

THE LOST CHILDHOOD OF STREET CHILDREN IN NEPAL

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Devendra and Pramila Basnet and family, whose love, devotion and encouragement continue to serve as an inspiration to me

To my husband, Suman Khadka, for all his love, encouragement, patience and sacrifices he made during this graduate program. He has made this time in my life a truly wonderful experience

To all street children wherever they may be

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CHAPTER 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the present situation of armed and political conflict in Nepal, protection of children is at stake. There is a pressing need in such an environment to address all aspects of children's rights in order to be able to reach out to children in crisis. One group of children in crisis are those living on the street. I have often seen street children picking rags, sniffing glue, begging & selling newspapers and the like. These children, living on the streets day and night, have been directly affected by poverty and social exclusion. Even though there are a few child welfare organizations in Nepal trying to address the problems of street children, a large group of these children remain a part of the urban landscape. It seems like the common public response to street children is either sympathy or hostility. They are perceived as victims or criminals. It was within this context that my interest in exploring the lives of street children in Nepal emerged. My goal was to uncover some of the perceptions about the lives of street children from the organizations working with them. Through semi-structured interviews with child welfare workers and observations of some of these children themselves, this study explored a) how agencies identify street children b) what are the main reasons children become street children c) the risks street children face and d) how individuals and organizations can help guide a positive transition to the life of street children. The following questions will work as a tool to disclose other important answers. For instance, the answers to reasons children come to the street is helpful in developing preventive measures. Similarly, answers to the risk factors that street children face will be effective in designing protective measures for those children who are already on the street.

CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are several issues, topics and subsidiary problems that became evident in the existing or related research on street children. The first pressing issue is the terminology. There is still an ongoing debate on the term „street children“ itself. According to UNICEF, over 40,000 children in Nepal are estimated to have been displaced over the course of the Maoist uprising (UN Chronicle, 2006).

UNICEF ("Street Children" n.d., para. 3 in Wikipedia) categorizes street children into:

1. *Children on the street*: Those engaged in some kind of economic activity such as begging or vending, but mostly go home at the end of the day and contribute their earnings to their family. They may be attending school and retain a sense of belonging to a family. Because of the economic fragility of the family, these children may eventually opt for a permanent life on the streets.
2. *Children of the street*: Children who actually live on the street (or outside of a normal family environment). Family ties may exist but are tenuous and are maintained only casually or occasionally.

Likewise, Baker, Panter-Brick & Todd, (1997) describe street children as homeless and home based, which varies in developing countries according to location and the socio-economic and political conditions therein. In Nepal, very few children have become homeless through being orphaned or abandoned. Instead they tend to have had poor relations with their biological parents/relatives (Baker, Panter-Brick & Todd, 1997). Because the experiences of these two

groups are likely to differ, it is important to explore both types of children in order to assess the different programmatic needs of each group.

Descriptions of street children would not be complete without distinguishing between “runaways” and “throwaways” (Roux, 1996). Roux further explains that runaways are described as children who voluntarily leave home without parental permission while throwaways are those who leave home because their parents have actually encouraged them to leave, have abandoned them, or have subjected them to intolerable levels of abuse and neglect. Hence, the term street children include several different contexts.

Secondly, existing research suggests street children vary due to their background characteristics such as reason for running away, family attachment, age, gender & caste (Baker, Panter-Brick & Todd, 1997). The review of the literature revealed a number of characteristics of street children in different parts of the world (Roux & Smith, 1998; Baker, Panter-Brick & Todd, 1997; Panter-Brick, 2002). Panter-Brick (2002) focused on identifying characteristics of a street lifestyle and the depth or diversity of their actual experiences. It was not surprising that most children do not initially want to talk about the more personal aspects of their life. Hence, Panter-Brick found a gradual approach was necessary for gathering information.

One of the noteworthy characteristics discussed in the literatures is that street children are the victims of unfortunate circumstances such as economic hardship, lower socioeconomic strata and being orphaned or displaced by war, but most street children also have unfavorable family histories in common (Roux and Smith, 1998). Another noteworthy finding is that males predominate amongst street children. The scarcity of girls in the street is the consequence of either their social and cultural status (Baker, Panter-Brick and Todd, 1997) or the fact that the

girls have been sexually abused and have turned to prostitution (Roux and Smith, 1998). Another interesting finding is that the longer children spend on the streets, the more likely they are to become involved in criminal activities and show signs of cognitive and emotional dysfunction (Roux and Smith, 1998). However, it is important to remember that the deviant behavior is a result of circumstances rather than from negative or fatalistic attitudes. For example, consumption of drugs serves as a temporary escape from the harsh reality of street life (Roux and Smith, 1998). At the same time, when street children band together, they represent an exceptional companionship and show a strong loyalty to each other while maintaining a high preference for personal freedom (Roux and Smith, 1998). Above all, street children desire respect and yearn to become someone (Roux and Smith, 1998).

Just as the demographic characteristics of street children vary, the studies indicate there are various reasons children end up on the street. According to Baker & Panter-Brick (1997), most of the boys leave home before the age of 12 due to family-related problems, economic reasons, excessive workloads, family stress and a desire for independence respectively. Family related problems such as alcoholism, child abuse (physical and sexual), or neglect motivates the children to leave home. Rapid industrialization and urbanization are other major reasons children end up on the streets (Roux & Smith, 1998). Improvements in communications (breaking down the isolation of many rural areas) and accessibility with urban centers could be some of the other important reasons which may broaden the options of an unhappy village child or widens the horizon of curious ones (Baker & Panter-Brick, 1997). Subedi (2002) points out that there is no single reason to explain why street children leave home. His study shows that adverse family situations such as the death of parents, presence of a step mother and domestic violence were the

leading reasons for children leaving home, while poor household economic conditions and the desire for modern consumerism were the other important reasons.

Similarly, Ali, Muynck, Shahab, Ushijima (2004) identified common push and pull factors that bring children to the street. “Push factors” included poverty, big family size, family violence, abuse, urbanization (migration), school abandonment and inadequate parental guidance, while the “pull factors” include desire for independence, financial security, excitement and glamour of living in cities, and some hope of raising one’s standard of living.

In a sample of 10 adults who had at one time been on the streets, eight participants shared their experiences about why they could not return home (Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004). They cited the following reasons, (a) they would just be returning to the same dysfunctional environment, (b) they were not wanted, (c) they could be placed in foster care or returned to juvenile facilities. Therefore, it is also important to note the children’s desires, hopes and expectations to be reunited with their family or not. Baker & Panter-Brick (1997) discussed some findings on reintegration of the street children with their families in their study. Surprisingly, three quarters of the street children visited their families at least once a year, usually during the national Nepali festival (Baker & Panter-Brick, 1997). These children also go home if they have saved money and can buy gifts for relatives, as they would feel ashamed to return without money and evidence of having made good in the city. Among children who are currently on the street, more than half stated that they want to be reunited with their family in the future (Subedi, 2002). Interestingly, the study found that more than half of boys wanted to be reunited with the family, while for girls this proportion is much less. This finding may be due to the cultural context of Nepal where once a girl runs away from home, her character and reputation itself is questioned and it is difficult for her to re-adjust to the family and society (Subedi, 2002). The duration of stay on the street

matters in regards to whether a street child wants to be reunited with his/her family or not. The longer the period of time a child lives on the street, the less likely it is for him/her to desire to be reunited with his/her family. Promisingly, Doyle (2002) mentioned that, “more than half of the kids reform themselves; the clever ones set themselves straight and get into some form of work.”

Finally, the existing research suggests there are several risks street children may face. One of the biggest risks street children experience is abuse. The community often treats them with contempt, they are harassed and arrested by the police, and they are even brutalized by older street children. In addition, they may fall victims to drug dealers (Roux & Smith, 1998). Forms of abuse street children may experience from these groups include verbal, physical and sexual. Subedi's (2002) study on “Trafficking and Sexual Abuse among the Street Children of Kathmandu” draws attention to sexual abuses street children experience in Kathmandu. Foreigners/tourists are the prime sexual abusers, followed by leaders of the street children. Social activists and local people were also reported as sexual abusers (Subedi, 2002). The most common forms of sexual abuse faced include requests for masturbation, oral and anal sex. The prominent reasons for sexual abuse/exploitation among street children is the child's vulnerability or dependency in terms of health, hunger, lack of proper counseling and guidance from parents. These children may not recognize the exploitation as they receive food, clothes, money, medicine, love and care in return, things that have been denied by their own parents and society at large. Similarly, Timothy Doyle (2002) had an eye opening discussion in his study on how street children in Kathmandu are sexually abused. Doyle (2002) pointed out that, “Kathmandu City looks like the scene of a war; but one fought without the use of military. According to Olivea Bertin, a French national and former child-care NGO worker in Doyle's study

commented that, “it is unpleasant work for the kids to be manipulated by foreign pedophiles for sex, but they like the easy money and the freedom of their lifestyle.” She further said, “Even if they are repulsed by the old men, it is hard for them to refuse the money.” In a developing country like Nepal, foreigners can do what they want and even the police look the other way, especially for those who have connections with the expatriate community of embassies, development or foreign aid. Some of these dignitaries run unregistered children’s orphanages prevalent with sexual and physical abuse (Doyle, 2002). What is astonishing is that Nepali criminal law lacks a clause for pedophilia; therefore, authorities charge these abusers with violations of public offense laws.

Rachel Baker’s (1996) study on participatory rural appraisal with street children in Nepal focused on different types of *ill-health* risks emphasized by the children themselves. She explained that the street children face different types of risks which are related to variation in income-generating activity (such as rag picker, beggar, rickshaw puller, porter, commercial sex worker etc.) and the social relations formed in the work context. The most frequent illness/risk the street children face on the streets reported by the children themselves were dog bites, wounds, diarrhea, cold and hunger (Baker, 1996). Surprisingly, many children knew the health risks that their work and living conditions exposed them to and could identify means to minimize them. Similarly, although new to Nepali society, glue sniffing is fast becoming an addiction among street children in Nepal (CWIN, 2002). Glue sniffing has resulted in various problematic behaviors including self-destruction due to hallucinations and fighting amongst friends, along with long term effects to the brain and the nervous system.

CHAPTER 3

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The existing literature sets the back drop for an initial understanding about the life of street children in Nepal and abroad. Most of the literature presented the demographic and lifestyle information of the street children in Kathmandu but many questions have not yet been answered. Hence, the current study investigates the following gaps discussed below:

- (1) Much of the research has been done with the street children themselves while little attention has been given to other stake holders. Several other stakeholders such as the case managers and field workers of child welfare organizations, police and parents of children living on the street may provide important information about this sensitive issue.
- (2) In order to present a meaningful definition of street children, one must clearly distinguish between various categories. Different countries describe street children in a different way (Roux, 1996). Hence, the study will identify and define the major groups of street children of Nepal in context to Nepalese society and culture.
- (3) There are a lot of research that focuses on physical and emotional abuse of street children but none covered the vulnerability of sexual abuse of the street children in detail. While major risks street children face such as trafficking and sexual abuse (Subedi, 2002) are well documented, none of the articles explore how and why these children are sexually abused.
- (4) Other health related risk factors such as risk of sexual & reproductive health problems and other common diseases and health related problems has not been covered in depth.

Street children are at risk from HIV/AIDS and other diseases because they are vulnerable to sexual abuse, unprotected sex, early sexual initiation, and injecting drugs.

- (5) Another important issue related to street children is that in many Asian, Latin American and African countries, street children are predominantly boys (Ali, Muynck, Shahab, Ushijima, 2004). Multiple research have mentioned that the street is dominated by boys, but very few articles focus on the reason why we see fewer girls on the street. This lack of explanation may be due to who is studied. It is my hope that child welfare workers and other stake holders may be able to shed some light on this issue.
- (6) A fuller understanding must also include an investigation of the law. For instance, Doyle (2002), as noted above, reported that Nepali criminal law lacks a clause for pedophilia and authorities charge these abusers with violation of public offense laws. Therefore, it is important to find out in detail the role of the Nepali government and what laws need to be passed in Nepal to be more effective in punishing crimes against street children.
- (7) Some people see the street as a transitional period which children will leave as they become older. Most studies of street children have focused on why children leave home, but few have explored how they are able to make successful transitions into adulthood. Understanding street children's path to adulthood may be one of the most important factors that we need to understand. Hence, information from various sources may help paint a picture of the trajectory of street children. Gaining insight into factors that influence the transition, including sources of support, warrants further attention. Hence, it is necessary to deal with these children with different approaches to help them live their childhood and adulthood in a better way.

Even though the most significant factors that lead these children to run away from home are family disharmony, economic hardship, urbanization and potential guidance (Baker, Panter-Brick and Todd, 1997), studies (Roux & Smith, 1998 and Subedi, 2002) show that more than half of street children state that they want to be reunited with their family in the future. Hence, it is the responsibility of the wide range of stakeholders such as the government, civil society, private sectors and donor community to get together and recognize the problem and address it soon in order to prevent more dire consequences. To conclude, this study was developed to gain a more sophisticated understanding of children's potential departure from the streets.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

This study uses in-depth, semi structured interviews with key informants knowledgeable about street children in Nepal. A pilot study was conducted during the fall of 2008 when a volunteer working for children in Nepal was interviewed in Kansas. This pilot interview helped me flush out critical ideas, reframe some of my interview questions and decide on a sample. This interview clarified the need to interview people from different backgrounds but who work for the same goal, i.e. for the benefit of street children in Nepal. In qualitative research, one's sample should be representative of some larger population to which one hopes to transfer the research findings (Crabtree and Miller, 1992). Hence, seven additional professionals were interviewed in January 2009 in Kathmandu, Nepal. Participants were chosen on the basis of being knowledgeable about children living on the streets of Nepal such as professionals from International Non Government agencies, field workers of child welfare organizations working directly with street children, volunteers at these child welfare agencies and local police. Snowball sampling, which consists of participants identifying other potential participants or key informants who were later contacted, was used to identify potential participants

In addition to the interviews with professionals, a non-participatory ethnographic observation was conducted of actual street children at various public locations. The focus of the observation was to observe the patterns of interaction between street children and the general

reactions by the public who come into contact with these street children. Special care was needed while choosing the sample such as age, gender and length of time children had been spending on the street. I tried to choose those children who were outgoing, communicated well and represented the population. The sample size that was observed was 6-8 children from two different groups. I spent around two hours conducting non-participatory observations with each group at public locations such as Streets of Thamel, Indrachowk and King's Way (famous tourist destinations in Kathmandu, Nepal) where a large number of street children congregate. Knowledge about the people being studied and familiarity with their routines and rituals facilitate entry as well as rapport once one has gained entry (Berg, 2007). Hence, I tried to find as much information as possible about these children before attempting to enter. Then I located the informants or the leaders of these groups and explained the research goal and convinced them that no harm would befall them or other members of the group as a result of my presence.

Procedures and Data collection

Following informed consent, a semi structured interview was conducted at the professional's respective office. Care was taken to assure the respondents that the respondents and their work place would not be identifiable in any subsequent report. An informal approach to interviewing was used to determine the respondents' views of the situation, feelings and meanings. An interview guide was prepared so as to explore various areas in depth with the respondents. On several occasions, the order of questions in the interview guide was altered to facilitate a thorough response from the respondents. The length of each interview was approximately one hour. Each respondent had a different opinion and perspective about street children of Nepal because some of the respondents were directly working for street children

while some did not. I also realized during my interview sessions that most of the interviewees were more comfortable and more expressive sharing their experience in Nepali than English. All the interviews were audio taped and later transcribed and field notes were recorded after each interview.

Ethnographers today must do more than simply describe the populations they investigate; they must strive to understand them and, if possible, to explain their activities (Berg, 2007). In recording data for observation, field notes were taken for running descriptions of settings, people, activities and sounds. The field notes helped me describe the general context, the activities these street children participate in, and the interactions between them and community members. In addition to the field notes, the images of some of the activities were captured in photographs and videotapes as a means of accurately capturing experience.

Data Triangulation

One process involved in corroboration of data is triangulation. In order to ensure quality and reliability of the data, I am applying “methodological triangulation” which involves the convergence of data from multiple data collection sources (i.e. individual interview, ethnographic observation and literature review). According to Denzin (as cited in Berg, 2007), no single method will ever meet the requirements, each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, and multiple methods of observations must be employed. Adding observations lead to a deeper understanding than interviews alone would provide since it provided knowledge of the context in which events occur and enabled me to see things that participants themselves were not aware of or that they were unwilling to discuss.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

Transcripts of semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behavior (Aronson, 1994). Based on Aronson's (1994) thematic analysis approach, the following procedures were undertaken to perform the thematic analysis of this study. The first step was data collection in which eight interviews and two ethnographic observations were conducted. Then, the data was identified and examined to identify following major themes in response to the interview questions.

Semi-structured qualitative interview questions

1. What do you think of when you hear the term "street children"?
2. What would you say are the main reasons children become street children?
3. What do general citizens of Kathmandu valley think of street children?
4. What are the risks these children face?
5. Who are the main abusers of street children?
6. Why are these children an easy target for abuse?
7. I have seen more numbers of boys than girls in the street, what do you think are the main reasons behind it?
8. What kind of rules or laws apply or should apply to street children?
9. What assistance do street children need in order to transition into adulthood as productive members of society?
10. What do you think are the key indicators of a successful program or activity aimed at helping street children?

The next step to a thematic analysis is to identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns (Aronson, 1994). Based on the above research questions, themes, categories and sub-categories were developed that specifically illustrated participant's ideas, emergent topics and responses to the major themes. Once each category and sub-category was identified from the interview questions, information on each category were prepared and reviewed where specific statements were identified that illustrated typical participant responses. Only those categories that uncovered specific perceptions about the lives of street children of Nepal were included in the current analysis as listed below:

Broad categories and sub categories identified

1. Definition of street children:
 - a) Children on the street
 - b) Children of the street
2. Reasons:
 - a) Poverty or economic hardship
 - b) Family Disharmony
 1. Inadequate parental guidance
 2. Family violence or abuse:
 - c) Lack of education
 - d) Search for independence
 - e) Urbanization
 - f) Peer/sibling influence
 - g) Internal child trafficking
 - h) Political conflict
3. Opinion of general citizen/society: Society has negative impact on street children
4. Risks:
 - a) Health risks
 1. Common diseases
 2. Injuries
 3. Inadequate nutrition
 4. Poor sanitation
 - b) Physical abuse
 - c) Sexual exploitation
 - d) Psychological abuse

5. The main abusers of street children
 - a) Gang leaders or elder street children/street youth
 - b) Foreigners
 - c) General Public

6. Street children are easy targets: Street children are easy targets because they are: very young, weak, innocent and trusting.

7. Girls vs boys: Social norms

8. Laws: Lack of laws

9. Support street children receive
 - a) Shelter
 - b) Economic support
 - c) Counseling
 - d) Increase awareness of rights
 - e) Education
 - f) Skill development training
 - g) Socialization
 - h) Reunite with family

10. Indicators of a successful program aimed at helping street children.
 - a) Public awareness
 - b) Support from Government
 - c) Roles of the organization working for street children
 - d) Coordination among organizations

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

Based on the perspectives of different stakeholders, the study identified the following primary explanations about the life of street children in Nepal.

Who are “Street Children”? The most common definitions of street children in Nepal focused on by the respondents in the interview were: children *on* the street and children *of* the street.

- a) *Children on the street*: These are children who spend a significant amount of time on the streets. They would spend the whole day on the streets engaged in different kinds of activities such as begging, part time street vendors, but who maintain relationships with or stay with parents or other family members. A field worker commented that, “These groups of street children are those children who come from a dysfunctional family and spends most of their time in the streets.” He further stated that, “this category of children is way better off than the second category because they at least have their family and home to count on.”
- b) *Children of the street*: The second category described as the children who are completely street-based, working and living on the streets and do not have a home or orphanage to go or spend the night in. One of the field workers described that, “These children do not appear to have a family or elders to look after them. They could be orphaned, abandoned, simply neglected or runaways. Some may have gotten lost when they came to the city with their parents and started living on the streets. They could be with or without family.” This

type of children lives 24 hours on the street sleeping, eating and completely living on the streets under an open sky. Another field worker stated that, “Our general philosophy is that those children who live by begging, stealing, rag picking and who do not think of their parent and families are known as street children.”

The definition of street children has generated much discussion and is still debated. Efforts should be made to develop a suitable definition and careful distinction of street children but it should not be homogeneous.

What factors lead to the existence of street children? There are numerous reasons participants identified in their understandings of the common push and pull factors that bring children to the street. They are as follows:

- a) *Poverty or economic hardship*: Most of the respondents cited poverty to be the main reason for living on the streets. Participants responded that, “Street children work on the streets to earn money for themselves while some children need to work to support their families due to some sort of tragedy such as a death of the primary earning member of the family, natural calamities, political conflicts.” Both previous research and interviews suggests that street children are more likely to come from families who have moved to the cities recently in order to increase their economic opportunities only to face continued economic hardships.
- b) *Family disharmony*: A second overall theme emerging as a perceived precursor to children living on the streets is family disharmony.
 1. *Inadequate parental guidance*: One subcategory of family disharmony is inadequate parental guidance. A social worker stated that, “Sometimes the children are left alone

to take care of themselves when their parents die or are in prison. There is nobody to take care of them and their remaining relatives do not want to take on the burden of taking care of them. Their relatives are either not interested or they are financially weak and have their own children to look after. Hence, these children have no other option than to leave home.” He further said that, “At other times, they are raised by a single parent after the other parent dies. But when the surviving parent remarries, the step-parent and the new family may neglect the child and so they are compelled to run away from home.”

2. *Family violence or abuse*: A second subcategory of family disharmony is family violence. As stated by a police officer, “Some children runaway as a result of an alcoholic parent, due to witnessing their parents fighting with each other, and/or due to experiencing physical abuse by a parent themselves as to discipline their children.” Sometimes, these children have been sexually abused by their parents or another family member. A police officer further commented that, “These children do not have anyone or anywhere to talk about the abuses they face. Even when they are aware that they could take help from police officers and social workers, they fear being punished and ignored by us. The only option they think left for them is to run away from home.”

c) *Lack of education*: A third factor influencing the lives of street children is lack of education. Some children may have been denied a chance to go to school or have dropped out of school and have nothing to do. Participants cite lack of motivation together with financial problems as the leading cause of children not attending school or the primary reason they drop out. School abandonment was identified as one of the push

factors causing children to run away from home (Ali, Muynck, Shahab, and Ushijima 2004).

- d) *Search for independence*: Another factor that leads these children to run away from home is their search for independence. It was reported by a field worker that, “they wish to find a better job, earn more money and think it is better to live by themselves. But unfortunately, it may not end up being better; instead they are rejected by everyone and start living on the streets.” Once they get used to this way of living, they often do not want to go back to the constraints of living at home.
- e) *Urbanization*: Another primary factor which has drawn these children to the street is the attraction of cities. “They dream of coming to the cities for better employment opportunities and are attracted to the cultural opportunities of the city (for example movies/media)”, a field worker commented. Another apparent explanation is related to the transport infrastructure. A doctor explained that, “Transport facilities are improving from surrounding districts to Kathmandu city permitting and encouraging more children to come to the cities.
- f) *Peer/sibling influence*: Another interesting factor according to the experiences of participants working in the field is a form of chain migration that can occur between sibling networks. A social worker informed that, “While visiting home for a festival or an attempt at reintegration, street children may bring siblings or friends who are experiencing their own difficulties at home back to the streets with them.”
- g) *Internal child trafficking*: Not all reasons participants cited for the occurrence of street children were based on the child’s choice to enter the street. Some of these children are brought to bigger cities by friends, teachers, social workers or relatives who make false

promises to the children's parents or the children themselves. These children are initially trafficked for child labor such as domestic child labor, hotel work, carpet weaving etc. But the majority of these children did not get enough food, a decent place to sleep, or are not paid well. In addition, their working conditions were often severe and in reaction, they run away from the employers and/or master's houses and end up living on the street because they have nowhere else to go. As explained by a police officer, "I feel that 20% came to the cities by themselves to see the cities, run away from home but 80% of the children came through others like who used to work in house, hotels, industries and choose the option of living on the street when they are abused and tortured by their employers or masters."

- h) *Political conflict*: A final reason participants suggested children end up on the streets is political conflict in the region. For instance, during the participatory observation, one of the children shared about how he came to the streets, "I was working as a bus conductor a year ago. The maoist army took me away from my work place to receive maoist army training. It was a very hard and tough training and I was beaten most of the time. Because the training was very hard, I ran away from the army camp and started living on the streets." Hence, political conflict is also one of the reasons these children land up on the streets.

Unfortunately, there is no single or simple explanation for why a child may come to the streets. Based on participant interviews, each child's journey is unique. For some street children, there could be more than one factor mentioned above that may lead them to live on the streets while for some, only one of the factors must have triggered them to run away from home. Hence, care

should be taken to identify each child's journey to the street which is more effective for developing an individual approach to help them live a better childhood.

How are street children viewed by other citizens/society? The interviews revealed that the larger society generally has a negative view of children living on the street. Society usually perceives street children as difficult children who are out there to cause trouble. From this perspective, society members may not think of these children as being a child or a human being, they have a negative attitude towards them and perceive them as a thieves, robbers, drug addicts, terrorists, and revolutionaries. For these reasons, the public generally tries to avoid street children and may even run away from them. The public thinks that street children are violent, uncontrollable and have no morals and emotions. They tend to be unsympathetic to the difficulties and situations street children may encounter. A field worker elaborated on his perspective by commenting that, "The reason for the condition of these children is because of the general citizen. If a child is engaged in stealing, I feel he was made to steal by the general citizens. People blame him/her for being a thief even if he is innocently doing his other work honestly; one of the kids told me that when the public calls me a thief without stealing and blame him for being one, then he might as well steal!" Thus, the negative reactions of the general society can reinforce a form of self-fulfilling prophecy internalized by some of these kids.

What Risks Do Street Children face? Children on the streets are a vulnerable population susceptible to multiple risks. When children live on the street, they commonly face police harassment, hunger and health related illness. A field worker rightly said that: "*Their life starts*

where our lives end,” meaning that we throw out food and clothes which the street children need to live on. Throughout the interviews, the major risks reported were:

a) *Health risks:* One field worker noted: “99% of the street children are suffering from various kinds of risky diseases.” Street children are inherently susceptible to four major health risks.

1. Disease. These children are most at risk of *common sexual and reproductive health problems* such as sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. One disheartening fact reported by participants of this study is that the majority of street children suffer from HIV/AIDS. These children are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS primarily because of using the same syringe for drugs and because of having unprotected sexual relations with multiple sex partners, among opposite sex as well as same sex. A doctor noted that: “These children share everything with their friends. For example, there is this case in the Jamal area where there were a group of 15-20 children on the street including 3-4 girls and whoever had money would marry or have sex with one of those girls. Hence if one of them has HIV, it communicates to all of them.”

Another health risk is addiction. Participants in this study reported that the majority of street children have the habit of *glue sniffing*. Their addiction is to the odor that comes from an adhesive commonly known as “Dendrite”, mostly used in making leather shoes. A field worker noted that, “This drug is easily available on the street and very cheap compared to other recreational drugs. These children expressed that glue sniffing helps them forget all their worries and it results in hallucinations.” As described by one street child: “when we sniff glue, we forget pain, hunger, cold

and we don't feel shy to be on the street." Another child noted: "when I take glue, I feel like I'm in a helicopter trip, live in a dreamland, go to heaven and meet gods. It's a fun trip and it is very hard to leave this habit once we get it."

Participants reported that street children also experience many other common diseases such as tuberculosis, skin diseases, dental problems and parasitic diseases, all of which can be prevented if these children had enough resources.

2. Injuries: The second major health risk street children face is injury. It is not uncommon for these children to be hit by vehicles or injured in gang fights. In some cases, they have lice within their whole body because they have improperly treated wounds everywhere. There is also a risk of injury at their work sites. For example when they pick rags, they might get different types of skin diseases, fractures and big wounds or cuts.
3. Inadequate nutrition: The third health risk these children face is inadequate nutrition. As informed by the doctor, "Even when street children can get enough to eat, they do not have nutritious diets. This commonly leads to malnutrition, anemia and vitamin deficiencies." It was also reported that because of a lack of sufficient nutritious food intake during early childhood, street children do not attain their full height potential for their age and thus growth stunting is prevalent among them.
4. Poor sanitation: Finally, street children do not have access to proper sanitation and medical treatment leaving many to suffer from chronic diseases. They rarely have access to facilities that they need for keeping up proper hygiene, such as toilets and a clean and safe water supply. They are therefore more vulnerable to health problems resulting from poor sanitation.

- b) *Physical abuse*: Not surprisingly, the participants reported that street children are at high risk for physical abuse. The police officer reported, “Abuse is a daily part of life for these children, it is like a reality of everyday life for these children.” It was reported that the street children are physically abused and harassed by the public, police officers, street adults they encounter, and other street children all the time.
- c) *Sexual exploitation*: In addition to physical abuse, the participants explained that street children are also frequently sexually used and misused by foreign or local predators who believe they are easy prey for their sexual gratification. A social worker commented that, “Sexual exploitation including beatings, rape and exposure to pornography has become the norm for many street children.” It was reported in the interview that the most common forms of sexual abuse were request for manual stimulation (masturbation), oral sex, and anal sex. Participants frequently reported that the bulk of sexual abusers were foreigners, leaders of the street children, some local public and even some social activists.
- d) *Psychological abuse*: A final risk factor discussed by participants was psychological abuse. As reported by a social worker, “The consequences of street life have a long lasting impact on the children’s lives. The various stresses that street children experience make them more vulnerable to emotional problems, psychological disorders and learning difficulties.” In addition, it was reported that the victims of physical and sexual abuse suffer from long-term psychological damage. Yet, these children do not receive adequate care for these conditions. Another field worker explained that, “Many times, street children are insulted, morally abused, scared and terrorized by people who are afraid of them or who do not recognize that they are still children despite their way of life. They suffer from emotional insecurity and before they become teenagers, most of them have

learned one key lesson, „*you can trust no one*’.” Sometimes they are forced to move or hide from the police, welfare authorities, gangs, and drug syndicates. This transitory lifestyle can lead to problems of social isolation and loneliness and difficulties in developing emotional attachments to other individuals.

Who are the main abusers of street children? As is clear in the previous section, street children risk facing multiple abuses. When asked who the most likely perpetrators of that abuse are, participants identified gang leaders, foreigners, and the general public.

- a. *Gang leaders or older street youth:* Participants reported that it was not uncommon for adults who have spent their childhood or a significant amount of time on the streets become leaders to the street children, involving them in commercial sex work, and drug trafficking. These leaders use other street children to steal, beg, deal drugs and have sex for them.
- b. *Foreigners:* Participants reported that foreigners or tourists were the prime sexual abusers of street children. The majority of street children were initiated into sex exploitation through promises of money. As reported by a field worker, “The foreigners first give them money, food, medicine and clothes to convince the children or build a rapport with them and then take them to the hotel later for additional luxuries. After they gain the children’s confidence, they use them for their sexual satisfaction. They collect a few children and often take their pictures while having sexual pleasures with them.” This kind of abuse has a long lasting effect on the children. They prefer street children because it’s easy to abuse them despite the risk of HIV and other communicable diseases.

- c. *General Public*: Finally, participants reported that some of the general public such as social workers and drug dealers use these children for drug trafficking and commercial sex work. A field worker reported that, “If you go to Thamel in the evening, these children are engaged as a mediator to various groups of people like gays, or prostitutes. They are involved in different kinds of criminal activities like selling drugs, act as a pimp, and they have a vast network with these kinds of people. I have come across 5-6 similar cases”.

Street children are perceived as easy targets. Participants reported that because street children are vulnerable, they are ready to do just about anything if they get money, food, clothes or shelter. It is also easy to convince them or take them away for sexual activities because they are young, weak and innocent. A police officer reported that: “These children get abused by pedophiles because these kids are helpless, you give them food, money and they are ready to give you anything. We have caught these pedophiles red hand, but due to our weak laws they can get away easily.” There is no one to enquire or worry about these children, so the abusers are not worried someone would enquire/report/complain about them. The rules and regulations in Nepal are very weak making it easy for abusers to get away with their behavior.

The Gendered Nature of Street Life. According to participants, there are number of reasons why there are fewer street girls than there are street boys. It is mainly because fewer girls are abandoned by their families. The girls are often socialized and groomed to be submissive and caring and are usually not as open to running away. In Nepali society, as reported by a field worker, “boys have more freedom to make decisions of their own and are bold enough to leave

home or run away. The boys are bold, aggressive and try to take up challenges, while girls have fewer behavioral problems as compared to boys. Since girls have fewer behavioral problems, they have less conflict with their families and do not need to leave their homes. The families can also get rid of girls by other means, such as marrying them off at an early age.”

On the other hand, another field worker stated that, “Those girls who run away from home or are lost in the cities have a higher element of fear in regards to being abused while living on the streets. Those girls who live on the streets tend to find work as domestic servants or work in restaurants / hotels or use drugs and stay in some corner of a temple or other quiet areas in the day time and later at night they go to or work in clubs, restaurants or if necessary sell their bodies.” Due to existing gender norms, street girls are often more looked down upon, increasing their risk for exploitation and are, therefore, not as visible on the streets when compared to boys.

Laws. All the respondents mentioned that there are currently no laws passed to protect street children exclusively. Street children are totally neglected when it comes to rights and policies. In Nepal, the only laws cover children in general. One of the respondents replied that, “The government has made a lot of commitment towards improving this problem but it has not yet been implemented due to lack of vision and political involvement.” It is clear from study participants that there are no initiations of law from government. The consensus among respondents is that the government needs to come up with long lasting programs not only for children but for their families as well. For example, one respondent asserted, “We need to find the root cause of children coming into the streets and the main reason we have seen is due to family disharmony. So I feel there has to be some kind of support/program for low income earning people by the government which will reduce/prevent children coming to the street.”

Similarly, the police officer said, “The government has to focus on street children exclusively but they should not be termed as street children but termed as „neglected children“ and focus on how to protect them. They are drafting laws for juvenile justice, but that has to cover and link it with street children too and their prevention. They have to classify these children into children with parents and children without parents or missing children and we have to make strategies for helping these children and not just include them in general terms and try to solve problem.”

Hence, laws and policies need to specifically focus on the experiences of these neglected children and the social factors that lead them to life on the street. The government needs to introduce more programs at the national level and solidify their commitment to decreasing this social issue.

What Supports need to be in Place to get children off the street? A field worker participating in this study reported, “Street children themselves cannot shed their identity of being a „street child“ because they are ignorant and too young to make decisions. It is our (all the stakeholders) responsibility to mend them. If these stakeholders do their duty, these children are compelled to act accordingly. Hence, these stakeholders should have the capacity to motivate these children to come out of their street life.” Along these lines, participants outlined eight forms of assistance stakeholders can invest in to help bring about a positive transition off the street.

- a. *Shelter:* According to participants, the primary step that needs to be taken is to find a place for street children to live. It is very obvious to respondents that, if there is no home environment or other family to support these children, drop-in centers or shelters appear to be the best option for them. Giving these children some place to stay even if it is for a

short term, like three months or six months, to help get them on their feet and assist them in finding a long-term placement is very beneficial and supportive to these children.

- b. *Economic support:* The second suggestion participants had was to provide economic support not only for the children but families as well. Economic security is very important not only for survival but also in terms of educational pursuits. Increased economic security enables children to pursue and finish a minimum of a primary education and may relieve familial factors that prevent children from staying with their family units.

There was an interesting example cited by a social worker while commenting on economic support. He commented that, “In my opinion, when street children beg, we should never give them money, instead we can offer them food. We should also remember that when we give them food, always open the seal so that they don’t sell that stuff back again and get money back for drugs. If we give them money, we are encouraging them to buy something else.” He further stated that, “Some organizations and the general public provide food, blankets, and clothes on a regular basis in the name of religion or helping street children. But in reality we do not realize that we are encouraging these children to live on the streets.” Hence, the respondent commented that the public and other organizations need to avoid methods of helping the street children which may enable and encourage substance abuse, but they have to encourage them to go to shelters or homes that are ready to help them in more appropriate ways.

- c. *Counseling:* A third support that street children need is counseling services. Organizations need to work together to provide individual and group counseling, as well

as psycho-social education. These services can help street children to increase their self confidence and self respect, and assist them in realizing that they are somebody meaningful and not just a street child. In addition, such services can assist children of the streets to realize that they can do something for themselves as well as for their family and community at large.

- d. *Increase Awareness of Rights:* According to participants, street children are not aware of their rights. A field worker reported that, “Organizations working for these children could increase awareness through media outreach, going out to the spots these children generally hang out at, and gathering them for information sessions at drop-in centers.” It was stated by another field worker that, “we need to educate the general citizens as well how to behave with street children.” She further stated that, “Our society keeps quiet in these matters, they do not care to do anything better for the society at large. For instance, some children have gone to some good professional work like driving public vehicles but if they are not supported for what they are doing, then most of them are compelled to indulge in criminal activities and join the street again.”
- e. *Education:* Another support participants listed was education. It was generally believed that reaching these children early by getting them into orphanages that provide structure and educational opportunities would best aid in the transition back into a normal childhood. When these children have a place to live and get education in schools, they will not have a negative perception of being street children and will have better opportunities for getting better jobs later on in life.
- f. *Skill development training:* Similarly, it was believed that job skill development was an important resource to provide for older child who are too late for orphanages and

traditional forms of education. Along these lines youth serving organizations could provide street children, vocational training or skills training (such as driving, carpentry, pottery etc.), according to a child's interest and their capacity so that they can easily learn skills which will help them become eligible for entry level jobs that will move them from living in survival mode to subsistence mode.

The organizations could also develop relationships with local employers to provide former street kids some kind of job guarantee during their transition off the streets. These children only know the importance of money and they don't care about anything else. In many cases, street children will go back to the streets if they do not find consistent employment despite their training. Hence, organizations need to follow up on the youths' employment activities on a regular basis through case management services.

- g. *Socialization:* These children have been made tough by the street and are used to a care-free living environment without any responsibilities. They fear going back to the family environment or to the shelters because of the structured environment. Because street children have a great deal of freedom, they need to be socialized into the structures of daily life. Organizations could work on socialization by helping these kids learn about the expectations associated with non-street life. They could provide opportunities for street kids to engage in various activities that would structure their behavior such as teaching them common daily hygiene routines from cleanliness to eating habits, as well as how to talk and interact with different types of people, and generally how to live again as a child.

- h. *Reunite with family*: Finally, participants reported that youth serving organizations should try to reintegrate street children with their families whenever possible. A family is the building block of society and is a key context for socializing members of society. It is where children learn about different aspects of life which can never be fully learned by living on the street or in a shelter. If a child's family environment is better than the street, and the family is ready and able to take the child back, organizations could provide transition services to the whole family as a way to support reunification. A social worker reported that, "the children should never be forced to go back to their families; it should all depend on the child's interest. If the child is ready to go back to the family, the organization should enquire about his or her community and family. When finally both family and children are interested to reunite, then the organization should reintegrate them."

Participants reported that there are many difficulties faced in transitioning children off the street. Street children have become accustomed to a great deal of freedom in their lifestyle and they do not always see the benefits of other ways of life. As is clear above, prevention and intervention initiatives must rely on multiple stakeholders (including the general public, families, government, local and international organizations, and police) in order to eliminate this social issue.

What are Indicators of a successful program aimed at helping street children? As reported in the interviews, the following are key indicators participants identified as composing a successful program or activity aimed at helping street children.

- a. *Public awareness:* One component of a successful program is increased public awareness. A field worker commented, “We need more help from the public. We are trying so hard to help these children but the general public thinks that we are here to earn money or make a profit in the name of these children. The public should realize that these children are not harmful.” Similarly a police officer noted that, “If you see the law, if children under 16 commit a crime or any offense, we don’t term them as a criminal. So if a child commits a crime, they are not supposed to be named as a criminal forever because they are very innocent at that stage. Similarly the general public should think that way.” A social worker also added that, “When the general public abuses or treats them badly, it will only serve to increase children’s marginalization from the society and increase the likelihood of offending them in the future.”

Hence, the public needs to understand that these are young children and it is their responsibility to help them become a better citizen in the future. It is also very difficult for these children to face the world as productive members of society if the public does not support them or encourage them to live a different life.

- b. *Support from Government:* The most common responses from participants reinforced the fact that programs cannot be successful without “government support.” It was believed that the government should be identifying the various problems that lead to children living on the street and then sponsor and fund various programs to address the issues. For example, participants reported that the government should be more active in developing awareness programs and should provide separate policies focusing specifically on the factors that lead children to the streets and that address the factors that keep them on the street once they are on the street.

- c. *Roles of the organization working for street children:* In regard to youth serving organizations, respondents stressed that in order for organizations working for street children to be successful, they need to be flexible in their programming so they can address several different problems that street children face. A field worker suggested that, “The organizations working for street children should have dedicated social workers, good mediators, and efficient human resources in order to work according to the vision/mission of the organization. Finally, these organizations need to provide a good, safe environment for the children to live a normal childhood.”
- d. *Coordination among organizations:* Finally, participants agreed that in order to be successful in reducing the number of children living on the streets, youth serving organizations and other stakeholders need to form collaborations and coordinate services. For example, one field worker commented, “In our society, we have the habit of blaming each other. So only advocacy does not work, implementation is necessary. Donors and government can donate money to schools to educate and train these children too.” Most of the respondents stated that some organizations work for their own goals and based on their own motives, not necessarily based on the needs of street children exclusively. Successful organizations must be able to evaluate their program successes and their failures in order to improve accordingly. It is believed that more communication across stakeholders can improve the existing approaches geared towards working with these youth.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

It is very important to have insight and knowledge on street children in order to help them live better lives. The definition of street children is still debated worldwide. Seven out of eight respondents defined two categories of street children, i.e. children *on* the street and children *of* the street. While less commonly referred to, one more category of street children emerged in the interview by a field worker categorized as *Children of a street family*. He explained that, “These are the children who belong to a street family, which means the whole family lives on the streets. These children live on the sidewalks with the rest of their families who have been displaced due to poverty, natural disasters, or wars. They move their possessions from place to place when necessary.” He further added that, “These children are the „real“ street children out of all three types.” Children who belong to „street families“ work on the streets with other members of their families and spend all their time in the streets for livelihood and shelter and should not be neglected. Hence, this category of street children cannot be ignored and should be given a further attention.

The literature review and the findings of this study reveal that these children have different push and pull factors that bring children to the streets (see diagram 1). The study corroborates evidence from the literature review (Ali, Muynck, Shahab, and Ushijima 2004; Roux & Smith, 1998; Baker, Panter-Brick & Todd, 1997) that poverty and family disharmony are the main reasons for children being on the street. Other noteworthy factors that have emerged from the literature review and this study are lack of education, search for independence, urbanization, internal child trafficking, peer/sibling influence and political conflict.

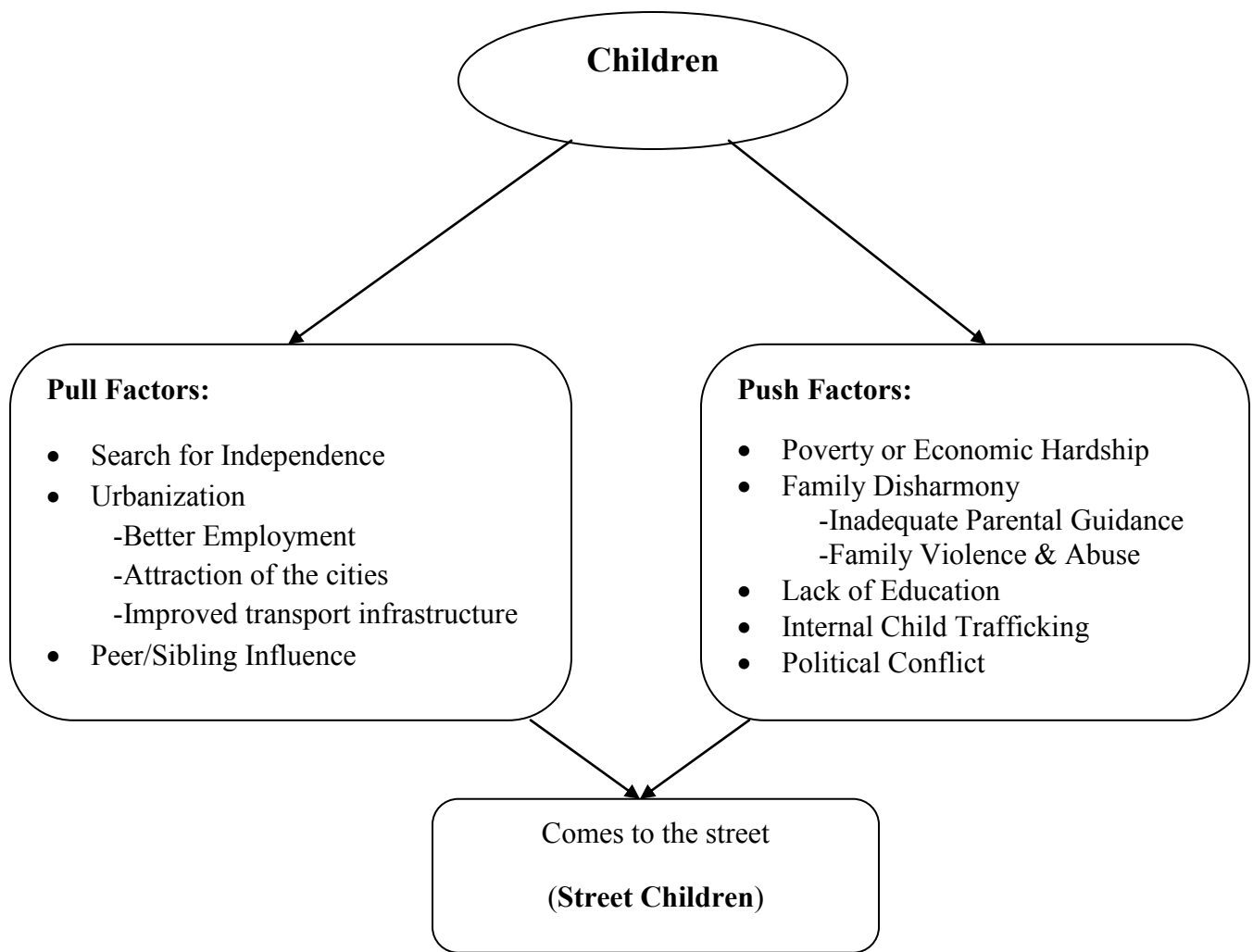


Diagram 1. Factors that bring children to the street.

This study also indicates that Nepalese society may have a negative impact on street children. Society members think these children are violent, uncontrollable and have no emotions. They perceive these children as thieves, robbers, drug addicts and terrorists. This perspective makes street children susceptible to a variety of risks. They are exposed to numerous health risks as well as physical, sexual and emotional abuses. Similar findings have been cited by various authors (Roux & Smith, 1998; Doyle, 2002; Subedi, 2002; Ali, Muynck, Shahab, and Ushijima 2004; Baker, 1996). But the finding of this study also reveals some of the risk factors which are

highly prevalent in Nepal such as the issue of glue sniffing and other health related risks such as common diseases and injuries that occur from malnutrition and poor sanitation.

Furthermore, the study substantiates findings from Doyle (2002) and Subedi (2002) that street children in Nepal are sexually exploited by elder street children, foreigners and the general public. But the current study illustrated how street children in Nepal are lured for sexual pleasures by foreigners in greater detail. For example, the findings show that street children are frequently beaten, raped and exposed to pornography. Street children are considered to be an easy target for abusers. This study shows that street children are easily abused because they do not have a strong sense of worth and are very vulnerable. There is none to enquire or worry about these helpless children. Lack of strong rules and regulations against pedophiles also encourage the abusers to exploit street children.

The findings also reveal the reason for a predominance of boys compared to girls on the street. The result explains that in Nepali society, the girls are often socialized and groomed to be submissive and caring while boys have more freedom and are bolder to make decisions on their own. Another surprising fact that the results disclosed was that the street girls are not as visible on the streets when compared to boys because they work as domestic servants or work in restaurants or use drugs and stay in some quiet areas in the day time and are involve in sex work in clubs later at night.

Nepali criminal law lacks a clause for pedophilia and authorities charge these abusers with violation of public offense laws (Doyle, 2002). Similarly, the finding of this study uncovers that the street children in Nepal are neglected when it comes to rights and policies. The suggested role of the government is to recognize the problem, formulate, amend and implement laws to protect and promote rights of neglected children, to end exploitation, abuse and

discrimination. Special attention needs to be given to child abuse and the government should develop strict laws against pedophilia as a social crime. Additionally, it was also suggested in this study that government must allocate budgets and provide other necessary support for programs and organizations oriented towards street children. This finding suggest that the policy on street children addressing issues such as the definition of a street child, reasons for coming to the street, health care and free & compulsory education must be developed and implemented.

It is quite evident from the studies that street children vary due to their background characteristics and the duration of their stay on the streets (Roux & Smith, 1998; Baker, Panter-Brick & Todd, 1997; Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004). This study substantiates evidence from previous literature that because each child has different reasons and backgrounds for leaving their homes, different approaches are required for individual children to help them improve their lives and status. Risk factors emerging from the study may be very useful in identifying the problems and implementing timely preventive measures. This study indicates that two major approaches need to be taken into consideration, a) Preventive interventions to stop children coming to the street and b) Protective measure to help children who are already living in the streets. Some of the possible programs suggested in the study aimed at stopping children in Nepal coming to the streets are providing economic support and increasing awareness of rights while the protective measures emerging from this study are providing shelter, education, skill development training, counseling and socialization.

Finally, this study mainly focused on public awareness as a primary factor that prevents children from coming to the streets as well as guide street children to get a better life. This study suggested that the government and civil society in coordination with police, media, teachers, social workers and other stakeholders, has to take immediate action to raise awareness of treating

these children as other normal children and to address their problems. It was also suggested that a child's desire to be loved and cared for is the number one reason why they are willing to endure sexual abuse. Hence, our society should know that patience, forgiveness and understanding are essential for assisting previously abused child.

CHAPTER 8

LIMITATION

The study was limited by a small sample of eight stakeholders and an ethnographic study. The generalization of the findings in this study to other areas should be made cautiously. Other limitations are as follows:

Time frame: The major *research limitation* of this study was the failure to conduct follow-up interviews or focus group discussions with the participants to clarify information obtained in the first set of interviews due to the limited time frame of my visit to Nepal.

Support from organization and participants: Some of the organizations working for street children were not willing to share information about their organizations or about the children living in their shelter. I was not allowed to talk to the children and it was not possible to interview these children. I wished to interview these children so as to gain their perspective on life away from street and experiences on living in the shelter, but unfortunately I did not get the permission to do so.

Access to resources: Conducting an ethnographic study was not easy. Observing their activities from one place was impossible. These children moved from one place to another in search for food, shelter and income. It was difficult to communicate with these children about research objectives and goals. Most of these children used foul language and it was quite embarrassing for me to listen to them communicate with each other as well as with the general public.

Translation: Since most of the interviews were in Nepali, it was difficult to express the participant's exact quotations and translate their feelings in English.

Because of these limitation factors, I had to be flexible and adapt my approach according to the needs of the respondents and research.

CHAPTER 9

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations arising from the current study target five important areas. They are as follows:

Develop preventive interventions. As mentioned earlier, there are various push and pull factors identified for those children at risk for coming to the street. In many cases, it is possible to easily identify those children coming to the street both in terms of risk factors and geographical proximity. Preventive interventions should be targeted in areas such as a) districts from which children are more prone to come to the streets, b) parental literacy to stop domestic violence, c) family rehabilitation and counseling etc. The wide range of stakeholders along with the government and district-based agencies need to develop coordinated and targeted interventions to provide interventions to identify and prevent at risk children from coming to the street.

Protect children. Children on the street are highly vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional abuse as well as at risk of drug abuse, exposure to criminal activities, and high risk sexual behaviors. It is even worse for those children who sleep on the street at night and who work at night. In order to protect these children, field workers with the support of other stakeholders need to coordinate and provide protection to street children from above mentioned high-risk and abusive behaviors among themselves as well as from their abusers, especially in high risk areas at night and motivate these children to leave the streets.

Target high risk behaviors at an early age. Children on the street develop high-risk behaviors at an early age, such as sexual risk behaviors, drug abuse, exposure to criminal activities and other violent behavior. These behaviors may start before the child is even ten years

of age. Hence, certain strategies need to be developed and implemented such as providing them with appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills from an early age and prevent these children from adopting high-risk behaviors.

Effective social service. The organizations working for street children should introduce certain important social services that are available to the street children and their families throughout the country. These services need to be planned and implemented in a way which will enable the street children to receive timely intervention. Street children are often in need of drop-in centers for food, shelter, medical services and counseling services. These services should be publicized through public education programs to acquaint these children, their families and professionals with the availability and nature of the services. It is very important to provide on-going individual, group and family therapy after these children return home with their parents. The organizations must engage constructively with street children focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration. But when street children do not continue living with their families or relatives, a social service agency can try to provide an alternative living arrangement with foster parents, group homes or residential treatment centers where counseling and other social services should be provided.

Eligible human resources: There is a need for change in the attitudes of the people who work for these children. They have the potential to be the closest with the street children. The attitudes of the staff and their way of dealing with the children are very important. These people should be tactful, knowledgeable, understanding, good people who treat these children well. Eligible human resources such as psychologists, counselors and social workers are essential to motivate these children to leave the streets and experience their normal childhood. In addition, a code of conduct for child care workers should be developed, supervised, and enforced. Training

for child care workers in areas such as psychosocial counseling for children and families should be introduced.

CONCLUSION

Street children are part of our society but unfortunately they do not have good guidance from their parents or elders and are forced to live a poor standard of life. We should always remember that these children are not adults and they have the right to childhood and it is up to the adult world to make it true or happen. It is also the responsibility of stakeholders such as the government, civil society, private sectors and donor community to get together and recognize the problem of street children and address it soon in order to prevent more dire consequences.

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