The Effects of Socio-Political Factors on Street Children in Eldoret, Kenya

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Abstract: *The problem of street children has been an existing and growing phenomenon worldwide. In Kenyan, street children problem is expected to grow further given the rapid rate of urbanization and its resultant impacts on the society today. Street children continue to face social and political challenges in their struggle to participate in the wider community. In emergency contexts, such as the 2007/2008 PEV in Kenya, the security and well being of children is undermined as they become targets of security agencies as perpetrators of violence due to their visibility in the streets. Moreover, the already tense relationship within the society exacerbate as they are viewed as the major suspects of looting and vandalism. Despite government and NGO interventions towards alleviation of the problem of street children, there is a lack of comprehensive approaches that yield any significant impact in addressing specific challenges of street children. Study findings show that street children in Eldoret face myriad social-political challenges which included violence from themselves, security agents, business community and the public. The study further established that there was poor coordination and duplication of services provided by the government and nongovernmental organizations which often had a poor impact on the street children situation. The study suggests that government and other stakeholders should conduct community awareness creation and sensitization on the challenges facing street children at the community level; need for a sector-wide training approach for service providers involved in dealing with street children at all levels be developed by the government in collaboration with stakeholders to provide holistic services to street children; and government agencies mandated with street children services should be well staffed to enable them deliver quality services to street children. There is also need for establishment of information desks at police stations to identify, track and follow up with street children whom are picked up from the town streets.*

Keywords: Socio-political factors, street children, Eldoret, Kenya

1. Introduction

The problem of street children has been an existing and growing phenomenon in many countries of the world and in particular, Kenya and is expected to grow given the rapid rate of urbanization and its resultant impacts on the society today. Street children continue to face social and political challenges in their struggle to participate in the wider community. In emergency contexts such as the 2007/2008 PEV in Kenya, the security and well being of children was undermined as they became targets of security agencies as perpetrators of violence due to their visibility in the streets. Moreover, the already tense relationship within the society exacerbate as they are viewed as the major suspects of looting and vandalism.

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the primary function of States is to provide protection to children, especially for the most vulnerable. However, governments of countries where the problem is most acute have been unable to give it the attention it deserves, and have thus, contributed to its persistence. Despite proliferation of soft legislation aimed at the protection of human rights for street children. It is important to recognize that these instruments are used as political documents and that their implementation depends on the willingness of government to adhere to them. In the current state of affairs the exact number of street children is impossible to quantify but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world.

It is likely that the numbers are increasing as the global population grows and as urbanization continues apace (UNICEF, 2005). It is difficult to get an accurate appraisal of street children from sources that have a stake in describing the children in a certain way. The press, as well as the international and national organizations that exist to provide for the children, exaggerate their numbers and the degree of the children's emotional problems and delinquency (Aptekar, 2007).

According to Boakye-Boaten (2006), the social and political accountability of most African societies on street children is non- existent, and to a large extent not challenged either by internal or external elements. The plight of these children is thus left in their own hands or on some few effective Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who are limited by their functions and resources to deal effectively with the situation. The Post Election Violence (PEV) experienced in Kenya in 2007/2008 has been identified as contributing to significant increases in numbers of street children in major urban centres. In Thika, AfCiC-Kenya (2008), an organization, which had successfully reduced the number of street children in the town witnessed a surge of young boys and girls returning to the streets in search of food, collecting scrap metal and getting involved in commercial sex work. In Eldoret, UNICEF (2011) reports 800-1500 street children now on Eldoret streets and admissions in the Children's Remand Home based in Eldoret town increased significantly in 2008 PEV.

Studies have indicated that there might be a link between violence and the onset of street children. Veale (1992) in a comparative study of street children in mid 19lh century Ireland and the current Sudanese street children notes that civil unrest was the reason for the origins of street children in both countries. Civil unrest dating from the Mau Mau struggle for independence has been connected to the origins of Kenyan street children (Nowrojee, 1990). There are also many street children in South Africa, where their high

numbers have been related to the country's violent political problems (Swart, 1988). The Commission of Inquiry into the Post Election Violence (CIPEV) said that, between 1992 and1996, the number of street children increased by 300% in just four years. Many of the children, who are now adults, are the product of displacement by ethnic past violence and are particularly exposed to crime and violence both as victims and perpetrators.

The UNICEF/Save the Children Rift Valley Street Children Profiling Project Report (2011) found out that the main identified push factors included hunger (59%), abuse at home (23%), post-election violence (21%), and high cost of education (21%). In order to survive in such hostile environments street children are an easy target for recruitment. Perez (2007) notes two limitations emanating from the mechanisms of member states; one is that the reporting system is weak and in most cases, states do not commit themselves to implement the rights recognized in the CRC or that the recommendations made by the Committee. Secondly, street children are given very little attention in these reports as there is no specific headline for street children. Normally they appear under the headings of separation from parents, juvenile justice, economic exploitation, but more frequently under the headline of "other types of exploitation" provided by article 36 of the CRC. The implication from this is that given their exclusion from government reports one can only conclude that they are in the risk of not being given due consideration in government policies and programmes.

Political manipulation interference has been identified as an issue that predominantly affects the youth in Africa. Injustices in society create discontent among school going youth and politicians take advantage of this anger to influence students to take up political causes in their home areas. This was especially true during the political violence of 2007/2008 where many students were propagators of violence. Unsubstantiated reports say that local politicians instigated the spate of violence by inciting the youth. Rizzini, (1996) concludes that one of the reasons that make us think that street children are being ignored is that the problem of marginalised children in the streets have to this day not been tackled by through serious and politically viable proposals to improve income distribution, education and health. Therefore, street children continuously live in inhumane conditions, suffering from hunger, harassment, diseases and physical abuse, without education or health care. The relationship between street children and security agencies and the public has always remained synonymous with suspicion and violence. UNDP, (1992) report that street children are denied rights such as personal security, political representation and their disadvantages conflict with the principles of equality of opportunity and the rule of law. They are also deprived of social respect and of a mere measure of power to control the course of their lives, they are subjected to abuse, they experience dangerous conditions on the street, and are perceived as a threat to society (Ataov and Haider, 2006; De Venanzi, 2003). CRADLE, Undugu Society of Kenya and The Consortium for Children Services (2004) note that there is lack of a comprehensive and concise interpretation of the term 'street children' and that lack of clarity in its usage have made it difficult to obtain

exact estimates of how many children fall into this category in Kenya. Different methodologies and definitions among government and NGO sources have produced exaggerated, under-estimated or often wildly conflicting statistics. The implication here is that street children do not benefit from well designed interventions to address their plight in government policy documents due to poor presentation.

Ayuku, (2004) notes the influx of street children in Eldoret due to the 2007 post-election crisis including violence and displacement of persons. As a fact, the book notes the political involvement as a public health and welfare matter since the 1991-1993 ethnic clashes, when the Kikuyu, Luhya and Luo ethnic groups were affected most. Now, like previously noted in the book, street children meet and live at 'congregation sites' also known as 'Barracks'. They live as 'undocumented' refugees at variious 'camps'. Due to their exposure to violence both at home and on the street; street children grow into adults who engage in criminal activities thus threatening security of the public. In a report by Ringa and Machuhi (2008) one security guard was killed and another was fighting for his life at Coast General Hospital in Mombasa after a vicious attack by street children. Living outside the protection of responsible adults, street children become easy and silent targets for abuse by police and society at large, they lack protection and social services such as health and education they easily acquire anti social behavior which is an impediment to the development of the nation.

The challenges that street children continue to face after ramifications of the 2008 PEV clearly indicate social problem that justifies this study. Thus the situation necessitates an in-depth understanding and investigation to understand the challenges facing street children and recommend effective measures through which their plight can be addressed. It's upon this background that this study sought to establish the social-political factors affecting street children after the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Eldoret town Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

2. Research Methodology

This paper is based on a study conducted between March and June 2013 in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu County. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design which targeted street children, social workers from NGO and officers and from department of Children and Eldoret Municipality. Data was collected using questionnaires for street children, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with three groups of street children and one FGD with social workers and key informant interviews were conducted with children officers and municipal officers. The unit of analysis was a street child. The paper is an outcome of one of the objectives of the study which examined the socio-political factors affecting street children in Eldoret town. The criterion for selecting the area of study was based on the fact that the town was hard hit by post-election violence of 2007/2008 in Kenya prompting the government and international agencies such as Save the Children, World Vision, and USAID among others to launch various interventional programmes for street children. The paper concludes by giving recommendations to the government, street children and

relevant development stakeholders for policy making to promote and strengthen child protection activities.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Social and political factors affecting street children in Eldoret Town

The study sought to establish the social and political factors affecting street children while on the streets. The study looked into aspects such as access to educational facilities, access to healthcare services and street children's participation in socio-political activities within the Eldoret town. All the street children sampled for the survey indicated that they participated in socio-economic activities as highlighted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Economic activities undertaken by street children in EldoretTown

Economic activities	Frequency	%
Begging	9	20.0
Selling drugs to children	5	11.1
Carrying luggage	4	8.9
Collecting and selling scrap metal and plastics	7	15.6
Begging, Gambling, Hawking and Car Parking	9	20.0
Commercial Sex Worker	2	4.4
Fetching water and cleaning business premises	2	4.4
Pick – Pocketing	3	6.7
Selling vegetables and food to street children	2	4.4
Peeling potatoes	1	2.2
Selling paper bags	1	2.2
Total	**45**	**100.0**

Majority of the children involved themselves in begging and accounted for 20.0 % along with begging, gambling, hawking and serving as parking boys. Collecting and selling scrap metals and plastics was also a favourable economic activity among the street children with 15.6 % indicating this as their occupation. Focus Group Discussions with the street children revealed that they are paid Kshs 30 per kilogram of either material. However, social workers indicated that they are sometimes given a raw deal by the scrap metal dealers where they would tamper with the scales to get more material for cheaper prices.

The researcher therefore sought to establish if indeed children suffered from illnesses during their time in the streets in order to document their experiences while seeking for treatment. Table 4.7 below presents the children responses where 60.0 % indicated they have been sick compared to 40.0 % who said no. Further the study sought to identify what ailments or diseases street children in Eldoret town commonly suffered from which are presented in Figure 4.
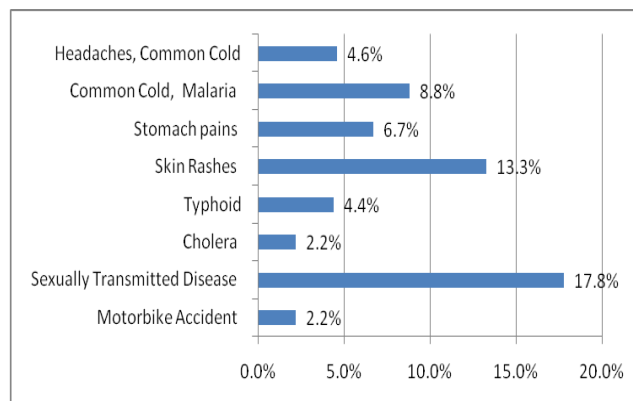

Figure 1: Sicknesses Commonly Suffered by Respondents

As illustrated in Figure 1 above, majority of street children had suffered from one or more sexually transmitted diseases including gonorrhoea and spyphillis and these accounted for 17.8 %. This finding implies that street children are involved in unprotected sexual activities which has led to their vulnerability to contracting HIV/ AIDS. This finding is similar to that of the SNV/GTZ (2002) where street children in the streets of Nairobi during interviews and workshops, they identified the negative effects of sexual relationships as HIV/AIDS, STDs including syphilis and gonorrhoea. Focus group discussions with social workers revealed that sexual activities were rampant between the street children themselves and also with the community members. Taxi operators and watchmen indeed had sexual relations with street girls and this has contributed to the increase of street families as study findings show.

Skin rashes were also a common occurrence among the street children with 13.3 % indicating they had suffered from this kind of ailment. Common colds and malaria combinations were also present and were represented at 8.8 %. Similar to this study, UNICEF (2003) observed that many street children look sick, and suffer from coughs, watering eyes and sores. UNICEF further observed that the street children also look filthy, and live in surroundings with poor sanitation which could result in spread of diseases like cholera and dysentery.Eldoret town like other major towns in Kenya has also seen an increase in motocrcycles where they are the preferred mode of transport. As such it was observed that the street children were involved in motorcycle accidents where 2.2% indicated this as a form of sickness or ailment suffered.

The researcher further sought to ascertain where street children seek health services given that they were suffering from particular ailments. Public hospitals were the main source of treatment that street children cited and this accounted for 28.9 % of those who had suffered from ailments. The study revealed that 11.1 % acknowledged having sought treatment from public facilities and had to meet the cost of their medicine. The Moi Referral and Teaching Hospital was the main source of treatment where street children indicated that they were asked to buy their own medicine from chemists. The findings imply that street children are accorded the same treatment as children from home that may have access to medicine with support from their guardians. Street children were at a disadvantage since

they may not be able to have the financial capacity to acquire this important medication.

4. Political Factors Affecting Street Children in Eldoret Town

The researcher sought to identify political factors affecting street children. Political factors facing street children include lack and poor of protection of their rights as children, actual and perceived conflict with the law and their inability to defend the infringement of their rights. In the sample 26.7% indicated that they had been arrested compared to 71.1% who indicated no. As illustrated in Figure 5 below there were several reasons for which street children were arrested in Eldoret town. Children were usually arrested during occasional swoops by police in Eldoret town. Interviews revealed that there was no clear approach to conducting these arrests which were mostly influenced by any security threats or occurrences that may have happened where street children were mostly perceived as the culprits. This implies that their rights as individual citizens are usually contravened based purely on a circumstantial evidence which is a threat to their political and human rights.

Loitering in the streets was a major reason leading to arrests as well as being found in the possession of scrap metal
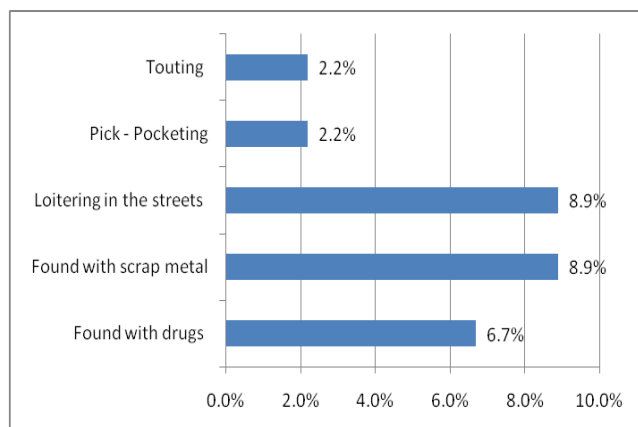

Figure 2: Reasons for Arrests among Respondents

The researchers further sought to establish the experiences of street children during and after their arrest. Figure 3 below illustrates violent beatings from police officers and other inmates' occurrence from the responses which was represented at 6.7%. Children also expressed that they were usually detained with no food for several days the police stations and these accounted for 6.7%. According to Wernham (2004) and Roy & Wong (2006), street children are more likely than most children to come into actual or perceived conflict with the law; and in the first place and at the same time, once within the system, they are less able to defend themselves against infringements of their rights." Among the respondents 4.4% indicated that they were remanded for months with no trials or any judicial process being undertaken at the Children Remand Home (CRH) within the outskirts of Eldoret town. Key informant interviews revealed that one of the challenges in protecting and safeguarding the rights of street children was that when the court orders for a child to be committed to a CRH, they don't take time to gather all the information concerning the

which accounted for 8.9% of the sample. This confirms our earlier finding of the large number of street children who were involved in dealing with scrap metal collection and sale. Drug possession was also presented in the responses at 6.7% where street children were commonly found with bhangi (Marijuana). Drugs abuse was a prominent past time activity among the street children. Drug abused included sniffing glue, bhang, changaa and busaa. During an FGD with the children one participant indicated that:

"I sniff glue because it helps me not to feel hungry and feel cold at night because I sleep on the verandah." Pick-pocketing and touting were also observed to be reasons that had led to arrests among 2.2 % of the sample. Touting was also another reason leading to arrests where street children were found touting at the Eldoret town bus terminus. Street children indicated that they were occasionally given the opportunity to persuade passengers to board matatu for Public Service vehicles (PSVs) for a relatively lower fee than the normal rates. This happened mostly during evening hours when passengers are rushing to their homes after work. Perez (2007) observes that children arrested for vagrancy or begging are considered offenders in connection with acts that would not be punishable if committed by an adult.

child thus, it becomes difficult to assist the child appropriately. Another challenge identified through key informant interviews was that street children did not give true background information which could be used by the social workers in taking any further action such as trying to establish why they are in the streets in order to take appropriate action. Lack of proper facilities for arrested street children was identified where 2.2% indicated that they slept on the floor during their time in custody in police stations. There were also children who were arrested but later released by police officers without any action being taken and this accounted for 2.2%. They indicated that they paid for their freedom since at their time of arrest they had some money with which they bribed the officers in order to be released by police officers without any action being taken and this accounted for 2.2%. Street children indicated that they paid for their freedom since at their time of arrest they had some money with which they bribed the officers in order to release them with. This finding is supported by Perez (2007) who asserts that governments frequently put forth the idea of improving care for marginalized children, but in practice, these street children will probably end up as criminals because almost no public funds are allocated to support them.
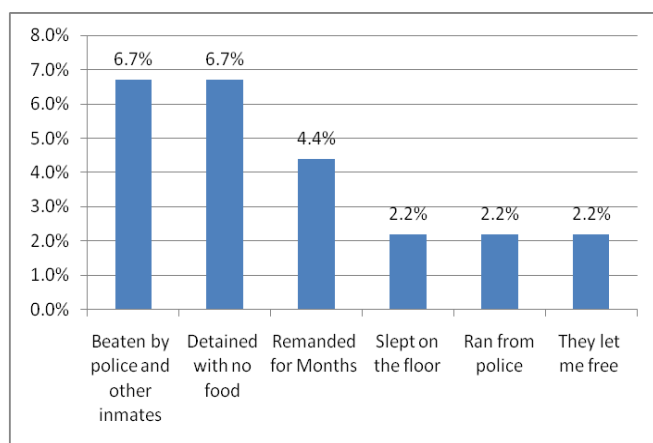
Figure 3: Street children experience with the police

Figure 3 above shows a graphical presentation of the street children experience with the police officers. Street children have often suffered the brunt of violence from the community, business community, and security agencies and also among themselves. Among the respondents 84.4% indicated yes against 15.6 % whom indicated no. Further the study sought to establish from whom the respondents had suffered violence, with their responses shown as highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2: Source of violence meted to street children

Source of violence	Frequency	%
Older street children	6	13.3
Business people / community	5	11.1
Security agencies	14	31.1
Older street children and business people	1	2.2
Older street children / Security agencies	5	11.1
Business community / Security agencies	4	8.9
Security agencies / pedestrians	2	4.4
Mother	1	2.2
All the above	1	2.2
Missing Responses	6	13.3
Total	**45**	**100.0**

Table 2 above shows that security agencies were the major perpetrators of violence against street children and accounted for 31.1%. Security agencies included the municipal askaris and the regular police officers. Violence from police officers occurred during the regular swoops of street children whereas violence from municipal askaris occurred when they were found hawking in the streets of Eldoret town. Violence among the street children was also observed where older children were the culprits who were culprits who were involved in the use violence against the younger children and this was represented by 13.3%. Business people and the community were also found to use violence against street children and this was shown by 11.1%. The business people attacked street children who would occupy front verandahs of their business premises while hawkers would also use violence against street children who were involved in selling wares. A focus group discussant indicated how he had been roughed up by 5 hawkers for selling paper bags near the Eldomatt Supermarkets being told that it was their job to sell wares and their work was to chokora mapipa (go through garbage bins). Parents were also found to be violent toward street

children where 2.2% indicated that they had received beatings from their mothers after they had stolen money from them. This further confirms the study findings that there are children of the streets who were born in Eldoret town.

Focus group discussions with social workers revealed that such as the police, day and night guards which at times led street children often times conflicted with security agents to fatalities. Social workers have a problem in dealing with the security agents when they try to seek justice for the street children. This finding is attributed to the fact that most street children when attacked/assaulted do not report in the police station immediately because of ignorance or fear of further brutalities. Thus, it becomes hard to sue some of the offenders without evidence. A social worker stated that:

"The problem is that, even if the street children confide in us about police harassment or violence directed at them; we try to follow up at the police station but no action is taken and reports are not recorded in the police occurrence book" (Social Worker).

Additionally, it was noted by social workers that legal processes for street children were not done in a procedural manner. Although there were child information desks in the police stations these were not often manned and getting assistance from police officers was a big problem as they deemed street children as cases that did not require their attention. Social workers involved in the FGD also shared that there was no guidelines or strategy to deal with street children. As such most of the contacts of street children with law enforcement agencies were during rounding up of the children where they are beaten, harassed and their property and possessions are confiscated from them whenever security agents ambushed their barracks.

"The police conduct sweeps in the streets of Eldoret now and then to round up street children. However, there is no guideline as to how it is conducted but only done when there has been a report of increasing street children, a serious crime has been committed or there have been complaints from the community" (Focus group Discussant).

Street children are also at risk of being molested. During the FGDs the researcher found out that there was sodomy practiced among the boys in Eldoret town and on the other hand street children were enticed by smartly dressed men in the town. There was a case of a street child who shared his experience of attempted kidnapping by a woman who suddenly started screaming that she was his mother and the public were harassing the boy to go home with his "mother". This indicates the vulnerability of street children regardless of the gender.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established that there are social and political factors negatively affecting street children in Eldoret town after the post-election violence (PEV) of 2007/2008. Education was identified as a challenge where most of the children were not in school although they wished they could join school. Street children were discriminated against in

attending public schools with children from normal family settings. School administrations were reluctant to admit these children because of their truancy. Poor guidance and counseling services offered during rehabilitation were also a factor that contributed to the ineffectiveness of street children programmes and for the re-admittance of street children to school. Discrimination against street children with sexually transmitted infections was pointed out due to lack of professionalism in dealing with children suffering such illnesses. Street children also face security challenges where they are often victims of violence from the security agencies, business community and also from the public. They further cannot seek redress against these acts due to the fear of being arrested if they made the complaints to the relevant authorities. Social workers also revealed that cases submitted by street children are not followed up and thus, justice has not been forthcoming. The study recommends for the protection of street children from politically influenced conflicts which often lead to their vulnerability as victims and perpetrators of ensuing violence.

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