



## STREET CHILDREN OF KARACHI IN RELATION WITH THEIR HEALTH ISSUES

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### INTRODUCTION

The population of homeless people and street children has been increasing since decades; United Nation has estimated that there are approximately 140 million street children worldwide. Out of these 20 million of these children are homeless and they haven't ever met their families their entire lives. South Asia has been considered a largest hub to these street children. The actual number of street children residing in Pakistan is still not reported however, SPARC- Society for the protection of the Rights of the Child has declared that Pakistan holds around 1.5 million street children. Around 10,000 street children are living in Karachi up to date (Towe, V. L., ul Hasan, S., Zafar, S. T., & Sherman, S. G., 2009). With the updates of previous researches the number of street children in Pakistan has been increased since decades and this has led the raise in social and mental health concerns in these children. The raised ratio of street children in Pakistan, basically in Karachi had led the public health workers to point out the poverty, deprivation of basic life necessities like food and medicine and disease burden in these areas. These children are being separated by their family and this makes them to lose hope for education and health care facilities. Most commonly they face hunger, malnutrition, and mental health retardation and hygiene issues and most of them die on streets unreported. Unfortunately, no one cares they live or die on street and no one reports their issues and being mistreated by society, around half of these population serves as street vendors or work for some people in reward of a little amount of money. Previously, several scholars have demonstrated that unhygienic conditions and disturbed physical health affects mental health of these children, which ultimately leads to decreased performance (Medlow, S., Klineberg, E., & Steinbeck, K., 2014). To save children from attempting dangerous acts like robbing, stealing and criminal acts, a strong support system is needed who are required to go through the depth of emotions they are facing and the extent of problems and the level of distress in lives (Hutz, C. S., & Koller, S. H., 1999).

### Life of street children and difficulties faced by them

People shows sympathy for the children who spent their lives on street and most of them help them by providing them with food, medicine, cloths and other regular stuff. Children living on street are much deprived of basic necessities like health care facilities, shelter and education. Despite of great efforts done for these street children, a lot more social work is needed to be done in order to secure more lives. Within the current social and political condition of Pakistan, where violence and terrorism are being spread with a passage of time, these children are at great risk of getting themselves involved in terrorist activities (Towe, V. L., ul Hasan, S., Zafar, S. T., & Sherman, S. G., 2009).

Currently, the debate on street children academia and their lives on street are going through the policy makers and social service providers. Much of the previous research studies have already mentioned the adversity encountered by street children. Some of them work as

street vendors; some of them are trapped in exchange of drugs and drug abuse and some of them gets involved in terrorist and theft acts, no matter what kind of activity they are involved in but the most common thing is they are facing a lot of distress in lives to earn their breads (Towe, V. L., ul Hasan, S., Zafar, S. T., & Sherman, S. G., 2009). Merely, all of them are facing serious scared basic necessities like food supplies, health care facilities and place to live. Some children have reported the issues regarding physical health, drug abuse, unhygienic ambiance, sexual harassment and mental health issues. Most of these children are observed sleeping under bridges, foot paths and other public spaces. Majority of them gets themselves fed by prostituting, stealing, smuggling and are encountered by a number of diseases which even includes sexually transmitted diseases and other health ailments due to their unhygienic sanitary conditions (Panter-Brick, C., 2002).

The usage of drug is another most common thing observed in street children, most of the children are observed consuming drugs which are easily approachable and inexpensive. These drugs might include tobacco, gutka, pan, beetle nut and some inhalants. Inject able drugs are reported to be expensive and unapproachable for these children, therefore a lesser number of children are being observed using these kinds of drugs (Embleton, L., et al., 2013). Some of the children have reported the requirement to exchange sex in order to get these drugs. Unfortunately, a gang is being involved in providing drugs to these innocent lives. The uses of these addictive drugs have made these children more weak and dependent on begging and stealing for their survival.

#### **Health hazards in street children**

Malnutrition is commonly found in street children, as they deprived of the basic required food like milk and bread, they are commonly observed to be thin and lean with a weaker body metabolism. Being deprived of food they are usually weaker than other normal children with retarded growth and other abnormalities (Towe, V. L., ul Hasan, S., Zafar, S. T., & Sherman, S. G., 2009). They are less likely to have pure water; rather they depend on the water supplies by the government setups. There is no quality control of the water in Karachi and most of the time this water has been observed to be mixed with the sewage lines, causing gastro problems in people (Woan, J., Lin, J., & Auerswald, C., 2013).

The exchange of sex is commonly observed in street children in order to get money in reward, however the use of condom and other protective measures are observed to be nonexistent. This scenario counter plays the higher incidence and prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in these children. The male street children are reported with more prevalence of HIV and among those are the individuals who reported having unprotected sex in exchange of drugs or money.

Mental illness is another most common thing found in these in these children, a number of researches are being done which reports that retarded growth due to deprived food supplies and disturbed physical health and weakness ultimately leads to disturbed mental health in these children. Stress and low self esteem in these children forces them to stay back from normal daily chores and even if they are given an opportunity to leave this life and do something good to earn money, they reject the idea. According to most of them nothing good can even happen to them. The reason behind this behavior is might be due to the prolonged distressed conditions they have faced and number of promises they heard from different communities (Iqbal, M. W., 2008). Unfortunately, bringing these children out of the life they spent would be as difficult as to move a heavy mountain.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Since the number of street children is increasing with a passage of time, it is important to keep a notice on the activities performed by them and the gangs and mafia involved behind these activities. Providing those basic necessities like food and medicine can be the first step preventing them from begging robbing and keeping a counter check of drug supplies might be extravagantly helpful. A strong drug control organization is much needed in Pakistan, whose responsibilities should be to ban selling drugs to the individuals less than eighteen years.

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