

Addicted Children Living in the Street in Morocco: Marrakesh as a Case Study

Soumaya TIFNOUTI

Professor and Researcher, Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakesh, Morocco, Department of English Studies, Humanities

Abstract: *This study aims to explore the phenomenon of homelessness among children in Morocco. Poverty, broken families, addiction are the main reasons for this social problem. These factors have the potential of seriously affecting children throughout their life. The prevalence of homeless children living in the streets of Moroccan cities is dramatically high. We wanted to understand better what drives these children to live in the streets. Hence, we investigated their daily life in the city of Marrakesh.*

Keywords: Morocco, children living in the street, addiction, poverty

1. Introduction

This research attempts to study the phenomenon of homeless children in Morocco. Addiction in children living in the street is a crucial problem in Morocco. This phenomenon needs an extensive investigation into multiple issues driving these children to live in the streets and become addicted. We wanted to know how Moroccan society with Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations are struggling to eradicate this epidemic. Also, the study looks into the causes leading to this social dilemma as poverty and broken families. These factors are the causes that severely affect children throughout their life. The predominance of homeless children living in the streets in Moroccan cities is desperately high. NGOs are working very hard to provide shelters for these children. Our goal is to understand the reasons driving these young children to live in the street. And how and why they shift to addiction at a very young age. Homeless or street children are one of the fastest-growing phenomena in Moroccan society. Currently, we realized the threat of this issue when we got interested in this topic. They live abused and vilified in the streets daily. The majority of the streets of Moroccan cities are bursting with children in large numbers, dirty and sniffing the glue all the time. Morocco's Secretariat of State of Family, Solidarity and Social Actions estimates there are between 10.000 and 30.000 street children across Morocco.¹ Aicha CHANNA, a Moroccan Human Rights Activist, declares that twenty-four children out of 100 born abandoned every day in Morocco.²

1) The psychological and socioemotional state of street children.

The emotional, social, and physical development of young children living in the street in Morocco has an immediate impact on their growth and evolution. A secure environment, the presence of parents, and encounters are critical aspects for a child growing into a teenager and eventually an adult. Street children in Morocco do not have any skills to help them achieve their goals. They live in the street without a family to protect them or provide for them. They are found everywhere in the cities of Morocco and are victims of the socioeconomic environment. They endure so many problems and experience physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

The circumstances of homelessness among children are numerous and diverse. Poverty is the main reason behind this issue, followed by single mothers abandoning their kids. Family problems appear at the forefront of the factors that contribute to the spread of this matter. We find those children everywhere, in the corners of the streets, under vehicles or parked cars, and inside abandoned houses. The life of many children turns into pain, suffering, and misery. Those unusual circumstances are psychologically destroying their childhood to make them monsters in the eyes of society. Children should be at school and with their families and not in the streets sniffing glue and sleeping under parked cars. They have to deal with the harsh living conditions that push them to use drugs to forget that they are, in a way, rejected by their own families and by society. Broken hopes, perversion, and absence of affection are the only reality they know. Some of these kids become experts in begging and crime. Others accept any task to guarantee their daily sustenance and drug charges. Many children run away from their homes to escape the severe circumstances they live in, but neither life nor society nor even the street has mercy on them. They become prey to physical and mental exploitation that drives them into crimes and addiction.

The attitude of society toward street children is a negative one. Also, the reaction of people to street kids is rough because they always ignore them. Those actions affect these children psychologically and intensify their hatred and resentment toward society as a whole. As a result, many of them become pickpockets, criminals, burglars, and housebreakers. Whatever their reasons are, these children need help and protection against abuse, crime, and any other risks in their daily life. GOs and NGOs try to fix this problem by helping those street children to reintegrate into society through education and job opportunities.

The study of addicted children living in the street was challenging because many refused to answer our questions or talk about their families or their current situation. We wanted to know how these kids survive the cruelty of life without anyone besides them? Where are their parents? What are the causes leading them to be in the street instead of living a healthy childhood? How did they become addicted? And is it a choice to live in the streets? How do they feel about their situation and society?

2) The factors driving Moroccan children to live in the street and become addicted

Childhood should be the most preserved period in life. However, this is not the case for some children in Morocco. Many Moroccan kids face the harshness of life by themselves. It becomes impossible to go out in Morocco without coming across a street child. They are practically in every corner. Street children in Morocco are approximately 30.000 kids in the country. Many circumstances force those minors to live in the streets and submit to the cruelty of life. Those factors can be personal, social, economic, or other.

1.1 Personal factors

When we talk about youth, we refer to adolescence. The conflict between a child and his parents during his teen years reveals constant quarrels between them. That shows that many kids leave their homes during this period and end up in the streets and become addicted to drugs, tobacco, alcohol, or get involved in crimes and sexual relationships at a very young age.

1.2 Family factors

The deprivation of thousands of kids from their families is one of the causes of addiction among them. Some of them are born in the street, and others are the outcome of sexual relationships or rape. Divorce is another aspect of family separation affecting children and leading them to live in the street. Researchers have shown that children who experienced the divorce of their parents are more likely to get addicted and involved in crimes or live in the streets.

1.3 Economic factors

Poverty comes at the peak of the causes of homeless children. Morocco is one of the developing countries still suffering from poverty which is the main reason impacting those children living in the street. Moroccan society suffers from many social problems, and homeless children are one of the difficulties this society should solve by building shelters and providing for these children.

Poverty has a considerable impact on Moroccan families since it directly affects the lives of children. Several minors are obliged to live in the street and become beggars, thieves, addicted, and criminals. Another sort of children come from rural communities to the city looking for a job to help their families. However, they crash into the harsh reality of the cities and end up in the streets. These kids become alcoholics, drug-addicted, and suffer from sexual abuse. They experience various emotional and mental issues. Many homeless children are in the streets because their parents cannot provide them with the necessities to live like ordinary children of their age. They are not enjoying their rights to education and healthcare.

The Moroccan economy has developed quickly during the last two decades, and the changes in economic structure and government have influenced the opportunities available to families with no income. It is undeniable that poverty and homelessness are interconnected. Street children are simply victims of the social system of any given society. The

attitudes of society toward addicted children living in the street

Across the urban districts of Morocco, we observe so many addicted children trying to find shelters in the street to spend the cold nights of winter. Lack of economic and educational opportunities is the major cause driving these kids to be addicted and live in the streets. Those children do not have any education, and many engage in crimes, drug use, and early sexual activity. Subsequently, several factors contribute to this street children issue, yet the results are similar: those kids end up addicted, homeless, and many times criminals.

2. Daily life of addicted children in the street: Marrakesh as a case study

In Marrakesh, there are hundreds of children who either work or live in the street. These children tend to spend time together in groups gambling, drinking alcohol, sniffing the glue, or consuming drugs, especially at night, predominantly in some particular areas and corners. Those areas in Marrakesh are known to be dangerous, and no one can venture there at night. The vast majority of street children drop out of school or never went to school. Ignorance and unawareness among this group are prevailing, the reason why they engage in crimes.

2.1 Drug abuse

Glue-sniffing is the most common substance abuse for these street children. Glue can be bought legally by anyone at any age in almost any shop in Morocco. We did some interviews with street children. We included just those who were willing to answer our questions. They reveal they regularly sniff the glue. To the question: why are you sniffing the glue? The answer was unanimous. They sniff glue to escape from the harsh reality of their condition and avoid thinking of any of their difficulties. Some of the children declared that they drink alcohol daily. They also smoke hashish which is available everywhere in Marrakesh. These children become anxious, worried, troubled, upset, and aggressive due to their dependence on different drugs and inhaling the glue.

2.2 Addicted Street children and society

The attitude of society defines how the communities deal with these street kids. A street kid is labeled as nonconformist by society because he is different. These kids execute illegal activities to survive in the street. Society rejects them, blames them for their condition, and does practically nothing to help them split up living in the streets. The WHO 2000 identifies street children as marginalized and rejected by any society. The society promotes the action of "street educators"³, who make them aware of the importance of being educated and integrate them into the community. Street children constantly live in dangerous situations. Developing intervention programs to support these young children is complicated. It is hard to conduct an efficient study on these children living in the street as they move on continually and are rarely visible in

the daytime. In addition, they are skeptical and afraid of the police or any strangers addressing them.⁴

3. Conclusion

A lot of media attention on street children has focused on India and Brazil while neglecting Morocco. In 2004, the UNICEF Program Evaluation reported that the number of children living in the street increased dramatically.⁵ The report also blames this rise to poverty, family break-ups, school drop-out, loss of cultural and social purposes.

These children are marginalized, abused, and ill-treated by an often fearful society, and their hopes remain vague and dark. Furthermore, the absence of investigation into these matters surrounding the addicted children in Morocco makes planning interventions particularly challenging.

Morocco is the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to ask about the well-being of children by approving the International Convention for the rights of children.⁷ Morocco agrees to join the United Nations for Children Rights (UNICEF) in 1992, and it set its first Conference on child rights in 1994, then created the National Observatory of child rights in 1995. With the responsibility of continuous monitoring of the situation of children.

The state considers children, either directly through official quarters or through institutions that enjoy administrative and financial autonomy. The constitutional adjustment in 2011 has given much importance to child protection in Morocco by including more governmental partners in this matter.¹²

A child needs to grow up in a safe environment in suitable living conditions, aware of the presence of his parents to develop into a teenager and eventually an adult. Unfortunately, many children in Morocco are not privileged enough to have this type of positive experience in their childhood to help them achieve a fulfilling future. Sadly, thousands of children live in the street without a home or family to look after them. Children ages 0-14 make up about 26 % of the population of Morocco.³

To sum up, many organizations are working in the field of child protection in Morocco. Many specialized in street children. Consequently, street children are part of society as any other citizen. They are victims of the social conditions of life. Moroccan government launched many actions and programs to help those children. The awareness of this phenomenon is crucial in society. However, a fair fund aimed to resolve this phenomenon is not yet confirmed. The absence of actual data about the exact number of street children lacks in Morocco.

Finally, we get to several outcomes through the different works made in this study. The circumstances driving those children to the street are uncountable and differ from one case to another. However, the leading causes remain the same. Poverty and social difficulties come at the peak of the reasons behind children living homeless and addicted. Many street kids live in inhuman conditions, stripped bare of their simple social rights and rejected by their society. Being homeless suggests being exposed to a wide range of

exploitation and abuse, and those children are exposed daily to all kinds of pain and misery. Those factors drive these children to become prostitutes, drug dealers (selling weed), burglars, and criminals.

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