

A Street Children Dilemma: Between a Student and a Breadwinner

1st Tsuroyya

Communication Sciences Department
Universitas Negeri Surabaya
Surabaya, Indonesia
tsuroyya@unesa.ac.id

2nd Damajanti Kusuma Dewi

Psychology Department
Universitas Negeri Surabaya
Surabaya, Indonesia
damajantikusuma@unesa.ac.id

3rd Putri Aisyiyah Rachma Dewi

Communication Sciences Department
Universitas Negeri Surabaya
Surabaya, Indonesia
putridewi@unesa.ac.id

Abstract—The study investigated psychological factors of street children in opting for study or work. A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted to demonstrate the process of determining to stay in one or to survive both environments, taking into consideration: initial motives, internal conflicts, justifications, and final decisions. Data were collected from semi structured interviews using purposive samplings. Results indicated that inadequacy of financial support, poor family planning, child economic value, lack of role models, and incapability of children upbringing played a significant role in the process of making the call. Efforts to overcome this persisting phenomenon may be worthwhile examined in the future. For policymakers in particular, this study serves as a basis to formulate strategic policies that aim at street children betterment. At the grassroot level, fully understanding the phenomenon of street children helps them design various activities to keep them away from streets and provide compulsory education.

Keywords—street children; psychosocial; cognitive dissonance theory

I. INTRODUCTION

A street children dilemma in opting for schools or work has been triggered by a need to provide for the family, whereas schools become the last priority since these youths could also learn from their work [1]. Working on the street has taught street kids how to become a businessman, develop their skills, and meet new people from whom they learn what a good or a bad man is [1]. To accommodate street children's need of study, studies argue a greater emphasis should be placed on education through a new brand of institution to advocate and address the problems of street children [2].

Scholars frequently discuss the issues of street children encompassing their stereotypes, addiction to gambling, and survival methods [3]–[5]. On the issue of stereotypes, previous research has confirmed that street children are likely identical to lower access to health, street begging, orphanhood, and mistreatment [6]–[8]. Furthermore, it is clear that the positions of some writers arguing for greater vulnerability of living in the

streets [4], [5], [7]–[11] could be misinterpreted by children as validating some forms of self protection and survivals [12].

Addressing this confusion children have with maintaining security appropriately requires a wide variety of alternatives to provide children with non-formal occupation, 'protection agency', 'youth empowerment', safe situated learning environment, and art expression platform [2], [10], [12]–[15]. Challengingly, while the concepts of these resolutions, protection agency in particular and legal violation may overlap, they are easily confused because most common examples of legal agency also violate laws [4]. How children perceive these areas appears to also depend on their own perceptions of seriousness of legal agency activities [11], the likelihood of being self empowered, and the possibility of learning from potential facilitators [2]. This last area, the induction of children into a creative art platform aiming to reduce violent behaviors [10] and development of an understanding of the concepts of family supporting these youths [9] is challenging at both institutional and grassroot levels due to limited successful empowering programs [2] and abundant child-domestic violence cases [9].

While it is important to understand street child's barriers in visiting drop-in centers and staying with parents/ family members [2], [9], previous studies reveal essential strategies of street children education attainment. That is to create bonds with these youths by which they are able to obtain careful attention and a sense of serenity in conducive atmosphere for the development of children's curiosity and inquiries [14]. Arguably, research on psychosocial factors of street children may seem lack of investigation on internal conflicts leading to their decision to stay living in the streets rather than attending the schools.

This study presents an exploration of the extent to which children begin living in the streets, experience internal conflicts, find justification, and eventually make the call to become street children. In particular, the authors are interested in children's attitude toward their situation and surroundings, and the extent to which dissonance is treated differently to more serious problems such as violence.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative descriptive approach was applied to this research. With regards to data collection method, semi-structured interviews were employed among voluntary respondents consisting of 10 street children in the 5-12 age groups. They were primarily involved in education-based NGO activities. The questions inquired both demographic and psychosocial data contributing to child's motives to stay living in the streets. The former consisted of age, education, parents, and siblings, whereas the latter covered goals, reasons and feelings of being street children, and people with dominant and/ or oppositional attitude to this non-ideal condition. Results of the interviews were examined using thematic analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants in this study provided background information of their family, role models, and education as illustrated in Table I. One dominant finding emerged from this family setting information describing the fact that the majority of respondents' parents was working. Results clearly showed that most participants came from either a complete family or separated one, whereas only 20% were orphans. With regards to the number of siblings, equal proportion was shared between those who had 1-2 siblings and those of the only child of the family.

TABLE I. THE PERCENTAGES OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

No	Demographic Data		
	Questions	N	%
1	Sex		
	Male	4	40
	Female	6	60
2	Age		
	< 7 years old	2	20
	7-12 years old	8	80
3	Education		
	Yes	5	50
	No	4	40
4	Working parents		
	Yes	7	70
	No	3	30
5	Complete parents		
	Yes	4	40
	Divorce	4	40
	Others	2	20
6	Siblings		
	Yes	7	70
	No	3	30
7	Role models		
	Parents	3	30
	Non parent	7	70

Street children are perceived to be vulnerable as they need to earn money to survive rather than to study [1], [11]. However, this research contradicts the current finding considering the facts that their parents are working and the number of family members is relatively small. In other words, it may not seem urgent for these children to provide for their family members. Yet, an argument has been put forward that adults are the perpetrators for the existing phenomenon of

street children [1]. Arguably, this claim may not necessarily be true as these youths act the same way as the adults in essence of survival; thus they cannot be simply considered as 'innocent' and 'helpless' [12].

Nevertheless, children in general require protection and security from their families. An ideal family setting may well provide street youths as they are likely vulnerable to crimes, violence, and gangs [3], [4], [11], [12]. Both protection and security can also be obtained from education institution where street kids could meet a counselor and/ or a teacher [2]. The present results suggest that there has been a considerable proportion of a street child coming from separated parents. This is consistent with previous work justifying why a child remains in the street for security and self protection due to the unavailability of family protection [12].

Interestingly, these street children found their role models beyond their nuclear family, yet they hardly managed to clearly describe their role models. This fact proves to be inconsolable for the children may not obtain a positive image from their parents, rather these kids discover a role model from surroundings, a place where emotional bonds and friendship are created [1], [3], [4], [8], [11], [13]. To street youths, friends transcend the concepts of a sense of belonging, protection, trustworthiness, family relations, and an essential asset to survive in the streets [1], [3], [4], [8]. However, it is also interesting to see that few street children idolized people outside their environment such as the president and a major as the ones who these kids looked up to in the future. Obviously, this clearly counters previous claims on the important roles of friends for street children.

The other prominent result indicated that female street children were likely to join informal gathering or organization. However, in terms of education, nearly half of these children did not go to schools, with 30% approximately were dropped out. It is evident from the results that overall, children incline to opt for informal education than the formal one. Therefore, strategic approaches are necessary to attract these children studying at a school including acknowledging their emotional and social needs [14]. Flexible hours, formal and informal schools may also become potential solutions to engage street youths to education [2]. Above all, economic supports from governments may not be discounted from resolutions to counter the unwillingness of street children going to schools as this prevents these youngsters from working in the streets illegally [4], [7], [11].

A. Beyond the Role of Breadwinners

Most street youths continue living in the streets due to inadequate financial support from their family as illustrated in Table II. An insignificant proportion, approximately 20% of youths showed they came from homeless family. Often the term of "street working children" has become a multifaceted problem. It is the responsibility for taking care of family that force them to survive in the streets and seek financial security independently [1]. Various responses from the participants such as "I become a street child to help my mother"; "I sell newspapers to provide for myself"; and "I work in the streets

because I am an orphan” verify previous claim that these youths somehow borne the burden to become breadwinners.

This concept to family members however, is well perceived since these youngsters are considered as a valuable asset from both economic and family relation perspectives. The former confirms that previous work’s claim on street children ‘informal employment’ [13]. The latter on the other hand, highlights a process of responsibility transition from adults to these kids by taking care of and providing for their younger siblings. One of the participants narrated the story of her working in the streets and taking care of her younger sibling at the same time. This finding extends beyond the previous scholars’ argument that the street children prioritize “people like us”, their street friends to be taken care of, rather than relatives [4], [8], [12].

B. Between Ideals and Endeavors

It appears from this evidence that high motivations in learning were not always associated with an increase in the number of formal employment. However, this work represents only a preliminary attempt to establish such link. The actual relationship between the two may be more complex; for instance, it is possible that because the participants lacked of understanding on the importance of education attainment in achieving their dreams, the number of respondents with poor education was higher without any real change in their study. These results nevertheless suggest that monitoring street children learning activities may provide useful input for future projection strategies.

Different approaches in nurturing street youth dreams may require the existence of center and counsel with continuous support and engaging activities. To illustrate, counselors facilitate hard skill trainings which may be a useful approach to take street youths from the streets, and assist the adjustment process [2], [7]. Furthermore, specific strategies are also necessary to advocate street children with family problems particularly mistreatment and inconvenient upbringing [9]. Counselors in this case play an important role to enlighten family members on consequences of having kids working in the streets including crimes, accidents, and violence. Therefore, counseling should be made available in both formal and informal education [7].

C. Underneath the feeling

Table II. reveals street children’s acceptance and feeling toward their condition became more prevalent. This does not correspond to previous scholar’s finding that most children will not be ashamed of their condition as they hold the responsibility to the process of their family livelihood [1]. Most participants mentioned their refusal toward the fact that they lived in the streets as these kids thought this way of living brought more negative consequences including fear, accidents, exhaustion, and dehydration. One participant highlighted her miserable feeling when a passerby was angry and forced her to leave his car. These consequences seem trivial to Ethiopian street working children since these youths feel more depressed for not being able to earn money for family members rather than being unable to attend the school [1].

TABLE II. PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS OF LIVING IN THE STREETS

No	Psychosocial Data		
	Topics	N	%
1	Motives		
	Economy	8	80
	Homeless	2	20
2	Goals		
	White collar	8	80
	Blue collar	1	10
	Undecided	1	10
3	Feelings		
	Positive	2	20
	Negative	8	80
4	Encouragement		
	Family/ Neighbours	8	80
	Surrounding	2	20
5	Knowledge		
	Parents	2	20
	Relatives	2	20
	No acknowledgement	6	60
6	Willingness to study		
	Yes	3	30
	No	7	70
7	Acceptance		
	Yes	1	10
	No	9	90

D. Over Motivation and Apprehension

Much encouragement was provided by either neighbors or surroundings for the participants. On the other hand, most family members failed to acknowledge that their kids were working in the street. This finding challenges the earlier investigation on Ethiopian street working children with their family support. This family clearly considers kids as assets with large contribution to its livelihood [1]. Accordingly, one possible to counter this problem will be organizing workshops and providing counsels to train parents with children upbringing [9].

As noted earlier, a small number of participants viewed their relative as a role model as well as a reliable person with strong influence in their perception of life. In other words, obtaining support from the neighbor validated the participant action to continue living in the street. Some plausible resolutions, however, lie in the combination of providing counsel for street children surrounding and therapy to reduce their ‘aggressive behavior’ through ‘narrative exposure therapy’ (NET) [5], [7]. Earlier research has claimed that children who are exposed to insecure and violent environment are likely to become aggressive and incline to be less violent once they engage in narrative exposure therapy [5].

E. Through the Upside-Down of Dissonances

Street children have experienced difficulties in solving financial, insecurity, protection, and family problems with minimal consequences. Existing resolutions such as drop-in center and protective agency [4], [12] prove to be fairly effective for street youths find their environment consoling. This, however, results from encountering internal conflicts of whether or not being street children is legitimate and secure.

In this study internal conflicts have been expressed through initial motive of being street children to making the call to stay living in the street. The process of this substantial decision somehow reflects a similar pattern in Cognitive Dissonance Theory [16]. In the beginning, the participant believed that living in the street was difficult and danger. However, she had to be a street child to provide for her sibling. Or, in another case, a respondent was forced to do so due to the absence of parents. This resulted dissonance in a way that a respondent had to provide protection for her younger sibling while she was working. Since there was no support from either relatives or neighbors in taking care of her younger sibling, she began adapting her surrounding with food and security as her priority. Only through this method was she able to reduce her feeling of guilty of living in the street. The majority of the respondents with similar case however, insisted to refute their conditions as they longed for an ideal family and safe environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study highlights psychosocial factors of street children particularly their role as a breadwinner and a student, feeling toward their condition, and acknowledgment from relative and surrounding. The results of this study suggest that street children also experience a cycle of cognitive dissonance to decide surviving the street life. Finally, the discovery of street children cognitive dissonance offers sustainable and resolutions in overcoming this phenomenon for future researchers.

REFERENCES

- [1] D. Gebretsadik, "Street work and the perceptions of children: Perspectives from Dilla town, Southern Ethiopia," *Glob. Stud. Child.*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 29–37, 2017.
- [2] T. Batista and A. Johnson, "The Children's Aid Society," *J. Fam. Hist.*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 67–80, 2017.
- [3] K. Gadd, "Constraints, Incentives and Pockets of Local Order on the Streets of Pelotas, Brazil," *Young*, vol. 25, no. 4S, pp. 1–18, 2017.
- [4] K. Saldanha and D. Madangopal, "The social dimensions of gambling among street youth in Mumbai: Is it really an addiction?," *Qual. Soc. Work*, p. 147332501770933, 2017.
- [5] A. Crombach and T. Elbert, "Controlling Offensive Behavior Using Narrative Exposure Therapy," *Clin. Psychol. Sci.*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 270–282, 2015.
- [6] L. Ravensbergen, R. Buliung, K. Wilson, and G. Faulkner, "Socioeconomic inequalities in children's accessibility to food retailing: Examining the roles of mobility and time," *Soc. Sci. Med.*, vol. 153, pp. 81–89, 2016.
- [7] R. O. Bukoye, "Case Study: Prevalence and Consequences of Streets Begging among Adults and Children in Nigeria, Suleja Metropolis," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 171, pp. 323–333, 2015.
- [8] J. Olsson, S. Höjer, L. Nyström, and M. Emmelin, "Orphanhood and mistreatment drive children to leave home – A study from early AIDS-affected Kagera region, Tanzania," *Int. Soc. Work*, vol. 60, no. 5, pp. 1218–1232, 2017.
- [9] G. Kayiranga and I. Mukashema, "Psychosocial Factor of being Street Children in Rwanda," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 140, pp. 522–527, 2014.
- [10] R. Folostina, L. Tudorache, T. Michel, B. Erzsebet, V. Agheana, and H. Hocaoglu, "Using Play and Drama in Developing Resilience in Children at Risk," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 197, no. February, pp. 2362–2368, 2015.
- [11] S. Atkinson-Sheppard, "The gangs of Bangladesh: Exploring organized crime, street gangs and 'illicit child labourers in Dhaka," *Criminol. Crim. Justice*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 233–249, 2016.
- [12] S. Atkinson-Sheppard, "Street children and 'protective agency': Exploring young people's involvement in organised crime in Dhaka, Bangladesh," *Childhood*, no. 1998, p. 090756821769441, 2017.
- [13] H. Reza, "Networks, social ties, and informal employment of Bangladeshi street children," *Childhood*, 2017.
- [14] H. Ö. Bademci and E. F. Karadayı, "What Makes Children Want to Learn? Working with Street Children at a University," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 159, pp. 651–655, 2014.
- [15] C.-M. Povian, "Children in Need in a Globalized World," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 197, no. February, pp. 1183–1187, 2015.
- [16] E. Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 8th ed. New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2012.