

## AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS, COMMUNITY POVERTY AND DELINQUENCY OF STREET CHILDREN IN PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*The quest for this study was to examine the socio-economic factors contributing in the increasing number of street children and risk behavior associated with street life. The term "street children" and various titles given by the society such as street kids. The "street children" phenomenon in Peshawar-Pakistan exhibits itself through the presence of children in the streets for long hours working, wandering, begging, scavenging, or trolling aimlessly. Street children are the outcome of economic deprivation of wider community and delinquent behavior is the byproduct of street life. Poverty rests instrumental in compelling significant figure of children and their kin on streets contributing in snowballing of already growing figure of children breathing/employed on streets of our cities. The major factor that causes these children to opt streets over school is abject poverty of family and community. This fact is devastating that our Government policies have failed to give the child his basic rights to fulfill his needs. Due to the above-mentioned severe problem, this study was conducted to examine socio-economic factors that compel children to work on streets rather than getting education & health to help pave a road map to the government agencies to curb this issue and make suitable policies. A Sample of 100 children randomly selected, from Peshawar. Fifty street children were randomly selected using snowball sampling technique from Peshawar city and 50 street children, randomly selected from service providers. Data collected through self-constructed questionnaires, and focused group discussion. The collected information then analyzed and presented through tables and figures. The results show that major factor that causes children to opt streets over schools is abject poverty of family, as 83.6% children were not able to go to school due to financial distress. The study also discloses that they used to work for 8 to 12 hours a day with a mean weekly income of PKR 896. Moreover, results reveal that among the respondents, 78% had used drugs and 38% had various kinds of addictions. The study revealed that 92% of the children had suffered from abuse and violence. Most of them had not informed anyone about it whereas 30% had informed their parents, or employer, or even the police. Despite their call for help, more than half of the respondents could not receive relief and assistance. The study exposed that the Police apprehension was low, as 20% of the respondents been arrested, whereas 35% had been handcuffed for no reason, 25% were caught for theft and 40% were caught for drugs.*

*Keywords:* Street Children, Economic deprivation, Delinquency, Child labor, Harassments, Pakistan.

### INTRODUCTION

The term "street children" and various titles given by the society such as street kids, street boys, parking boys, street urchins, stray children, homeless children, car washers, street vendors, street beggars, children on their own, and scavengers refer to a complex phenomenon. Growing numbers of street children in Pakistan in general and in Peshawar in particular is alarming to the government. After the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in the constitution of Pakistan, several powers transferred to the provinces. Hence, formulation of adequate policy is needed to curb the issue of roaming/working children and increasing crimes. Therefore, this study helps to evaluate the specific reasons such as poverty and income status of the street children and its impact on the delinquency of the street children is thoroughly evaluated. The "street children" phenomenon in Peshawar exhibits itself through the presence of children in the streets for long hours (8-12) working, wandering, begging, scavenging, or trolling aimlessly. However, most of these children do not sleep on the streets. Some of them have homes to go to, and some take shelter in welfare centers. Street children are individuals under the age of 18, whose behavior is primarily at variance with community norms, and whose principal funding source for his/her development needs is not a family or family substitute (Cosgrove, 1990). The growing number of street children is the outcome of unrestrained expansion, mass mobilization and migrations from domestic conflicts; social and economic issues persuading masses into miserable life. Poverty rests instrumental in compelling significant figure of children and their kin on streets contributing in snowballing of already growing figure of children breathing/employed on streets of our cities. Child labor is one of the major current concern of the socialist and activist and strongly connected to the existence of street children. The major factor that causes these children to opt streets over school is abject poverty of family and community. This fact is devastating that our Government policies have failed to give the child his basic rights to fulfill his needs. The miserable life conditions forced children to get them engaged into labor and earn for survival. Children who came out into the street with low level of education or completely illiterate has no other option than heavy physical labor. Street Children carry out subsistence activities in the street to earn and contribute to the family income. Challenging lifestyle of street children make them vulnerable to substance use from the very young age. Street children are sufferers of the most horrible kind of child labor that includes sexual manipulation, forced labor, child trafficking, contribution in unlawful activities and risk experiences (Ioana Rosu, 2010). Street children live and grow up in difficult circumstances, mostly unaccompanied and unsupervised. Quite often, these young people take advantage of illegal opportunities and commit various offences, become drug addicts or commit theft, robbery and assaults. Street life exposes young children to harsh environment, where they learn and develop inappropriate behavior and the victims become offenders. Hassan et al. (2005) reported that an estimate of 5000 children are living in the streets of Lahore, among them

approximately 67% children were having drugs. Many unsuitable circumstances connected to street life make children susceptible to chronic illnesses and sexually transmitted diseases. Children cope, unaided, find exploitative physical work to alleviate their poverty and relief hunger. Substance use is common among street children as they look for means to minimize their sufferings and they find drug as a relief after hard manual work. Adults into drug dealings and other activities such as stealing and prostitution often tempt street children. Studies have shown that almost 90% street children use psychoactive drugs including alcohol, cigarettes, heroin and medicine. The purpose of this study is to collect and bring together the existing information related to street children to assist the progress of national policies, intended to promote, defend and protect street children rights. Therefore, the study deeply investigates the situation of street children in Peshawar and presents an assessment of the problem.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:** The main objectives of the study are:

- To determine the socio- economic issues associated with delinquent behavior of street children.
- To evaluate the impact of community poverty on delinquency of street children.
- To assess the association of street life to the persecution, harassment and victimization of street children.

**HYPOTHESIS:**

- *H<sub>0</sub>*: street children delinquencies and victimization are associated with economic deprivation of the street children.
- *H<sub>1</sub>*: street children delinquencies and victimization are not associated with economics deprivation of street children.

**METHODOLOGY:** A Sample of 100 children including boys and girls, ages 4-16 years, randomly selected from Peshawar. 50 street children were randomly selected using snowball sampling techniques from Peshawar city and 50 street children were randomly selected from service providers for focused group discussion. Data was collected through self-constructed questionnaires. The collected information was arranged, organized, coded and analyzed. The Statistical Package for Social Scientists 16.0 (SPSS 16.0) was used in generating frequency distributions, cross-tabulations and chi-square test. The obtained results were presented through tables and figures in APA format with the proper description.

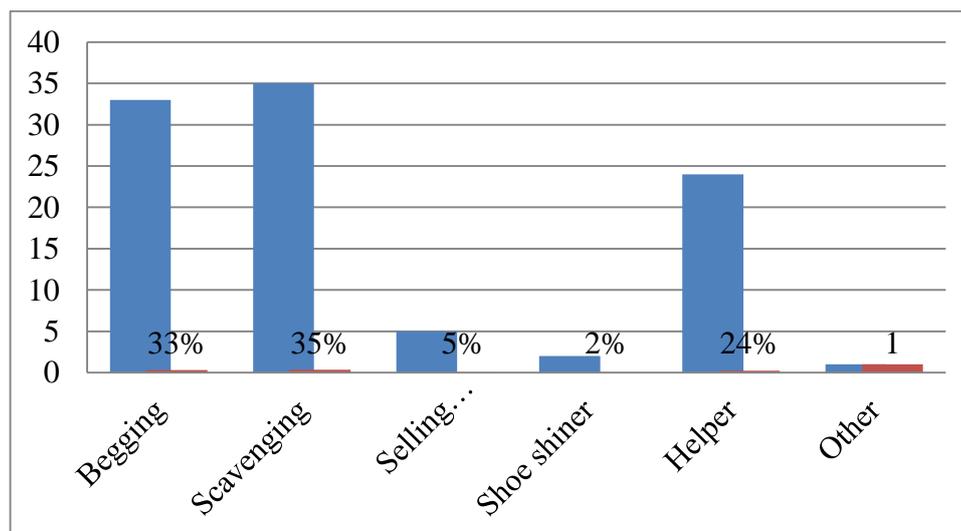
**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:** This section has two parts: economic problems and social problems that influence the delinquency of street children.

#### ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

Economic problems of street children are further categorized as earning and expenditure.

**EARNINGS ACTIVITY:** Street Children carry out subsistence activities in the street to earn and contribute to the family income. They work nonstop for long hours almost every day.

Figure 1: Earning sources of the Respondents



The figure above shows that of the targeted children 35% were involved in scavenging (collecting garbage, papers, recycling materials), 33% of the children in begging, 24% were helpers with shopkeepers, bus drivers, and drug dealers. 5% of the children reported that they get their income through selling flowers, or newspapers on signals or in other residential and commercial areas.

2% of the children were shoe shiners. Only 1 of the street children confessed that he is into male prostitution. Hence, the targeted children were engaged in a wide variety of activities. The above Figure exhibits the list of the activities of the sample children. However, these children did not clearly mention some activities that the key source professionals mentioned, during in-depth interviews. These activities include **Thieving, snatching, prostitution, Pick Pocketing, Drugs dealing, and working as Informer of anti-social people.** 35% of the children scavenging and 33% children begging is undoubtedly alarming. These children do not earn much, yet they are compelled to do so in order to get two times bread and support their families. The profession they are compelled to choose is of course an irony.

**INCOME:** street children are engaged in earning for their families because they belong to very poor families. Following table shows their weekly income.

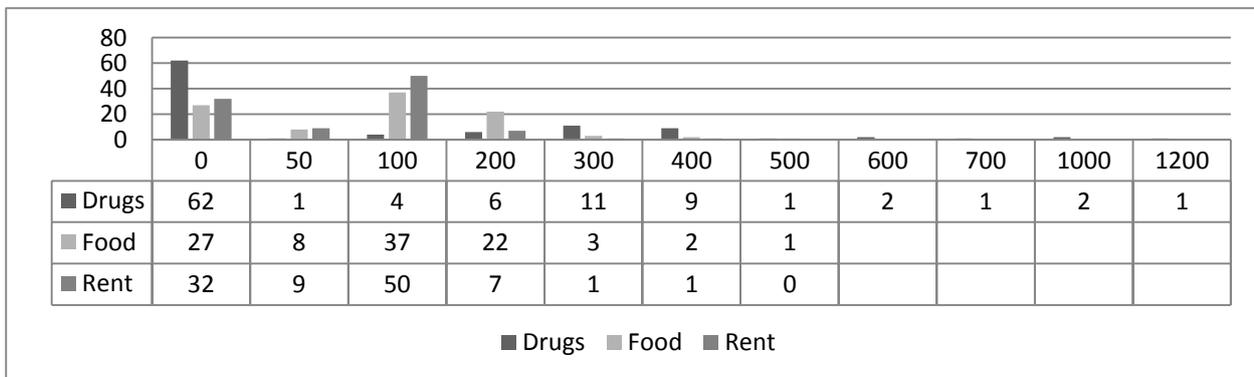
Table 1: Weekly Income of the Respondents

Income	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
300	1	1.0	
400	1	1.0	1.0
500	2	2.0	2.0
600	12	12.0	4.0
700	18	18.0	16.0
800	14	14.0	34.0
900	26	26.0	48.0
1000	8	8.0	74.0
1200	8	8.0	82.0
1400	6	6.0	90.0
1500	1	1.0	96.0
2000	3	3.0	97.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0

According to the Table, the highest weekly income of street children was 2000 and only 3 children marked the highest point of earning, followed by 1 who said he was earning 1500 per week. 74% of the respondents had earnings below 1000 PKR per week. Most of the children (26%) earn 900 PKR per week, which is undoubtedly not enough to fulfill their daily diet and health. These children have been engaged in employment on very low wages. Moreover, child labor globally is a zero tolerant phenomenon.

**EXPENDITURES:** Major expenditure of the street children according to the data, made on food, rent and drugs. Drug addiction is one of the many evils that usually street children adopt due to living by their own without supervision of their parents or guardians.

Figure 2: the respondents' Food, Drugs, and Rental Expenses



According to the Figure above 73% spent PKR 50-500 on food and 68% spent PKR 50-400 as a rent for their stay at night whereas 38% of the respondents spend 50 to 1200 PKR on drugs. One shocking fact shown in the figure above is that street children made

maximum expenditure on drugs that indicates their high vulnerability to drug addiction. This addiction can lead them to commit a crime if they could not find enough money to fulfill their addiction. Which is alarming.

**SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

**DRUGS AND ADDICTIONS:** As mentioned above street children are highly vulnerable to drug abuse. The table below shows the involvement of street children in drugs.

Table 2: Drugs use among Street Children

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	78	78.0	78.0	78.0
No	22	22.0	22.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

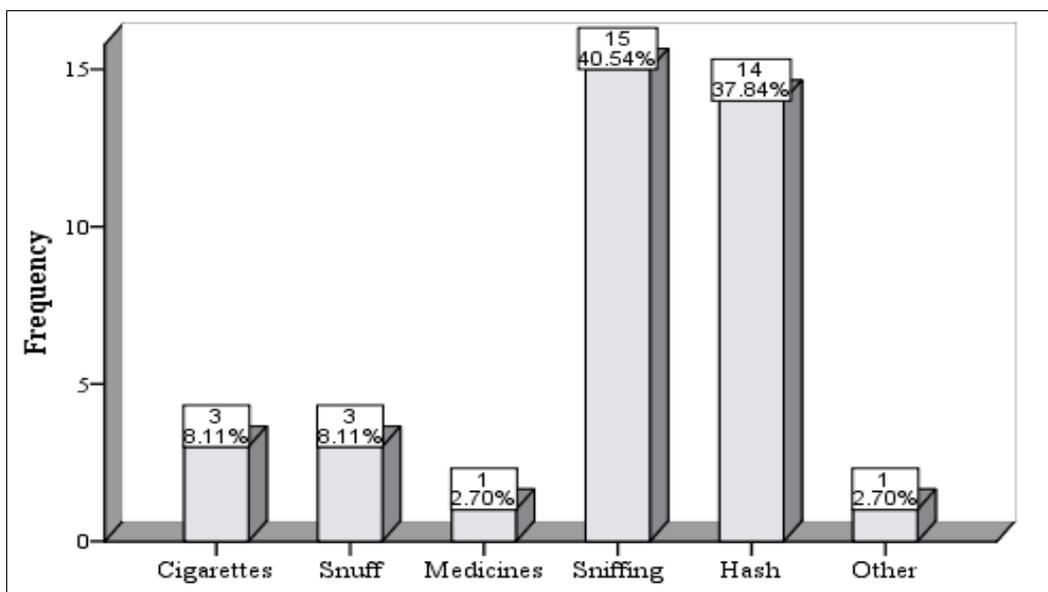
The Table above displays the information about the drug use among children. 78% of the respondents confessed that they have taken intoxicants, which is the highest and still growing percentage among street children of Peshawar Pakistan. However, 22% responded that they have never taken drugs. However, it looks like they are vulnerable to this situation as well.

**DRUGS ADDICTION:** Drug addiction is one of the major social problems of 21st century and street children are more exposed to this menace. Table below reveals the dependence level of children on drugs, 62 % children did not have any kind of addiction while 38 % of the targeted children we addicted to certain drugs.

Table 3: Drug Addiction among Street Children

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	38	38.0	38.0	38.0
No	62	62.0	62.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3: predominant substance addiction



Sniffing and snorting (glue, ice and cocaine) was the predominant substances used with the highest percentage of 40.5 % followed by hash 37.8%, cigarettes 8.1%, snuff 8.1% and medicines (cough syrup, Valium and OxyContin). While one of the 37 children did not specify his addiction.

**POLICE ARREST:** Street children live on street by their own hence usually harassed and arrested by the police and other law enforcing agencies. According to the table below, 20% of the respondents told that the local Police arrested them.

Table 4: Arrests of Street Children

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	20	20.0	20.0	20.0
No	80	80.0	80.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Reasons behind the Arrest of the Respondent

Reason	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Stealing	5	25.0	10.0
Drugs	8	40.0	25.0
For no reason	7	35.0	65.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0

Children are more at risk on the street and prone to various crimes. Their hidden activities can get them caught whereas, in some cases the police arrest or detained children for no apparent reason. 35% claimed that they did nothing but were arrested just to harass them.

Table 6: Release of the Arrested Children from the Confinement

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dealer/Broker	4	20.0	
Family	1	5.0	20.0
Friend	2	10.0	25.0
Employer	5	25.0	35.0
Police set me free	8	40.0	60.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0

The involved and arrested children further investigated, regarding the help provided by people who freed them, according to the Table above as 40% of them not found guilty of any lawbreaking and the police set them free later. The employer freed 25% of them, 10% have been freed by friends and 5% released from confinement by family and 20% have been freed by the person who were behind the crime. The collected data revealed one dejected fact that outlaws to do criminal activities use these children.

**MALTREATMENT AND HARASSMENTS:** Maltreatment and harassment is a colossal problem of street children. They are maltreated and harassed.

Table 7: Harassment cases among children

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	92	92.0	92.0	92.0
No	8	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table reveals the physical and sexual exploitation of street children. 92% of the children explained they have been victims of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Physical harassment was the most common type of violence. Beating Scratching, punching, biting, choking, strangling, and bullying street children was considered normal the constant abusive behavior of parents have made them immune to domestic violence. They confessed that they have been constantly beaten, and tortured by the police, local people, elder street children, employers and even by their own parents. They have become immune to violence and felt emotionless and neutral about the situation. Older adolescents and adults used children for sexual stimulation either by engaging them in paid sexual activities or by pressurizing them. Children felt hesitated while sharing those indecent incidents however, they revealed the cases of their friends and other street children who were tortured and molested by adults, police, employers, and bus drivers. 8% of the respondents did not report any kind of physical and sexual assault.

Table 8: Frequency of Reporting the Harassments

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	30	32.6	32.6
No	62	67.4	100.0
Total	92	100.0	

Table above shows that if the children have informed any one about the harassments or preferred to keep it secret. Out of 92 children who had been, abused only 30 children have told someone about the violence to seek help. However, 62 children have kept it secret or did not feel the importance to complaint about the brutality and ask for help. Upon inquiry, the children who did not share their story confessed that they were either ashamed or unsure of getting of help. Those, victimized by their own parent were afraid of further assault and those, abused by employer or the police or other adults did not have the courage to stand up against the power. Our system is fragile to prevent and protect a child from abuse and punish the pervers and convicts. Among 30 Children who have expressed about their violence, 22 children trusted their parents to ask for help, 5 children informed their employers, 2 of them told the police while 1 of those children asked some local person to help.

Table 9: Assistance and Help provided to the Victim

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	12	40.0	40.0
No	18	60.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	

Out of the 30 children who raised their voices against the abuse, only 40% provided with help while 60% found neglected and no attention given to their complaints. The children believed that they are more likely to be abused and victimized again. They further complaint that they have never witnessed a wrongdoer, or a pedophile ever been punished. In order to restore their faith in the system the perpetrators of this kind of horrific crimes must be brought to justice.

## COMMUNITY POVERTY

When economic conditions and living stranded of the street children was discussed. It was assessed that they all belonged to low income class and used to live in slum areas of Peshawar. Slum areas are usually neglected parts of the big cities. Low income clubbing with either illiteracy or low levels of education further augmented the problems of street children. Hence, community poverty is a big question mark on societal development since community significantly not only affects the uprightness, grooming, education of adolescents but it also affects the delinquency. Keynes relative income theory supports our results because community poverty affects the consumption pattern of the family that intern impact the delinquent behavior of the street children.

## CONCLUSION

Street life is a clear violation of the child's right to safety. The UN adopted the convention on the rights of the child in 1989 (Britto and Ulkuer201). This study proves that street children delinquencies and victimization are associated with economic deprivation of the street children. Moreover, this study depicts that street life is violation of the basic human rights and right to survival, protection from abuse and protection from neglect and exploitation, in fact street life contributes in the destruction of a child's personality. Familial poverty is a prime factor for pushing children into the streets. Unemployment of the guardian, death of the parents, and being affected by war or natural disaster, are some of the factors that causes economic deterioration in the family and compel children to work on the street. Young children of ages 4-16 start physical labor and get involved into various activities as soon they realize their responsibility due to economic condition. Street children were involved in various menial income generating activities such as scavenging, selling flowers or newspaper on checkpoints, begging and helping shopkeepers. Child beggars pretend to be crippled and paralyzed to elicit more sympathy, or in worst cases, they cut and hurt themselves or mutilated by their employers. Besides these occupations, many children were involved in numerous veiled activities, that includes, drug dealings, prostitution, pick pocketing, gang stealing and shoplifting. Children escape miserable life in urge to live a fear free life and end up on the streets: heedless of the harsh realities of street life. Physical and sexual harassment reported to be common among street children. The people who are supposed to protect them such as their parents and the police do not protect them. They usually are, expelled from their work places, tortured, abused and sometimes arrested without any reason. Street children are the exploited, neglected and abused group of children, deprived of their basic human rights and protection. Street serves as a delinquency institution for young children where they learn crimes as gang stealing, pick pocketing, prostitution and drugs. Their drug dealers push the drug addicts into major crimes and children being dependent on the intoxicants do not realize the consequences. In this regard, this study delivers a wide-ranging facts & figures in Peshawar city of Pakistan while also shedding lights upon the role of Government and Non-Government organizations in supporting street children in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study examines the reasons for the existence of street children related to poverty, broken families and abuse. Past couple of decades, the world witnessed growing global concern for the rights of children. Pakistan also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 12 November 1990. However, there is currently no mechanism to ensure effective implementation especially in these difficult circumstances. This study examined causes and consequences of street life, and available services to fight against those brutal outcomes of Street-ism.

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