

STREET CHILDREN “TALE OF HOMELESSNESS”: SCENARIO, STATUS & STRATEGY (A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF FOUR MAJOR CITIES OF RAJASTHAN - JAIPUR, AJMER, KOTA, & JODHPUR)

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Abstract: The present study is a sociological study of the Street Children, which casts light on Scenario and Status of the street children across the country and discusses the strategies contrived for the welfare of street and rehabilitation of street children in the country as well as in the state of Rajasthan. The study explores the various aspects and exposes the harsh realities of the daily life of the street children in four major cities of Rajasthan i.e. **Jaipur, Ajmer, Kota and Jodhpur. Street children, regarded as complex urban realities worldwide. They eat, live, sleep, earn on streets in the age where a normal child enjoys the privileges and joys of child hood. Street children are often subject to abuse, neglect, exploitation. Due to various reasons, children end up on the streets. This study explores the hidden and isolated nature of the life of street children. Rajasthan is the largest state of India with rapid devolvement transforming in a Metro city. Rajasthan is the 5th state of India having largest child population i.e. 10,649,504 Crore (Census 2011). As per the 2011 Census; the share of the population of children (below 18 years) in Rajasthan was 43% of the total population. Rajasthan has several manifestations of violation of child rights. Irregular income, poverty, family migration, social marginalization and deprivation, low social awareness and scant attention added with feeble commitment from the State to handle these issues effectively have resulted in high incidences of child exploitation, rampant child abuse, increasing inward and outward child trafficking, migration and child sexual violence. There are districts like Jaipur, Ajmer, Kota and Bhilwara, Jodhpur where the percentage share of migrants settling in urban areas with context to the total migrants is comparatively much higher. The problem of street children is largely an urban phenomenon in Rajasthan too—mostly street children appear concentrated in Jaipur, Kota, Ajmer, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Bharatpur and Bikaner—the actual number of street children in Rajasthan is not very well known. The problem of street children is becoming more serious because of their increasing number day by day and violation of Child Rights by the society at large, in order to fulfill their vested interests.**

Keywords: Street children, Rajasthan, Abuse, exploitation

1. INTRODUCTION

The India is second only to China in population with over 1200 million citizens. It is home to almost 19% of the world's children. More than one third of the country's Population, around 400 millions, is below 18 years. The future and strength of the nation lies in a healthy, protected, educated and well-developed child population that will grow up to be productive citizens of the country. The children are considered as an asset of any nation but unfortunately children remain a voiceless population, a deprived population that is not able to amplify voices against the exploitation and torture by their own relatives, friends, parents, and teachers. An increasing number of children are being forced to the streets as result of poverty, abuse, torture, abandonment, negligence or orphaned by the circumstances.

They walk aimlessly with the look of snotty noses, unkempt hair, wearing either undersized/ torn clothes or half naked, under the influence of substance, dirty feet and vanquished faces tell their story without many words. We see them everywhere, at traffic signals, at crowded marketplaces, near eateries and at places of worship. Still, they remain 'invisible entities' left to be ignored, disgraced and abused while everyone looks the other way. No place to live, no job to support their family with, they are forced to take to streets as their homes live on the meager earnings that they somehow manage by doing various odd jobs. The railway stations and their surroundings like stairways of the platform; junk coaches of the train; footpaths; big water pipes; old garages; bus stands; under flyovers and over bridges, and in unoccupied spaces, shanties etc. They spend most of the part of their lives on the pavements and dividers of the roads. They are called as homeless children, street children, and street youth. Different terms are used to describe the street children as homeless, dirt of the society, abandoned etc. **The children are on streets due to violence, drug and alcohol abuse, the death of a parent, family breakdown, war, natural disaster or simply socio-economic collapse, many destitute children are forced to eke out a living on the streets, scavenging, begging, hawking in the slums and**

polluted cities of the developing world¹. It is estimates that about 40 % of children are in difficult circumstances or vulnerable which include like children without family support, children forced in to child labour, abused trafficked children, vulnerable children, children affected by substance abuse, by armed conflict/civil unrest/natural disaster, manmade disaster like displacement. Survival, growth, development and protection of these very large numbers therefore need priority focus and attention. **Though there is no concrete data on the exact numbers of street children but it is estimated that India has the largest population of street children in the world. At least eighteen million to twenty million children live or work on the streets of urban India².** To a great extent the issue of street children is closely associated with the process of rapid urbanization that has been taking place in the major cities of India since the sixties. They come to the city with high expectations and full of hopes that they would easily get jobs there and would be able to live comfortably with their families or without families. But except for the fortunate ones the dream is shattered in the case of many. **In Jaipur, there are hundreds of thousands of destitute, runaway and orphaned children living hand-to-mouth. For them education is an unattainable luxury, or an irrelevance. They lose their childhoods and have little hope for a better future.** Alms have become serious business in Ajmer. Begging is the prominent source for children and adults. A large number of people depend on alms at Dargah Sharif and Pushkar. The begging has become so commercialized that children are picked by gangs and coerced into begging. Jodhpur is home to a large number of street children trying to earn a living on railway stations or by begging in tourist places. These children live in miserable conditions and are often addicted to solvents. Most of them are from Jodhpur or come from nearby states lured by the tourist city's promise. The connectivity of the all major cities of Kota through rail network makes it transit point for street children. Migration of the parents, from surrounded districts and states increases the number of street children in Kota city. Thousands of children every year enters in the city due to various reasons from across the country. **Children from nearby districts like Swai Madhpur, Baran, Jhalwar, Jaipur, Bundi, Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Bharatpur** daily migrates through trains and adopt begging as a major source of earning. Besides this a large number of children from nearby slum areas can be seen roaming around the city. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, urban poverty, migration, increasing population compare to basic amenities are the issues which makes the child population vulnerable and contributing factors in phenomena of street children in four major cities of Rajasthan.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nancy Leigh Tierney, the author of "Robbed of Humanity" provided a detailed account of the everyday realities faced by street children in Guatemala City through several moving personal testimonies. The book gives an insight into the daily obstacles these children are forced to overcome, the brutality they suffer at the hands of the police and private civilians, and the corrupt system responsible for them. Tierney attributed the indifference shown by the general populace towards their situation to Guatemala's history of terror and torture, a history in which the plight of the growing number of street children has never been a major concern.

N. K. Behura and R.P. Mohanty examined the impact of urbanization on street children's and their problems **in their book "Urbanisation, Street Children and their problems"**. The author explained that street children are the consequences of urbanization process. The author regards that family is most important institution for healthy growth of a children and his/her future but urbanization and migration has weaken this system with this backdrop image, the family background of the street children has been discussed in the book in very detail. **Minorities, SC & ST getting affected by the process of urbanization and data reveals that this is the matter of highest concern.**

Rashmi Agrawal in her book "STREET CHILDREN" examined the phenomena of street children from the **socio-psychological point of view** in which she explored and indentified the street children and their problems related with psyche of the people by posing some questions like she asks "who are street children" "how many are the street children across the globe and what is Indian scenario" "Why are they on street" and tried to find out the answers of these question to extend the existing knowledge. **She argues that child labour is a major problem which is affecting the lives of thousands of children in India.**

"Escape from Childhood" provides a detailed account on childhood process. The author, **"John Holt"** provides an in-depth understanding of child hood with his logics, different point of views, illustration and examples. This book is about young people and their place or lack of place, in modern society. It is about the institution of modern childhood, the attitude customs and laws that defines and locates children in modern life and determine to a large degree, what their lives are like and how we, their elder treat home. The book is thought provoking and it is based on the theory **"Free the Children, They Need Room to Grow"**. John Holt advocates treating children like real people, not pets and slaves, and for making available to them all the adult rights & responsibilities as outlined in the U.S. Bill of Rights. This book will challenges ideas about what constitutes "childhood" in today's society, but ideas about society as a whole

The book "street children of India: A socio-legal study" written by Dr. S. Nagaseshamma, first published in the year of 2010. He looked the problem of street children as a subject that needs immediate attention. The book draw the immediate attention towards the phenomenon of street children in India, seems to have acquire gigantic dimensions in the wake of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Thus the author regards that **industrialization and urbanization are the responsible factor for the phenomena of street children.**

3. OBJECTIVES

The research exposes the reality of street children in four major cities of Rajasthan i.e. **Jaipur, Ajmer, Kota & Jodhpur**. One of the **central objective** of this research is to reveal the faces and voices of street children and analyze their various back grounds, in relations to the streets. The anthropological outline of the lives of street children is **second objective** of this research, namely to map different policy initiatives for street children and to identity the best practices to satisfy street children's needs.

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study is exploratory in nature to understand the situation of street children with a mixed use of qualitative Methods. Throughout the study, qualitative methodology was adopted however, some quantitative methods were also used in order to supplement & confirm some qualitative statements. An interview schedule was administered in order to collect primary data and demographic information of street children and their socio-economic characteristics. A variety of ethnographic research methods were used including in-depth interviews (structured and unstructured), with research subjects, participants and non-participant observations, recording life histories, case studies of street children and their stories about street life experience and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The entire research process treated the children as an active participant in the whole exercise. A combination of alternative playful research methods were used to attract the attention and participation of the street children and to provide insight into the way in which they are working. The researcher sought the help and support of NGOs, grass root level workers, Govt. Institutions, Universities/Colleges, in order to facilitate the data collection process in the study area. Selection of the respondents was done through a purposive sample. A sample of 50 street children was taken from each district. The places of concentration selected were mainly railway station, bus stand, under bridges, near around temples and shrine places, market places, traffic signals, hotels and parks etc. Secondary data collected from online literature, recent publications and articles, books etc.

5. CONCLUSION & FINDINGS

The present scenario of the street children and categories of disadvantaged, abandoned, destitute of street living, playing and working children in the cities of Rajasthan has posed and intense threat to humanity and child rights. **The state government of Rajasthan needs to take urgent steps to curbe the phenomena of street children in Rajasthan.**

- 61% respondents of the total sample were in 11-15 years age group. Jaipur and Jodhpur had higher concentration of this age group respectively 72% and 66%. The age group 16-18 years comprised 23% of total sample and with 22% Kota district was afore in all districts. Children between 6-10 years constituted 15.50 % of total sample.
- Majority of street children were follower of Hindu religion with 94% of total sample and follower of Muslim religion shared 6% of total sample.
- Surprisingly 45% children belonged to Schedule Caste (SC) and 10.50 % were from Schedule Tribes (ST). The children from general category shared 9.50% and OBC³ shared 30 % of total sample. 5% children were not able to tell their caste and category as they got separated from their families at early age.
- Fourteen percent were found sick that needed immediate treatment. Anemia, weakness, and malnutrition were clearly visible in all children.
- Majority of children came from joint family i.e. 57 % of total sample, 35% from single family and 7% from broken families.
- Around 86 % children had their biological parents, 10% children lost their parents and only 2 % had adopted parents.
- Out of 86 %, biological parents (both) of 72% children were alive and living together. Almost 5% children told that their biological parents both were alive but not living together. 11% children lost their mother and around 9% children's lost their father. 2% children told that their mother went to another person by following Nata Tradition.
- Out of total sample, 60.50 % children belonged to lower class. Around 29.50% children belonged to labour class. Surprisingly 8.50% children came from middle class family.
- Total 83% children came from urban areas. The situation was almost the same in all districts. More than 70% children were coming from urban slum areas in all districts.
- 74% street children's parental house was nothing more than shanty or kachha house in Kota district, 66% in Ajmer, 48% in Jaipur and 42% in Jodhpur.
- 94% family members of street children were substance and drug users. Of which 62% around 28% both parents and 3% only mothers, around 7% of were drug addicted or substance user. Ajmer district showed highest male substance user i.e. around 83% followed by 70% in Kota, 64% in Jaipur.
- There was no absolute source of obtaining food among the street children. Children gave multiple responses. They ate at home, ate left over thrown by passengers, stole food from pantry cars, scavenged dustbins, and ate religious places.
- The respondents rated gossiping with friends as a number one pass time activity, secondly they rated watching films and thirdly playing cards, fun and picnic, taking drugs/substance with friends.
- 84% children of total sample consumed various types of substances and drugs. Of which 75% children were addicted of chewing Gutkha along with other substances, around 50% children were sniffing whitener, and around 42 % were consuming alcohol along with most commonly used drugs such as cannabis, marijuana, smack etc. 36% children were chain smoker. Whitener sniffing was most common addiction in all districts 68% in Jaipur, 52% in Kota, 26% in Ajmer and 52% in Jodhpur respectively.
- Around 18% of total users were using drugs/substance less than one year and 67 % were using up to five years. There were around 11% children who had been using substance/drugs for 10 years, 21% children up to 10 times in a and 23 % children were taking more than 20 times in a day.
- It was found that around 51% children out of total sample were having health ailments like weakness, T.B., Pneumonia, Cough and Fever, Jaundice, Skin diseases, Piles, Stones etc. Of which only 35% children sought medical help and around 65% children were found careless regarding their general health.
- Almost more than half of the sample population had experienced the animal bite on streets or nearby surroundings. They were majorly bitten by dogs (76%), monkeys, rats, scorpions, snakes and pigs. They never had vaccine. **They just applied chili powder and oil over the wound.**

18. It is very unfortunate that despite free and compulsory primary education, 52% children never went school, 48% were drop out before primary, and 25% didn't complete their upper primary education. Only 2% children reached secondary.
19. Poverty or impoverished state of the family was most significant reason behind not attending and drop out the school of children. Another major factor was lack of interest in studies due to this around 24% child never went school and 19% left school before universal primary free and compulsory education.
20. It was evident in the multiple responses of the street children that they adopt a multiple range of survival means, both legal and illegal to confront the challenges of street life. 71% children adopted begging, 39% rag picking, 15% were vending water bottles, 17% children pick pocketing, drug paddling etc.,
21. The daily income of the street children was found quite different and unequal. 44% children earned Rs 50-100 per day, 27% children earned Rs100-150/day, 14% children earned Rs 150-200/day, 12 % up to Rs 50/day (small and younger children and untrained) and some of them earned above Rs 200/day (older and trained children by hook and crook managed to earn sufficient amount).
22. The respondents spent their money mainly on drug addiction. They did not like to spend money over food. Some of them occasionally sent money or gave to their parents whenever they visited their native place or family. Very few children saved their earnings. In Jodhpur, the nature of saving was found highest while in Jaipur it was the lowest. The 66 out of 200 children saved money.
23. About 51 % children of the total sample were having regular contacts (part of street families/slum dwellers) with their parents. **23% children were totally disconnected.**
24. Impoverished state was most significant factor that led 73% children to leave home. Family factors such abused and negligence by parents, alcoholic father, abuse by relatives, domestic violence, conflict among siblings, remarriage of parents, and demise of parents were the second most significant factors.
25. 20% children had been living on streets for more than five, 20% were going to complete two years of street life. Kota had highest concentration of children who were living on streets more than five years followed by Jodhpur. Around 18% children were fresh; they just spent less than six months on streets. 12% children were on streets for around two years and 11% children were experiencing street life for less than one year.
26. The street children used multiple places of living like 48% children reported that they didn't have any fixed place to live or sleep. 28% lived and slept at their homes mostly but simultaneously they used to sleep at other places due to their mobility. 28 % responded that permanently they slept and lived at railway platforms. The number of such children was found highest in Kota district followed by Jaipur and Ajmer. 13% children were living in shelter homes who recently rescued by the NGOs in Jaipur and Kota districts. Around 4% children slept and lived in rented house and 3% children used condemned building as a living or sleeping place.
27. The study found that verbal abuse and Physical torture by parents was more common in all the districts. The respondent reported sexual abuse in Ajmer, Jaipur and Jodhpur by parents, siblings and other (relatives).
28. Street children are vulnerable to exploitation at home as well on streets too. They reported multiple perpetrator of abusing them on streets altogether. The study reveals that the vendors were most dangerous for the street children as almost 90 % children accepted that mostly they were physically, verbally and mentally, sexually abused by vendors.
29. 71 % children told that Police/GRP/RPF⁴ was not sensitive for them. 23% children reported abuse and torture by employers and almost 19% children reported that older children were also a great risk for them (multiple responses).
30. The study found that cruelty and brutality was high in Jaipur (72%), followed by Ajmer (70%). In totality the RPF, Police and GRP was found insensitive towards these children. 57% children of total sample accepted that GRP and RPF had been exploiting in terms of extorting money, getting done odd jobs, expelling them from station etc. 32 % children out of total also told that GRP/RPF and Police was cruel and brutal for them in terms of locking them up, detaining in police station, booking false charges, beating etc.
31. Almost 33 % were suffering from itching and burning in urination. 28% children were having blisters on genital areas and almost 5 % were having pus on genital areas. 28 % couldn't mention exactly what type of problem they were having.
32. The study explored that 64% children were sexually active. The median age at first sexual activity was 13 years among the street children. Out of 200 children, 47 children got physically intimated once, 42 children had sex two to five times and 41 children had sex more than five times.
33. 74% respondents of total sample were not aware about HIV/AIDS while 16 % were aware about HIV/AIDS but not about STIs.
34. 59% respondent of total sample said that they knew about condom but never used.
35. It was found that 45.50% street children received the information about condom from their friends, 37% from television, 10% from advertisement and adult movie, 11.83 % from porn /adult movies.
36. Street children showed different perceptions of immediate needs. Larger number of children wanted employment or job as their immediate need or capital to start petty business. Some of them wanted food. Few of them wanted to live life with respect and dignity. Some of them expressed that they wanted to go in shelter home so that they could be able to live a better life.
37. Out of total sample 60% children were appeared dirty, wearing undersized clothes with unkempt hair. 48% children were wearing dirty and tattered clothes that were not covering their body parts. Along with this appearance, 42% children were under the influence of substance use (whitener, solvent, marijuana etc.). 5% children were found half naked only in pajamas. 13% children were found neat and clean with ok clothing. 5% children were under the influence of Alcohol in day time. Only the appearance of 10% children was found normal with so-so clothing (multiple responses).

38. The street children gave varied response on their future aspirations; most of them wanted to possess their own house, car, auto etc and wanted to get married. Some of them wanted to be a doctor, police officer, teacher, actor, dancer, guitar player etc. Some of them said that they wanted to be a Taporis ¼Viksjh½ / Bhai¼HkkbZ½. Ultimately they wanted to live a normal life like other people of the society.
39. More than 90% felt that the general public disliked them, they were seen as Taporis ¼Viksjh½ and that they should be forcefully removed from streets, while around 8 % reported that the general public was sympathetic towards them.
40. More than one third of the respondents expressed disliking for shelter homes. Few of them were escaped from shelter homes. Mostly children disliked the disciplined life of shelter homes, some of them complained about physical and sexual abuse in homes.

6. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the above findings from the study following are suggested

1. Mapping of these invisible children must be initiate and the census should include information about the runaway and missing children of the families.
2. There is also a need to think of the good and effective social work intervention to reestablish a good coping strategy for the street children. Social work intervention plan should focus to work with families of street children and dialogue between street children and their families should be created.
3. The child protection mechanism in Rajasthan that has been placed at all levels National, State, District, Block and Gram Panchayat level has to be effective and strengthen for that collaboration among the various concerned departments, cooperation with NGO and the local community should be strengthen.
4. It is very difficult to understand the present scenario of the children without their participation. Their voice should be heard while making policies, laws and programs for them.
5. Railway department, GRP and RPF needs awareness, technical knowledge of child rights and qualitative training program along with sensitization. A pressure group should be formed to implement the SOP.
6. Further studies should be made to identify and evaluate the intuitional capacity of local bodies, public/private that can help out with re-integration of these children into the society.
7. Counseling, psycho-social counseling will be helpful to curve the family problem. Counseling and support center should be establish at all level from district to Panchayat.
8. A mechanism to monitor the government officials' efficiency, implementation of programs and policies should adhere to ensure welfare, wellbeing, social security, social justice to the children in need of difficult circumstances.
9. Street educators and Junior Health workers can help street children to protect them from vulnerable diseases and health cards should issued these children so that they could avail government health facility. Health facility providers like Doctors, compounders, nurses should be sensitize towards street children.
10. Unemployment, Job security, skill training program should be integrated to eradicate the poverty of the families of street children. GoI, GoR should plan to help and support to their families.
11. Special efforts should be made to keep these children in school where not only do they run less risk of getting into trouble, but also stand to benefit by their personal intellectual development that open up better horizons for them in the future.
12. To live a life with respect and dignity they should be provide financial support in terms of loan and employment opportunities. Some respectable job opportunities and vocational training program should be planned because poverty and impoverished state of the family brings them on streets.
13. Last but not the least, street children are valuable members of society. They are resourceful, extraordinary talented, daring, and determined people who must given a chance. Their choices and stories should be listened to and learnt from. Families, community and the government need to recognize that the children are full of imagination, desires and hopes and that they must be involved in decisions that affect their lives. More should be found out about their problems and prospects and how best they can be helped.
14. Advocacy must be intensified to ensure child rights and their care and protection. NGOs, stakeholders, civil societies must take up the issues for advocacy.

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