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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### STREET CHILDREN AND THEIR CONCERNS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SRINAGAR DISTRICT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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#### ABSTRACT

A street child is any girl or boy for whom the street has become his or her habitual abode or a source of livelihood, and who worked on the street and went home to their families at night. The scenario of street children is considered to be the most important problem facing both developed and developing societies. Street children constitute a snubbed group as they are the product of economic growth, war, poverty, loss of traditional values, domestic violence, physical and mental abuse. Every street child has a reason for being on the streets, and the present study was an endeavor to analyze the reasons or causes of a child on the streets. The research work was an exertion to highlight the socio-economic problems faced by the street children in Jammu and Kashmir with special reference to Srinagar district. Street children are the most perceptible fragment of our society, deprived with vital services like education and health care, and the most difficult to protect. They become the victim of all forms of exploitation and abuse, and their daily lives are likely to be very different from the idyllic childhood. The findings of the study divulge that there are many reasons for children to decide to leave their homes: poverty, disagreement at home, disintegration in family, unable to pay school fee and to find jobs.

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#### INTRODUCTION

In many regions of the world, the phenomenon of street children is unabated, while it is emerging in others where it was unknown so far. Behind child disconnection lie highly vulnerable families and communities, many struggling to come to terms with economic liberalization and growing inequality. Disconnection can also be traced to a lack of communication in the family and the weakening of social capital. Street children are an alarm signaling the dire need for social development and poverty reduction policies to improve the situation in the community at large, and to prevent more young people from becoming marginalized (Elena Volpi 2002). Children worldwide experience violence, exploitation and abuse. They are forced to fight in wars or labour in intolerable conditions; they are sexually abused or subjected to violence as a punishment; they are forced into child marriage or trafficked into exploitative conditions of work; they are needlessly placed in prisons, detention facilities and institutions. Children in circumstances such as these are seeing their human rights infringed in the most fundamental ways - and suffering both physical and psychological harm that has wide-reaching and sometimes irreparable effects. The elements of a healthy childhood as specified in the Convention on the

Rights of the Child are being denied because the world is failing to provide children the protection to which they are entitled. The Millennium Declaration of 2000 explicitly addresses the need to protect children from conflict, violence, abuse and exploitation. All countries adopting the declaration resolved to:

- Strive for the full protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all.
- Combat all forms of violence against women and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- Ensure that children and all civilian populations who disproportionately suffer the consequences of natural disaster, genocide, armed conflict and other humanitarian emergencies are given every assistance and protection so they can resume normal life as quickly as possible.
- Encourage the ratification and full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Child protection intersects with every one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -from poverty reduction to getting children into school, from eliminating gender inequality to reducing child mortality (Progress for children 2009).

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In 1989, UNICEF estimated 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world. 14 years later UNICEF reported: 'the latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million (UNICEF 2002). And even more recently: 'The exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world. It is likely that the numbers are increasing (UNICEF 2005). Similarly, it is debatable whether numbers of street children are growing globally or whether it is the awareness of street children within societies which has grown. While there are understandable pressures for policies to be informed by aggregate numbers, estimates of street child populations, even at city levels, are often hotly disputed and can distract rather than inform policy makers. There is no clear definition of street children. For example, it cannot be assumed that all children on the streets are homeless. The great majority—well over three-quarters and as many as 90% of the children on the streets in various developing countries work on the streets but live at home and are working to earn money for their families (Ennew 1986; Myers, 1989). Estimates of Colombian street children have ranged from 130,000 (UNICEF, 1985) to 25,000 (Goode 1987).

(Lusk 1992) developed four categories of children found in the street. Each group has its own psychological characteristics. First, there are poor working children returning to their families at night. They are likely to attend school and not be delinquent. Second, there are independent street workers. Their family ties are beginning to break down, their school attendance is decreasing, and their delinquency is increasing. Third, there are children of street families who live and work with their families in the street. Their conditions are related to poverty. In India, they are referred to as pavement dwellers (Patel 1983), whereas in the United States they are the children of homeless families. Finally, there are the children who have broken off contact with their families. They are residing in the streets full time and are the "real" street children. (Lusk 1992) considered this group to be about 15% of his sample of children in the streets of Rio de Janeiro. (Patel 1990), in her study of street children in Bombay, had a similar categorization of children in the streets.

### **How children come to be on the streets**

There are many contributing factors political, social and economic - to explain the context behind the phenomenon of street children. These include poverty and child labour, economic migrations and the economic attraction of big cities, domestic violence exacerbated by economic and social insecurity and inadequate national child protection schemes in developing countries, war and the fragility of countries emerging from conflict. Under such circumstances, traditional social bonds are weakened or even destroyed and families torn apart. Rampant urbanization is also a factor in itself. As Xavier Emmanuelli, the founder of Samusocial International, emphasizes: "humanity is changing of environment; we are all going to end up living in cities, but traditional societies are no longer relevant in a city". Social exclusion within an urban environment is the symptom of this change. These contextual factors are of little help, however, in analyzing the essential issue, that of the family bond. While the economic situation

may serve to explain why children are taken out of school, or never enrolled, because they are needed to contribute to the family's income (through begging or street trades), it does not suffice to explain why some children remain permanently on the streets and what lies behind the break, not just with the environment of family life, but also with the bonds of family. Some children who work on the streets during the day will end up not returning home at all. Some will run away repeatedly until the time finally comes when they no longer return home. Others move onto the street the moment they first leave their original home environment. In order to arrive at an understanding of how children come to be on the streets, it is first necessary to look at what these children's lives were like before they finished up on the streets.

The reasons that lead a child onto the streets may lie in a series of conflicts with the family or with the world of school, but they may also stem from traumatic upheavals such as war, as in the case of Kinshasa, or from the need to escape from violence that has become unbearable. It is important to explore the lengthy process that causes a child or adolescent to move from an unstable situation, made up of "mini" break-ups with the child, from the family to the street and back again, to full blown exclusion. What are the reasons that drive the individual to break out of the situation of instability, to take the step from being an occasional runaway to being a street child? What causes the child or young person to stay on the streets? In many instances, what apparently happens is that during the period of instability and minor breakdowns that precedes the child's flight to the streets, something traumatic occurs: an act of violence that is beyond bearing, an instance of bullying that goes beyond the daily annoyances previously endured, or the death of the only family member who continued to show the slightest tenderness for or interest in the child.

An in-depth study of street children in Bamako conducted by Samusocial International and Samusocial Mali between 2009 and 2010 highlighted one particular key factor in the child's decision to leave its home environment: an overload of violence, both externalised and internalised. The children become worn down by violence, physical and verbal, from parents, and tutors. The violence they suffer is often associated with another form of "perceived" violence clearly expressed by the children, particularly as regards the economic exploitation frequent when a child is placed with a spurious teacher or ill-intentioned third party (see box on the practice of child fostering). The triggering factor seems, however, to be more the consequence of internalised violence linked to the child's sense of a lack of personal history, especially when the child was fostered at a very young age or has been repeatedly fostered. The decision to leave may thus be the result of an "overload of violence", a last straw that drives the child into flight. Running away then becomes a "state of self-preservation". The traditional practice of fostering, as such, is not a direct factor explaining how children come to be on the streets, but abuses of the practice are. The challenge now posed by fostering is that of a practice that may become out of control, especially when the child is placed with an ill-intentioned third party, or as a result of family problems, or where there have been previous conflicts in the child's life. An unhappy fostering experience frequently perturbs the child's

life history. Comparable situations, in which children risk ending up on the streets after being fostered with ill-intentioned third parties, are to be found in other parts of the world. In Haiti, for example, poor families, often from rural backgrounds, may place a child with a foster family as a domestic servant, with the promise that the child will have access to an education. The promise is rarely kept in the case of these *restaveks*, as they are known (from the French “*reste avec*”, meaning “stay with”), whose situation is more akin to that of domestic slaves (Quiterie Pincent et.al 2012). One indication of poverty is the existence of street children. Street children are among the most visible of all children, living and working on the streets and squares of cities all over the world. Yet, they are also among the most invisible children: the hardest to reach with vital services like education and health care, and the most difficult to protect. Once on the street, children become vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and abuse, and their daily lives are likely to be very different from the ideal childhood defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, it is important to remember that street children are individuals, and they all have their personal circumstances, their own ways of living and/or working on the streets and a range of reasons for doing so (UNICEF 2006).

### Children in India

In India, childhood has been defined in the context of legal and constitutional provisioning, mainly for aberrations of childhood. It is thus a variable concept to suit the purpose and rationale of childhood in differing circumstances. Essentially they differ in defining the upper age-limit of childhood. Biologically, childhood is the span of life from birth to adolescence. According to Article 1 of UNCRC1 (United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child), “A child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” The definition of the child as given by the UNCRC has definite bearing not only on child development programmes and on budgetary provisions for them, but also on production of statistics as applicable to different cross sections of children in terms of reference ages. A child domiciled in India attains majority at the age of 18 years. However, various legal provisions address children with differing definitions. The age-groups of 0-14 years, 15-59 years and 60 and above years form a commonly accepted standard in reporting demographic indicators. The child related legal and constitutional provisions are kept in view while statistics are generated for different cross-sections of children that align with specific age-groups standing for specific target groups of children such as, child labourers, children in school education, children in crimes, etc.

### Demographic Profile of children

India, with 1.21 billion people is the second most populous country in the world, while China is on the top with over 1.35 billion people. The figures show that India represents almost 17.31% of the world’s population, which means one out of six people on this planet live in India. Every year, an estimated 26 millions of children are born in India which is nearly 4 million more than the population of Australia. It is significant that while an absolute increase of 181 million in the country’s population has been recorded during the decade 2001-2011, there is a reduction of 5.05 millions in the population of children aged 0-6 years during this period. The decline in male children is 2.06 million and in female children is 2.99 millions. The share of Children (0-6 years) in the total population has showed a decline of 2.8 points in 2011, compared to Census 2001. In 2011, the total number of children in the age-group 0-6 years is reported as 158.79 million which is down by 3.1% compared to the child population in 2001 of the order of 163.84 million. The share of children (0-6 years) to the total population is 13.1% in 2011 whereas the corresponding figures for male children and female children are 13.3% and 12.9%. Twenty States and Union Territories now have over one million children in the age group 0-6 years. Uttar Pradesh (29.7 million), Bihar (18.6 million), Maharashtra (12.8 million), Madhya Pradesh (10.5 million) and Rajasthan (10.5 million) constitute 52% Children in the age group of 0-6 year.

### Constitutional Provisions for children in India

Several provisions in the Constitution of India impose on the State the primary responsibility of ensuring that all the needs of children are met and that their basic human rights are fully protected. Children enjoy equal rights as adults as per Article 14 of the Constitution. Article 15(3) empowers the State to make special provisions for children. Article 21 A of the Constitution of India directs the State to provide free and compulsory education to all children within the ages of 6 and 14 in such manner as the State may by law determine. Article 23 prohibits trafficking of Human beings and forced labour. Article 24 on prohibition of the employment of children in factories etc, explicitly prevents children below the age of 14 years from being employed to work in any factory, mine or any other hazardous form of employment. Article 39(f) directs the State to ensure that children are given equal opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and guaranteed protection of childhood and youth against moral and material abandonment. Article 45 of the Constitution specifies that the State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years.

**Table 1. Population (0-6 years) 2001-2011 India**

	Children (0-6 yrs) (in millions)			Total population (in millions)			Share of children (0-6 yrs) to the Corresponding total population (%)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Census 2001	163.84	85.01	78.83	1028.74	532.2	496.5	15.93	15.97	15.88
Census 2011	158.79	82.95	75.84	1210.19	623.72	586.47	13.1	13.3	12.9

(Source: Census, Office of Registrar General of India)

Article 51A clause (k) lays down a duty that parents or guardians provide opportunities for education to their child/ward between the age of 6 and 14 years. Article 243 G read with schedule-11 provides for institutionalizing child care to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living, as well as to improve public health and monitor the development and well being of children in the Country.

### **Union laws Guaranteeing Rights and Entitlement to Children**

A fairly comprehensive legal regime exists in India to protect the rights of Children as encompassed in the Country's Constitution. The age at which a person ceases to be a child varies under different laws in India. Under the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986, a child is a person who has not completed 14 years of age. For the purposes of criminal responsibility, the age limit is 7 (not punishable) and above 7 years to 12 years punishable on the proof that the child understands the consequences of the act, under the Indian Penal Code. For purposes of protection against kidnapping, abduction and related offences, it's 16 years for boys and 18 for girls. For special treatment under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2011, the age is 18 for both boys and girls. And the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 defines a child as any person below the age of 18, and includes an adopted step- or foster child (Children in India 2012).

### **Street Children in India**

India is home to millions of indigent children. Many of them - all too often illiterate, sick, and malnourished - live in neglect with wretched families who cannot take care of them. Millions more are forced into the work force at the time they should be learning how to read and write. Millions still live in the streets as a result of the loss of their loved ones, the breakdown of their families, or simply because they no longer could endure the abuses inflicted upon them by parents, relatives, and employers. While this phenomenon is by no means new, globalization and economic liberalization have in some instances aggravated the vulnerability of children. In India, where the staggering economic growth continues to produce scores of nouveau riches, the distribution of wealth has grown increasingly unequal. Such growth has certainly not reduced poverty, which continues to afflict hundreds of millions. Estimating the world's true number of street children is a hopelessly complicated task. Because of their very lifestyle, street children are not included in official statistics that rely on data collected by surveying families or schools; any estimate is therefore necessarily imprecise. According to UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO), the steadily growing number of street children worldwide could be between 100 and 150 million. India has the highest concentration: in 1994, UNICEF itself estimated that 11 million children lived in the streets of India, while other groups put the number as high as 18 million. Two in three are male. Moreover, while the majority are between 11 and 15 years old, a large percentage belongs to the 6-10 age group. Contrary to conventional wisdom, most of the children roaming the streets of India's cities and villages have a family to which they could in

principle go back. Some studies reveal that as many as 90 percent of them could live with parents or relatives if they so wished, though their families are invariably destitute. In most cases, therefore, it is the children who choose to leave their homes and take care of themselves. Many end up at the train station, where some look for work while others become vagabonds, criss-crossing the country on its vast and intricate railway network. They endure constant hunger and malnutrition, which are often accompanied by scabies and dysentery. On the streets, they may be found working a variety of jobs: they clean train compartments; they collect plastic, aluminum, paper, and anything else they may be able to resell; they serve as paperboys, shoe shiners, dishwashers, or porters for hotels and local businesses; they play music, juggle, or simply beg. Their lifestyle exposes them to the many grave risks that derive from their frequent involvement in drug trafficking, organ trade, pornography, and slave (Federico Ferrara and Valentina Ferrara 2005). UNICEF's estimate of 11 million street children in India is considered to be a conservative figure. The Indian Embassy has estimated that there are 314,700 street children in metros such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Kanpur, Bangalore and Hyderabad and around 100,000 in Delhi alone.

A study in 2007 in India found the following:

- 65.9% of the street children lived with their families on the streets. Out of these children, 51.84% slept on the footpaths, 17.48% slept in night shelters and 30.67% slept in other places including under flyovers and bridges, railway platforms, bus stops, parks, market places.
- The overall incidence of physical abuse among street children, either by family members or by others or both, was 66.8% across the states. Out of this, 54.62% were boys and 45.38% were girls.
- On a study in India, out of the total number of child respondents reporting being forced to touch private parts of the body, 17.73% were street children. 22.77% reported having been sexually assaulted (Kacker, L. et al. 2007).

The complex situation of street children makes it difficult to get an accurate number of street child populations. In India, there have been various estimates of street children population. The 1991 Census recorded 18 million children. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in 1993 had reported that India had the largest population of street children in the world (UNDP 1993). Big cities draw in larger numbers of street children. India has the highest concentration of street children. In most third world cities, they are the shadowy presences who fill the background of daily life, doing odd jobs, scavenging for food, begging and stealing (Lalor et al. 2000). Agarwal (1999) estimated that India was a home to about 20 million street children (approximately 7% of the child population). There is, however, no census data available for street children since they constitute a floating population (Adeyinka, 2000). Every child during the span of development runs several risks to his/her healthy development. It is the duty of significant adults to be mindful of these barriers to development and enable the child to experience and enjoy the process of growing up. After all, childhood is meant for growing, learning and developing into all that one is meant

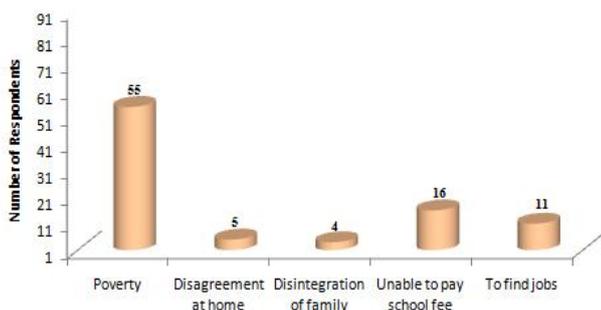
to be. When the developmental process is hindered, a child is in a situation of risk in such situations; and the complexities of the situations must be understood and relevant efforts must be made to rescue these children (Ayuku et al. 2003).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research work was an endeavor to highlight the problems faced by the street children. The main tool used for this research work was interview schedule consist of comprehensive questionnaire regarding the problems and issues faced by the street children. The questionnaire was completed by 91 street children in Srinagar district of Jammu and Kashmir, who spend the majority of their time in the streets. In addition to the interview schedule various rounds of National Sample Survey, the Central Statistical Organization, official statistics, Human Development Reports by the UNDP, UNICEF benefited the research study. There are many factors responsible for a child to be in the streets as it has been analyzed that 55 street children out of 91 who have been interviewed consider that poverty is the main cause of leaving home and spend most of their time in the streets. 05 street children consider that disagreement at home is the cause of living in the streets. Other 04 respondents cited that disintegration in family is the reason of leaving home and residing in streets. 16 street children consider that the reason of leaving home is that they are unable to pay school fee. Another 11 respondents consider that in search of jobs they left home and survive on the streets.

**Table 2. Cause of Street Children to live on the streets**

Causes	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Poverty	55	60.44
Disagreement at home	05	5.49
Disintegration of family	04	4.39
Unable to pay school fee	16	17.59
To find jobs	11	12.09
Total	91	100



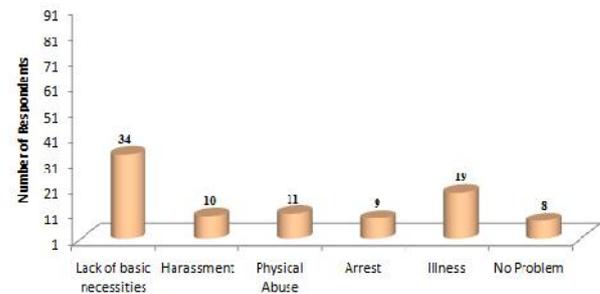
**Fig. 1. Causes of Street Children to live on the streets**

The street children in the streets experience and face many problems these include lack of basic necessities, ill health, harassment, physical abuse, arrest etc. As it has been observed that 34 respondents experience lack of basic necessities (food, shelter and clothing). There were 10 street children who become the victim of harassment. 11 street children who have been interviewed consider they are physically abused. Other 9 street children had been arrest by the municipal police. It has also been observed that 19 children sufferer of illness and

other diseases. Another 8 children consider that they are not facing any problem on the streets.

**Table 3. Problems faced by the Street Children**

Problems faced	No of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Lack of basic necessities	34	37.37
Harassment	10	10.99
Physical Abuse	11	12.09
Arrest	09	9.89
Illness	19	20.87
No Problem	08	8.79
Total	91	100



**Fig. 2. Problems faced by the Street Children**

## Findings and conclusion of the study

The issue of street children is an alarming and escalating and the volume of this problem is expected to continue with increasing with the rise of population and urbanization. A closer look of the study reveals that there are many factors responsible for the stipulation of street children in Srinagar district of Jammu and Kashmir which include poverty, disagreement at home, disintegration in family, unable to pay school fee and to find jobs. These are children who spend most of their time in the street outside their homes. While on the street, these children seek work, beg, play, hang around or spend leisure time. An economic issue is a major factor pushing children into the street. In light of the high unemployment and poverty rates, many families send their children to work in order to contribute to sustaining family needs, which results harassment, physical abuse, arrest and illness of street children. In addition, the breakdown of traditional family values, modernization and urbanization leaves a large number of children without necessary care and support for their sound growth and development.

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