

## Contribution of Selected Family Factors to the Influx of Street Children in Nakuru Municipality, Kenya

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### Abstract

An unprecedented rise in the number of street children in the last decade has raised concern in Kenya. Numerous and complex socio-economic factors have been attributed to the rising presence of children on the streets. Therefore, this study purposed to investigate the contribution of selected family factors on the influx of street children in Kenyan towns with special reference to Nakuru Municipality which has a population of about 3,800 street children with 800 of these in rehabilitation centers. This was a descriptive survey that used an *ex- post facto* design. Nakuru Municipality has eight active rehabilitation centers for street children. Five rehabilitation centers were randomly sampled to provide a sample of 100 street children and 5 managers. Self-response questionnaires and an interview schedule were used to collect the required data. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the raw data. The main factors within the family such as family type, inability of parents to provide for their children, child abuse, parent's drunkenness and poor parent- child relationship, have contributed a lot to the street children phenomenon. Family counseling can be used to assist the families of street children.

Key words-Family factors, influx, street children, Nakuru Municipality

### 1.0 Introduction

Street children in Kenyan towns have reached considerable numbers and become a subject of intensifying concern to the Kenyan society in the past few decades (African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), 1994). This began in early 1950s when the colonial government broke up families by taking men to concentration camps and encouraging others to migrate to urban areas for formal employment leaving women and children in the rural areas. In urban centers, there were few women who provided commercial sex. Single parenthood and the poor living conditions of these commercial sex workers seem to have produced the first lot of street children whose parents were taken to detention camps leaving them to become vagrants.

The United Nations International Labour Review of July/December 1963 reported that in the period between the declaration of the state of Emergency in 1952 and 1962, the police dealt with 1,113 vagrant children in Nairobi (ANPPCAN 1994). These children may have been pushed out of their home districts and villages by poor living conditions to alternative life in town. Since then, there has been an increase in cases of street children both in rural and urban areas of Kenya. By 1992, it was estimated that there were 4,000 street children in Nairobi city alone (Ombaso & Munyako, 1992). ANPPCAN (1995) estimates the number of street children in Nairobi city as

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40,000 and that street children have been identified in small towns such as Kajiado, Narok and Kapenguria.

The rapid mushrooming of children's homes and the number of organizations such as the Child Welfare Society of Kenya, Kenya Medical Women's Association, African Network on Prevention of and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect, Plan International, Save the Child Fund, Church Organizations and the Government reveal the enormous concern that the phenomenon of street children has generated. A search of current literature reveals that most studies are aiming at getting solutions to the problem of street children since their number is increasing rapidly (ANPPCAN, 1995). The increasing concern over street children provides further need for more research on the reasons why these children leave their families. It is for this reason that this study looked into the issue of street children with special reference to the contributing factors.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Research done on street children indicate that their numbers have increased tremendously in Kenyan towns in recent years. Studies have so far tended to focus on the number of street children and their life on the streets without seeking to identify the reasons that drive them from their families to the streets. This paper addresses this knowledge gap by focusing on the contribution of selected family factors on the influx of street children.

### **1.2 Objectives**

This paper seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- (i) To determine the types of families the street children lived before going to the streets.
- (ii) To establish the economic backgrounds of the source families of street children.
- (iii) To determine the role of family counseling and empowerment in alleviating the problem of street children.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Street children are persons below 18 years who dwell in and eke out a living in the streets by engaging in such activities as would enable them support themselves or supplement the family income, at a time when they should be in school or under parental care (Ayako, 1992 ; Kuria and Apollos, 1997). There are two categories of street children (ANPPCAN, 1991). Full-time street children work and live within the streets and have nothing or very little to do with their families while part-time street children work in the streets but return to their homes at night. Most of the part-time street children are from poor or broken homes or are orphans (Wainaina, 1977).

Socio-economic problems are the push factors forcing children to migrate from their homes to the city streets (Ayako, *et al*, 1991). In a survey of 634 street children throughout Kenya, ANPPCAN determined that 20% of the children claimed to have no alternatives for a better way of life, 16% wanted to help support their families with their income, 10% had run away from their parent, 10% were victims of hunger, 10% had been influenced by their peers to join the street life, and 2 % had been born on the streets (Ayako, *et al*, 1991).

## 2.2 Social - Cultural Changes in the African Family

The root causes of the street children phenomena arise from the social changes that have occurred within the African family as a result of modernization (Kuria & Appollos, 1997). The modern world system and the associated lifestyles known as “modernity” have not generated systems comparable to those of the pre modern family and community. Traditionally, children were cherished and highly esteemed, as an assurance of the renewal and perpetuation of humankind and family legacies (Ayako *et al.*, 1991). They were so important to the total kin group that husbands were allowed to marry a number of wives and childless ones were despised. Levirate and woman to woman marriages were also practiced to ensure that children were born (Kuria & Appollos, 1997).

New socio-economic changes facing post-modern Kenya undermine the basis of the traditional position of children, who are now considered more of a burden (Kilbride & Kilbride, 1993). The traditional African family culture acted as a social security for members of a broken family. Today individualism and the shift of importance placed on the nuclear family have taken over the traditional communal way of life, which put the responsibility for the upbringing of children into the hands of all members of the community (Gichuru, 1993). Parenthood in traditional societies got support in the socialization of children primarily from the immediate and extended family members to an extent that the child could be said to belong not only to the parents but also to the community into which he was born. Studies done in the United States where kin or neighbourhood bonds are comparatively weak, has found that families isolated from relatives and friends show higher rate of violence than do other families probably because people with relatives and friends can turn to them for help and also because relations and friends can intervene if the situation deteriorates too far (Strauss & Gelles, 1970).

Kilbride and Kilbride (1993) stress about the importance of the extended family as a moral community, one whose members act to alleviate child abuse and neglect through interventions and continued child care. Studies done by Kilbride in Western Kenya in 1986 showed that modern Kenya has witnessed a decline in paternal support a decline in the positive value of children, overburdened grandparents and increased co-wife problems. He continues to conclude that child abuse is simply a function of the mere presence or absence of moral nets such as extended families.

## 2.3 Single Parenthood

A single parent family consists of one parent and dependent children living in the same household without the assistance of a co-parent. This could be as a result of divorce, separations, desertions, out-of-wedlock births and death. This is common among women who turn out to be prostitutes (Kiunjuri, 1985). A majority of abandoned children come from female-headed households and many street children do not even know their fathers (Wainaina, 1981). According to Njeru (1989), the majority of the street children’s parents is single, has irregular incomes and for most part is self-employed as street hawkers. Because of their low incomes, the families tend to live in overcrowded slum areas of the urban centers. The majority of the families live on incomes derived from illicit trade in ‘chagaa’ brewing, petty businesses and tailoring. Kuria and Appollos (1987) maintain that some children are on the streets because they come to town with their adolescent mothers while the latter are already in the streets.

There is an increasing number of adolescent mothers from poor families whose heads either chased them away when they got pregnant or they themselves chose to go to the streets to fend for themselves and their children. Some of the adolescent mothers enter into love relationships with men and street boys and end up giving birth to other babies who eventually increase the number of street children. In some single-parenthood homes, some “liberated” individuals’ bring several boyfriends/girlfriends home which affect some children. The children may then find their homes as both materially and morally depriving and therefore go to the streets (Kuria & Appolos, 1987). Dallape (1987) says that most street girls are born out of prostitution.

#### **2.4 Parent’s Drunkenness**

This behaviour leads to homes becoming materially and morally depriving since abuse of alcohol especially illicit liquor leads to carelessness on the part of the parents (Kuria & Appolos, 1997). A single mother who abuses alcohol for instance becomes an easy prey to many men looking for cheap sex. Apart from the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS leading to orphans who turn to the streets, such mothers bear more children than they can adequately tend for. In their attempt to use the only resource readily available to them (their bodies) for survival, the women compound their problems by making more babies which leads to an overcrowded home life.

The situation is aggravated by alcoholic fathers who dissipate their little incomes fast. This results to domestic conflicts which inevitably have a spillover effect on the children who consequently seek alternative homes in the streets. According to Burt (1944), in a drunkard’s home, money is squandered, health and discipline neglected, the family is despised by neighbours and perpetual life of discord, irregularity and passion is created and sustained. Parents abuse and mistreat the children and each other. This leads to an unhappy home environment.

#### **2.5 Domestic Violence**

Children directly or indirectly suffer as a result of domestic violence for reasons that they have no control over (Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children, 2003). According to Thornton and Voigt (1992), evidence mounting from a number of studies suggests that “psychologically broken homes” are likely to produce delinquent behaviors. If parents are constantly quarreling, they may not provide effective supervision or socialization of their children. Parental affection also lacks in families where there is conflicts and chances of delinquent behaviors are increased. KAACR (2003), also maintain that study statistics drawn from the department of children services showed that parents account for 50% of all violence committed on their children.

Coalition on Violence Against Women (2002), analyzed cases of children in Nairobi children’s Home and Kabete Approved School who had been rescued or given protection. It contested that most of the cases reported in these children’s Homes are of neglect, child labour and assault by employers and physical and sexual abuse by parents. They also noted that child neglect may occur in cases where one or both of the parents abuse the family unit. Many street children have run away from home because they have been abused at home or cannot cope with their family situation, where they may fall victim to the dramatic consequence of drug abuse, alcoholism and domestic violence (Grant, 1989). Domestic violence can interfere with the mother and fathers parenting abilities to such a degree that the children may be neglected or abused (KAACR, 2003).

## 2.6 Poverty

Penny and Kate (2002), maintain that some families cannot afford to clothe and feed their children as they would wish. Parents of the street children are economically depressed and live with poverty and malnutrition, in deteriorating dilapidated houses (Wainaina, 1981). Many factors are known to contribute to poverty situations especially in female headed households where a father who is the bread winner may desert home leaving the mother responsible of the family. The young child finds that the mother does not meet most of their basic needs and in an attempt to satisfy these needs they set to look for companions with whom they can share the problem and end up on the streets.

Another issue contributing to poverty situation is giving birth to too many children. To the poor people, many children are expected to support their parents socially and economically at old age. It is also hoped that at least one of them will get education which will in turn help secure a good job and help the rest of the unfortunate members of the family (Kiunjuri, 1985). This however has not been met and the large families have exhausted the existing resources and this has played a significant role in impoverishing the family. Consequently, members of the family are forced to live in poor houses where overcrowding is a common phenomenon. In such situations, the older children feel uncomfortable and out of place when they cannot bear the intolerable situations any longer, they leave home to go to the streets and fend for themselves.

## 2.7 Parent-Child Relationship

According to Hurlock (1972), parental attitudes towards their children have a strong impact not only on family relationships but also on the attitudes and behavior of children. The way parents raise their children may be divided into three varieties: authoritarian (restrictive), firm (strict) and permissive (easy) (DeMause, 1977). In permissive type of parenting, the permissive nature of parents leads to delinquency in that self discipline and inner control of a child are not emphasized since the parents play little or no supervisory role on their children (Sluckin & Herbert, 1987). On the other hand, parents in restrictive type of parenting don't allow their children to decide on anything. The parents are very authoritative and over-protective to their children. The more authoritarian the parent is the more resentful the child and the more likely he is to be defiant and willfully disobedient. They tend to develop certain behavioral characteristics such as being socially withdrawn, they are low in adult role taking they like quarrelling and are shy with their peers.

Parental rejection also has certain effects on the children. Aggressive boys who have suffered parental rejection show much less dependent behaviour than non-aggressive boys who have been accepted by their parents (Hervert, 1974). Mothers who are warm but set firm limits, emphasize the do's rather than the don'ts, treat the child with respect, and encourage independent behaviour tend to produce mature and competent social behaviour in their children (Hamner, 1985). By contrast, parents who are punitive, hostile and aggressive tend to provide a model of aggression for their children, who in turn produce the same sorts of behaviours and are more socially immature and dependent.

## 2.8 Abuse and Neglect of Children

Hamner (1985) defines child abuse as an active, hostile, deliberate and aggressive act carried out by the child's caregiver with the intent of willfully injuring the child. Child neglect on the other hand is a more passive type of treatment characterized by a lack of interest in the welfare of the child. Children have been abused in different ways; there is physical abuse where the parent (or caregiver) inflicts physical injury to the child through beatings, whipping, and branding, scalding, shaking, or even torture.

Child labour is another form of abuse which occurs when families are very poor and they hire out their children as labour to earn some money. A child who abandons education to work for wages in order to support himself and sometimes his family is indeed being abused. Dallape (1987) continues to say that such children become commodities which are marketed or sold. In this case, the protective family structure is "substituted" by the imbalance of power between the employer and the child laborer. Other forms of abuse include emotional abuse where adults fail to show children love and affection and where they may continually threaten, shout or verbally abuse a child. This causes the child to lose confidence and become withdrawn and nervous (Hamner, 1985). Sexual abuse by parents, step-parents, close relatives and caretakers has been reported in the media.

## **2.9 The Rights of Children**

Parents have a responsibility to take care of their children. The children have a right to life. They must be protected from things that can end their precious and God-given life. This protection must be given to them at all times. The government and the family are responsible for ensuring the child's survival and development. Children deserve good medical and health care, nutritious food, decent shelter and adequate clothing, lack of these things can expose them to high chances of death (Children's Act, 2001).

Children also have a right to protection. Children are very important in any society as they are its future. It is the duty of everyone in the society to protect children from all forms of exploitation, abuse, neglect or slavery, sexual exploitation, inducement or coercion to engage in any sexual activity and exposure to obscene materials. They must also be protected from torture, cruel punishment or unlawful arrest or jailing. Children also have a right to freedom of expression and a say in matters that affect their lives (CLAN, 2003).

Parents also have responsibilities to their children. A parent is required to maintain the child, especially in providing education and guidance, immunization, adequate diet, clothing and shelter and medical care. It is an offence for any person who has responsibility, custody or care of a child to assault, mistreat or abandon the child, or expose the child to injury. It is also an offence to cause the child to become in need of care and protection. Any person or conditions which deny these rights contribute to an abuse. Kempe (1962) maintains that when the society becomes a silent observer and does nothing to enable children to grow and develop, it becomes a perpetrator of child neglect and abuse.

## **2.10 Family Counseling as an Intervention to the Street Children Phenomenon**

Antony (1996) stresses that the family could either frustrate or facilitate the potentializing of the family members. An individual's dysfunctional symptoms are in a way the product of the failure

of the family in meeting the needs of that person. The aim of counselling is to facilitate the whole family system to improve their interdependent network of need - satisfying relationships.

Hamner and Turner (1985) give guidelines on how abusive parents can be helped. They say that each reported case of abuse should be investigated and decisions made concerning the most appropriate way to assist the family. Abusive parents can be rehabilitated through training on effective child management. The parents should first be interviewed and then provided with a problem behaviour workbook, and instructed on how to describe and record the child's behaviour. Home visits should be made to observe the parents and children and their behaviours coded. After baseline data is collected, parents should be trained to solve specific behaviour problems. Contingency contracts can also be used with the parents to ensure their application of appropriate child management techniques. Parents can have an alternative to severe punishment for child misbehavior, having someone to come into the home to help, and having an incentive for following through a new way to handle children.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Design**

This descriptive survey used the *ex post facto* design because the researcher did not have direct control of independent variables since their manifestations had already naturally occurred (Kathuri & Pals, 1993). The study was conducted within Nakuru Municipality because it is a town that has seen a growing number of street children in recent years. There is also rapid mushrooming of rehabilitation centers. The target population comprised of 3800 street children in Nakuru municipality. The accessible population was 800 street children who have been put in rehabilitation centers within the municipality. There are 8 active rehabilitation centers in the municipality. The managers of the centers participated because they have the information of all the children who join their centers.

#### **3.2 Sampling Procedures and Sample**

Five rehabilitation centres were randomly selected for the study. Simple random sampling procedure was used to select 20 street children from each of the selected centres and 5 managers were purposively sampled giving a total sample of 105 respondents.

#### **3.3 Instrumentation**

In order to obtain data, questionnaires were used to obtain information from the children. The managers of the centers were interviewed by the researcher. Piloting of instruments was done to establish the clarity of meaning and comprehensibility of each item, determine the time needed to complete the questionnaire and establish the reliability of the research instruments (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999) which was computed using Cronbach's alpha to determine internal consistency (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The results of the pilot study yielded reliability coefficient of 0.72 which was sufficient for purposes of research.

#### **3.4 Data collection Procedures**

The researcher visited the selected rehabilitation centers and with the help of the institution staff, questionnaires were administered to the sampled former street children. This ensured a high rate of response and the researcher also had an opportunity to explain the study and answer any

questions that the respondents had before they completed the questionnaires. The researcher personally interviewed each manager of the centers.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

After getting the completed questionnaires from the children and information from the interview schedules, the data generated was first coded in the SPSS version 11.5 worksheet and then analyzed using descriptive statistics to generate frequency tables. It served as a guide for preparing tables for each of the objectives of the study. Qualitative data was used to describe the various aspects of the study and drawing conclusions and recommendations.

## **4.0 Results**

### **4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Street Children**

The sample comprised 95% male and 5% the female street children because out of the sampled homes only one had girls. The study established that 97% of the respondents were aged between 10 and 19 years, 82% had between 3 and 8 siblings and 74% had attended formal schooling before. They had left school at different levels due to various reasons such as lack of school fees, hostile school environment, violence at home, lack of interest and poor performance. The study established that 74.2% of the street children had been on the streets for between 1 and 5 years and that 85.6% of them did not like staying on the streets. However, 14.4% of the sampled respondents liked street life because they got friends, made friends and it gave them independence from parents.

### **4.2 Type of Family**

The results indicated that 51% of the respondents were partial or total orphans while 5% did not even know their parents. Therefore not having both parents alive could be a contributing factor to the street children phenomenon. These findings go in line with a study done in Nairobi by Dallape in 1987. According to the findings, some street children are born out of prostitution and therefore they don't even know their fathers. The study established that street children come from different family types with 35% coming from families where both natural parents are living with their children. 16% of the street children come from families where there is a stepparent and 31% come from families with a single parent. The remaining 18% lived with their relatives. Different family types have had a contribution on the street children phenomenon. In families with step-parents, some of them were cruel to the children through the treatment they gave them and this made the children take to the streets. Some parents were not able to feed their children or even take them to school. Where children lived with their relatives, some relatives would not accept the responsibility of caring for children who are not their offspring due to financial problems. A child whose basic needs are not met in the sense of shelter, food and clothing will go out of the home to seek ways and means of meeting basic needs no matter which ways are employed (Dallape,1987)

The study findings show that to over 40% of the children, lack of food, being beaten and lack of school fees made them unhappy at home and therefore go to the streets. Other reasons such as child labour and being orphaned were given by less than 30% of the children. Less than 20% of the children said that they were unhappy for being harassed by stepparents, being isolated and parent being a drunkard.



### **4.3 Economic Background of Parents**

The results show that 67.1% of the parents are unemployed and only 32.9% were employed. For those who are employed, their occupations are characterized by low wages and status. It was established that 73% of the parents could not afford to take their children to school. This explains why most of the children did not go beyond primary level of education. The results also show that 68% of the parents could not provide enough food for their children. Faced with starvation, such children ended up in the streets to fend for themselves. The results also show that 69% of the parents could provide shelter for their children. However, 52% of the children said that the family house was not enough to accommodate all the members in the family.

### **4.4 Forms of Child Abuse and Neglect**

There were several forms of child abuse that made the children leave their homes and go to the streets. 64% of the children reported that they had stayed for a long time without food. Parents of such children simply and completely ignore or do not allow the child to have adequate food, clothing, shelter or sanitation. These children are frequently unclean, unkempt, inappropriately dressed, underweight and in need of medical attention. Faced with such problems such children go to the streets to fend for themselves. 11% of the children reported that they had either been raped by a father or a step parent, close relatives and caretakers. Rape is very harmful and it causes great psychological damage, (Penny, Kate & Harnet, 2002).

The results also show that 54% of the children experienced beating in their homes. This is characterized by severe physical abuse from parents or guardians. According to Grant (1989), many children have run away from home because they have been abused at home or cannot cope with their family situation where they may fall victim to the dramatic consequences of drug abuse and domestic violence. Domestic violence can interfere with the mother's and father's parenting abilities to such an extent that the children may be neglected or abused. Such children run away from home in search of safety. 58% of the children had been denied educational opportunities. Faced with idleness such children go to the streets. 36% of the children had been subjected to child labour. They therefore had to abandon their education to work for wages in order to support themselves and sometimes their family. The results also show that 26% of the children were sent away from home. This is in line with a survey done by KAACR in 2003 that revealed that stepmothers often mistreat their foster children to the extent of chasing them away.

### **4.5 Role of Family Counselling and Empowerment**

The results show that 80% of the managers of the institutions reported that families could be assisted to solve their family problems through guidance and counselling. Antony (1996) stresses that the family could either frustrate or facilitate the potential of the family members. An individual's dysfunctional symptoms are in a way the product of the failure of the family in meeting the needs of that person. The aim of counselling is to facilitate the whole family system to improve their interdependent network of need - satisfying relationships.

Economic empowerment and taking children to school was reported by all the managers as a way of alleviating the problem of street children. Wainaina's 1981 study showed that parents of the street children are economically depressed and have known to live with malnutrition. Economic empowerment would enable the families to be able to provide for their families. 60%

of the managers said that if children were to be provided with love and care by their families, they could not run away to the streets.

The results indicate that 27% of the children showed that one needs to change their bad behaviour at home and they also need to be patient with the problems at home. 25% stated that praying God and asking for divine intervention would help. 21% of the children stated that one should never think of going to the streets as a solution to the problems that they get at home. Only 4% of the street children stated that one could seek help from the government if they have problems at home. The results of this study show that if proper guidance and economic empowerment was to be provided to the families, the street children phenomenon would be minimized if not eliminated.

### **Conclusions**

This study has established that family type, poor parent –child relationship, poverty, parents' drunkenness and child abuse and neglect have contributed to the influx of street children in Nakuru Municipality. Street children have faced a lot of problems in their homes, thus seeking alternative homes in the streets. However, diseases like AIDS cannot be underrated since it is a major contributing factor to orphans. There is therefore need to establish institutions to attend to such eventualities.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations below are as a result of the above conclusions as established in the study.

- (i) Social workers can be used in identifying families at risk of providing a home environment unfavorable to psycho-social development in children with a view to focusing on promotive and preventive effort on the families most in need.
- (ii) Community based child care services should be initiated so that children can be supported in their own homes instead of being moved to institutions. This would also mobilize the community for advocacy towards protective and prevention of child neglect.
- (iii) The right attitude towards family planning should be inculcated in parents to avoid children who eventually get abused and neglected. This requires proper training and through available media; hence proper training of social workers.
- (iv) Sensitization of the general public and law enforcers on the need to understand the problem of street children so as to create an enabling environment even for the children to be rehabilitated and give them emotional support and allow them to exercise their human rights.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Since the study results point at the family being a major cause of the problem of street children, the following areas should be considered for more research so as to deal with the problem of street children.

- (i) More research should be carried out to determine the causes of family breakdown. This would be with a view to recommending appropriate ways and means of improving the situations in order to help the family unit to remain intact.
- (ii) HIV/AIDS is a major contributing factor to orphans; hence research can be done on how institutions can be established to attend to such eventualities so that affected children don't end up on the streets.

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