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PARENTAL ABSENCE ON THE INCREASE OF STREET CHILDREN IN NAKURU TOWN, NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: Kenya has been grappling with an upsurge in the number of street children throughout the years in spite of the relentless efforts which have been set up by different stakeholders for instance the establishment of rehabilitation centers to rehabilitate these street children and reunite them with their families. The purpose of this study was to establish in what way absence of parents contributes to the increase of street children in Nakuru Town, Nakuru County. This study was guided by Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. The study employed descriptive survey research design including quantitative and qualitative data gathering approaches using a sample size of 295 street children, four key informants and 12 institutionalized ex children of the streets at Arap Moi children's home who were randomly selected. A multi stage sampling technique involving convenient, stratified random sampling, snowballing and purposive sampling was used to select the respondents for the study. Questionnaires, focus group discussion and Interview schedules were used as the main tools for data collection. The study results showed that while still at home, children had a lasting and painful life experiences due to death of parents, parental divorce and maltreatment by folks/parents which made them flee onto the streets. The study also revealed that there was a statistical significant relationship between absence of parents, child abuse, domestic violence and the increase of street children in Nakuru town.

Keywords: Child, Child abuse, Family, Street children; Urban area.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Children living and operating on the streets, typically alluded to as street children are a typical component of town centers in poor nations globally in both developed and developing countries (UNICEF, 2015; Alam & Laha, 2016). According to Boakye-Boaten (2008) street children phenomenal is not novel nor is it limited to certain geological regions.

Recent studies conducted by Ondieki (2019) however noted that street children were still roaming freely in Nakuru town in spite of Governor Lee Kinyanjui's earlier order that the street children be registered in a bid to re-integrate them in the society a move that saw only about 440 children being registered among them 53 street kids who were willing to pursue their education further. There has been different dimensions as to the cause of the upsurge in the numerical of street children in Nakuru town with an examination done by Wanja (2014) attributing this upward trend to the laxity of the children's department in Nakuru to deal with street children as a result many came from as far as Eldoret, Mombasa, Nairobi and other major towns as those towns are strict in dealing with them. Wanja (2014) also added that the children's department had abdicated its role of looking for parents of the street children something that increased the number of street children in Nakuru town since they have nowhere to go but to turn to the streets of Nakuru. Current data on street children as latest as 2019 national census of street families in a study done by Njanja (2020) indicated domestic violence as a major cause of

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the increase in street children with 81 percent male as well as 36 percent female street children citing abuse by relatives especially where their parents died or did not live together as the pushing factor of them going to the streets. Additionally in a study done by Akwara (2015) on child neglect, he noted that there was rampant cases of child neglect in Nakuru Sub County something which was being attributed to alcohol and drug abuse by both men and women which influenced domestic violence and actual neglect of children after separations causing children to seek for refuge in the streets of Nakuru for survival.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nakuru County has been grappling with an upsurge in the number of street children throughout the years in spite of the relentless efforts which have been set up by different stakeholders in an effort to contain the situation for instance the establishment of rehabilitation centers by both the county government and non-governmental bodies to rehabilitate these street children and reunite them with their families. This increase has been highlighted by numerous surveys which have been done for example A survey carried out by the Children, Social and Gender Department in Nakuru in the year 2014 showed that there were over 1000 street children in Nakuru town with over 400 only coming to the street during the day to look for food to feed their siblings and then going back home in the evening. Going by the above studies it's clear that indeed the numbers are on an upward trajectory which is also becoming a nuisance to not only the locals but the county government of Nakuru however noticeably is the fact that they keep on dwelling on statistics rather than the root cause as a way of trying to find out why the numbers are increasing despite the efforts put in place to address the same. This study will therefore breach this knowledge gap by focusing on parental absence on the increase of street children in Nakuru town with the aim of helping the society to curb the situation at an earlier stage thus reducing the number of street children.

2. PARENTAL ABSENCE ON THE INCREASE OF STREET CHILDREN

Absence of parents may be occasioned by either death, divorce/separation or imprisonment of one or both parents. Street children need effective psychological support from both parents which due to death, divorce, separation or imprisonment of one or both parents may be lacking. The lack of the presence of parents in a child's life will make the child not to get any affection, care or convenient upbringing. This absence of parents may also make the child to have a deficiency of psychosocial support from the adult figure hence in most scenarios they may tend to feel emotionally disadvantaged of the consolation of being with their born parents. Thus as a result according to Mwoma & Pillay (2015) this can lead to rebellious behaviors, early dropout, and even a fundamental hazard to the social structure of humanity. The absence of parents also tends to subject this children to emotional turmoil demonstrated with fright, fretfulness, hopelessness, and constant unhappiness, anguish and self-doubt. According to Finkelstein (2005) with the absence of both or one of the parents occasioned by the demise of the parents, can lead the child to a situation where he or she has to be accommodated by a different parent figure for example a step-father who might be unreceptive. This especially affects boys, who tend to be much more unruly than girls. With this feeling of being unwanted they then opt to migrate onto the streets to start a life. Osborne and Mclanahan, (2007) in their study also reiterated that absence of parents can lead children to much more emotive glitches like apprehension and despair. This children may then have a formed opinion of being worthless than their counter parts with parents and start wondering the reason as per to their parents' abandonment.

Absence of parents is a global issue and not restricted to a certain geographic block. In the developed countries for instance in Morocco according to a review by Moroccan Children's Trust (2012), countless abject stricken family circle are characterized by, at least one guardians being missing or perished, to a great extent dads. This tends to occasion most children to invest a large portion of their energy in the city or to entirely leave their homes onto the street. In the United States a study done by Allen and Daly (2007) indicated that absence of parents particularly the father figure had a far reaching effect on fatherless children who experienced more psychosocial problems for instance depression, suicide, substance abuse etc. than those who had the father figure. Consequently, when one of the parents was absent, the psychological distress for the child increased because of the need to understand why the parents were absent.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research applied both qualitative and quantitative research methods in collection of data from different sources through questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions. This study adopted descriptive survey research design in order to capture the state of affairs as it currently exists in regards to the influences of absence of parents on the increase of street children in Nakuru town.

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Two categories of data were utilized: primary data and secondary data. Primary data was acquired from the responses to structured questionnaires created by the researcher. Information from the interview schedule also provided important research data that the study maintains. Secondary data, on the other hand, was obtained from the results expressed in the printed documents and references identified in the research question.

The target populace for the study was comprised of 1,122 street children (1000 males and 122 females) between the ages 10 and 18 years as recorded in the national census of street families' report of 2018 (Caroline, 2018), two social workers of Arap Moi children's home, two Nakuru county children officers and twelve institutionalized ex children of the streets at Arap Moi children's home. Street children Participants were conveniently selected in Nakuru town having fulfilled the following inclusion criteria: self-identified as a street boy/girl, agreed to participate in the study and having lived on the street for a month or more. A mixed sampling design was utilized in this study which involved a combination of both the probability random sampling and non-probability sampling techniques for the selection of a sample (Adama, 2019). Street children were obtained by convenient sampling because they are a mobile populace. Four key informants' that is two social workers working in Arap Moi rehabilitation center as well as two County children officers in Nakuru Town were selected purposively to give an in-depth information.

4. FINDINGS ON PARENTAL ABSENCE AND INCREASE OF STREET CHILDREN

Absence of parents is one of today's challenges in the family structure. The study looked at parental absence in relation to the death of parents and divorce/separation of parents.

4.1 Death of Parents

Death of parents was a major indicator that establish how absence of parents influences the increase of street children in Nakuru town. The research examined death of parents in sub theme in relation to the status of the parents. A query was placed through in an attempt to get info in regards to street children's parental status and their responses are as summed up in the beneath mentioned Table 1;

Parental Status Frequency Percentage Both alive 10 6.67% Both parents dead 75 50% Mother alive, father dead 30 20% 20 Father alive, mother dead 13.33% I don't know 15 10% **Total** 150 100%

Table 1: Parents status

Source: Research Data (2022)

In determination of parental status the vast number of the respondents indicated that they were from homes where both the parents were deceased marked by 50% response, from single parents 20% and 13.33% respectively and both parents alive 6.67%. There were also those who didn't know whether their parents were alive or dead forming 15%. Implication of this result is that with the absenteeism of a parental figure children do find themselves in a compromising situation in terms of lack of basic needs, love and emotional support from both parents thus compelling them to shoulder the responsibility of providing for themselves, which as a result leads them onto the streets as a way of fetching for means of fulfilling their basic needs.

This findings were supported by a research done by Project Concern International Zambia (2002) in relation to the variant degrees of parental availability in a child's life where it was learnt that most children on the streets in Lusaka, Zambia stayed orphaned by the death of either both parents or one of the parents with 22% having both parents deceased, 26% having their fathers passed on while 10% of the street children having lost their mothers. Further it was noted that with the death of one parent what that did was leaving the burden of child caring on one parent who by the end of the day gets overwhelmed as a result children taking advantage of that weakness to endeavor onto street life. This findings are also supported by Anon 2003 and Mahlangu 2002 whose study outcomes on street children pointed out the interference of family structure by the demise of either of the parents as a sole reason behind most children drifting onto the streets.

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4.2 Divorce/Separation of Parents

Divorce/separation of parents was also a major indicator that establish in what way absence of parents influences the increase of street children in Nakuru town. The research examined divorce/separation of parents in sub theme in relation to whether the parents were living together or not and the living arrangement of the children before joining the street. The study additionally sought to establish whether parents of children interviewed were still living together or not at the time of collating data. The outcomes signposted that 66.67% of those who responded indicated that their parents were not living together whereas 33.33% recounted that their parents were living together. The responses were summarized in Figure 1.

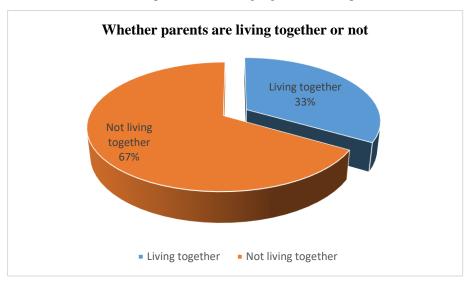


Figure 1: Whether parents are living together or not

From the above response it's worth noting that majority of the respondents indicated that they were from homes where the parents are not staying/living together marked by 66.67% while a small percentage were from families where parents were living together indicated by 33.33%. An indication that dysfunctional families on the grounds of divorce/separation or whatever reasons causing the parents not to live together left children in a vulnerable position which might explain the migration trend of children onto the streets as a way of responding to their search of family. What also came out clearly from this result is that by the virtue of parents living together was not a guarantee that the children won't end up on the streets. Also from the findings 33.33% of the respondents had both parents living together and that didn't prevent them from migrating to the streets an indication that there might be underlying factors making children to migrate onto the streets apart from the absence of parents in the child's life.

In concurrence with the current results, Endris & Sitota (2019) in there study of street children mentioned that the utmost accountable factor for the presence of children on the street was an absence of helpful and serviceable family, which likewise incorporated, family split up or parting as a result having a place with a single parent left kids more defenseless and prone to become offspring of the streets. However contrast opinion in support of this findings was also drawn by Ballet (2006) in his study of street children in Mauritania whereby he indicated that street children came from family formations with both parents as frequently as from single parent formations and that in the two scenarios, the parents were absent from households for the vast majority of the time making children to be deserted. Family breakdown was another major cause for streetism (Issa and Madelyn, 2018; Mandoyu, 2018).

4.3 Who the Children Were Staying With

To comprehend the street children's background, the research endeavored to find whether they had parents before they went out to the streets. The existence of a parent was significant in the life of a child just to guarantee the availability of basic needs, safety against abuse and living in a safe surrounding. As postulated by Lieten and Streil (2015), societal customs around the world required children to live with their parents, guardians or a responsible person and in the event such was lacking the children then became isolated and links with family weaken or broken. The reactions are as summed in Figure 2

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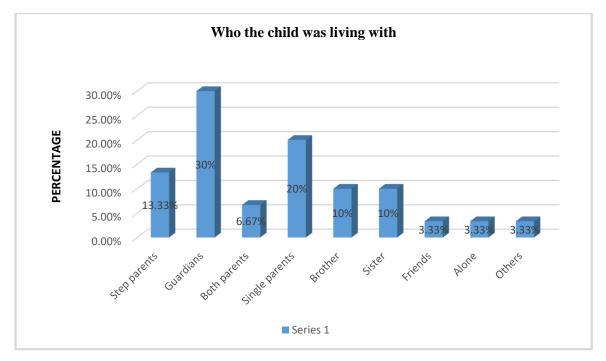


Figure 2: Bar chart representation of who the child was living with

The findings presented in the table above indicates that 30% of street children stayed with their guardians, 13.33% lived with their step parents, 6.67% % stayed with both the parents, 20% stayed with either father or mother alone, 10% stayed with a brother or sister respectively, 3.33% stayed alone or with friends, wherein 3.33% stayed with others for example aunts, uncles, cousin and so on. The outcomes demonstrated that every street child had a kin some place where they originated from. Additionally, this findings pointed out that the vast number of children on the streets left home at a time when parental responsibility was needed the most which apparently was lacking as a huge number of respondents were staying with guardians who might have not had the interest at heart to care for this children who as a result opted to venture onto the streets.

An interview with key informants also concerted that disappointment of family members to deal with deserted and bereaved kids because of disintegration of the conventional social fiber could have added to the increase of street children in Nakuru town. What this infers is that the social obligation that existed in the customary social emotionally supportive network was gradually disappearing. This was on the grounds that really direct relations were observed to have disregarded and passed on the stranded and mishandled kids to agonize by repudiating them shelter and attention. Thus this could have prompted the consistently expanding statistics of street children on the streets.

These discoveries concurred with studies done by Walakira et al (2015) who called attention to the fact that a larger segment of road youngsters comprising of 64 percent in rehabilitation centers had a kin somewhere. This discoveries were further echoed by Deb, Sunny and Manjumdar (2020) whose study on street children noted with a lot of concern that tragically a bigger statistic of kids in rehabilitation centers had parents and that they should not be institutionalized to start with rather parents should own up to their parental responsibility.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the study it was found that children who venture out from households and reside on the street doesn't do so voluntarily, but for unavoidable reasons beyond their control. The study results showed that while still at home, these children had a lasting and painful life experiences due to the death of parents, parental divorce and maltreatment by folks/parents. In their homes, children felt mentally ill and ignored and were physically and verbally abused by their parents and other family members. This throbbing experience at households compelled them to flee onto streets, which incredibly was undeniably seriously anguishing. In the streets, children similarly encountered dread and nervousness, bodily and psychological maltreatment.

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Results of this study showed children's family life experiences were intolerable and they appeared to be boiling in their homes throughout their lives. Children endured a ton of mental misery, negligence, physical and obnoxious attack from persons termed close members of the family. This study underscored that these agonizing life experiences continued through parental death, spilt up or annulment of marriages and countless types of child abuse. Most respondents recounted several kinds of oral, emotive and actual maltreatment by their folks and more distant families. A few street children did report having bad dream about their deceased parents and experiencing glimpse of despair and fear, while others reported crying whenever lonely.

The study recommends that, children need to be sharpen on the accessibility of children support administrations and on the freedoms of the children. Given the moderately low information on the kids on which establishments to go to in the event of issues, inside any help program there ought to be incorporated missions to sharpen them on potential wellsprings of help. These programs ought to anticipate home visits as a way of guaranteeing that kids are not being abused and that their amalgamation/ rehabilitation is operational. Further research can be done to investigate roots for heighten frequency of separation and annulment of marriages in Nakuru region.

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