

PROBLEMS FACED BY STREET CHILDREN IN SELECTED URBAN AREA OF COIMBATORE**Dr.Malarvizhi.V * &Dr.K.T.Geetha******Designation: Assistant Professor* & Professor** in Economics****Institution: Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore,
Tamil Nadu.****Abstract**

Street children in India are frequently exposed to abuse and extortion. Because they have no social status and no adults to protect them, street children identify being physically threatened and intimidated by adults as the one factor that contributes most to the misery of living on the streets. The study will provide a precise and comprehensive picture of street children in selected urban area of Coimbatore city. The objectives of the study are to examine the socio-economic profile of street children; to describe the reasons for skipping classes and factors affecting street children's education and to identify harassment and problems faced by the children. The data collected from 75 samples residing in Town Hall and Gandhipuram are by adopting incidental purposive sampling technique during the period November 2014 to January 2015. The study found that majority of them faced physical harassment during their presence in the street. Hence, the government should take necessary action to protect children from harassment by police and public.

Keywords: Domestic problems, Economic condition, Education, Harassment and Street Children

Introduction

A street child in India is someone 'for whom the street has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults'. It is estimated that more than 400,000 street children in India exist. Mainly because of family conflict, they come to live on the streets and take on the full responsibilities of caring for themselves, including working to provide for and protecting themselves. Though street children do sometimes band together for greater security, they are often exploited by employers and the police. Their vulnerability requires specific legislation and attention from the government and other organizations to improve their condition. While 18 million children work on the streets of India, it is estimated that only 5-20 percent of them are truly homeless and disconnected from their families. Because the street children in India have unique vulnerabilities - the amount of time they spend on the street, their livelihood depending on the street, and their lack of protection and care from adults - they are a subgroup of the Indian population that deserve specific attention in order to ensure that their needs are known. As the most vulnerable group of children in India according to UNICEF, they need to be understood as much as possible.

A government study has found that a vast majority of street children face sexual abuse in India, which is home to the world's largest number of destitute children. According to a study conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the overall incidence of physical abuse among street children was 66.8 per cent. The majority of the street children facing physical abuse are in the age group of 5-12 years. Around 55 per cent of the street children reported to have undergone sexual abuse. The study covered 13 states -- Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal with a sample size of 12,447 children. These included children in family environment, those attending schools, those in institutional care and street children. Out of these, 2,317 children (18.6 per cent) were street children. Estimates by international agencies put the number of street children in India at 18 million, which is the largest in the world. The Women and Child Development ministry has recently introduced a centrally-sponsored scheme, namely Integrated Child Protection Scheme, for such children. It is also implementing another scheme called 'An Integrated Programme for Street Children' for the welfare and rehabilitation of street children. (Times of India, 14/1/10)

Need for the Study

The street children problem is a serious problem both at national and state level. They have many issues, and there is a need for greater concern for these people. The study is an attempt in this direction, which will help to understand the socio-economic characteristics of the street children. Publications in both academic and welfare literature have emphasized the sheer scale of the worldwide problem of street children but not able to explain fully the root causes of this phenomenon. There is a need to make in-depth study on street children, as they are the most vulnerable group even among child labour category. There are many researchers, officials and social workers who work directly with disadvantaged children in urban areas. There have also been many studies and reports on this issue with various purposes and methods. Based on these existing works and studies, the researcher would like to analyze the socio-economic status and problems of street children further with a special attention on the dynamic implications of Indian economic growth. The study will provide a precise and comprehensive picture of street children in selected urban area of Coimbatore.

Review of literature

Irene (1992) examined the problem of street children in urban India is a very complex and acute, and therefore calls for immediate, suitable and feasible policy action to bring these children back into the normal system. Very little work has been done exclusively on the problems and situation of the street children in our country covering all the aforesaid aspects in its holistic perspective. The study it is hoped would be of help to planners, administrators and policy makers in providing them with sufficient knowledge and information about the street children and in carving out suitable schemes and programmes not only for welfare and rehabilitation of these children but also for possible and feasible preventive to contain the problem.

Scanlon (1998) states that millions of children throughout the world live on the street. These children are among the most deprived, they usually have no access to health care or education and some of them have been victims of violence even before taking to the street. Many countries have used violent and punitive measures to remove them.

Pandian (2000) observed that children who spend considerable part of their time in gainful employment are deprived of education. That is not only a loss to children but also to the nation in the future. Education is an investment both to the individual and to the society at large, producing not only huge direct benefit but also an immense magnitude of externalities, economic, social, cultural and political. Education is also considered a human right, and effort is initiated in the recent years to make elementary education as a fundamental right in the constitution.

Mathur (2009) carried out a detailed study with an aim to map the socio-economic realities of street in Jaipur City, India .The field scenario indicates that majority of street children were boys (71%) and in 8-12 years age group incidence of migration was observed and 70.5% of these children lived with their families. Gambling, watching films and television, smoking and drinking, and taking drugs were common entertainment and relaxation for these children.

Objectives of the study

- ☞ To examine the socio-economic profile of street children in the city of Coimbatore
- ☞ To describe the reasons for skipping classes and factors affecting street children's education
- ☞ To identify harassment and problems faced by the children
- ☞ To examine the future aspirations among the children.

Hypothesis of the study

- ☞ Intention to skip the classes was based on the fear of punishment and lack of awareness about the importance of education.
- ☞ The main factor that affects the street children education are 'domestic problem' 'security condition' 'didn't enrol in school' 'difficulty in economic condition' 'student mockery' and 'disregard of education'.
- ☞ Harassment and domestic problems are the major hurdles faced by the street children
- ☞ Domestic problems and economic conditions affects the children's education level

Methodology

The population of the study consisted of street children residing in Town Hall and Gandhipuram area in Coimbatore city. From these areas 75 samples were selected by adopting incidental purposive sampling technique. Data pertaining to the study were collected by personal interview method by administering a pre-tested interview schedule during the period November 2014 to January 2015.

Results and Discussion**Demographic Profile of the Street Children**

A design of the sample's demographic profile was used for an understanding of the probable variations or divergences that may appear between the sample and the total population. The sample survey also followed the findings of the census that nearly 79 per cent of the street children were boys. Girls constituted only one-fifth of the total street children population. Considering the very low incidence of girl children on the streets, the rest of the analysis was only done for the total sample.

Age: Age is an important factor in human life. It reflects individual attitudes, perceptions, motives, level of understanding, capabilities etc. Majority of the street children were in the age group between 11-16 years.

Gender: A large number of street children were reported to be males. The low incidence of street girls in urban area may be due to their under enumeration. In the study, majority of them were boy (57%) and the remaining (nearly 43%) were girls. Most studies show a predominance of the male children within the population. Zuber; F (2005) found that 74% of the street children were males and rests were girls.

Religion: Data pertaining to the religion of the respondent reveal majority (71 %) of the sample respondents belongs to Hindus religion; 21 percent of the sample respondents were Christians and the remaining 8 percent were Muslims. Thus the surveyed samples were predominantly Hindu.

Education: Education is not merely to improve knowledge of the children but to develop in him/her those habits and attitudes with which may help them to successfully face the future. Nearly 31 percent of the street children only received some form of formal education and majority of them have not received any formal education.

Details of Education level of Street Children

Level of Education: As per the Annual Statistics of Education Report (ASER) 2012, 96.5% of all rural children both the ages of 6-14 were enrolled in school. The Fourth Annual Survey Report enrollment above 96%. Majority (39 percent) of the children have attended the school just for few months and 26 percent of them attended school for 1-2 years. Hence it was observed that, low level of education among the children were associated with poverty and maltreated by the teachers.

Types of Schooling: In the study, majority (78%) of the children were educated in the government school; followed by government aided school (13%) and rests of them (nearly 9%) were educated in private school. Free education, provided in the government school coupled with their low economic status may be a reason for the street children to patronize such school than private school where the fee structure is high.

Skipping Classes: Being in street, the street children were not regular to school and often skip classes. The study found that 69 percent of the street children skipped the classes and the remaining 31 percent of regularly attended the classes.

Reasons for Skipping Classes: An attempt was made to identify the factors influencing the intention to skip the classes by the street children. The respondents were asked to assign ranks to various reasons/factors according to the order of priority, which influenced their intention to skip the classes. The ranks were then converted into scores based on Garrett's rating scale. The average scores calculated are given in the table.

TABLE-1
REASONS FOR SKIPPING THE CLASSES

S.No	Reasons	Mean Score	Rank
1	To work	50.08	4
2	Don't have money	48.31	5
3	Don't have books and stationary	47.92	6
4	Not doing homework	52.31	2
5	Afraid of school punishment	53.38	1
6	Not convinced about the need to go to school	50.38	3

Source: Field Survey, 2014

The most important factor which influenced their intention to skip the classes were 'afraid of school punishment' (1st rank), not doing their homework (2nd rank), and 'not convinced about the need to go to school' (3rd rank), the scores assigned for these factors were 53.38, 52.31 and 50.38 points respectively. The factors which had the lowest priority are 'do not have money' and do not have books and stationary' with the scores of 48.31 and 47.92 points respectively. To sum up, intention to skip the classes was based on the fear of punishment and lack of awareness about the importance of education. Hence, if the children are treated in a better way and made to realize importance of education the dropouts/skipping classes will be less.

Factors Affecting Children's Education

In India the free and compulsory education to all the children till they attain the age of 14 years is a constitutional directive under the Article 45 of the Constitution of India. India has made progress in terms of increasing the primary education attendance rate and expanding literacy to approximately three-quarters of the population in the 7-10 age groups by 2011. India's improved education system is often cited as one of the main contribution to its economy debt.

Factor analyses were used in the present study to identify the factors which affects the street children's education and whether these factors can be grouped in terms of a composite variable. To determine the appropriation of applying factor analysis, the KMO and Bartlett's test measures were computed and the results are presented in table.

TABLE-2
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST MEASURES

KMO and Bartlett's Test	Factors
KMO measures	.622
Bartlett's of test of sphericity :	
Approximate chi square	54.751
Degree of freedom	28
Significant	.000

Source: Field Survey, 2014

KMO statistics for factors affecting street children educations were .622 signifying higher than acceptable adequacy of sampling. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was also found to be significant at one percent level providing evidence of the presence of relationship between variables to apply factor analysis.

The communalities for each variable were computed to determine the amount of variance accounted by the variables to be included in the factor rotation. All the variables had values greater than 0.50 signifying substantial portion of the variance accounted by the factors. Table-3 presents the Eigen values, their relative explanatory power and factor loadings for 6 linear components identified within the data set. The Eigen values greater than one alone was considered for inclusion in the analysis.

TABLE-3
ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

S.No	Rotated Component Matrix	1	2	3	4
1	I didn't enroll in school		.790		
2	Difficulty in economic condition		.748		
3	Disregard of education				.875
4	Domestic problem	.859			
5	Security condition	.714			
6	Students mockery			.784	
	Eigen value	1.900	1.509	1.247	1.102
	% of variance	23.748	18.860	15.584	13.780
	Communalities %	23.748	42.608	58.192	71.972

Source: Estimation based on field survey. Extraction method: principal component analysis.

Rotation Matrix: Varimax with Kaiser Immortalizations rotation converged in of iterations.

The results indicates that for the sample data Eigen value of the first four factor alone was greater than one indicating that these factors also were appropriate for inclusion in the analysis. The four factors together accounted for nearly 72 percent of the variations in the factors. Factor 1 had significant loadings for two dimensions namely 'domestic problems' and 'security condition'. These two dimensions together explain nearly 24 percent of the variance. Factor 2 had significant loadings for two dimensions namely 'did not enroll in school' and 'difficulty in economic condition' and explained nearly 19 percent of the variance. Factor 3 had significant loadings on one dimension namely 'student mockery' and it explained 16 percent of the variance. Factor 4 had significant loading on one dimension namely 'disregard of education' and it explained nearly 14 percent of the variance. From the above discussion, it can be inferred that the main factor that affects the street children education are 'domestic problem' 'security condition' 'didn't enroll in school' 'difficulty in economic condition' 'student mockery' and 'disregard of education'.

PROBLEMS FACED BY THE STREET CHILDREN

Majority of the children faced problems during their presences in the street. The study found that,thirty eight percent of them were faced harassment by police officials; nearly 36 percent of them from by passerby/people; 26 percent of them faced problems due to their occupation and remaining (24%) of them were facing weather/natural calamities during their presence in the street. Government should take necessary action to protect children from harassment by police and public.

Children were asked to rank the problems faced by them. The problems were listed and the children were asked to rank these problems in their order of priority. The ranks were then converted into percent position and from the percent position the individual scores were determined on a scale of 100 points by using Garrett's rating scale. The average scores and the ranks corresponding to each suggestion are presented in the table-4.

TABLE-4
PROBLEMS FACED BY STREET CHILDREN

S.No	Problems	Mean Score	Rank
1	Domestic Problems in my Family	34.62	5
2	Problems between the Parents	80.77	2
3	Unemployment and Free Time	54.62	4
4	Poverty and Deteriorated Economic Situation	71.15	3
5	Drugs or Behavioural Problem	1.15	1

Source: Estimates based on field survey, 2014

The major problems faced by the children were 'drugs or behavioural problem' (1st rank), followed by 'problems between the parents' (2nd rank), 'poverty and deteriorated economic situation' (3rd rank), 'unemployment and free time' (4th rank), and 'domestic problems in my family' (5th rank). In short government should take initiative to improve the socio-economic conditions in the society by providing gainful employment to downtrodden people as this will ensure that domestic problems are kept to the minimum. Majority (44 %) of the children faced physical harassment; 37 percent risk for their life/health and 19 percent of them faced harassment from their masters and police officers. Thus majority of them faced physical harassment during their presence in the street.

OPINION ABOUT HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS

Children were asked to rank their opinion on complaints taken by the police personnel. The opinion were listed and the children were asked to give these opinion in order of priority. The ranks were then converted into percent position and from the percent position the individual scores, were determined on a scale of 100 points by using Garrett's rating scale. The average scores and the ranks corresponding to each suggestion are presented in table-5.

TABLE- 5
OPINION ABOUT COMPLAINTS

S.No	Opinion about Complaints	Mean Score	Rank
1	They ignored the complaint	95.10	2
2	The complaint is still being processed	69.23	4
3	The perpetrators were rebuked	85.00	3
4	The perpetrators were imprisoned	46.92	5
5	The perpetrators were fined	96.15	1

Source: Estimates based on field survey, 2014

The foremost opinion ranked by the children were 'perpetrators were fined' (1st rank), 'they ignored the complaint' (2nd rank), 'perpetrators were rebuked' (3rd rank), 'complaint is still being processed' (4th rank) and the least rank has given 'the perpetrators were imprisoned' (5th rank). In short, the main factor that affects the street children education are 'domestic problem' 'security condition' 'didn't enroll in school' 'difficulty in economic condition' 'student mockery' and 'disregard of education'.

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS OF THE CHILDREN

Nearly 43 percent of them were want to change their field of work; nearly 31 percent of them wanted to improve their standard of living conditions; 17 percent of them wanted to improve their present job; 9 percent want to leave the work and finish their education. In short the street children definitely wanted to improve their economic conditions through moving on to a new job/better job and completing their education.

CONCLUSION

The life pattern and poverty of the street children excluded them from the rigid structure of formal schooling, and thus adding to the number of illiterate in the country. The manifold social, physical and sexual abuses that the street children face in their daily lives makes them the most vulnerable group and a serious challenge to the country's development. Proper nourishment of the children- their education, health care, clothing and housing- should be the first priority in national planning. Hence, there is a need for timely intervention and enriched environment to prevent further damage to the future of these tender lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ☞ Street children need to be provided essential entitlements such as safe shelters, food, clothing, education, safe drinking water, and sanitation with the help of grass roots organizations, so that the benefits reach the end beneficiaries.

- ☞ Duty bearers such as the Departments of Education, Women and Children; the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, police, and civil society members need to ensure that street children are protected and work on strategies that can facilitate their rehabilitation and integration into the mainstream, starting with getting them enrolled in schools.
- ☞ To bring down the incidence of street children, much larger focused interventions are needed such as better housing plans, inclusive urban development policies, and increased number of boarding schools for poor children in both rural and urban areas

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