



# LIFE ON KANPUR STREET: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

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***Abstract:*** Substance Use and Homelessness are an important concern affecting street children. Street and its associated life-styles make street children vulnerable to the use of psycho-active substances. The present paper thus measures the causes and impact of streetism on the lives of children living in Kanpur City of Uttar Pradesh state grouped under 5-18 years of age.

***Key Terms:*** Street Children, Homelessness, Substance Use, Streetism

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding why street children live on the streets, how they spend their time and different types of problems they face, are few of the questions which have been tried to explain in the present paper. Since, the phenomena of homelessness and substance use among street children in urban cities is not new to any of us, still a very few data and researches are available related to the present subject. Thus, this paper provides an attempt to reflect factors associated to the lives of street children.

### Who are Street Children?

Street Children are those children who are majorly dependent on the streets for their survival. They are one of the most vulnerable groups of urban poor. Usually children who are orphans and who have lost one or both of their parents constitutes a group of children who live on the streets and are homeless.

UNICEF's definition includes three different categories of street children:

- Children 'of' the street: who live and sleep in public places without their families
- Children 'on' the street: who work on the streets and in the night return to their shelters
- Street-living children: who live with their families on the streets

### What is Homelessness?

The children who live on the streets face the most acute problems related to shelter. They are vulnerable to all ranges of weather conditions be it the burning heat of summer, the rainstorms or the chilly winter days-nights. These children do not suffer merely from physical homelessness, but also from a psychological homelessness since they have no place to call as their homes.

### What do you mean by Substance Use among Street Children?

The toxic, harmful, dangerous and fatal elements such as alcohol and drugs which adversely affects the mental, emotional and psychological status of street children to which these children are seen addicted too, describes the 'Substance Usage' term among street children. The non-medical use of chemical substances in order to achieve alterations in psychological functioning has been referred to substance usage. Many street children are seen using psychoactive substances in an attempt to escape from the overwhelming pressure of their traumatic past and their daily problems. Children unknowingly start using such substances and later on they get addicted to them to such an extent that it becomes their necessity for every day and without having them they can't resist. In order to consume them these children can go beyond any situations. Many children are seen being involved in illegal activities such as committing crimes like theft, rape, murder etc.

## **STREET CHILDREN IN KANPUR**

Nearly, 18 million children live on the streets of India. India is often considered as a poor and underdeveloped nation. Here, many children play, work and live on the streets which they consider their homes. Children are seen earning money on and near the streets by selling newspapers, flowers, washing cars, etc. to help their families to meet their daily necessities. They are generally poor and are given very few rupees by their employers even after working day and night. It is heartbreaking to know that most of these street children are orphans and they have no one to take care for them. They consider these streets as their permanent homes.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Millions of children across the world are forced to seek survival on the streets of urban cities. They work and live alone and sometimes with their families without adequate food, shelter, education, affection and social security, leaving them extremely vulnerable with many of their physical, mental and social needs unfulfilled. It is often seen that these marginalized children fall into patterns of drug use in order to cope with their adverse circumstances and situations of life. The nature of continuous exposure to the street and its associated life-styles make street children vulnerable to the use of psychoactive substances. Street children's often consumes alcohol, tobacco and fatal inhalants. World Health Organization estimates that globally, 25-90 percent of street children are indulge in substance use. According to UNICEF, there are more than 500,000

street children in India who live and work in inhuman conditions and are at high risk of substance use. This number is a drastic underestimation. The Indian embassy estimated 314,700 street children in cities such as Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Kanpur, Bangalore and around 1,000,000 alone in Delhi. Broken family is taken by various experts to be the major causes for streetism among children (Gobena, 1994). The author describes that family disruption is prevalent among rural families with poor economic conditions which leads to the runaway of young children from the poor families living in rural areas. Also, the urbanization process involves rural-urban migration among children of rural and backward areas. Many observations have identified that most of the children who run away from their homes come to big cities through railways and therefore there is a need to safeguard and provide care to these children and other such children who live around railway stations. So that, these children could be contacted and proper care could be given to them. Thus, streetism exposes the children to a variety of health problems, hazards and diseases.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the phenomenon of homelessness and substance use among street children.
2. To identify causes responsible for children to live on the streets.
3. To study the impact of street-life on children.

## IMPACT OF STREETISM

Streetism is a relatively new term which means living on the streets or being of the streets. It is sometimes used to describe the street children especially in Anglophone Africa. Streetism exposes about street children who faces a lot of health problems and other fatal hazards. Most of the children live, work, sleep and wake up on the streets. Streets are better to be called as their permanent homes. Major diseases affecting street children include malaria, fever, cold, rashes, cholera, headache and skin infections.

### ▪ CAUSES

There are numerous causes for this problem. Children have lost contact with their parents or families which results the loss of the children and their identity on or of the streets. Some children are the offspring of prostitutes, so they live on the streets. Some families reject their children if they are handicapped. A number of factors contribute to the global rise of street children, push factors including: poverty, violence at homes, neglected by their step-parents, abuse; pull factors including attraction of city-life, peer pressure.

## ▪ CHALLENGES

Life on the streets expose these children to a world of drug addiction, sexual abuse, physical, mental or verbal exploitation, labour exploitation, involvement in criminal activities and violence done to them by police or criminal gangs. Many of the street children who have run away from home have done so because they were beaten or sexually abused. But unfortunately, their homelessness leads to further abuse through exploitative child labour and prostitution.

## ▪ CONSEQUENCES

Due to no home, children are homeless. They hardly get enough to eat, they lack have nutritious diet. This leads to malnutrition, anaemia and vitamin deficiencies. Children are also seen with injuries and the cut marks on their bodies. Their injuries may be caused while intoxicated or when depressed. The rate of injuries is usually higher for male than for female street children. Having unreliable access to food, no education and improper medical treatment are the problems faced by them while living on the streets. Children also get addicted to fatal drugs and abuse.

## CONCLUSION

Street children are minors who live and survive on the streets. They often grow up in public landfills, train stations, over and under the bridges of the world's major urban cities. Thus, homelessness among street children is not a recent phenomenon in urban cities moreover it is multifaceted. The combination of familial economic, social factors constitutes an important role in their poor status. It is therefore very difficult to single out one or more causes. Many children are seen working as child labourers. The work they do are rag-picking, street vending, selling flowers, washing cars, begging etc. Poor health is a chronic problem among street children. Half of all children in India are malnourished, but for street children, the proportion is much higher. These children are not only underweight, but their growth has often been stunted. Seen as marginals, street children are often victims of discrimination. Not only they are exposed and susceptible to disease but they are also unlikely to be vaccinated or receive medical treatment. Most street children have not been vaccinated against TB, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Polio, and Measles. They are far more sexually active thus hugely are at risk of contracting the sexual diseases. Consequently, they are often associated with the dangers of the streets. It is often difficult for these children to reintegrate into society.

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