

The Plight of Street Children in Quetta, Balochistan

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Abstract:

The problems and number of the street children are increasing in Quetta. This study shows that mostly the children are found on the streets in Quetta in order to augment family income. Children below the age of seven work on the street. Lack of awareness and absence of significant research has also aggravated the problems of street children in Quetta. Due to inadequate government resources including financial and human, the problems of street children are not given due importance and weight. This paper justifies the need for further research into the subject-matter.

Keywords:

Street Children, Quetta, Pakistan, Government, NGOs, Poverty, Abuse, Problems, Research.

Introduction

“A world which abandons its children in the streets has no future; it no longer renders it possible to create and develop a project of life.... A world which tries to ignore the precariousness of the human condition inspires no confidence.... It is a world wherein each one survives amongst a complete spiritual disintegration. It is a world that has become simply dehumanized, and which today needs urgently to awake to the true values.”

--Judge A.A. Cancado Trindade, The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (*Villagrán Morales et al vs Guatemala-1999*)

In Pakistan, the issue of street children has never been given any importance. Khan (2007) provides that street children particularly with reference to Pakistan are very unfortunate and forgotten. When we talk about children's rights in Pakistan we normally talk about special children or those which left home due to one reason or the other. There are very few persons or NGOs who talk about street children. Anwar (2002) quotes a survey conducted by Centre for Research and Social Development (CRSD), stating that, *“about 1.2 million children are on the streets in Pakistan's large cities working as beggars, vendors or shoeshine boys. Children become homeless because of abuse and poverty and once on the streets, they are exposed to countless hazards, including child labour and sexual exploitation”*.

Under the law, children are not allowed to work below the age of fourteen years in Pakistan. According to Article 11 (3) of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan *“No child below the age of fourteen years shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any*

hazardous employment". The state has a foremost duty to protect the child and the family. The state shall protect the marriage, the family, the mother and the child. The state shall make provisions for ... ensuring that children ... are not employed in vocations unsuited to their age ... Article 37(e). The Employment of Children Act 1991¹ also prohibits the child working below the age of fourteen years. Similarly, in order to protect the rights of the children National Child Protection Policy (draft)² has been prepared. According to Shahid (2009) the National Child Protection Policy (draft) would address concerns of 15 to 20 per cent children in Pakistan who endure some form of sexual abuse, make child trafficking punishable and rescue more than eight million children under 14 from child labour. The policy would particularly protect interests of more than two million children born into poor households every year.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 says that ... Childhood is entitled to special care and assistance. (Preamble). In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. [Article 3(1)]. However, neither the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan nor UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 nor the Employment Act 1991 is being followed and implemented in letter and spirit.

In Pakistan, the issue of street children has never been given any importance. Khan (2007) provides that street children particularly with reference to Pakistan are very unfortunate and forgotten. When we talk about children's rights in Pakistan we normally talk about special children or those which left home due to one reason or the other. There are very few persons or NGOs who talk about street children. Anwar (2002) quotes a survey conducted by Centre for Research and Social Development (CRSD), saying that, "*about 1.2 million children are on the streets in Pakistan's large cities working as beggars, vendors or shoeshine boys. Children become homeless because of abuse and poverty and once on the streets, they are exposed to countless hazards, including child labour and sexual exploitation*".

There is no accurate data as to the number of street children in Pakistan. "*Lahore is host to around 14,000 street children compared to just 5,000 in Peshawar, while Karachi and Quetta are thought to have around 15,000 each. The reliability and potential of these estimates is, however, questionable, and there has been no unified effort to assess the scale nationwide while using a single methodology, perhaps because the issue of street children has not generally been considered important or urgent enough in Pakistan to warrant such a check*".(Tufail, 2004)

It is imperative to prioritize the reasons which normally lead to predicament of street children, particularly, why does a child leave his home to live or work in the streets alone? The origins of the street children phenomenon are varied and the direct causes are many. Their experiences on the street are difficult to comprehend. However, a correlation between the cause and effect is yet to be established on the basis of sound empirical research. In Quetta, the street children can be seen everywhere including bus stations, fruit and vegetable markets and city centre. The street children in Quetta are classified into street living and street working children. However, majority of the street children are street working children in Quetta.

Due to the mass influx of Afghan refugees in 1979 and after the US led Afghan war on terror since 2001, the number of Afghan refugee street children in Quetta is in large numbers. Majority of them are involved in garbage picking. Despite the huge number of street children in Quetta, no research has been carried out particularly by the NGOs. According to Qadeer Baig (2006) the primary aim of most of the NGOs in Pakistan is to carry out programmes for the benefit of the underprivileged in the shape of service delivery in areas of health, education, sanitation, rural development, etc. Research, therefore, is not specifically seen as the prime mandate of such organizations. Similarly, the government has also not carried out any study on the burning issue of street children at the grass root level. In Quetta, street children are extremely prone to various risky behaviours including drug use, sexual and physical abuse and exploitation. Most of them do not have adequate access to health, nutrition, hygiene and legal support. Thrust into a hard and uncongenial environment, these children become rigid and insensitive. Various factors including poverty, dysfunctional home and work place environment have contributed to the abysmal situation of street children in Quetta. However, empirical research will reveal that how many and how far these children are exposed to and affected by criminal behaviour and crime indulgence are to be checked and verified from local law-enforcement agencies.

Definition

The term street children was first coined in 1852. William (1993) states that the term “street children” was first used by Henry Mayhew in 1851 when writing *London Labour and the London Poor*, although it came into general use only after the United Nations year of the child in 1979.

Brick (2002) says that the United Nations has defined the term 'street children' to include “any boy or girl... for whom the street in the widest sense of the word... has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults”. According to Lusk (1989) the most commonly used definition comes from UNICEF and

distinguishes two groups: *Children on the street*: “Home based” children who spend much of the day on the street but have some family support and usually return home at night. *Children of the street*: “Street based” children who spend most days and nights on the street and are functionally without family support.

In Pakistan, Tufail (2005) has categorized the street children into three types, the first category is of those street children who maintain strong relationships with their family of origin, then there are those street children who have very limited or no contact with their family of origin, and who have no or temporary shelter without consistent employment, while the third category include those children for whom street has become their real home. It includes children who might not necessarily be homeless or without families, but who live in situations where there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults. The argument is supported by UNODC (2004) which states that there are different types of street children but majority returns home. It defines street children as those for whom the family support base is weakened and who must share in the responsibility of family survival by working on city streets and market places.

All those children, for the purpose of this study, who are below 18 years of age and who either work or live on the streets in Quetta are street children.

Statement of the Problem

The government does not have enough resources to cater the needs of street children in Quetta. The non-government organizations have set up Drop-in-centres for street children in Quetta. Non-formal education and the vocational training centres are the two major components of the Drop-in-centres (DICs) along with the provision of food, health and recreational education and free legal aid. Formal education remains a far cry for street children. These DICs only cater to the problems of street working children, those who work during the day time and return to their homes at sunset. There are no shelter homes to accommodate abandoned or runaway street children. As a consequence, abandoned or runaway are more prone to sexual exploitation due to the fact that they live on the streets. The public view street children as “scum's of earth” and treat them with utmost disdain. The paper attempts to highlight the problems being faced by the street children in Quetta and provides viable recommendations for various stakeholders to assess the nature and extent of the problem associated with street children and to develop and implement appropriate responses.

Limitations of the Study

The street children can be found in various districts of Balochistan; however, the study will be limited to a sample in Quetta only, the capital of Balochistan.

Despite the fact that limited research and that no concrete data is available on street children, this empirical study has brought forward the practical recommendations with a view to sensitize the stakeholders on the issue of street children and limitations are no bar to take appropriate steps to address the problems so identified. The study will be based on generalization and not particularization.

Literature Review

Although there has been increase in street children, their problems are further aggravated with lack of significant research on the issue in Quetta. The issue of street children in Pakistan has not been considered important enough for research into the magnitude to be done. The study will be the first of its nature on street children, to the best of my knowledge, in Quetta. The literature review will focus on the micro factors related with the street children in Quetta.

Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain the origins of street children. One relates to urban poverty, a second relates to aberrant families (e.g., abandonment, abuse, or neglect), and a third is associated with modernization (Aptekar 1994). The main reason of children leaving their homes and turning to street is poverty. The street children during the interview voiced that they have left their homes in order to support their families. All over the world, children often turn to the streets in an attempt to resolve problems that arise from the social structures and situations in which they find themselves. Children that turn to the streets share one common factor namely, 'working the streets' to make a living. This happens because households are unable to provide adequate living arrangements for their children (Grundling and Irma 2005). It is also stated by Mufune (2000) that "being on the street is a public disclosure of destitution. It is a statement to both the public and the individual concerned that one is poor".

With large family composition and limited opportunities to education and inadequate home environment, children turn to street in Quetta. The consequence is that children are often exposed to crime, abuse and sexual exploitation and with little hope of the future and personal growth. Prevalent in the informal and underground economies, these children are often exposed to exploitative employment, illegal substances, urban crime, prostitution and abuse by authorities with little or no protection (Basu, 2003; Sutherland and Richardson, 1998). Because of the nature and milieu of their labor, street-working children often endure consequences affecting their health, safety, and moral and social development. Given this negative impact, this type of work constitutes one of the worst forms of child labour (ILO, 1999).

The children also leave their homes due to neglect and abuse. Schurink (1993) has put defined street child as:

A street child is a boy or a girl who is under the age of 18 and who left his/her home environment, part time or permanently (because of problems at home and/or school, or try to alleviate those problems) and who spends most of his/her time unsupervised on the street as part of a subculture of children who live an unprotected communal life and who depend on themselves and on each other, and not on an adult for the provision of physical and emotional needs such as food, clothing, nurturance, direction and socialization.(Schurink, 1993)

According to Tufail (2005) any of the processes of children becoming separated from family may result in children living and working on the street at some point and they may even end up in brothels and sweat shops. Parents are often blamed for the departure of children from homes to streets. The parents' inability to support large family often results in children turning to streets.

The street children are construed as a problem to the society and public at large with no morals and have chaotic lives. Street children are in conflict not only with the law but also the whole of society (Van Beers 2003). When the society fails to protect children from abuse and exploitation, children turn to street or runaway from their homes.

Street children in Quetta are seen in groups and are headed by a leader who controls their activities. Ennew J and Kruger JS (2003) posit that the role of the street group is significant in terms of physical survival. Sharing resources and information is vital and a group is often a means of protection from violence and police harassment. Khan (2007) observes that children who live and work on the streets or simply work in commercial areas at a young age, are subjected to gross injustice and are frequently neglected by national law despite the fact that our own country has ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990* and played the host for the *World Summit on Children*.

The research is particularly silent on the issue of orphaned or abandoned children. The study shows that orphaned children are at a most disadvantageous stage in Quetta. "Yet research has consistently failed to show either high numbers of orphaned or abandoned children living and working on the streets, or children who have permanently severed ties with their families" (see for example, Aptekar 1994; Aptekar and Heinonen 2003, Baker 1998; Butler and Rizzini 2003, Ennew 1986;).

Neglect at the micro level often results children heading towards the street. Beauchemin (1999) has stated that:

"...while the consequences of the growing numbers of street children are a problem, these children are not responsible for their predicament. They are turning to the street because of the failures of the education system, parental negligence and abuse.....growing poverty (p.81). With large

family and neglect of parents along with poverty, street children either live or work on the streets of Quetta. Majority of them work in order to supplement family income."

The paper adds to the current, though unbelievably scanty literature. This research identifies ways and means that the government and non-government entities can adopt to address the problems of street children in Quetta.

Research Methodology

The research design is qualitative in nature. Patton (2002) posits that, "... *qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases*". The research instruments were structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews were conducted with the officials of the government departments and members of non-governmental organizations. Unstructured interviews were conducted with the street children in Quetta. The writer also visited the Drop-in-centres of (DICs) of SEHER (Society for Empowering Human Resource) and WESS (Water, Environment & Sanitation Society) in Quetta.

Sample size and Population

The sample size comprise of 25 members including:

- 20 street children from Quetta
- 1 official of the Social Welfare Department, Quetta
- 1 official of Police Department in Quetta.
- 3 members of NGOs including SEHER and WESS

The sample was collected from Hazarghanji, Liaquat bazaar, Jinnah Road and Sada Bahar Bus station.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed qualitatively keeping in view the perceptions and understandings of the street children study in Quetta. The final result was based on the description of the street children of Quetta. Because of all the difficulties associated with studying street children, it is helpful to give the reader a heuristic analysis of the data. Such analysis gives logical arguments about how the data were collected and what was done to overcome methodological problems (Kvale, 1986).

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis includes perceptions of stakeholders including social welfare department, Quetta, NGOs such as SEHER and WESS, police, and the experiences and perceptions of the street children.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study involved children, special care had been given to ethical considerations including the principle of voluntary participation, the requirement of informed consent, protection of privacy, participants' confidentiality, and principle of anonymity. In this study, children names were kept secret.

Discussion

1. Profile of street children

During the interviews it was learnt that street children are street smart and it's difficult to collect accurate information about their age, family, current condition and future plans. Getting accurate information from the children is quite difficult. They have developed an extraordinary capacity to tell stories. Lying about their ages, family background, the reasons for being on the streets, and their current circumstances is included in their well-rehearsed scripts (Felsman, 1989; Leite & Esteves, 1991).

The research findings show that the average age of the street children is five and the middle age of entering the street is seven and the majority of street children are between the ages of 9-16. Nine children interviewed belong to Quetta and only one child belongs to Dalbadin district of Balochistan province. The children interviewed belong to the Baloch, Pashtun and Afghan ethnic communities and were predominantly male. 70% of the street children interviewed provided that they work in groups.

In Quetta, majority of the street children are street working children and they return to their homes at dusk. There are a few street children who have left their homes and live in various places of Quetta. However, this study could only encapsulate three street living children in Quetta. In the absence of a rehabilitation mechanism, street living children are more prone to commercial sex and sexual harassment. There are no shelter homes to accommodate them. Neither the government nor the NGOs can accommodate them or rehabilitate these children. 90% of the children interviewed stated that they return home at dusk. Kombarakaran (2004) labelled this phenomenon 'home-based children on the street'.

During the interviews, 80% said that they work 7-9 hours every day and sometimes sleep on the streets. 85% of the children have never gone to any formal school. The average earning of street children ranged between Rs. 50 to Rs 150 per day. The average family size of the children interviewed was 5-9. 30% said that they left the home due to family problems. 80% children were garbage pickers. 20% were involved in different work including shoe polish, supporting in shops and fruit selling.

Orphan street children complained of being hit hard by many in Quetta. The father is the head of the family and with his death the burden of shouldering the entire family members rests on male members including boy child. With no adequate support from the government and society, these children head to street to support family income. 5 children interviewed were orphaned by father. One orphan child opined that he had to work hard in order to have both ends meet. "If, I do not work, my younger brothers and sisters would not eat and survive. I'm the sole breadwinner of the family."

2. Factors Accounting for Street Children

There are a variety of reasons why children turn to street. Some may quote rapid industrialization, urbanization, urban and rural poverty and socio economic pressure as major reasons for the rapid growth of street children in the country. But these are over simplification and generalization of the social implications of development process in a country. Such statements as made by Tufail (2005) don't reflect the true underlying reasons for more number of street children. Industrialization or urbanization has not given rise to such problems in the developed world.

70 % stated they work in order to support their families. 30% of the children interviewed had stated that they work on the street due to drug addiction of their father. Only one child stated that his father was in jail and the environment in his neighbourhood is not conducive to live, so he left the home. In response to a question about his contact with his family, he said that he has maintained a regular contact with his family and he talks to his younger brother quite frequently.

One participant observed that

"He was an orphan by father. He has three brothers and four sisters. He was 15 years old and he's the eldest. His mother also works as a maid and she earns Rs 100 per day. He's a garbage picker and earns Rs 60 every day. The amount varies depending upon the quantity of garbage he picks. This is how he and his mother are running the family. If he goes to school, then who'll provide sustenance to his family".

The major reasons for child labour include poverty, inadequate educational system, and social behaviour. Second major aspect includes inadequate education, fear of unemployment, increase in educational expenses, death of head of household, large family composition etc (Achakzai 2009). Two children stated that they have left their home due to physical abuse by either their father or elder brother. Extreme physical abuse, according to Russell (1998), in home promotes rebellious attitudes among many adolescents, who may perceive leaving home the only opportunity towards emancipation.

The macro level issues have an impact on the micro level problems. This point is supported by UNODC (2004) which states that the population explosion not only gives birth to physical and environmental stresses such as shortage of food supply, fuel and energy but also adds to the psychological problems such as anxiety, tension, worries, depressions due to deprivation of need fulfillment and technological advancement. Such malfunctions of society always strike hard against the powerless including women and children. Children in particular are highly susceptible to these highly volatile situations. Parents, friends and the physical environment all play an active role in the development of a child personality. Any neglect, deprivation and indifferent parental behaviour possibly due to a disruptive relationship can cause serious and irreversible damage to the developing personality, pushing the child into deviant behaviour.

3. Problems of street children

The street children face numerous problems on the streets. They spoke out during the interviews that the major problems they face in Quetta are related to health, education, drug use, sexual harassment, police mishandling and above all, absence of respect and love. In Quetta, there are no statistics available as to the total number of health related problems of street children, how many children are involved in drug use and how many are sexually abused, and above all, there is no social support system. The issues of street children are highlighted by NGOs, however, absence of concrete data has exacerbated the problems of street children in Quetta. Similarly, how many street children are victimized in Quetta and how many are involved in criminal activities are still to be examined. These questions pose serious concern for all stakeholders including government and non-government entities. No consolidated effort has been made in order to mitigate the problems of street children in Quetta in this regard.

4. Police, Street Children & Child Protection

50% of the children stated that police is one of the major threats to them. Whenever a crime is committed including theft, they face police abuse and torture. According to Tufail (2005) the "public view of street children in Pakistan is overwhelmingly negative. The public has often supported efforts to get these children off the street, even though they may result in police round ups, or even murder. There is an alarming tendency by some law enforcement personnel and civilians, business proprietors and their private security firms, to view street children as almost sub-human". This seems true but the police station criminal record or courts files must have been seen for the same to quantify this general observation against the police attitude. When asked that the street children voice their concern over the abuse and harassment by police, police official replied that

"The police are never involved in the abuse and harassment of street children. On the other hand, police are facilitating the suffering children. For the awareness of public and police officials, the board containing important points of juvenile justice is fixed in every police station in Quetta and Provincial Police Headquarters and branch office including 15 Madadgar in Quetta".

The Child Protection Unit (CPU) was established at Police Headquarters with the support of UNICEF on 2nd July 2007. The service outlet at 15 was established on 16th August 2007. Cases of 643 missing children were reported to CPU Balochistan. The task was taken up and 238 missing children were recovered and handed over to their parents/relatives. Whereas the other cases are being followed-up. One case of the child in conflict with law was facilitated.

The police department has set up Child Protection Unit in district Quetta, which only deals with missing children and children who are sexually harassed. The main function of the service outlet 15 Madadgar is to coordinate with all the police stations for the collection and responding to the issues of the children in contact and in conflict with the law and to provide service to these children directly or through referral partners including Edhi Centre in Quetta. However, when asked about the criminal involvement of street children or data as to the total number of crimes committed by street children in Quetta, the official stated that they do not have any such a data, and the same may be available with police stations. The CPU seems to be a god initiative, but it has not produced the desired results as far as data collection or child rehabilitation issues are concerned. It lacks proper structure, specialized staff and resources for such activities. Street children are not dealt by them.

5. Social Problems of Street Children

100% street children interviewed indicated that the society does not trust them. The attitude of the society is adverse to them. Street children have hardly any social status in the context of larger society. Their existence is tolerated but they are looked down upon by society as delinquents and are not trusted. While most street living children are law abiding, the sheer need for survival compels some into illegal activities like pushing drugs, contraband, etc. Some also acquire the habit of smoking and gambling at a young age. They also run the additional risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. Besides, they are deprived of love and legal support.

"The government does not have enough funds to establish a shelter home nor carry out research in order to mitigate the problems of street children in Quetta. The government resources are very meager and human resources are required for studying the causes of street children in Quetta."

6. Education Problems of Street Children

UNODC (2004) reports that majority of the street children have never attended any school. According to their research 76% of the street children in Pakistan never attend the school. The situation was found to be worse in Quetta where according to UNODC (2004) 90% of the street children never attend school. The lack of interest in education due to poverty and lack of awareness mostly results in educational problems. The illiteracy of parents also leads to the educational problems of their children. 90% of the children indicated that they desire to have a formal education. 10% stated that they have no intention to have an education, rather they preferred to work. Education of street children depends on how they manage their financial resources.

7. Health hazards and Street Children

Out of the ten children interviewed, only three stated that they smoke cigarettes. However, they indicated they were tempted by others to drug use but till now they have resisted. However, they provided that there are many children on the streets of Quetta who use drugs. According to Tufail (2005) among the most serious threats to the health of street children is their high degree of exposure to drugs and sex abuse. All the children stated that they have minor injuries during their stay in the streets including minor cut and bruises. When asked about the health problems of street working children in Quetta, WESS DICs coordinator stated that smoke and cannabis are major problems in relation to drug use by the street working children.

In the absence of provision of basic health facilities, these children face numerous problems including skin diseases. When minor disease is not cured timely, it would result in major health hazards including AIDS, hepatitis and tuberculosis. During the harsh winter and summer seasons, these children can be seen at various dust bins collecting garbage. Children as below as six and five years could also be seen in these places. Younger children collect garbage while walking through the streets in Quetta, while slightly older use handcart or donkey cart in Quetta. The things they collect include plastic bags, mirror, iron, animal bones, dry bread etc. Iron fetches them Rs 15 per kilogram (kg), good quality plastic Rs 30 per Kg, dry bread Rs 10 per Kg. One child can approximately collect 10 to 30 kg garbage and his earning amounts to 100-150 (Ackhakzi 2009). All these items in garbage are injurious to the health of these children, causing mainly skin and lung diseases.

8. Resilience and Street Children

The street children in Quetta have a greater sense of resilience and self independence. According to one stakeholder participant

"The street children have an independent nature. They are very confident individuals. Majority of the street children in Quetta support their families. Parents also send them to street for earning. The garbage pickers, for example, start their work early in the morning at 6:00 am, without breakfast, and continue work for 7-8 hours. They are also very skilful and very talented too. However, they are used to scorning at the streets. With the passage of time, they become more hardened individuals. They are more brave and unrelenting as compared to the children of their age group. Working in street makes them street-smart.

The street children know the art of making a living on the streets of Quetta. They are thrown into unfriendly environment, yet they face every challenge that comes their way with steadfastness. During the interviews, one orphan child stated that *"If I don't work and support my family on the streets of Quetta, despite the fact that we are taunted and ridiculed every day, I stand unyielding in my work including garbage picking. My family will suffer and my younger brothers and sisters will not eat and live."* Since they are engaged in a day-to-day survival scenario, street children develop the resourcefulness, self-reliance, independence and survival skills in an unfriendly and unsupportive street environment.

9. Role of Non-Government Organizations

The number of street children are increasing despite various programmes and projects of NGOs aimed at addressing the issue. Schurink (1993) concludes

that the problems encountered with these programmes do not stem from a lack of initiative, but rather from a lack of sufficient resources, such as funding and trained staff, as well as a lack of proper planning and government policies. The international organizations seeking attention from funding agencies use their publications to make their case for financial allocations. They, too, rely on showing the youngest, the most drug dependent, and the most violent. Even though these groups are motivated by high ideals and perform excellent services, they can contribute to the existing biases against the children (Felsman, 1989; Tyler, Holliday, Drler, Echeverry, & Zea, 1987).

There are a few organizations carrying out day time activities in the Drop-in-centres (DICs) for street children in Quetta including SEHER and WESS. The main objective of these NGOs is to impart informal education and provide vocational training to street children in the Drop-in-Centres (DICs). Non formal education is the major component of these NGOs.

During a visit to the SEHER and WESS DICs in Quetta, the coordinator informed that the DIC provides literacy programme, English language, computer education, psychotherapy, recreational activities, health and hygiene training, legal aid and tailoring. This only concerns with children who are involved in commercial sex. The DIC is an opportunity for them to withdraw from commercial sex. Five children who are provided non-formal education and vocational skills were interviewed. They opined that they were satisfied with the facilities provided at the DIC. A friendly environment has enabled them to learn non-formal education and also develop their skills.

The NGOs have a target group within a certain time frame. Same is the case with SEHER and WESS. Their projects are limited to an extent that they can only operate within the bounds of their projects. There are many other street children who are working on the streets of Quetta and who could not get the benefit of either SEHER and WESS DICs. The basic premise of SEHER and WESS is to facilitate street children and adopt ways and means of the withdrawal of street children. However projects of SEHER and WESS cannot mitigate the sufferings of the entire street children in Quetta.

In succinct, with the ever increasing number of street children, time is ripe that the government should taken some concrete step to address the issue and solve the problems of street children and such serious problems should not be left at the mercy of NGOs and foreign donations. We as a nation should do something as it is the state responsibility in all earnest; this principle was established by the by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in *Villagrán Morales vs Guatemala*, which found the State had been responsible for the ... right to life, as enshrined in the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR). The

Court stated that the right to life comprises not only the right of all persons to not being deprived of life arbitrarily, but also the right to having access to the conditions needed to lead a dignified life. The Court also concluded the State had failed to comply with its obligation to adopt special measures to protect children whose rights are under threat or violated (cf. Art. 19 American Charter for Human Rights), resorting to several standards in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child to define the scope of the “protection measures” mentioned in the said article. This was the first time the Inter-American Court referred to the States' obligation to adopt special measures to protect children, basing its interpretation on the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. I argue that international human rights litigation can be a powerful means of political expression and community mobilization for abused and victimized children in developing countries and can result in precedent-setting interpretations of core treaties affecting the rights of children.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are as under:

- ☞ The government has the primary duty to *protect, respect* and *fulfil* as a responsible state, therefore, it should ensure that free primary education is available to the street children in Quetta, and of course, anywhere in the country where they are. The majority of the street children are unable to attend school in Quetta due to financial constraints. The social welfare department should establish an educational and vocational centre, whereby, street children are not only educated but also provided some financial assistance. The government should also allocate sufficient funds realize the right to having access to the conditions needed to lead a dignified life.
- ☞ A shelter home should be set up for runaways' street children and for those who have left their homes. The government and the NGOs do not have a shelter home where children could stay at night and are immune from sexual exploitation and commercial sex. Hyder and Malik (2007) put forward that the concept of post-event care and victim support for child victims barely exists in Pakistan. Non-governmental organizations have initiated limited support services in some urban parts of the country but there are no data to determine either their accessibility or their effectiveness.
- ☞ The government should ensure that every district administration should have a database of street children within their areas of jurisdiction.

- ☞ The problems of street children are multiple because there is lack of awareness of the issue. The ethnic communities of Baloch, Pashtun, Hazaras, Afghan and others in Quetta should be sensitized over the issue by publishing a literature in their native languages/dialects, explaining the problems of street children, importance of well-knit families and advantages of education. Religious leaders and tribal elders can perform a pivotal function in this regard. Through them, the social welfare department and the NGOs can reach the communities and the general public easily on the issue of street children.
- ☞ The society is patriarchal in Quetta. Effort should be aimed at supporting children orphan by father on a priority basis, as they supplement family income. The government should ensure that the amount of Zakat should reach these children. Orphan child is the most vulnerable and government should properly monitor the distribution of Zakat to them.
- ☞ In Quetta, street children are involved in drug use and commercial sex. Street children who collect hospital waste, for example, from the children hospital in Quetta, are unaware of contracting HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis-C and sexually transmitted diseases. The government should make plan in raising awareness, prevention and the rehabilitation of such children including a provision of detoxification and rehabilitation centre. There are various places in Quetta where children are being commercially exploited for sex.
- ☞ The role of police has not been up to the mark. The street children often complain of being victims of physical and sexual abuse by the police. The police should be sensitized on the problems of street children and be imparted training on the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Juvenile Justice System Ordinance 2000, Employment Act 1991 and other juvenile legislations.
- ☞ The Social Welfare Department should be provided enough resources in order to prepare a complete rehabilitation plan, whereby the process of returning children to their families and schooling should be addressed. Additionally, children at risk should be provided boarding and lodging and all other basic facilities.
- ☞ Street children are often treated by the public with hatred and disdain. The media can play an effective role in disseminating information regarding human rights of street children and highlighting their problems in Quetta.
- ☞ Additional research must take place on all aspects of street children and especially of those who are in conflict with the law and their problems during their contact with the criminal justice system. Finally, street children who collect hospital waste, as they are prone to catching dangerous diseases

including HIV, hepatitis-B and AIDS, and those street children who are involved in drug use and in commercial sex in Quetta, should be meticulously studied and helped.

Conclusion

Although the study was limited in scope, it revealed problems of street children in Quetta and the need to tackle the issue on an urgent basis. Poverty, large family composition, lack of importance, lack of significant research, lukewarm support and absence of government's initiatives to tackle the issue effectively are some of the major problems resulting in the increase in street children in Quetta. It's high time for the government to undertake some concrete steps to address the problems of street children in Quetta. The resources of the government are meager to solve the problems of street children. With limited opportunities for formal education, the street children in Quetta remain discriminated. Non formal settings by NGOs in their drop-in-centers provide only a temporary relief to the street children. Since there are no shelter homes for runaway street children in Quetta, therefore, they are involved in commercial sex and drug use. Rehabilitation plan of children at risk is the need of the hour. Finally, the miseries of the street children should be a concern of the society at large.

End Notes

¹The Employment of Children Act, 1991 (Act No. V of 1991) is an Act to prohibit the employment of children in certain occupations and to regulate the conditions of work of children. Sec.2 (i) states that "adolescent" means a person who has completed his fourteenth but has not completed his eighteenth year. Sec.2 (iii) provides that "child" means a person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age

²The National Child Protection Policy (draft) was first prepared in 2006 as National Child Protection Bill but rejected by the cabinet and prepared as a policy. This information is taken from Shahid J (2009): Child protection policy draft sent to social welfare ministry. Dawn News, 29 August 2009.

³Interview with the Coordinator of SEHER Drop-in-centre on 20 August 2009 in Quetta.

⁴This information is taken from the Child Protection Unit in Quetta.

⁵Interview with the official of Directorate of Social Welfare, Women Development and Special Education, Social Welfare Department on 18 August 2009.

⁶Interview with the WESS Executive Director on 25 August, 2009

⁷This information is taken from <http://seher.org.pk/imtizaj.html>. Retrieved on 2 August, 2009.

⁸ Zakat (Wealth Tax) is a form of giving to those who are less fortunate. It is obligatory upon all Muslims to give 2.5 % of wealth and assets each year (in excess of what is required) to the poor. This is done on yearly basis. Giving Zakat is considered an act of worship because it is a form of offering thanks to God for the means of material well-being one has acquired, retrieved on 3 August 2009 from <http://www.zpub.com/aaa/zakat-def.html>

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