



A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF STREET WORKING CHILDREN OF AGRA CITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract: Street children are the common sights of every society in all over the world. They are working or living on their own on the streets in very poor conditions. Street children face various problems like abuse, exploitation, violence, drug abuse etc. working on the streets. The present study aimed at identifying the socio-economic profile of street children working on the streets of Agra City. The data for the study was collected from 38 street children between the age of 5-17years by using snow-ball sampling technique. The information was gathered by face-to-face interviews. The results of the study showed that the majority of street children were boys and the number of females were less than males. It was found that street children were involved in various kinds of work which include begging, rag picking, selling water bottles, working on roadside food stalls, and construction sites. The study suggested to have better implementation of policies for protecting children in difficult circumstances.

Index Terms – Street Children, Socio-economic, Profile, Conditions.

Introduction:

The phenomenon of street children is a very common and one of the very challenging social issues of today's world. Street children are a common sight in every society in the world. Street children are the most vulnerable of all the children in difficult circumstances around the world. According to United Nations sources, there are more than 150 million street children in the world today. These children are chased from home because of violence, drug abuse, family breakdown, war, natural disasters or socio-economic collapses. In India, street children can be seen roaming, living, or working on the streets, roads, bus stands, railway stations, traffic signals, market places, crossings etc. Street children become the easy victims of abuse, violence, exploitation and harassment by strangers, communities, older street children, adults on the streets, and even by the police. According to **Aptekar (1994)**, "there are three reasons which are majorly responsible for the existence of street children in the society. These are poverty, aberrant families and urbanization". Street children are also the victim of child trafficking. The poor socio-economic conditions of street children's families are the major reason for a child ending up on the streets. This problem of street children raises a great concern about the safety and security of child rights in the world. The present study focuses on defining the socio-economic conditions of street children living or working on the streets of Agra City.

Street Children (Definition):

The term “street child” was first used in the year 1851 in a famous literature work “**London Labour and the London Poor**” written by **Henry Mayhew**. But the term ‘street children’ was first introduced in the ‘**United Nations International Year of Child**’ in 1979 and came in general use by UNICEF. According to the definition by United Nations, street children are defined as “any girl or boy for whom the street (in its widest sense, including unoccupied dwelling, wastelands etc.) has become his or her habitual abode and source of livelihood. Later, UNICEF and other international organizations gave the new terms to define street children after recognizing that all the children found on the streets did not have the same family circumstances. And thus, street children were defined as the children “of the streets” (who live on the streets) and the children “on the streets” (who work on the streets for earning money and return to their homes at night). The current prevalent definition used widely by UNICEF defines street children as anyone under the age of 18 years who either live or work on the streets. According to this definition, street children are categorized into three: -

- **Children on the Streets:** These are the children who formed the largest category of children. they work on the streets for earning money to support their families financially and return to their homes at night after working on the streets.
- **Children of the Streets:** These are the children who live on the streets but are in contact with their families.
- **Abandoned Children:** These are the children who has no family and are living on the streets on their own without having any responsible adult to care of them.

Review of Literature:

H. A. Chande (2008) in his article ‘*A Study of the Street and Working Children Living in Thane City*’ conducted research on street children with the aim to understand the reasons responsible for the existence of street and working children in Thane City. The total number of 121 street children were selected as sample for the study and the data was collected through questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that the main reasons for the existence of street working and living children were poverty, alcoholic father, disintegration of family, and violence in family.

Meena Mathur (2009) in her research article ‘*Socialization of Street Children in India: A Socio-economic Profile*’ conducted an in-depth study of the socio-economic profile of street children of Jaipur City. The objective of the study was to understand the interrelated socio-economic conditions of street children which play an important role in their socialization in India. A total number of 200 street children were interviewed for the study. The results of the study revealed that majority of the street children were Hindus. The street children reported for being engaged in semi-skilled jobs in unorganized sectors of Jaipur City.

N. B. Patel, Toral Desai, R. K. Bansal and Girish Thakur (2011) in their research article ‘*Occupational Profile and Perceptions of Street Children in Surat City*’ studied the occupational profile of street children. A total number of 326 street children were selected for the study. The data was collected through interview schedule. The results of the study revealed that street children were involved in occupations like working on food stalls or tea stalls, begging or sweeping on the streets, selling newspaper magazines, and books, shoe shining, and selling drinking water bottles and cold drinks. The occupations of street children were changing according their growing age, period of stay and money available with them.

Loknath Ghimire (2014) in his master's thesis '*Being on the Street, Cause, Survival Strategy and Social Perception: An Empirical Study of Street Children in Kathmandu*' studied the major reasons responsible for forcing children on the streets. The data for the study was collected through interviewing children below the age of 16 years. The results of the study revealed that majority of the children found on the streets were boys because of the social and cultural impact of the society.

Pratibha, A. Mathur and Ansu (2016) in their research article '*Difficulties and Problems of Street Children*' studied the problems of street children living in various slums of Faizabad District. A total number of 260 street children which comprised of 130 boys and 130 girls. The data for the study was collected through self-made questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that majority of the street children started their life on the streets between the age of 4-6 years. The main reasons for the street children crisis were poverty and gender discrimination.

Objectives:

The Main objective of the study is to identify the socio-economic conditions of street children living or working on the streets of Agra City.

Research Methodology:

The present study was conducted at two railway stations of Agra City namely: Agra Cantt railway station and Agra Fort railway station. The sample of 38 street children was selected by using snow-ball sampling technique. The information was collected by using structured interview schedule.

Table: Socio-economic Profile of Street Children

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Male (No.)</u>	<u>Male (%)</u>	<u>Female (No.)</u>	<u>Female (%)</u>	<u>Total (No.)</u>	<u>Total (%)</u>
<u>Age</u>						
5-10 years	6	21.4%	1	10%	7	18.4%
11-15 years	18	64.3%	7	70%	25	65.8%
16-17 years	4	14.3%	2	20%	6	15.8%
Total	28	100%	10	100%	38	100%
<u>Migration/ place of origin</u>						
Agra	25	89.3%	10	100%	35	92.1%
Outside Agra	3	10.7%	-	-	3	7.9%
Total	28	100%	10	100%	38	100%
<u>Contact with Family</u>						
Yes	27	96.4%	10	100%	37	97.4%
No	1	3.6%	-	-	1	2.6%
Total	28	100%	10	100%	38	100%
<u>Place of Sleep</u>						
Pukka Home	11	39.4%	7	70%	18	47.4%
Kachhi Abadi home	13	46.4%	3	30%	16	42.1%

On the streets/traffic signals/pavements etc.	4	14.2%	-	-	4	10.5%
Total	28	100%	10	100%	38	100%
<u>Educational Status</u>						
Yes	7	25%	6	60%	13	34.2%
No	21	75%	4	40%	25	65.8%
Total	28	100%	10	100%	38	100%
<u>Kinds of Work</u>						
Begging	8	28.6%	1	10%	9	23.7%
Rag Picking	5	17.9%	3	30%	8	21.1%
Roadside Stalls	6	21.4%	1	10%	7	18.4%
Construction Sites	3	10.7%	3	30%	6	15.7%
Selling Water Bottles	6	21.4%	2	20%	8	21.1%
Total	28	100%	10	100%	38	100%
<u>Total Hours of Work</u>						
4-6 hours	9	32.1%	6	60%	15	39.5%
6-8 hours	11	39.3%	3	30%	14	36.8%
8-10 hours	8	28.6%	1	10%	9	23.7%
Total	28	100%	10	100%	38	100%
<u>Earnings</u>						
Less than 100 Rs.	7	25%	5	50%	12	31.6%
100-200 Rs.	13	46.4%	3	30%	16	42.1%
More than 200 Rs.	8	28.6%	2	20%	10	26.3%
Total	28	100%	10	100%	38	100%

Source: Primary Source (2018)

Results:

Age and Gender

The results show that the majority of the street children were boys. The larger number of street children (65.8 per cent) were between the age of 11-15 years which includes 18 male and 7 female street children. 7 (18.4 per cent) street children (including 6 males and 1 female) belonged to the age of 5-10 years and only 6 (15.8 per cent) street children (including 4 males and 2 females) belonged to the age of 16-17 years.

Migration Status/ Place of Origin

The result shows that the majority of 35 (92.1 per cent) street children (including 25 males and 10 females) were from Agra City. While 7.9 per cent street children were from outside Agra City and all were males.

Contact with Family

The result shows that 37 (97.4 per cent) street children were having contact with their families and only 2.6 per cent street children were having no contact with their families.

Place of Sleep

The result shows that majority of 18 (47.4 per cent) street children (including 11 males and 7 females) reported sleeping or living in Pakka Homes. Other 42.1 per cent street children (including 13 males and 3 females) reported sleeping or living in Kachhi Abadi Homes and only 10.5 per cent street children reported their place of sleep as streets, traffic signals, or pavements and all were boys.

Educational Status

The result shows only 13 (34.2 per cent) street children (including 7 males and 6 females) reported being educated while 25 (65.8 per cent) street children (including 21 males and 4 females) reported being illiterate.

Kinds of Work

The result shows that majority of 9 (23.7 per cent) street children were involved in begging among which 8 were males and 1 was female. The other works reported by street children were rag picking (21.1 per cent, including 5 males and 3 females), selling water bottles (21.1 per cent, including 6 males and 2 females), roadside stalls (18.4 per cent, including 6 males and 1 female) and work at construction sites (15.7 per cent, including 3 males and 3 females).

Total Hours of Work

The result shows that majority of 15 (39.5 per cent) street children were working for 4-6 hours in a day including 9 males and 6 females. 14 (36.8 per cent, including 11 males and 3 females) street children were reported working for 6-8 hours in a day. Only 9 (23.7 per cent, including 8 males and 1 female) were reported working for 8-10 hours in a day.

Earnings

The result shows that 16 (42.1 per cent) street children were earning 100-200 rupees in a day. 12 (31.6 per cent) street children were earning less than 100 rupees and only 10 (26.3 per cent) street children were earning more than 200 rupees in a day.

Conclusion:

Street children phenomenon is one of the very challenging social issues of present world. Street children are the most vulnerable group of all the children in difficult circumstances. The poor socio-economic conditions of street children clearly indicate the problems they are facing while living or working on the streets. In the present study, it can be clearly seen and observed that street children face various problems working on the streets. The major reason for children being on the street is poverty. The poor financial conditions of street children become the cause of the existence of street children in every society in not only India but all over the world. Street children are forced to work on the streets for earning money to support their families financially. They do not go to schools because of having poor economy. Street children are involved in various occupations like rag picking, selling items, working on food stalls etc. Many street children are also involved in begging. The poor conditions of street children clearly indicate the need of policy implications for protecting such children. The study suggests for the implementation and monitoring of policies that are working for the protection of children in difficult circumstances.

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