

Activities by Street Children which affect Business Operators

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Abstract: *This part of a broad study that sought to investigate the psychological effects of the presence of street children in Harare Central Business District to business operators. This particular study focused on the activities of street children that affected the operations of business operators in Harare Central Business District. The study sought to identify the activities by street children which psychologically affected business operators. The study used the qualitative approach to get business operators' experiences with street children. The research used questionnaires as research instruments. Forty (40) questionnaires were distributed to gather data from business operators in Harare Central Business District. Twenty seven (27) business operators responded to the questionnaires. Since street children are not found all over the Harare Central Business District (CBD) but specific areas dotted around the Central Business District (CBD), the study used convenience sampling. The study found out that street children were involved in stealing from both the operators and their customers. The street children also begged from the operators and their customers. Street children were also engaged in touting which disturbed customers and in urinating and defecating publicly which was a menace to customers. At times the street children smoked marijuana and consumed alcohol in the public. The study recommended that it is imperative for the government through the Ministry of Public Service and Social Welfare to put policies that cater for social welfare of disadvantaged children. The Government and NGOs should plan and implement public awareness campaigns on the importance of the public's contribution to assist street children have a better life. The corporate sectors should also be urged to contribute to the alleviation of the street children life style. This can be done through the promotion of corporate social responsibilities. The government should make effective legislation and ensure strict implementation of the laws for example execution of Child Protection and Adoption Act. The government should undertake measures to provide free primary level education to street children in Zimbabwe and to provide for the associated costs of education for such disadvantaged children.*

Keywords: street children, business operators, Harare Central Business District, touting and begging

1. Introduction

People who are in business do all they can to present their services in good light to consumers. They however face a number of challenges as they promote their products. They have stiff competition and they have to face the menace of street children who perform activities that negatively affect the way they operate their businesses. Street children act in ways that scare customers so as to shun visiting their business places where they will be operating. The sight of street children who in most cases have an unkempt appearance, beg from customers, steal and generally make customers have a negative perception of their business operation thereby affecting the way they operate. The presence of street children make customers detest visiting premises thereby reducing to a large extend their sales.

2. Research Question

What activities of Street Children affect Business Operators in Harare Central Business District?

3. Literature review

Phenomenon of street children

Regardless of definition, the phenomenon of street children is not new and neither is it restricted to certain geographical areas (Connolly, 1990). The phenomenon of street children is an alarming and escalating worldwide problem. The problem of street children in Africa may not be new as related by Grier (1996). According to Le Roux (1998) the phenomenon

of neglected children, an offspring of the modern urban environment represents one of humanity's most complex and serious challenges. According to Munyacho (1992) as quoted by Kudenga and Hlatwayo (2015) noted that some children in the streets had fled from problems at their homes to come to the streets where they made their own rules. In addition Terwase (2013) pointed out that social, political, familial, religious and economic forces, all tied to poverty, have continued to push children to the streets of urban centres in Third World countries, especially Africa and particularly, Nigeria Cities.

However, according to Kudenga and Hlatwayo (2015) the problem of children living or working on the streets of our urban areas appears to be a recent phenomenon in Zimbabwe. Prior to Independence (1980) it was almost impossible for children to work in the streets as vendors, car-washers, beggars, or parking boys as Municipal by-laws were very strict and were brutally enforced. With Independence, such enforcement of the restrictions became slack and unpredictable thereby making it possible for the problems to surface.

Activities of street children affecting business operators

Street children perform various activities that negatively affect the way business operators function. These activities include bullying the business operators, stealing from the shops and from customers, snatching bags from customers, doing menial jobs in front of their shops, consuming drugs in the presence of customers and begging from customers and the business operators.

Street Children bully Business Operators

Bully refers to a person who uses strength or power to coerce others by fear (Giddens, 2009). According to Giddens (2009) talked about street encounters where one feels threatened by someone behind or someone approaching. Giddens (2009) pointed out that bullying when at least one party is viewed as threatening to others. If a stranger cannot pass inspection and be assessed as safe, the image of predator may arise and fellow pedestrians may try to maintain a distance consistent with that image (Giddens, 2009).

In the same vein street children pose a threat to would be customers to Business Operators in Harare Central Business District and when customers sense danger they move away from areas infested with street children. Apart from threat to people's property, street children sometimes harass the public and can threaten their physical safety (Bourdillon, 2001). According to <http://progression.org.uk/blog> 01/06/16 street children can easily become agitated if they do not get what they want and become violent hence scare many people away and possibly those who wish to assist. At times the business operators are powerless as there is very little that they can do so as make the street children go away from the places where they will be operating.

Street Children stealing from shops

According to Goode (1994) street children who are homeless living in Rio de Janeiro City existed by stealing from shops and robbing pedestrians. Caught several times by the police, street children are taken to court or sometimes just detained and later discharged (Goode, 1994). The behaviour of street children attracts the retaliation of shop owners as they try to protect their property. Bourdillon (2001) argued that street children often break the law and often involved in minor crimes. They do not respond well to attempts to control their activities especially where money is concerned as they also try to fight Business Operators (Bourdillon, 2001).

According to www.mirror.co.uk (2/06/2013) starving street children have been caught stealing food from shops because their families are too poor to feed them. In Islington, North London, police have caught children shoplifting essentials such as bread (www.mirror.co.uk (2/06/2013)). Street children can become a menace to society, especially at night when many of them turn into criminals stealing from customers who want to do night shopping thereby affecting Business Operators (Bourdillon, 2001). At times the street children steal so as to satisfy their needs and at times whenever they get a chance they can steal in order to resell the stolen wares.

Street Children as bag snatchers

Street Children snatch handbags from older women who they know will not be able to run after them (Bourdillon, 2001). Customers will then stop shopping from such shops where there are street children as they sense danger that street children will snatch their goods. Moreover, when family people bought food for their children, street children site these children as easy targets and snatch the food before running away (Bourdillon, 2001). The practice has a negative effect on the business operator's effort to woo customers to buy in their shops.

Street Children begging from potential customers

Generally street children have refused to remain in neglected, hidden away areas from the city. We found that the majority of street children had staked out the most beautiful areas of the city-squares, markets, outside shopping centers and new restaurants (info@soschildren.org). According to info@soschildren.org these are areas of the city rich in resources: people to beg from and restaurants that hand out free food. The disadvantaged traders devised a solution that is almost unbelievable, they hired death squads to clean up the streets (info@soschildren.org). However, there are also areas of the city that the wealthier residents of the city prefer to claim as their own and to keep beautiful. This situation has given rise to many uncomfortable encounters between Business Operators and the street children.

According to info@soschildren.org a number of very young street children and babies are used by adults to elicit sympathy and obtain money by begging at major street intersections and in busy shopping areas. Others are seen tapping on car windows asking for money. Very young children between the ages of 2 and 6 years are sent out onto the streets by their mothers (info@soschildren.org). She would in turn watch over them from a distance. These children would give to their mothers the money "donated" by the public.

According to <http://blog.priceconomics.com/post> in Portland business leaders, fed up with aggressive beggars and loiterers, have advocated for tighter restrictions on the homeless population, who they say drive away shoppers and tourists. In the 2004 Portland Business Alliance Census and Survey, downtown business owners and managers ranked beggars and transients as the top two factors needing improvement over the cost of parking, taxes and business fees (<http://blog.priceconomics.com/post>).

Substance and Drug abuse by Street Children

According to Newman (2010) substance refers to any psychoactive drug. According to Fuqua (1978) drug can be defined as any compound that affects the functioning of an organism. According to Mpfu, Chiremba and Kent (2003) research has shown that the reasons why street children resort to substance abuse are qualitatively different from those who live with their families at home. According to World Health Organization (WHO 2000) it is estimated that 25% to 90% of street children use psycho-active substances of one form or another. These range from illicit drugs like marijuana. They also use industrial products such as glue, petrol and solvents. The consumption of these drugs is usually done in broad daylight along pavements. Having consumed these drugs, street children become violent, steal from the shops and become a nuisance to business operators.

Role of Drugs in street children

According to Mpfu, Chiremba and Kent (2003) drugs help street children to get by and to survive. Because of this it is very difficult for street children to refrain from or stop using drugs as they find them invigorating their energy. Psychoactive substances are reinforcers for street children. Apart from making them feel high they temporarily solve their problems or add some positive dimension to their lives.

For example when there is no money for food they gather dutch courage to steal from Business Operators in the city.

According to World Health Organisation WHO (2000) Intoxication is a temporary state that follows the use of one or more substances resulting in a change in the person's alertness, thinking, perceptions, decision making, judgment, emotions, or behaviour. World Health Organisation, WHO (2000) went on to say that after taking drugs street children may also be involved in accidents, violence and unsafe sex. Their eyes may be dilated, they may giggle or laugh in appropriately (sometimes in response to hallucinations) their mood may switch quickly between highs and lows and they may become aggressive.

Substance users with little income are constantly faced with the problem of finding money to replenish the psychoactive substances (World Health Organization, WHO 2000). World Health Organization WHO (2000) argued that some of them may steal or use violence to get the money and others might join illegal businesses or the sex industry to earn enough money to purchase the psychoactive substances. Street children will therefore target customers and steal from them to raise money for drugs.

According to <http://www.inquiries.journal.livingonthestreets> apart from stealing from customers they can also steal from business Operators causing a substantial loss in revenue. In addition, they threaten customers thereby scaring them away from the Business Operators who desperately need to boost sales.

Menial jobs by Street Children

According to Terwase (2013) street children particularly the boys also survive through car washing, other menial dirty jobs and scavenging. Sometimes Business Operators hire them to wash and guard their cars while they do their business. Street children share parking space among themselves and motorists park their cars for safe keeping and help parking at a fee. Usually in Harare Central Business District they charge 5 rand or 5 bond coin. All car parking areas in city are now manned by the Easy Park Private Limited Company and motorists park for \$1 per hour however street children force motorists to pay another fee for the safety of the vehicles.

Motorists who are potential customers to the Business Operators eventually end up paying what the street children will be demanding fearing that their vehicles might be broken into. In future customers would avoid going such places where street children are a menace thus prejudicing Business Operators of clients. In some instances street children demand Business Operators to offer them small jobs like washing their cars for a fee. They will not even consider whether the Business Operator has the money or not and as such Business Operators end up just offering menial jobs for the sake of peace.

According to Wilmot (2008) lamented that in every city across the nation, hordes of children who should be in school flood the streets selling cheap goods manufactured in China, newspapers and sometimes their bodies. On a daily basis, children below 18 years get involved in hawking items

like assorted soft/juice drinks, sweets, biscuits, pure water, cookies, gala, plantain chips, bread, cashew nuts and groundnuts (Terwase, 2013).

According to Rakesh (2012) in India jobs done by street children include cleaning cars; petty vending, selling small items such as balloons or sweets; selling newspapers or flowers. Some of the wares that street children sell will be direct competition with the Business Operators who will be selling the same products. In addition, some of the goods would have been stolen from the Business Operators and street children will be reselling the products to the customers business operators want to lure.

It is the intention of this research to identify activities by street children which psychologically affect Business Operators in Harare Central Business District.

4. Methodology

The researchers chose to use a qualitative research methodology. According to Burns (2000), qualitative research is an effective way of helping the researcher in obtaining information on the individual's experiences such as the one under study which is the psychological effects of the presence of street children to business operators in Harare Central Business District. Qualitative research also helped the researchers understand the participant's viewpoint on common challenges faced by business operators because of the presence of street children in Harare Central Business District. In addition, qualitative research uses different ways of gathering information thus providing rich data to be gathered for example in-depth interviews, questionnaires, observations and document analysis in which business operators are free to air out their views as compared to closed ended questions in which one cannot express her feelings towards the given questions (Mutch, 2000).

The research employed the descriptive research design. This design was used as the researchers felt it was the most ideal for the study. The descriptive survey research designs are defined by their methodical collection of standardised information from any representative sample of the population (Christensen, 1994). In addition, this research design suits the context under which the present study was taken as the descriptive survey represents a probe into a given state of affairs that exists at a given time. It therefore means that direct contact was made with the individuals whose characteristics, behaviours and issues were relevant to the investigation under study. In this case the researchers had direct contact with business operators who interacted with the street children. It allowed the researchers to choose from a wide variety of instruments and in this research it was the questionnaire. The researcher found the questionnaire to be relevant for the study because it can be used to measure opinions, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, perceptions as well as gather factual information about the respondent.

The researchers used convenience sampling in selecting research participants. This was due to the fact that street children by nature of how they operate are found at specific areas dotted around the Central Business District. According

to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) convenience sampling involves selecting those cases that are easiest to obtain for your sample. Convenience sampling represents a sample drawn to suit the convenience of the researcher (Wegner, 1995). The sample selection process is continued until required sample size is reached. The research participants selected will be meeting certain specifications that are required to answer the research question. In this study the research participants included only those business operators whose operations were affected by the presence street children. The sample consisted of forty business operators. Among these twenty seven were able to return fully completed questionnaires.

5. Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics
N=27

Gender of respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	15	56
Male	12	44
Total	27	100
Age of respondents		
Below 25	8	30
25-40	10	37
Over 40	9	33
Total	27	100
Type of business		
Food	10	37
Grocery	9	33
Clothing	6	22
Banking/Finance	1	4
Education	1	4
Total	27	100
Duration of operation		
Less than 5 years	7	26
5-10 years	15	56
More than 10 years	5	19
Total	27	100

The results showed that the bulk of the respondents were females with 56 %, the remaining portion of 44% were males. Women constitute a large number of the population according to Zimbabwe 2012 census. Thus, maybe explain why the majority of them are operating businesses, working in Harare Central Business District (CBD).

The above results showed that majority business Operators were middle aged, between 25-40 with 37% of the responded followed by those over 40 years with 33%.

The results revealed that the bulk of the respondents were from food businesses that is restaurants, fast foods followed by grocery business with 33% and clothing with 22%. Banking or Finance and Education have 4% each.

The above results showed that majority business operators have been operating in their respective areas for the period 5-10 years. The period of 5-10 years represented 56% of the respondents.

The study revealed that street children were involved in stealing, begging, touting and public urinating and defecating which had a direct effect on Business Operators.

Table 2: Activities by street children which affect business operators
N=27

Street Children activity	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Stealing	27	100
Begging	21	77
Touting	15	56
Public urinating and defecating	13	48

Stealing

Twenty seven (100%) of the respondents highlighted that street children were stealing small items that they can hide in their pockets or under garments and sell to street vendors who are a ready market. For example sweets, chocolates, shoe polish, caps and cell phones. Street vendors will then resell the products at cheaper prices to customers who are supposed to buy from the Business Operators.

Excerpt 1: *Street children enter shops in large numbers and confuse our security guards thereby stealing small items which they can hide in their pockets or under garments.*

Excerpt 2: *street children enter shops hide with the shelf and eat products like sweets, biscuits and chocolates.*

Excerpt 3: *These street children steal from our customers. This makes customers fear visiting our shops. Something should be done to chase them away and make sure they do not disturb our customers.*

Excerpt 4: *These street children are a real menace. We have to alert all the time. If we just relax they steal anything from products in the shop to our personal belongings.*

Excerpt 5: *We need to be alert all the time. These street children are on the look for opportunities to steal from either our customers of us. Whoever will be lax will be preyed upon. That is why I put warning posters on the walls. They make my work very difficult.*

Begging

Twenty one (77%) of respondents reported that street children were also a nuisance by begging from their customers in front of the entrance. Such actions frustrate potential customers and some customers will not come back to areas with street children.

Excerpt 6: *street children whenever they see a customer eating food they will approach the customer and beg for food. Customers will therefore leave the food or they move away.*

Excerpt 7: *Street children beg for coins or small change which they would have seen customers being given on the till points.*

Excerpt 8: *Street children have a practice of following customers who will have bought something from the shop begging or offering to carry parcels for a fee. The practice really offends customers and thus has a tendency of scaring customers away from the business premises.*

Excerpt 9: *Whenever they see a customer consuming some food they run to ask to be given a portion. The practice is really offending to customers and some will secretly vow never to return to the premises again.*

Touting

Fifteen (56%) of the respondents mentioned that street children are sometimes hired by street vendors to tout for customers thus diverting customers from the Business Operators to vendors who sell cheap goods. Business Operators stated that street children who had advanced are trusted to tout for customers pre-paid mobile phone airtime cards for some phone shop owners.

Excerpt 10: *street children are hired by street vendors to peddle customers to buy from them instead from business operators.*

Excerpt 11: *street children block the smooth flow of customers making a lot of noise.*

Public urinating and defecating

Thirteen (48%) of the respondents stated that street children urinated and defecated on their pavements or backyard.

Excerpt 12: *Street children urinating along pavements causing a stench smell that drive away customers.*

Excerpt 13: *children urinate in small plastic containers and throw them on the road. When vehicles are driven over the containers they splash potential customers.*

Excerpt 14: *The surroundings of the business premises smell because the street children use the walls as toilets. At times there is nothing you can do about them as even the police seem to be powerless.*

6. Discussions

The study found out that business operators echoed same sentiments on the activities of street children that psychologically affected them in their day to day operations. Firstly, respondents highlighted that touting by street children is one of the activity that psychologically affected them where street children tout for customers on behalf of street vendors thereby depriving business operators of potential customers thereby frustrating them. They try to lure customers to buy from street vendors instead of buying from the licenced business operators. These findings are consistence with findings of Bourdillon (2001) who noted that street children are found in variety of money-making activities such as guarding parked cars, touting and vending. In addition, Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003) lamented that some members of the public used street children to vend for their businesses. It is clear that these kinds of employers were looking for cheap labour. They were not sensitive to labour laws which prohibit employment of under age children. They employed street children for their own benefit disadvantaging Business Operators.

Secondly, more than 48% of the Business Operators witnessed public urinating and defecating by street children in the Central Business District thereby affecting their sense of self worth. These findings are in agreement with Dimenstein (1991) who lamented that street children lack restroom facilities hence they use roadside or railway line for their toilet. Hai (2014) also added that street children use different locations for toilet purpose like pavements and road side places. Though, the pavements are public property,

Business Operators have a vested interest in keeping their portion clean. Most of the street children discharge urine anywhere under open sky on the pavements or in plastic containers thereby Business Operators getting stressed due to the polluted environment.

Thirdly, street children steal from business operators thus instilling a sense of insecurity. These findings are also in agreement with those of Mella (2012) who pointed out that street children confessed that some of the vendors send them to steal and paid them when they brought clothes, cell phones. In addition, www.sos.children.org added that in some areas these small hungry thieves and their criminal activity drive customers away from business operators. Some of the street children steal from customers who will have visited premises of the business operators. When this happens some customers vow never to visit the area again. This deprives the business operators the privilege of having repeat clients.

Fourthly, street children beg from potential customers and Business Operators distracting them from doing their shopping thereby frustrating their efforts. These findings are in agreement with Mella (2012) who pointed out that children accompany their blind parents to beg on the streets. In some instances street children are sent by their parents or guardians to look for money from the streets. Considerable numbers of street children were found to be involved in begging hence customers stopping patronizing such areas (Mella, 2012).

In some cases street children offer to perform some menial services like carrying heavy parcels for the customers in return of a small fee. At times they perform some of their menial jobs right in front of the premises of the business operators. The street children are found washing cars, selling their wares to customers who will have come to purchase from the business operators. In some cases they sell identical products to those being sold by the operator meaning they will be in direct competition with the business operator.

7. Conclusions

The study concluded that the presence of street children had psychological effects to Business Operators due to their various activities. Research findings reflected that street children engaged in begging, touting, stealing and public urinating which affects the smooth flow of business operations thereby causing different types of psychological effects to Business Operators. As street children beg from potential customers they become a nuisance thereby frustrating the customers leaving them with no choice but to shun such business areas with street children. Street children are engaged in touting for customers on behalf of street vendors thus forcing potential customers to buy from vendors instead from Business Operators thus frustrating them. Business operators reported that street children stole from their shops causing a sense of insecurity. Furthermore, street children urinated on pavements and defecated at open spaces behind shops thus causing constant worry because they will be polluting the environment.

8. Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations in view of its findings:

- 1) Aid should be ear marked to facilitate the reunification of street children with their families.
- 2) The corporate sectors should also be urged to contribute to the alleviation of the street children life style. This can be done through the promotion of corporate social responsibilities
- 3) Business operators should unite and create a business against crime forum. Combine business against crime forum with all sectors of law enforcement that can help the CBD become conducive to conduct business.
- 4) The city fathers should also build more ablution facilities in the city centre so that street children do not use pavements or backyards as toilets.
- 5) The Harare City Council should also get rid of street vendors as they are a ready market for stolen goods from business operators.
- 6) Institutional supports are insufficient to ameliorate the predicaments of all the street children. There is need to increase institution that assist the disadvantaged so that they do not flock the streets in Central Business District.
- 7) Street children have rights to be protected like any other child. Since they stay alone on the street with no proper guidance from the adults they need to be educated about their rights.

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