

# Urbanization & Street Children

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**Abstract:** India is experiencing rapid urbanization, with a significant proportion of the population moving from rural to urban areas in search of better opportunities. However, urbanization has also led to the growth of street children in India. This statistical analysis aims to examine the relationship between growing urbanization and street children in India, analyze the various issues especially health issues faced by street children.

**Index Words:** Urbanization, Street Children

## 1. Introduction:

Street children are children who live and work on the streets of urban and semi-urban areas. They are children who have been abandoned or run away from their homes due to various reasons such as poverty, family problems, abuse, neglect, and other forms of violence.[1] Street children are often homeless and have no access to basic needs such as shelter, food, healthcare, education, and protection. They are exposed to various forms of abuse and exploitation such as child labor, child trafficking, and sexual abuse. The issue of street children is a global problem that affects millions of children worldwide. The issue of street children is complex and multifaceted, and there are several factors that contribute to it. Poverty is one of the major causes of street children. In many developing countries, poverty is widespread, and families struggle to provide for their basic needs. As a result, children are often sent to the streets to work and earn a living. In some cases, children are abandoned by their families due to poverty, and they end up on the streets. Family problems such as domestic violence, alcoholism, and drug abuse can also lead to children running away from home and ending up on the streets. Children who are victims of abuse and neglect may also choose to run away from home and live on the streets. In some cases, children are lured away from their homes by traffickers who promise them a better life but end up exploiting them on the streets.

## 2. Urbanization and street children

Urbanization is one of the major factors that have contributed to the increase in the number of street children around the world. Urbanization refers to the process of population growth and migration from rural to urban areas[2],[3]. As more and more people move to cities in search of better economic opportunities, urban areas become more crowded, and resources become scarce. This, in turn, leads to an increase in poverty, unemployment, and homelessness, which are all factors that contribute to the rise of street children. Rapid urbanization is a major problem in India, with millions of people moving from rural to urban areas in search of better opportunities. While urbanization can provide economic growth and development, it also brings with it a host of challenges that can negatively impact the lives of people, particularly those living in poverty. Urbanization in India is occurring at an unprecedented rate, with a significant proportion of the population moving from rural to urban areas. The proportion of the urban population in India increased from 17% in 1951 to 31% in 2011. It is projected to increase to 40% by 2030, according to the United Nations. Urbanization has led to the growth of cities and towns, which are the primary locations for street-children towns.

### Relationship between Urbanization and Street Children

The relationship between urbanization and street children in India is complex. On the one hand, urbanization has created new opportunities for street children, such as work opportunities in factories and construction sites. On the other hand, urbanization has also created new forms of exploitation and abuse for street children, such as prostitution and drug abuse. The following factors contribute to the growth of street children in urban areas [1]-[3]:

**2.1 Poverty:** Poverty is the primary reason why children end up on the streets. Urbanization has led to the growth of slums and informal settlements, where families live in poor conditions, unable to afford basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Poverty forces children to work on the streets to earn a living, exposing them to exploitation and abuse.

**2.2 Lack of Education:** Education is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty and vulnerability. However, many children in urban areas do not have access to quality education, particularly those living in slums and informal settlements. The lack of education makes children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and many end up on the streets.

**2.3 Family Breakdown:** Urbanization has led to the breakdown of traditional family structures. Families are often separated due to migration, with children left behind without proper care and supervision. Family breakdown also increases the risk of abuse and neglect, which can force children onto the streets.

**2.4 Migration:** Migration from rural to urban areas has increased with urbanization. Many families move to cities in search of better opportunities, but the lack of infrastructure and services in urban areas often leads to poverty and unemployment. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of migration, as they may not have the skills or education needed to find alternative work opportunities.

**2.5 Lack of Social Protection:** The lack of social protection for vulnerable populations is a significant issue in India. Children who are homeless or living in poverty often do not have access to social services such as healthcare, education, and protection from abuse. This makes them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and

### 3. Magnitude of problem

The exact number of street children in India is not known due to the difficulty in counting them. However, it is estimated that there are around 18 million street children in India, of which around 70% live in urban areas. Industrial towns attract a large number of street children due to the availability of work opportunities in factories and construction sites. Most street children in industrial towns are migrants from rural areas who come to the city in search of work.

#### Profile of Street Children

Street children in industrial towns come from diverse backgrounds, but they share common characteristics. They are mostly boys aged between 10 to 18 years old, although girls are also present in significant numbers. They are illiterate or have low levels of education, and most of them work in hazardous and exploitative conditions. They are often addicted to drugs and alcohol and engage in criminal activities such as theft, prostitution, and drug peddling.

#### 4. Consequences of Street Children:

The consequences of street children are numerous and far-reaching. Street children are vulnerable to a wide range of health problems such as malnutrition, respiratory infections, and communicable diseases. They are also at risk of physical and sexual abuse, as well as drug addiction and mental health problems. Street children are also denied access to education, which is essential for their development and future prospects. Without education, they are likely to remain trapped in poverty and may never have the opportunity to reach their full potential. In addition, street children are often involved in criminal activities such as theft, drug trafficking, and prostitution. They are also at risk of being recruited into armed groups, which can lead to them being exposed to violence and conflict.

#### 4.1 Exploitation and Abuse

Street children in industrial towns are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. They are often forced to work in hazardous and exploitative conditions, such as working in factories and construction sites.

They are paid very low wages and are often subjected to physical and psychological abuse by their employers. They are also vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, as they are often forced to engage in prostitution to earn a living. They are also at risk of drug addiction and are often used by drug dealers to sell drugs on the streets.

#### 4.2 Health and Well-being

Street children in industrial towns have poor health and well-being due to their living and working conditions. They are exposed to pollution, unsanitary conditions, and inadequate nutrition, which make them vulnerable to various diseases. They also lack access to healthcare services and are often unable to afford medical treatment. They are also at risk of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, due to the trauma and abuse they face on the streets. Health Problems of Street Children are:

##### 4.2.1 Malnutrition

Malnutrition is a major health problem that affects street children. Malnutrition is the result of a lack of sufficient nutrients in the body, which can lead to stunted growth, weakened immune systems, and other health problems. Street children are often deprived of access to healthy and nutritious food, which puts them at risk of malnutrition. They may rely on food scraps or have limited access to food, which can lead to chronic hunger and malnutrition.

##### 4.2.2 Respiratory Infections:

Respiratory infections are common among street children due to their exposure to air pollution, dust, and other environmental pollutants. These infections can lead to chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, and other respiratory problems. Street children who live and work in congested areas are particularly at risk of respiratory infections due to the high levels of pollution in these areas.

##### 4.2.3 Skin Diseases:

Street children are at risk of various skin diseases such as scabies, lice, and fungal infections. These diseases are often the result of poor hygiene and living conditions. Street children may not have access to clean water, soap, or other personal hygiene products, which can lead to the spread of these diseases.

##### 4.2.4 Dental Problems:

Dental problems such as cavities, gum disease, and tooth decay are common among street children. These problems are often the result of poor oral hygiene and a lack of access to dental care. Street children may not have access to toothbrushes, toothpaste, or regular dental check-ups, which can lead to these dental problems.

#### 4.2.5 Mental Health Problems:

Street children are also at risk of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These problems may result from the trauma of living on the streets, abuse, neglect, or other forms of violence. Street children may also suffer from the stress and anxiety of living in unsafe and uncertain environments.

#### 4.3 Education

Street children in industrial towns have limited access to education. Most of them are illiterate or have low levels of education, which limits their ability to find alternative work opportunities. The lack of education also makes them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, as they are unaware of their rights and are unable to defend themselves. Many street children drop out of school due to poverty or family breakdown, which perpetuates the cycle of poverty and vulnerability.

#### 5. Analysis

The following analysis provides an overview of the current situation of street children in India and their relationship with urbanization.

**5.1 Geographic Distribution:** According to the 2011 census, the highest number of street children in India was found in the state of Uttar Pradesh (270,144), followed by Maharashtra (179,980) and Andhra Pradesh (113,295). The majority of street children in India are found in urban areas, with Mumbai and Delhi having the highest number of street children.

**5.2 Age and Gender:** The majority of street children in India are boys, with estimates suggesting that around 85% of street children are male. The age distribution of street children varies, but the majority are between the ages 5-17 with a significant proportion dropping out before completing primary education. Lack of access to education is a significant issue for street children, with many forced to work to support their families.

**5.3 Economic Status:** Street children in India are among the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society. According to a study conducted by UNICEF, around 50% of street children in India are malnourished, and more than 80% do not have access to basic healthcare. Street children often work in hazardous and exploitative conditions, with many involved in activities such as begging, rag picking, and working in construction sites.

**5.4 Exploitation and Abuse:** Street children in India are exposed to various forms of exploitation and abuse. A study conducted by Save the Children found that around 70% of street children in India had experienced physical abuse, and around 60% had been sexually abused. Many street children are forced into prostitution, drug abuse, and other forms of criminal activity.

#### Conclusion

The growth of street children in India is a complex issue, with various factors contributing to the problem. Urbanization is one of the primary factors, with the growth of cities and towns creating new opportunities for street children, but also exposing them to various forms of exploitation, health problems and abuse. Poverty, lack of education, family breakdown, migration, and lack of social protection are other factors contributing to the problem. The statistical analysis presented in this article highlights the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need for action to address the issue. Governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders must work together to provide support and protection for street children, including access to education, healthcare, and social services, and work towards creating an enabling environment for their reintegration into society.

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