are ambiguous and vague. Different schools of thought have coined their own preferred definitions. These definitions have been built upon and framed as per their own preferences and existing problems. Let us have a glimpse over these definitions.

The United Nations (1985) has its own definition of Street Children. According to UN, "Street Child is any girl or boy for whom the street in the widest sense of the word (including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland etc) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults ⁵".

Lewis defines a street child as someone younger than eighteen, who has decided to leave home to care for himself / herself on the street unassisted by an adult ⁶.

Chetty states that street children are those who have abandoned or have been abandoned by their families, schools and immediate communities before they are eighteen years of age and drifted into nomadic street life ⁷.

He also refers to the difficulties in defining street children because the term is applicable to a large number of children; all of whom spend the significant part of their day in the street without necessarily sharing any other common characteristics ⁸.

Although the term, "Street Children" is widely debated but at the centre of each definition are children who are out of place. Lalor says that the picture is more complex than to be comprised in a simple reason ⁹.

It becomes a hard nut to crack to root out this social evil from the society. Some research studies found that the most important factor which pushes the children on the street is poverty ¹⁰. While Matchinda, does not completely reject the theory of poverty. She has found a co-relation between level of family income and children leaving homes ¹¹.

Kombrakaran has different opinion about children arrival on the street. He has found that the major reason for going to the street is lack of supportive homes which involve traumatic experiences; children have to cope with at home ¹². Another reason which is quoted for street life is to be considered the peer influence ¹³. It is also noted that before going to the streets, these children believed those who live on the street enjoyed life better than themselves did at home ¹⁴.

DEFINITION OF FAMILY

Goode consider the family as a group of people united by the ties of marriage, blood, adoption or cohabitation, characterize by a common residence or not , interacting and communicating with one another in their respective family roles, maintaining a common culture and governed by some family rules ¹⁵. While Lakenblom says that a family is the society's primary institution for rising children, caring for the elderly and passing on the values of the society ¹⁶.The first definition explains a family as a group of people with some kind of relationship while the second definition sees a family in terms of roles that it plays towards that group of people.

FAMILY FACTORS AND STREET CHILD PHENOMENON

Guttman mentioned different type of family factors as a contributing to the street child phenomenon ¹⁷. We will have a look on the some of following family factors,

➤ Divorce of parents

Lewis says that divorce in parents enhance the chances of children to be on the street because they can no longer cope with their family situation¹⁸. Kilbourne mention that female single parents often do not realize how important it is for their sons to have such a father figure. They tend to think that if their brother were able to grow up without the father or with a father working away from home, than their sons should also cope. The problem which is forget by them is that in the old extended family setting there were other men such as uncle and grand fathers who provided the father figure their brother needed ¹⁹. He also adds that this is no longer the case with nuclear families today. As a result, the boys go to the street in search of a father figure and often gang leaders provide this male figure to young ones ²⁰.

➤ Step father/step mothers

Plummer says maltreatment of step parents also pushes the children on the street and insufficient family discipline, supervision and attachment also pull them on the streets ²¹.

While Le Roux argues that in the result of a divorce, a boy will want to stay with his father but he is not accepted by a step mothers for all kinds of reasons or excuses such as "The boy eats too much, he is not well mannered, he steals, he is not co-operative, he does not have any quality of his father ²²". Le Roux adds that if the boy stays with his mother, the step father may deny to being responsible for him just because he is not his own biological child. At times, the boy will refuse to take the surname of the step father, who will then refuse to look after the child ²³.

Finkelstein concludes that at other times, the step father will say that it is not my job to look after him, it is the duty of his mother to look after him and that his own biological father has a responsibility to support him financially and educationally ²⁴.

➤ Parentless children

Finkelstein says that in a divorce situation, children may find themselves in a situation where they feel unwanted by both their stepfather and new stepmothers. This looks to affect the boys particularly which tend to be for more rebellious than girls. For a time, boys may move between the two new sets of parents without ever settling down, until they feel unwanted by both sets and decided to leave their home and comes on the street to explore the horizon of their longings ²⁵.

➤ Abandoned children

Ennew mentions that abandoned children are known as those children who often born out of wedlock. While they are still young, their mothers are available to look after them. However, as they grow up, problems start emerging up, such as bad friends, refusing to go to school, smoking or sniffing glue, fighting, stealing, and sleeping out etc ²⁶.

➤ Talented children

Charlin explains that unfortunately if the talented children born in uneducated families then their parents feel no need to educate them and this situation may frustrate these children. Their parents expect them to do work and support the family financially, this situation leads the children to be on the street²⁷. Biller says that such boys will mostly be tempered to make their own way. The reason for being on the street is to earn some money to carry on their education. Their dream is mostly seldom realized²⁸.

➤ **Alcoholic parents**

Erlbaum explains that the children with alcoholic parents often face the effect of their addicted parents. After drinking, parents are more likely to fight with one another. They also become the harsh and less patient with their children and often beat them up²⁹. Goode state that there comes a time when the children decided to leave their parents and also decided to opt out, at first for one or more than one days, and then for longer times, until eventually they settle themselves on the street for good³⁰.

➤ **Over-strict parents**

Plummer explains that majority of well-intentioned parents wishes their children to grow up the right way. However, they are not enough understanding of the psychology of how to grow up the children on right way. Usually their point of reference is based on their own upbringing which could be summarized as followings,

A hiding whenever there is a fault, little or no time for discussion with the children, and do as I say, not allowing them to go any where except home or school. As a result, seeing other children given for more freedom then they themselves are able to enjoy, these children do not understand their parents and end up deciding that being out of their family is a far better solution than being with in it and they then move to the streets for in search of freedom³¹.

➤ **Abused children**

It is mentioned that physical torture in some families has become a way of life. As an outcome, children grow up in fear whenever they happen to make mistake. They know that if they are discovered their own way, they will be definitely in trouble. There comes a time when a child makes what he/she consider a big mistake and prefer to shun their home rather than face the violent consequences. Brennan mentions that those children who are raped or sexually abused can also be include in this category. As they grow up, they are not in a position to cope with such abuse, so they prefer to run away from their homes to avoid being subjected to it again. The problem compounds itself when they are also sexually abused on the street as well³².

➤ **Hungary children**

Webber explains that the hungry children are known to have good appetites, yet, in times of drought, suffering and unemployment. It is too difficult for single parents to fulfill the all basic needs of their children³³. While most of the parents try to give food to their children, every day often parents do not have the same means to satisfy their hunger. The street, where the chances of making a few rand will enable them to buy more or enough food, become the only avenue open to them.

➤ **Delinquent children**

Ennew explain that most of the parents with delinquent children do not know what to do in order to put them on the right way. There comes a time when parents give up altogether and permit their children to do whatever they want, sometimes because they even fear them. As an outcome, these children will stay on the street and occasionally visit their families. They have full freedom

to do whatever they please and are well on their way to becoming first offenders and future criminals³⁴.

METHODOLOGY

Methodological techniques are very important for analyzing sociological problems empirically. Sound methodology is vitally important to establish chain for knowledge and empirical verification of hypothesis. The population for the study consisted of street children who were spending their life away from their home at least for one month ago and they have no or very little contact with their families. Present study is conducted at Lahore city. Different areas i.e., Data Darbar, Railway station, Minar-e-Pakistan, Laxmi Chock, Regal Chowk and Badami Bagh were the focal locals of the study. 370 street children were selected as a sample size through purposive sampling. According to Lawrence Neuman, "Purposive sampling is an acceptable kind of sampling for special situation. It uses the judgment of an expert in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind"³⁵. Data was collected with the help of a well structured interview schedule. Collected information's were analyzed through SPSS software. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE # 1
AGE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS

Age (in years)	Frequency	Percentage
9-11	76	20.5
12-14	111	30.0
15-17	183	49.5
Total	370	100.0

Mean age = 14.90 Std. Dev. = 3.18

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 49.5 percent falls in the group of 15-17 years of the age. The second highest number of the respondents was the age group of 12-14 years who were 30.0 percent. While the least number of respondents who were about one-fifth i.e. 20.5 percent of 9-11 years of age

TABLE # 2
SEX WISE CATEGORIZATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	370	100.0
Female	-	-
Total	370	100.0

Above table reflect that all of the respondents were male

TABLE # 3
RELIGION WISE CLASSIFICATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Islam	359	97.0
Christian	11	3.0
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 97.0 percent falls in the group of Islamic religion. While the least number of respondents who were only 3.0 percent belong to Christian group.

TABLE # 4
NUMBER OF SIBLINGS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Number of siblings	Frequency	Percentage
1-4	91	24.6
5-8	208	56.2
9 and above	71	19.2
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 56.2 percent had the siblings 5-8 in numbers. The second highest number of the respondents who were about one-fourth i.e. 24.6 percent had the siblings 1-4 in numbers. While the least number of respondent who were nearly one-fifth i.e. 19.2 percent had siblings 9 and above in numbers.

TABLE # 5
NUMBER OF BIRTH ORDER OF THE RESPONDENTS

Birth order	Frequency	Percentage
1 st	89	24.1
2 nd	38	10.3
3 rd	42	11.4
4 th	96	25.9
5 th	56	15.1
6 th or above	49	13.2
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were about one-fourth i.e. 25.9 percent had 4th birth order. The second highest number of the respondents who were little less than one-fifth i.e. 24.1 percent had 1st birth order. Whereas the third highest number of the respondents who were 15.1 percent had 5th and 13.2 percent of the respondents had 6th or above birth order. 11.4 percent of them had 3rd birth order. While the least number of respondents who were 10.3 percent had 2nd birth order.

TABLE # 6
EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Educational Background	Frequency	Percentage
Literate	310	83.8
Illiterate	60	16.2
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents i.e. 83.8 percent were literate. While the least number of the respondent i.e. 16.2 percent were illiterates.

TABLE # 7
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF THE RESPONDENTS

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
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Below primary	98	26.5
Primary	87	23.5
Below Middle	54	14.6
Middle	42	11.4
Below Matriculation	21	5.7
Matriculation	8	2.2
NA(Illiterate)	60	16.2
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were about one-fourth i.e. 26.5 percent falls in group of below primary and the second highest number of the respondents who were less than one-fourth i.e. 23.5 percent of primary passed. Whereas the third highest number of the respondents who were 14.6 percent had below middle group and 11.4 percent of them were middle passed. Only 5.7 percent of the respondents were below metric and the least number of the respondent who were 2.2 percent belong to matriculated group.

TABLE # 8

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENT' S FAMILY

Geographical Background	Frequency	Percentage
Urban	123	33.2
Rural	247	66.8
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 66.8 percent belonged to rural areas while the least number of the respondents who were about one-third i.e. 33.2 percent belonged to urban areas.

TABLE # 9

FAMILY SYSTEMS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Family system	Frequency	Percentage
Joint	231	62.4
Extended	23	6.2
Nuclear	116	31.4
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 62.4 percent were living in joint family system and the second highest number of the respondents who were less than one-third i.e. 31.4 percent were living in nuclear family system. While the least number of the respondent who were only 6.2 percent were living in extended family system.

TABLE # 10

EARNER FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Earner family members	Frequency	Percentage
One	166	44.9
Two	145	39.2
Three	59	15.9
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 44.9 percent had one earner member, while the second highest number of the respondents who were 39.2 percent had two earner family members and the least number of respondents who were 15.9 percent had three earner family members.

TABLE # 11
DEPENDENT FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Dependent family members	Frequency	Percentage
1-4	88	23.8
5-8	165	44.6
9 and above	117	31.6
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 44.6 percent falls in the group of 5-8 dependent family members and the second highest number of the respondents who were 31.6 percent had 9 and above dependent family members. While the least number of respondents who were 23.8 percent reported that they had 1-4 dependent members in their family.

TABLE # 12
TOTAL FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Family size (members)	Frequency	Percentage
1-6	134	36.2
7-12	147	39.7
13 and above	89	24.1
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 39.7 percent had 7-12 family members and the second highest number of the respondents who were 36.2 percent had 1-6 family members and the least number of respondents who were 24.1 percent had 13 and above family members.

TABLE # 13
APPROXIMATE MONTHLY FAMILY INCOME OF THE RESPONDENTS

Income (Rs.)	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 4000	191	51.6
4001- 8000	127	34.3
Above 8000	52	14.1
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 51.6 percent falls in the group of up to Rs. 4000 monthly family income while the second highest number of the respondents who were about one-third i.e. 34.3 percent had Rs. 4001-8000 monthly family income and the least number of respondents who were only 14.1 percent falls in the group of above Rs. 8000 monthly family income.

TABLE # 14
PARENT' S ALIVE STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Alive	Frequency	Percentage
Father	103	27.8
Mother	84	22.7
Both	172	46.5
None of them	11	3.0
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 46.5 percent said that their parents (father & mother) both were alive and the second highest number of the respondents who were 27.8 percent reported that their fathers were alive. The third highest number of the respondents who were 22.7 percent told that their mothers were alive. Whereas the least number of the respondents who were only 3.0 percent told that their parents (father & mother) both were died.

TABLE # 15
LIVING PATTERN OF THE RESPONDENTS PARENTS WHO BOTH ALIVE

Living status	Frequency	Percentage
Together	125	72.7
Separated	17	9.9
Divorced	30	17.4
Total	172*	100.0

* (see table # 14)

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 72.7 percent reported that their parents (father and mother) were living together and the second highest number of the respondents who were 17.4 percent stated that their parents were divorced. While the least number of respondent who were only 9.9 percent tell that their parents were living separated.

TABLE # 16
RELATIONSHIP OF THE RESPONDENT'S PARENTS WHO LIVE TOGETHER

Relation	Frequency	Percentage
Loving	34	27.2
Dominated by father	11	8.8
Dominated by mother	46	36.8
Physical torture	20	16.0
Abusive torture	14	11.2
Total	125*	100.0

* (see table # 15)

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 36.8 percent reported that their mothers were dominated while the second highest number of the respondents who were 27.2 percent told that their parents living together with loving. The third highest number of the respondents who were 8.8 percent told that their parents were living together while their father's were dominated. About 16.0 percent had physical torture based relation and the least number of respondents parents who were only 11.2 percent had abusive torture based relations.

TABLE # 17
DECISION MAKER OF THE RESPONDENT'S FAMILY MATTERS

Decision maker of the family	Frequency	Percentage
Father	105	28.4
Mother	176	47.6
Any other (grandfather, grand mother, uncle, aunt, brother, sister etc.)	89	24.1
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 47.6 percent told that their mothers' had decision making power and the second highest number of the respondents who were about more than one-fourth i.e. 28.4 percent said that their father had decision making power in their family. While the least number of respondents who were only 24.1 percent reported that any others (grand father, grant mother, uncle, aunt, brother, sister etc.) had decision making power in their family.

TABLE # 18
EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE PARENTS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Parents	Educated		Uneducated		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Father	151	54.9	124	45.1	275*	100.0
Mother	80	31.3	176	68.7	256*	100.0

* (see table # 14)

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 54.9 percent fall in the group whose father were educated and 45.1 percent of them had uneducated fathers. On the other hand, the highest number of the respondents who were 68.7 percent fall in the group whose mothers were uneducated and less than one-third i.e. 31.3 percent of them had educated mothers.

TABLE # 19
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF THE RESPONDENT'S FATHERS

Father's education level	Frequency	Percentage
Below Primary	57	20.7
Primary	21	7.6
Below Middle	29	10.5
Middle	27	9.8
Below Matriculation	10	3.6
Matriculation and above	7	2.5
NA (Illiterate)	124	45.1
Total	275*	100.0

* (see table # 14)

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were about one-fifth i.e. 20.7 percent had below primary and the second highest number of the respondents who were about one-tenth i.e. 10.5 percent had below middle and 9.8 percent had middle passed fathers. Below than one tenth i.e. 7.6 percent respondent's fathers were primary passed. The 3.6 percent

respondent's fathers were below matriculation and the least number of the respondent's fathers who were 2.5 falls in the group whose educational level was matriculation and above.

TABLE # 20**MOTHER'S EDUCATION LEVEL OF THE RESPONDENTS**

Mother's education level	Frequency	Percentage
Below Primary	40	15.6
Primary	16	6.3
Below Middle	10	3.9
Middle	3	1.2
Below Matriculation	7	2.7
Matriculation and above	4	1.6
NA (Illiterate)	176	68.7
Total	256*	100.0

* (see table # 14)

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 15.6 percent reported that their mothers were below primary and the second highest number of the respondents who were 6.3 percent had primary passed mothers. The third highest number of the respondents who were about 3.9 percent told that their mothers were below middle while only 2.7 percent of the respondents' mothers below matriculation. Only 1.2 percent of them had middle passed mothers. While the least number of the respondent who were 1.6 percent falls in the group whose mother's educational level was matriculation and above.

CONCLUSION

The results of the research show that the majority of street children belongs to rural families and had joint family system. The research also presents that the street children had large family size and low family income status while majority of their mothers were uneducated. The research also depicts that the majority of street children parents were alive and living together while their mothers were dominated in their parents relationship. The research reveals the dire need of initiating a nationwide micro credit program with the cooperation of public and private efforts especially in the remote areas to eliminate the vicious cycle of poverty. The research also recommends that Government and NGOs should devise training program on parentage skills which are necessary to improve the stander of parentage in Pakistan.

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