



A STUDY ON PLIGHT OF STREET CHILDREN IN INDIA: AN IGNORED TRAGEDY

KEYWORDS

Child Abuse, Health, NGO's, Family, Rehabilitation

Dr. K. V. Ravi Kumar

LLM., Ph.D., Assistant Professor, P.G. Department of Legal Research, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar

ABSTRACT *The aim of this study to investigate the problems that are facing by children who are lived in the streets in India. The street children of today can be the guerillas and terrorists of tomorrow. Millions of street children suffering from hunger, homelessness and poverty around the world. In the developing country like India, most of the street children live and work amidst trash, animals and open sewers etc., The harsh living conditions and the illiteracy seems to increase the irresponsibility of parents to take care for their children with regard to health and development, so that the parents driven out their children to the streets. The street children are becoming most vulnerable to many dangers such as chronic diseases and abuses in the society. There is a research gap existed to route-out the welfare conditions of the street children, and therefore, my paper is highlight on the problems that are facing by the street children in India.*

Introduction:

The twenty-first century presents a hostile face to many millions of children around the world especially who lived on the streets. An increasing number of children are being forced to the streets as result of poverty, abuse, torture, rape, abandonment or orphaned by dreadful diseases. During the past two decades, human rights violations against children have become a common and disturbing occurrence in many parts of the world. Indeed denial of basic human and legal rights including the right to life, liberty and security as a person to children are now a defining feature of the Indian landscape. According to UNICEF, 77 million children do not attend schools around the globe in general and 3,14,700 children are lived in the streets specifically in metros such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Kanpur, Bangalore and Hyderabad, and whereas more than 1,00,000 children even in territory of Delhi alone.

Street children are considered to be hooligans, vagabonds, and people prone to committing crimes. It is pertinent to mention that more children are escaping to the streets as a safe heaven, because they are facing numerous problems such as sexual abuse by relatives and neighbours, and breakdown of marriages, etc., Children as young as of six, have to resort to car washing, begging, carrying luggage, fetching tea or working in small industries to support themselves and sometimes to their families and whereas girls as young as eight are forced into prostitution in order to survive. More than 20% of India's Gross National Product is produced by children. The street children of today can be the guerillas and terrorists of tomorrow. This is the major and hectic problem which can no longer be ignored by the members of society. A question that we must increasingly ask ourselves is how long must it take before the problem of street children attracts the proper attention that it deserves? How many more children must first take to the streets or die because of lack of care on our streets before we can acknowledge that the problem of street children is a very serious one which is likely to affect all of us.

2. Role of United Nations :

At international level, the role of United Nations has played

an effective role in eradicating the problems of streets children. The General Assembly of United Nations in its resolution under vide No. 49/212, specifically mentions about the plight of the street children. There is a welcoming on special attention given to rights of children in Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and also re-called the Convention on Rights of child in relation to protection of the rights of all children especially the street children. There are diverse causes of the emergence and marginalization of street children including poverty, rural to urban migration, unemployment, broken families, exploitation and war and that such causes are often aggravated and their resolution made more difficult by serious socio-economic difficulties. The Assembly urges all the Governments to continue actively to seek comprehensive solutions to tackle the problems of street children and to take measures to restore their full participation in the society and to provide inter alia adequate nutrition, shelter, health care and education, and also to guarantee the respect for fundamental rights particularly the right to life and to take urgent measures to prevent the killing of children who lived in the streets and to combat torture and violence against them.

According to UNICEF, there are 3 types of street children :

- a) **Street Living Children** : Children who ran away from their families and live alone on the streets. They move from place to place, living in shelters and abandoned buildings.
- b) **Street Working Children** : Children who spend most of their time on the street, fending for themselves, but returning home on a regular basis. It is because of poverty, overcrowding, sexual or physical abuse at home.
- c) **Children from Street families** : Children who live on the street with their families. These children live on sidewalks or city-squares with rest of their families. They may be displaced due to poverty, wars or natural disasters. The families often live a nomadic life, carrying possessions with them.

3. Health :

The problem of street children being an age-old and burning problem facing around the world. Generally, the street children have poor health condition, and do not benefit from the rights to health and nutrition. There must be a difficult access to public health services, which prone to

cause a danger to their lives. Frequently, because of unaware of their health condition, they are exposed to higher risks of diseases like Tuberculosis, Malaria, Jaundice, kidney disorders, and sexually transmitted infectious dreadful disease like HIV/AIDS. Scabies, gangrene, broken limbs and epilepsy are common. Most of the street children are exposed to dirt, smoke and other environmental hazards, and constantly exposed to intense sun, rain and cold. Though they are supposed to be free in the society, personnel of government officials did not take care of them in admitting into the hospitals. Sometimes, street children do not have easy access to join into the hospital because of paying bribes, or the indifferent or hostile treatment meted out to them by the staff of the hospital.

4. Breakdown of Families :

Currently, the family institution is going through a lot of upheavals in India. Many families have broken up with children because of their selfish ends, as a result of this, children are coming out of their family and living on streets. It is relevant to note that many more children run away to the streets to avoid violence and abuse in their families. It is now common occurrence to hear of terrifying stories of abuse of children by neighbors, family members and even by parents. Children are increasingly being sexually abused, starved and ignored by the family and community at large. At present, it is surprising to see that the parents or guardians using the force or threats to send their children out to beg, steal and work to earn income for the family. Adults are also increasingly using their children as sources of income and thereby violating and denying children of their basic rights as human beings. Therefore, it is bounden duty on the part of the Government to look after the welfare and basic amenities to provide to the children.

5. Non-Governmental Organizations:

The first important step is to realize and acknowledge that the problem of street children is one of the most burning problem facing around the world. There needs to be a firm commitment by all concerned governments to tackle the problem and not just ignore it hoping that it will go away or people are going to come to solve the problem. Children living on the street, without homes or families, pose the greatest challenge in terms of rehabilitation, often needing long-term one-on-one counseling. The Non-Governmental Organizations had to take major support in rehabilitating the street children, and they are to be applauded in their efforts to address the problem of street children. There is a need for the Welfare Centers to be taken over for the protecting the children who are lived on streets. Discussions, seminars, conferences meetings are hold to make awareness among the public about the pathetic situation prevailed among the street children and provide necessary facilities for proper rehabilitation.

6. Legislative Approach :

There is no specific legislation that specifies the term 'Street Children' in India. Street children are in many cases, sent to remand in adult jails where they are abused, both physically and sexually, for indefinite period of time. There is no provision made for these young children to contact their parents or obtain proper guidance or legal representation. These

children are eventually escape from the homes. In some of the States, the street children are placed under the care of Observation Homes, Remand Homes and other Government Juvenile Centers, or Child Care Centers etc., It is pertinent to note that The Apprenticeship Act, 1850 which enabled public charities to bring up orphans and poor children, etc. and whereas The Reformatory Schools Act, 1867 dealt with neglected and delinquent children.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, (Act, 50/2000) dealt with the care, protection, treatment, development and strengthening process of neglected or delinquent juveniles, and for the adjudication of certain matters relating to, and disposition of, delinquent juveniles. This law specifically refer to the need of care and protection by providing proper care protection and treatment by catering to their development needs. In metropolitan cities like Mumbai, more than 3,000 cases brought before the Juvenile Court. There are inadequate Juvenile Boards in dealt with the cases of street children. The Act, adopts a child-friendly approach in the adjudication and disposition of matters in the interests of children and also for their rehabilitation through various institutions.

CONCLUSION:

Those children who lived on the streets are eking out a grim existence in India. Living on the streets is difficult and hazardous and anyone who are able to survive must be listened and helped. Families, the government and the community at large must seek the measures to eradicate the evil of living of children in the streets. Most of the street children are illiterate with no basic skills to help them. Education may help break the vicious circle of marginalization and help potential street children towards a better life. With liberalization and reforms, schools seems to belong to a different world, remote from the everyday existence of those most deprived. School then becomes for street children only another possibility of failure. Today governments are increasingly taking ruthless steps to clear the streets of street children and other unscrupulous characters. They do not offer any viable alternative to the street. Politicians, policy makers, and urban planners seem to be helpless in their efforts to solve the problem of street children.

In addition to fulfilling the material needs of street children, we, as a members of the society seek to provide a warm and caring atmosphere for children who are living in streets. In India, there are so many vocational centers, which are safe and fun places, where children gain confidence and self-esteem. The people may run a 'help line' for children who are in need. NGOs, male and female full-time counselors, have to support children's emotional development. It is to be noted that the government provides non-formal schools to ensure that working children get at least basic education. On behalf of the children who lived in the streets, the Governments should provide popular and practical vocational training, where they can learn skills while they are also earning some money. It is true that the street children are facing many physical, psychological, and health problems. Therefore, it is imperative on the part of the Government to look after their welfare in this regard on war-footing basis, or otherwise, the society would not grow properly.

REFERENCE

- (1) Freeman, M., (1983) 'The Rights and Wrongs of Children', Francis Printer Publishers, London. | (2) Amnesty International, (1991) 'Human Rights', in Review of African Political Economy, March 1991 No. 50, ROAPE Publications: Sheffield. | (3) UNDP (1997) 'Human Development Report', Oxford University Press, New York. | (4) BBC News, 'Street children surprisingly healthy', 13 April 2002, Visited <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1920570.stm>. | (5) Sebastian Marot, 'Friends' in consultation with Cambodian NGOs, reported by Consortium for Street Children, 2003. | (6) Nab Kishore Bahura et al., (2005) 'Urbanisation : Street Children and their Problems' Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi. | (7) Aptekar L.,(2014) 'Street Children and Homeless Youth : A Cross Cultural Perspective' Springer. | (8) Basta S.S. (1977), 'Nutrition and Health in Low Income Urban Areas of the Third World' Ecology and Food Nutrition. |