

A STUDY ON STREET CHILDREN IN BIKANER CITY

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ABSTRACT

Street children may be considered as the children in the worst condition. They live in the streets or at least, spend a larger part of their lives in the streets. They may even earn and live off the streets. Often bereft of their families and home, lacking access to basic needs and comforts of life, these are the most marginalized lot of all the children in the urban areas. Hence, it was deemed necessary to make an assessment of the condition of such children in Bikaner city. A purposive sample of sixty eight street children was taken for the study. The results have been presented under various heads like attributes, pattern of street living, family connections, and attitudes and perceptions.

KEYWORDS: A Study on Street Children in Bikaner City

INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions for street children, but the definition introduced by Inter-NGO Programme (cited in UNCHS, 2000, p.73) covers important dimensions: 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. Street children face difficulties in providing themselves with good sources of food, clean drinking water, health care services, toilet and bath facilities, and adequate shelter. They also suffer from absence of parental protection and security due to the missing connection with their families. In addition, there is a lack of any kind of moral and emotional support (Lugalla and Mbwambo, 1999). The average age at which street children start living on the streets is between 9 and 12 years old, and they keep living on the streets until they reach the age of 15 to 16. When they became older they start to look for stable jobs with better wages (Rizzini *et al.*, 1994, Abdelfatah, 2012).

OBJECTIVES

- To study the patterns, characteristics and problems of street children in Bikaner city.

METHODOLOGY

A purposive sample of sixty eight street children was taken for the study.

Data Collection

A questionnaire was developed to collect data through face-to-face interview with the respondents. This questionnaire was developed to obtain the relevant information regarding the personal information, household information, dietary intake pattern of target children & Inter relationship between different variables.

- Personal information: Personal information such as name, age, address, etc of the street children was collected.
- House hold information: house hold information such as whether they were alone or living with family, came from single or extended families etc., were also collected.
- Dietary intake pattern: Dietary intake pattern such as how many times they took meal, menus of meal etc., were included in the study.
- Relaxation time activities: we collected the data about their leisure time activities.

RESULTS

Attributes of Street Children

A gender wise distribution of the street children in Bikaner city showed that a majority of them were male (almost three quarters). The share of girls was only little more than a quarter. This trend only underlines the finding of other studies that have been carried out earlier.

A male-dominated society, concern for the security of female children, and a division of labour which earmarks the household chores to the womenfolk and girls seem to account for this (Table 1).

Table 1: Gender of Street Children in Bikaner City

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	50	73.52
Female	18	26.47
Total	68	

As per the survey of street children in Bikaner city, it was found that more than a quarter had been living in the street for less than three years duration. Those having spent more than 12 years were around 24 percent of the sample. The majority had spent 7years or less living like this, i.e., around 55 percent (Table 2).

Table 2: Duration of Street Living in Bikaner City

Duration	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 3 Years	18	26.47
4-7 Years	20	29.41
8-11 Years	14	20.58
More than 12 Years	16	23.52
Total	68	

Nature of Living Environment

According to place of living, a large chunk of about 71 percent street children belonged to the category of “children from street”. They remaining were found to live in slum like living areas, or on the empty lots of the city (Table 3).

Table 3: Place of Living of the Street Children

Living Place	Frequency	Percentage
Street	48	70.58
Slums	20	29.41
Total	68	

Street children don't spend their day time in schooling or playing. They may rather work, do rag-picking, and

even beg rather than studying or playing. Hence, most of the day time of street children is devoted to these activities, which are generally performed in the streets. Hence, more than half of the street children of Bikaner city were found to spend their day time in the streets. Around one third reportedly spent their day time at public places like railway stations and bus stands (Table 4 and Figure 1).

Table 4: Day Time Living Place of Street Children

Day Time Spent	Frequency	Percentage
Street	36	52.94
Railway Station	6	8.82
Bus Stand	16	23.52
Others	10	14.70
Total	68	

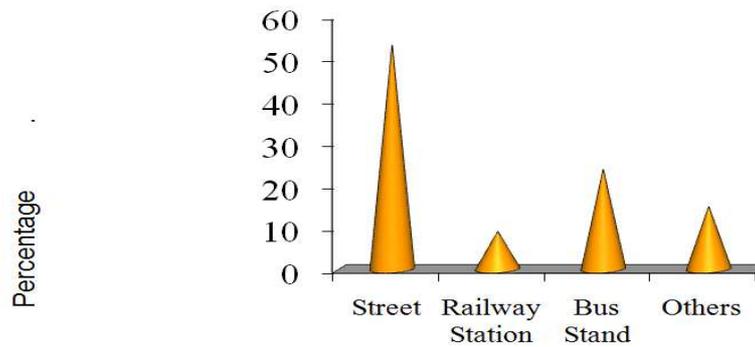


Figure 1: Day Time Living Place of Street Children

A night shelter (a place to sleep), and with whom they stay, can be the indicators of the children’s vulnerability (safety) and probable link with their families. As much as 38 percent of these children spend their nights in the streets, nearly 1/5th in the parks, and the remaining only 2/5th have access to poor quality slum housing, or even they may be sleeping out their nights in the open grounds. Thus, these vulnerable children are directly exposed to the extremes of weather (Table 5 and Figure 2).

Table 5: Place of Sleeping of the Street Children in Bikaner City

Place of Sleeping	Frequency	Percentage
Street	26	38.23
Empty Lot/Slum	28	41.17
Park	14	20.58
Total	68	

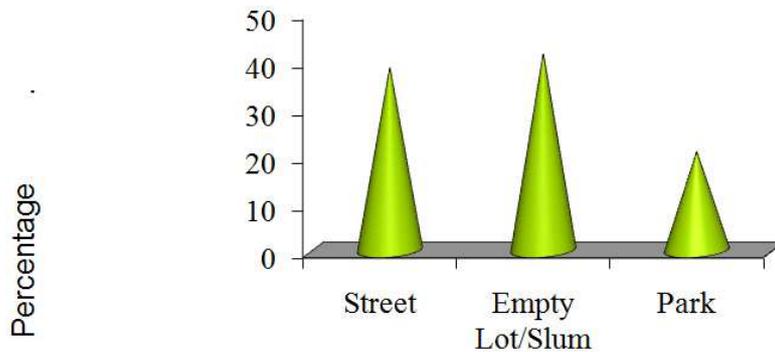


Figure 2: Sleeping Place of Street Children

In order to show the relationship of type of work done to the place of living in street children, table was calculated. Those working as labourers had lowest proportions amongst those living on the streets. Such children had greater probability of leaving in slums/empty lot. On the other hand, rag-pickers and, especially those doing "other" work had greater probability of living in the street (Table 6).

Table 6: Cross Tabulation of Type of Work and Place of Living in Street Children

Type of work	Street	Slums/Empty lot	Total
Labour	6(60.0)	4(40.0)	10(14.70)
Rag pickers	28(70.0)	12(30.0)	40(58.82)
Others	14(77.77)	4(22.22)	18(26.47)
Total	48(70.58)	20(29.41)	68

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentage.

To know the interrelationship of reasons of street living and place of living of the street children in Bikaner city, these information was cross-tabulated. Those citing poverty as the reason had lower tendency to live in the streets. On the other hand, those street children who were forced by their familial circumstances and who cited "other mixed reason" had greater propensity to live in the street (Table 7).

Table 7: Cross Tabulation of Reasons of Street Living Versus Place of Living of Street Children

Reasons	Street	Slums/Empty lot	Total
Poverty	18(64.28)	10(35.71)	28(41.17)
Family forced	18(75.0)	6(25.0)	24(35.29)
Other mixed	12(75.0)	4(25.0)	16(23.52)
Total	48(70.58)	20(29.41)	68

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentage.

Patterns of Street Living

Earning in one way or the other is essential for life. The street children don't spend a life of relaxation and comfort, but work in order to be able to fill their stomachs. The nature of jobs done by these children in Bikaner is illustrative of their general situation. On an average, they perform petty jobs requiring physical labour, retrieving recyclables from the wastes (rag-picking) for sale to the scrap dealers, or even begging in the markets or residential areas. Around 15 percent street children reported doing labour based jobs like shoe shining or working in repair shops, roadside dhabas and hotels. However, a vast majority, 3/5th of the total, were engaged in rag picking. There was another, more than a quarter of the children (around 26 percent), who were engaged in begging or small time manufacturing activities (Table 8 and Figure 3).

Table 8: Type of Work Done by Street Children in Bikaner City

Work done	Frequency	Percentage
Labour	10	14.70
Rag pickers	40	58.82
Others	18	26.47
Total	68	

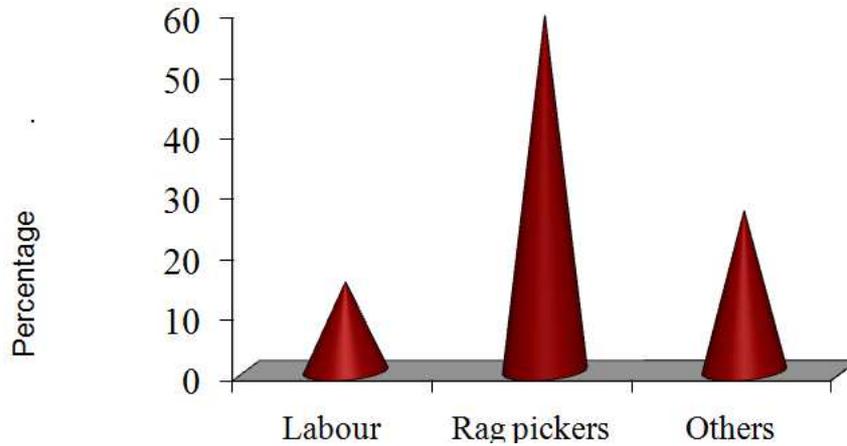


Figure 3: Work Done by Bikaner's Street Children

The street children in Bikaner city reported a diversity of sources of their food. The foremost category of children was that which reported that they bought food by spending the money earned by them (about 38 percent). Another big proportion (35 percent) got their food in exchange for the physical labour based services provided by them in the houses or the market places. The third, heterogeneous group got left-over food from the restaurants, parties or dust-bins, charities, or they ate from their own home (Table 9 and Figure 4).

Table 9: Source of Food of Street Children in Study Area

Food Source	Frequency	Percentage
Begging	26	38.23
Buy	24	35.29
Others	18	26.47
Total	68	

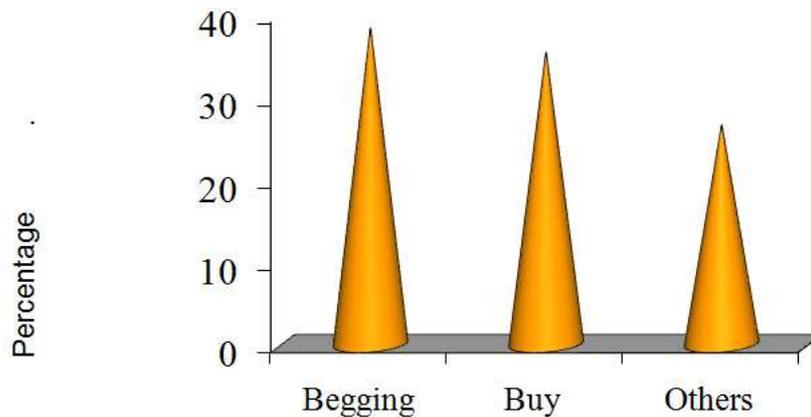


Figure 5: Food Source in Street Children

Food is basic necessity of life. The quality of food is significant, but sufficiency of food is of primary importance. Only one half of the street children in Bikaner reported that they ate two or three times a day. Another around 38 percent children had only one meal a day. The remaining 12 percent reported that they had their meal after a gap of more than a day (Table 10).

Table 10: Frequency of Eating/Day in Street Children

Times/ Day	Frequency	Percentage
Once a day	26	38.23
Twice a day	34	50
More than one day	8	11.76
Total	68	

Entertainment, play or relaxation in one or another manner is necessary not only for the children, but also for the older people. Hence, information was gathered about the way these children spent their evenings. The respondents were almost equally divided amongst their activities. These happened to be spending time at home with family members, playing with friends, and 'other' activities (Table 11).

Table 11: Utilization of Evening Time by Street Children

Time Utilization	Frequency	Percentage
Spending Time At Home	22	32.35
Playing With Friends	22	32.35
Others	24	35.29
Total	68	

A basic question asked about the reason behind their coming to the streets yielded varied responses. These responses varied from economic, to financial and surprisingly enough, even personal. The chief reason cited was, of course, economic wherein poverty and lack of resources resulted in the observed condition (41 percent). Another major chunk belonged to the category of disturbed/disintegrated families (about 35 percent), which was often characterized by violence perpetrated by the step fathers or step mothers and grandparents. A substantial group of respondents (about 24 percent) was reportedly living in the streets because of other reasons - they enjoyed the street atmosphere, or they simply felt like it. Perhaps their life of harder ship had made them adventurous enough to do this (Table 12).

Table 12: Reason Behind Street Living in Bikaner

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty	28	41.17
Family/Disturbance	24	35.29
Others	16	23.52
Total	68	

Family Connections

Children get an environment that is fulfilling for their emotional and psychological development, rather all round development, when they are living with their parents and siblings. It is tragic that street children are found to live away from their families. The survey in Bikaner city showed that around a quarter of these children has either no connections with their families, or have only partial connection. Around three- quarters indicated that are directly connected with their families (Table 13).

Table 13: Family Links of Street Children in Bikaner City

Linked	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	50	73.52
No	18	26.47
Total	68	

In order to correlate type of work and source of food amongst street children, a cross tabulation was performed. It

showed that children relying upon their own labour bought food for themselves. Amongst the rag-pickers, begging and “other” (eating left over) were comparatively major sources and buying of food was relegated to the third spot. In street children quoting “other” as their main category of work, begging was the major source of food (Table 14).

Table 14: Cross Tabulation of Type of Work and Source of Food amongst Street Children

Work	Bagging	Buy	Others	Total
Labour	0	10 (100.0)	0	10(14.70)
Rag pickers	16 (40.0)	10(25.0)	14(35.0)	40(58.82)
Others	10 (55.55)	4(22.22)	4(22.22)	18(26.47)
Total	26(38.23)	24(35.29)	18(26.47)	68

Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentage.

For a more detailed look into this connectivity with their families, the children were asked about the frequency of their home-visits. Thus, about three-fourth of street children reported about going home at the end of the day. About one-tenth (12 percent) could afford to go home only once in a week or month. The remaining, around 15 percent, was not fortunate enough to have families or homes (Table 15 and Figure 6).

Table 15: Home Visit Frequency of Street Children in Bikaner

Home Visit	Frequency	Percentage
Never	10	14.70
Once in a week or month	8	11.76
Always	50	73.52
Total	68	

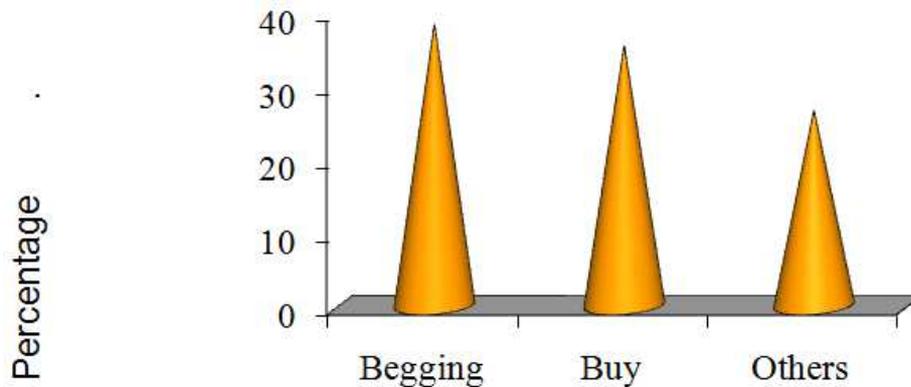


Figure 6: Frequency of Home Visit amongst Street Children

Street children are often looked down upon as undesirable elements of the urban society. They, thus, often have negative image, and are considered to be criminals and thieves. Thus, a query was made as to how the citizens usually treated them. A big chunk (47 percent) felt that they were usually treated in a bad manner. Nearly 27 percent, however, reported that they were accorded a nice treatment. An equal proportion was unable to categories people’s treatment towards them however (Table 16).

Table 16: Treatment towards Street Children in Bikaner City

Treatment	Frequency	Percentage
Good	18	26.47
Bad	32	47.05
No idea	18	26.47
Total	68	

Since the street children belong to the deprived lot, a question was asked as to what they really wished for in life. The responses mainly indicated their preferences for basic material and emotional needs of life like income, food, clothes, house and family. Some children indicated towards higher needs like education. As much as 47 percent children wished for ample income, about 26 percent wished rather for food. A smaller proportion wished for ample and better clothing. Amongst the miscellaneous wishes can be included those of living with family, having own houses and also opportunities for getting education (Table 17 and Figure 7).

Table 17: Wishes of Street Children of Bikaner

Wishes	Frequency	Percentage
Money	32	47.05
Food	18	26.47
Clothes	6	8.82
Others	12	17.64
Total	68	

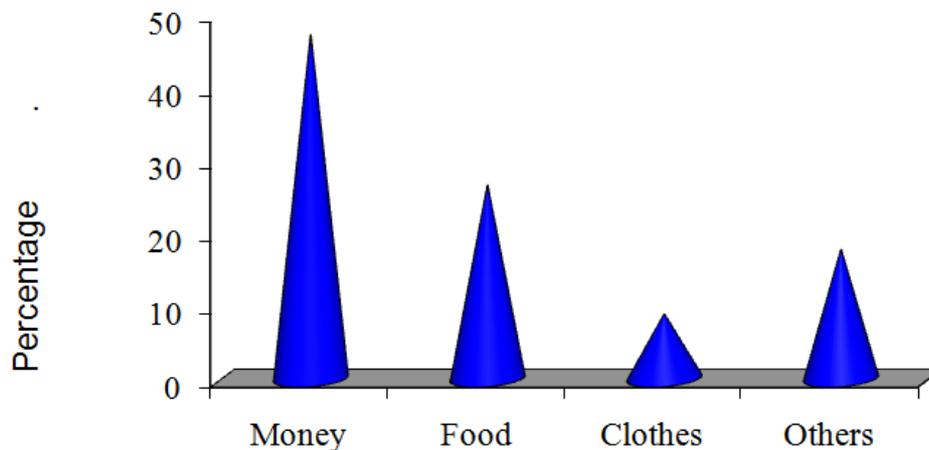


Figure 7: Desires of Bikaner's Street Children

When someone is not satisfied with one's present, he or she may think about an alternative life style in the future, i.e., he or she has some plan, which may be clear or not so clear, strived for or otherwise. Accordingly, about two out of five street children in Bikaner had some vision for their future, while the others had none of the kind (Table 18).

Table 18: Future Plan of the Street Children of Bikaner City

Future Plan	Frequency	Percentage
Some	28	41.17
None	40	58.82
Total	68	

CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of street children was mainly ascribed to poverty and disturbed families, while one-fourth even reportedly enjoyed the associated experience. Street children spent most of their time in the streets and public places; they slept in the streets, slums or parks; and worked mainly as rag-pickers (60 percent) and labour. They either bought their food, earned it through work or even fed over the left-overs. Around a fourth of these children either had no connection with their families or had minimum of it. Thus, around 12 percent went home only once a week or month, and about 15 percent never went home. Most of these children wished for money or food mainly.

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