

INTRODUCTION

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The scene is common and painfully familiar; a busy street lined with shops displaying the latest fashion and electronic equipment, well-dressed people going in and out. At night big cities come alive and urban life reaches its peak. But in the background, children huddle in corners, or walk about aimlessly, dirty, disheveled a painful sight.

Street children, the off spring of today's complex urban realities world wide, represent one of our global family's most serious, urgent and rapidly growing socio educational challenges. No country and virtually no city can escape the presence of the so-called street children (*Le Roux J., 1996*)

Nothing in life could be more worth than being young and living in the streets of major cities in the world. Estimates reported by the WHO project on children and substance abuse put the number of street children between 10 and 100 million World wide. Street children constitute major Portion of vulnerable children and youth.

They exist in every part of the world and Constitute a marginalized group in most societies. They do not have what society considers appropriate relationships with major institutions of childhood such as family, education and health. The continuous exposure to harsh environments and the nature of their lifestyles make them vulnerable to substance use that threatens their mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing (*WHO; 2000*).

The pain and suffering of children around the world none more So than street children, is well known to many of us (*Howard and Broughton 2004*).

Street and working children seem to be an increasingly common sight these days in cities around the world, especially in the poorer regions. Many of these children working and/or living on the streets will be deprived of the joys of normal childhood and adolescence (*Adeganha , 2002*).

These children are among the most deprived; they usually have no access to health care or education and some of them have been victims of violence even before taking to the street (*Scanlon et al, 1998*).

The street child phenomenon, the presence of vast numbers of unsupervised and un protected children is an alarming and escalating world wide problem (*Le Roux and Smith, 1998*).

The police, court officials, social workers and public in general, perceive street children negatively their behavior is deemed deviant (*Le Roux and Smith, 1998*).

These children are unloved, under nourished society often tries to forget them, or ignore them, or sometimes even deny that they exist. The problem will not go away by itself, however and unless addressed soon, may lead to more dire consequences (*Le Roux and Smith 1998*).

Most of these children miss love, protection and warmth of parental care. They lack supervision and are devoid of education. Losing these

legitimate rights they undergo physical and mental stress. They miss the opportunity to grow to the best of their potential. In street, they may suffer serious and often permanent physical and personality disorder making them vulnerable adults (*Sethi, 2004*).

Street children phenomenon is global issue that present many challenges. It is socio-educational problem precipitated by multifactorial event in the home, community and children personality attributes (*Densley and Joss, 2000*).

In many third world countries, there is an enormous increase of children nowadays roaming the streets. The causes of this phenomenon are diverse; rapid urbanization, worsening economic trends and rampant population growth (*Juliaan et al., 1999*).

It is estimated that there are over 100 million street children living in various cities around the globe (*Howard and Broughton 2004*).

Most estimates of the number of street children fail to give a definition of the street children or details of the method of counting. Never the less published estimates which are essentially informed guesses, are quoted and equated by different authers until they became accepted as fact.

In 1986, the United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affair estimated that that there were 30-170 million street children world wide. The large range illustrates how difficult it is to count street children accurately (*Le Roux and Smith, 1998*).

These children work at odd jobs. Street children is increasing problem. It is however difficult to estimate the number of children in the street as this is a highly mobile population (*Gurgel et al., 2004*).

The general public has labeled these children with derogatory terms such as "urchins, little bugs, little criminals, fruit bird, dirty faces, vermin, mosquitoes, or little farts, some view the children as undesirable in society that government, in situation, police and vigilante groups have killed them.

The most famous case occurred in 1997 in Brazil, when the police death squad shot at approximately 50 street children, killing five. Few days later, the majority of public disapproved these actions. Such in human violence represent a lack of under standing of the life of street and a lack of will to constructively face such a a momentous societal issue (*Huang et al., 2004*).

The street represents a refuge to the child coming from a needy family and also to the one who has a history of abuse from its family (*Riberio, 2003*).

The daily lives of many street children are unstructured and unstable in long term this sense that nothing is stable can produce distortion of the mind (*Le Roux and Smith, 1998*.)

The nature of continuous exposure to the street and its associated life style make street children vulnerable to psychoactive substances (*Jide and Odejide, 2003*).

A wide range of problems such as physical, nutritional, substance abuse, mental health, sex related medical concern and the ones associated with victimization and abuse (*Khurana et al., 2004*).

The longer children spend on the streets, the more likely it is that they will become involved in criminal activities; but the popular beliefs that the street are "school of crime" and the street children inevitably become criminal are not true. However, they are often guilty of antisocial or self destruction behaviour which frequently results from lack of knowledge rather than from negative and fatalistic attitudes (*Le Roux and Smith, 1998*)

They are at risk for physical emotional social and cognitive violation (*Densley and Joss, 2000*).

A scrutiny and synergy of the research that were done on the health of street children revealed a clinical picture of their negative state of well being of lowered immunity, morbidity, ill health and heightened susceptibility to serious diseases, e.g., tuberculosis, hepatitis, meningitis or Aids. Street children, if not sick, are psychologically and physically neglected to such an extent that he or she can not develop adequately (*Linda and Cycil, 2002*).

Sexual and mental health problems are on the increase worldwide especially among street children (*Guernina, 2004*).

Substance abuse by vulnerable children and youth living in the street is one of the major problems that face major countries world wide Street children regardless their sex are at high risk for the use of harmful

substances that are mostly abused by them and commonly lead to dependence especially Kolla inhalation and Cigarette smoking.

They are mostly poly substance users (1-9 substances). Using drugs as early as at the age of 8 and for a duration that may be up to 8 years. They commonly start substance use early in their street lives and consumed substances for many reasons that help them to cope with street peers and street life disadvantages (*Abou Hatab M.F., 2005*).

Although the problem of homelessness in Egypt is not terribly visible compared to other countries, indicators of homelessness are readily apparent in Egyptian society. Overcrowded urban areas and poverty have resulted in the creation of settlements of precariously housed and serious housing shortages. in addition, Egypt has witnessed an increasing number of children who work and/or live on the streets.

The phenomenon of street children is relatively new to Government and public recognition of problem is only very recent. The children in itself has very negative connotations, especially as "the street " is correlated with crime, vagrancy and deviance .until the end of the 1990s, no effort was made to differentiate between juvenile delinquents and the children who live and work on the streets or remain there during the day. According to Egyptian law, all of them fall under the law of "children at high risk" who are arrested when found and sent to custodial institutions for rehabilitation in order to re-admit them into society (*Bibars.I. 1998*).

Most researches seem to agree that the leading causes of the existence of the problem of street children are poverty, unemployment,

family breakdown, child abuse and neglect, dropping out of schools, child labor, the effect of peers, and other social and psychological reasons related to the social environment or to the personality of the child such as behavioral disorders or sensation seeking (*CIDA; 2001*).

The legal definition of street children seems to have long been affected by the "Correctional Approach" and the "passive social outlook" towards these children. Such a definition seems to be the Functional/operational definition of street children at the governmental level. Street children in Egypt had historically been labeled and considered as "vagrants", "delinquents", "juvenile delinquents", "juveniles exposed to delinquency". Under current Egyptian law, street children fall under "children at high risk". Or recognized as "children exposed to delinquency" and there for can be arrested when found and placed in corrective institutions [*according to the Child Law-Egypt (Law 12 of 1996)*].

Revisions of the Child-Law are undergoing now to rename and categorize such children under "Children in need for protection" (The National council for Childhood & Motherhood). The Child Law of 1996 defines "cases of exposure to delinquency" on the basis of the types of activities children do, which include the following:

- If the child is found begging, or selling trivial items or performing shows on the street , or any other activities, which are not considered as positive resources for living.
- If the child collects cigarette ends or other items or things from wastes.

- If the child has any connection with Prostitution , gambling or drugs.
- If the child has no permanent place to sleep, and usually sleep in the street.
- If the child contacts those exposed to Delinquency or suspects.
- If the child is accustomed to escaping from educational or vocational training institutions.
- If The child has a bad behavior and is delinquent from his guardian.
- If the child has no means to live and no trusted guardian.
- If the child is less than seven years of age, and found in any of the previously mentioned cases of exposure to delinquency, or if the child commits one of the previously mentioned felonies.
- If the child has a mental or a psychological disorders to the extent that he/she might cause harm to himself/herself or to others.

The Child Law also considers the child "at risk" if exposed to any of the following conditions:

1. If his safety, morals, health, or life is endangered.
2. If the surroundings where the child is raised exposes the child to vulnerability.
3. If his/her guardian refuses to take responsibility towards the child.
4. If the child's educational future becomes at risk.
5. If the child is exposed to deviance, whether through exposure to drugs alcoholism, violence, or prostitution.

Estimates of the numbers of children living on the streets are highly speculative. The global figures for children working on the streets all over the world are likely well over 100 million. Brazil alone has an estimated 100 000 child between the ages of 7 and 18 working on the streets of all their types (*CIDA 2001*).

The number of street children in developing and industrialized nations is estimated between 30 and 170 millions (*WHO report*). Although there are no official statistics on the magnitude of the problem of street children in Egypt, some efforts have been made to estimate their number, regardless of accuracy or techniques used to ensure both validity and reliability. *Sedik (1995)*, based on the records of Al-Amal Village in Cairo, estimated that the number of street children in Egypt, both males and females, is 93,000 others estimated that their number reached one and half million in 1996 (*UNICEF, 1996*). Moreover, Children "at- risk" reached two millions in their number at 1999 (*The General Egyptian Association for Child Protection; 1999*).

Thus even without official statistics observation and experience of those concerned with street children all point to a problem whose magnitude is growing Indeed the Rapid Situation Assessment *RSA team (2001)* believed that when all children defined as street children are included, their numbers exceed one million.