

HIV/ AIDS & CHILD RIGHTS AWARENESS AMONG STREET CHILDREN AT LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

The foremost objective of the research is analyzing the awareness level of street children about Aids and child rights. 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. Present research also indicates that majority of the street children had got their knowledge about AIDS from coworker & considered that the main cause of AIDS spreading was reusable syringes and blades. The research also depicts that majority of street children had no knowledge about child rights. The research also shows that majority of the street children had future plans which indicate that were not satisfied with their current life and wanted to go back to their homes. The research reveals the dire need of initiating such programs with the cooperation and coordination of public and private organizations which directly address the root causes of the street children phenomenon.

Key Words: *Street children, AIDS, Child rights, Knowledge, Future plan*

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood is considered the best stage in the cycle of human life. Nobody can forget the memories of his/ her childhood from the page of his/ her mind. Childhood is the most enjoyable and delightful period of human life but not for those who are caught up by the cruel clutches of the decree, not permitting them to heave up their mind and heart with many inner most wishes and inclination. But those who strive for really endeavor to mean it, particularly true for street children, preferring to shun their home to find out the horizon of their wishes and dreams.

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.

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.

It is estimated that there are 10 to 100 million street children in the world today¹. 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.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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. 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.

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 street children awareness about AID & child rights
3. To know about the future plans of street children

LITERATURE REVIEW

The 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".

Chetty also confirms this research statement that life in the street is difficult and that children are essentially alone. He adds that it might be happen that child fails to obtain some food, shelter, clothes, medical services and other relevant basic needs for child care and well being ⁵.

They fall prey to merciless and callous clutches of these unavoidable circumstances. In order to seek pleasure and comfort, they say adieu to their home. In doing so, they absolutely forget and neglect these pitiless and merciless clutches of the decree.

DEFINITION OF THE STREET CHILDREN

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 ⁶".

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 ⁷.

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 ⁸.

He also refers to the difficulties in defining street children because the term is applicable to a large number of children; all of them spend the significant part of their day in the street without necessarily sharing any other common characteristics ⁹.

Schurink defines street children as any boy or girl between the age of 0 to 18 years to live on the street permanently or temporarily. These children spend most of their time unsupervised by an adult and therefore develop a tendency to depend upon each other ¹⁰.

Barnett defines street children as children who spend a considerable amount of their time in street of urban centers to fend for themselves and their families and are inadequately protected, supervised and cared for by a responsible adult person ¹¹.

In the light of above mentioned definitions, there are three common elements are drawn which are listed below

- These children live or spend a significant amount of their time on the street.
- The street has become their source of livelihood.
- Overall, they are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults.

Although the term, “Street Children” is widely debated but at the centre of each definition are children who are out of place.

CATEGORIES OF STREET CHILDREN

UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) 1986 has defined the three most important categories of Street Children that has been widely used by the researchers all over the world.

Following are defined categories of Street Children by UNICEF ¹²,

The first category in UNICEF (1986) definition is poor working children of street families, living at home but earning money on the street for their Families. They are referred to as, “Children at risk”.

Second category in the definition is, “Children on the Street”. These children spend a lot of their time on the street but have some family support and live at home on regular basis.

The last category is, “Children of the Street”. They live and work on the street. They have no or very little family contact or support.

Patel (1990) in her study of street children in Bombay had same but some different categorization of children in the street ¹³.

THE NUMBER OF STREET CHILDREN

Due to the diversity of the term,” Street Children”, it is not possible to quantify the exact number of Street Children in all over the world. It is noted that some agencies are agreed that the term street children is inappropriate because it create an artificial category and diverts attention from the interconnected dimension of child vulnerability ¹⁴.

In 1989, the UNICEF estimated 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world. Fourteen Years later, the same international agency reported that the latest estimates put the number of these children as high as 100 million ¹⁵. In 2005, again the same agency reports that the exact number of street children is impossible to quantify but the figure almost certainly

runs into tens of millions across the world ¹⁶. At the same time claims are continue that street children numbers are increasing. It is likely that numbers are increasing as the global population grows and as urbanization continues apace.

Kalton says that the number is increasing daily and some street educators and researchers believe that it could be double within a generation unless some effective actions are taken ¹⁷. It is believed that when finding a number of street children cited in an article or book, it is often shown to be someone else estimate or the reference is simply not there ¹⁸. Finally, it is agreed convincingly that the number of street children were rarely referenced to counting methods and usually had no validity or basis infect ¹⁹.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan has a youth full population. About half of the population is under the age of 20 years. According to the survey conducted by the Federal bureau of statistics, 3.6 million children were engaged in labor in Pakistan. Primary education in Pakistan is characterized low enrolment and high drop out rates. The number of school in Pakistan, especially in rural areas is quiet insufficient for the growing number children of school going age. In the rural areas, more than one third of all children do not even complete primary education and drop out. Despite government's recent efforts to increase the accessibility to primary education by making it free and compulsory, a huge proportion of children are drop out of school as education is found to be of low quality and too expensive for parents to afford. Mostly the school drop outs from the poor households end up on the streets where they are exposed to all types of abuse and exploitation²⁰.

In Pakistan, there is no mandated system to reporting child exploitation, abuse and neglect. There is a paucity of reliable statistics and published data on the prevalence of child exploitation and abuse in the country. Like other major public health and social problems, it is not easy to document the actual incidence or prevalence of child abuse. It is always difficult to obtain information on sensitive and highly stigmatized issues, and even more difficult when the victims are children who cannot narrate their woes. In such a socio- cultural setting, most cases of child abuse remain under cover and go unreported.

BACKGROUND OF THE GROWTH OF STREET CHILDREN IN PAKISTAN

The incidents like down of iron curtains, war in different parts of the world and socio-economic crises one after the other on the various part of the world has decreased the world's stability and peace. Due to the Afghan conflict, Pakistan housed more than four million refugees which shake the bases of Pakistan's economy. Owing to this, in Pakistan the quality of life is decreasing rapidly with almost monthly increase in the prices of essential items especially in fuel and diesel. This situation has a diverse impact on the industrial sectors as well as agricultural sectors. Meanwhile, the Pakistan is also facing the problems of extremism and terrorist activities and also is a front line state in war against terrorism due to which large number of population is internally displaced with a great loss of precious human lives. This war against terrorism also damages the basic services delivery infrastructure of Pakistan. In just a decade, the ratio of the number of people living under the poverty line has been horribly increased. Pakistan is facing the challenges regarding to child development, survival, protection and participation attributed with poverty, high population growth, traditional family system, illiteracy, unemployment, poor socio economic development and gender discrimination. An outcome of these increasingly hard times is resulted in the appearance of children on the streets of Pakistan ²¹.

SITUATION OF STREET CHILDREN IN PAKISTAN

According to Spark, "population boom, urbanization and poverty are cited as the most common causes for high number of street children in Pakistan. Non-implementation of laws relating to children is also to blame, widespread child labor and poor quality of education further aggravates the situation of poverty which in turns puts children on the streets to supplement the family's income, abusive home environment and corporal punishment in school adds to the number for children on the street. In some cases, simply bad company, the desire of unrestricted freedom and the pull of hustle and bustle of cities, prompt them to leave homes in rural areas and low income localities of our cities especially belonging to Southern Punjab and parts of NWFP ((KPK) ²²".

In spite of the national and international legislation regarding child rights, surprisingly no one in Pakistan ever noticed the rapidly increasing number of children at the public places like bus stands, railway station and parks etc. At once news about street children's serial killing published in the newspapers which took the attention of the society about the street children.

Perhaps the issue of street children would not have come to the surface if Javed Iqbal (The Serial Killer) did not admit the offence of killing 100 children who had left their homes. These 100 children reached to their miserable end in thickly populated area of Lahore city.

In Pakistan, no doubt, there was a storm in the tea cup after the incident but right now the majority has forgotten that such a pitiless incident has ever taken place. But the street children are bitter reality of the day and can easily be noticed at their well known clusters.

In Pakistan, “some limited surveys and interviews conducted by various NGOs show that an alarming 80 to 90 percent of the street children are victim of sodmy, sexual and physical abuse not just by elders but older children within their own gangs. A majority of them are drug addicts. The most popular and affordable of the drug is glue which these children inhale by putting it on a piece of cloth. One can see young boys sniffing this glue openly on the street and pavements that according to one user,” tingles nose and makes one slightly drowsy”. The use of other drugs including hashish and even heroine are also rampant among these street children²³”.

It is even indigestible to mention over here that no serious effort is being done to collect the statistics related to street children in Pakistan. That’s why, no exact statistics about street children are available in Pakistan. It is just estimated that 1.2 million street children are spending their life in the streets of Pakistan²⁴.

But it is true that the number of children is increasing day by day but it seems we are waiting for another Javaid Iqbal.

Though over the last many years, the issue of children is coming into line light but many more is there to do especially with regard to Pakistan, where CRC is not more than a, “sacred documents” to which nobody can touch. Being the signatory of CRC, the state is accountable about the survival, development, protection and the participation of the children whether they are on the street or not. But all of this, Pakistan is determined and committed to improve the situation of child rights within its jurisdiction.

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 mind²⁵”. 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
BACKGROUND 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
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
	Mean = 6.24	Std. Dev. = 3.78
Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Islam	359	97.00
Christen	11	3.00
Total	370	100.0
Geographical Background	Frequency	Percentage

Urban	123	33.2
Rural	247	66.8
Total	370	100.0
Earners family members	Frequency	Percentage
One	166	44.9
Two	145	39.2
Three	59	15.9
Total	370	100.0
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
Number Of 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 and above	49	13.2
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicates that about one-fifth i.e., 20.5 percent of the respondents had 9-11 years of age, while 30.0 percent of the respondents had 12-14 years of age and about a half i.e., 49.5 percent of the respondents had 15-17 years of age. Mean age of children was about 15 years.

Table also presents the number of siblings of the respondent. As the siblings play an important role in the life of children so the numbers of the siblings of the respondents were asked. About one-fourth i.e., 24.6 percent of the respondents had the siblings 1-4 in number. A majority i.e., 56.2 percent of the children had the siblings 5-8 in numbers and little less than one-fifth i.e.,

19.2 percent of them had the siblings 9 and above in number. Average number of siblings (as calculated by mean) was almost 6.

Table indicates 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 also indicates that about one-third i.e., 33.2 percent of the respondent's family belonged to urban areas, while a majority i.e., 66.8 percent of the respondent's family belonged to rural areas. In our rural areas has less entertainment, educational and economic opportunities as compare to urban areas, so due to more attraction majority of the children run towards cities.

Table further depicts that a major proportion i.e., 44.9 percent of the respondents had one earning member, while 39.2 percent of the respondents had two earner family members and remaining 15.9 percent of the respondents had three earner family members. It indicates low economic status of the respondents' family.

Table also reveals that 23.8 percent of the respondents reported that in their family 1-4 dependent members, while a major proportion i.e., 44.6 percent of the respondents said that 5-8 family members were dependent and 31.6 percent of them told that 9 and above family members were dependent.

Table also 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 2

DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR EDUCATION LEVEL

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	60	16.2
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
Total	370	100.0

Above table shows that 16.2 percent of the respondents were illiterate, while more than one-fourth i.e., 26.5 percent of the respondents were below primary and less than one-fourth i.e., 23.5 percent of them were primary passed. About 14.6 percent of the respondents were below middle and 11.4 percent of them were middle passed. Only 5.7 percent of the respondents were below matriculation and 2.2 percent of the respondents were matriculated.

TABLE # 3

KNOWLEDGE OF RESPONDENTS ABOUT HIV/ AIDS

Knowledge about AIDS	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	207	55.9
No	163	44.1
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 55.9 percent had knowledge about AIDS and the least number of the respondents who were 44.1 percent do not know about AIDS.

TABLE # 4

RESPONDENTS SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AIDS

Source of knowledge about AIDS	Frequency	Percentage
TV	6	1.6
Friends	30	8.1

	Co-workers	139	37.6
NGOs	Nai Zandgi	5	1.4
	Pehchan	16	4.3
	Sahil	11	3.0
	NA (No knowledge)	163	44.1
	Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 37.6 percent get their knowledge about AIDS from co-workers while the second highest number of the respondents who were 8.7 percent gets knowledge about AIDS from NGOs i.e. Nai Zandgi, Pehchan, Sahil etc respectively. While 8.1 percent of them get knowledge about AIDS from friends and the least number of the respondents who were 1.6 percent get knowledge about AIDS from TV.

TABLE # 5

RESPONDENTS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE SOURCE OF AIDS SPREADING

Source of AIDS spreading	Frequency	Percentage
Unsafe blood transfusion	77	20.8
Use of reusable syringes	56	15.1
Use of reusable blade	49	13.2
Any other (sexual contacts with AIDs affected prostitutes etc)	25	6.8
NA	163	44.1
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 20.8 percent reported that the unsafe blood transfusion was a main cause of AIDS spreading while the second highest number of the respondents who were 15.1 percent had knowledge that the use of reusable syringes was a cause of AIDS spreading. 13.2 percent of the respondents had knowledge that the use of reusable blade was a cause of AIDS spreading. While the least number of the respondents who were 6.8 percent told that sexual contacts with AIDS affected prostitutes was the main cause of AIDS spreading.

TABLE # 6**RESPONDENTS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD RIGHTS**

Knowledge about child rights	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	91	24.6
No	279	75.4
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 75.4 percent had no knowledge about child rights and the least number of the respondents who were little less than one-fourth i.e. 24.6 percent had knowledge about child rights.

TABLE # 7**RESPONDENTS SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD RIGHTS**

Source of knowledge about child rights	Frequency	Percentage
*ORC of CPWB	38	10.3
NGOs	32	8.6
Co-worker	21	5.7
NA (No knowledge)	279	75.4
Total	370	100.0

* Open Reception Centers of Child Protection & Welfare Bureau

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 10.3 percent gets knowledge about child rights from ORC of CPWB and the 8.6 percent of them told that they gain knowledge about child rights from NGOs. While the least number of the respondents who were 5.7 percent get knowledge about child rights from co-workers.

TABLE # 8**DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD RIGHTS**

Information about child rights	Frequency	Percentage
Right to life	51	13.8
Right to education	23	6.2
Right to nutrition	17	4.6
NA (No knowledge)	279	75.4
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 13.8 percent told that the children had the right to life while 6.2 percent said that the children had right to education and the least number of the respondents who were 4.6 percent said that the children had right to nutrition.

TABLE # 9

RESPONDENTS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT INSTITUTION/ORGANIZATION WORKING FOR CHILDREN LIKE THEM

Knowledge about institution/organization	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	94	25.4
No	276	74.6
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 74.6 percent reported that they had no knowledge about the institution/organization working for children like them and the least number of the respondents who were about one-fourth i.e. 25.4 percent of the respondents reported that they had knowledge about the institution/organization working for children like them.

TABLE # 10

RESPONDENTS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE NAME OF INSTITUTION/ORGANIZATION WORKING FOR CHILDREN LIKE THEM

Knowledge about the name of	Frequency	Percentage
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institution/ organization working for children		
Police	5	1.4
Edhi Welfare center	20	5.4
CPWB	47	12.7
Neghiban	22	5.9
NA (No knowledge)	276	74.6
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 12.7 percent said that the CPWB is working for children like them and the second highest number of the respondents who were 5.9 percent told that the Neghiban is working for children like them. While 5.4 percent of the respondents had knowledge that Edhi Welfare Center is working for children like them. While the least number of the respondents who were only 1.4 percent told that police is working for children like them.

TABLE # 11

FUTURE PLANS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Plans for future	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	342	92.4
No	28	7.6
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 92.4 percent reports that they had their future plans while the least number of the respondents who were only 7.6 percent had no future plans.

TABLE # 12

DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO THE TYPES OF THEIR FUTURE PLAN

Type of plan	Frequency	Percentage
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To go back home	193	52.2
To establish their own business	40	10.8
Marriage	21	5.7
To work in film industry	61	16.5
Any other	27	7.3
NA	28	7.6
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were little more than a half i.e. 52.2 percent wants to go back to their homes in future while the second highest number of the respondents who were 16.5 percent had interested future plan, they aim to work in the film industry. About 10.8 percent of them want to establish their own business and 5.7 percent of the respondents wanted to be marry in future. The least number of the respondents who were 7.3 percent had some any other future plans

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that majority of the street children had got their knowledge about AIDS from coworker & considered that the main cause of AIDS spreading was reusable syringes and blades. It is also concluded also depicts that majority of street children had no knowledge about child rights. The research concludes that majority of the street children had future plans which indicate that were not satisfied with their current life and wanted to go back to their homes The research reveals the dire need of initiating such programs with the cooperation and coordination of public and private organizations which directly address the root causes of the street children phenomenon.

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