A Situational Analysis of the Street Child Phenomenon in Pakistan: A Literature Review

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Map of Pakistan
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<th>Acronym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>AREU</td>
<td>Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention in the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GOP</td>
<td>Government of Pakistan</td>
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<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<td>HRW</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>IRIN</td>
<td>Integrated Regional Information Networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>KABPS</td>
<td>Knowledge Attitude Behaviour Practices</td>
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<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>NCCWD</td>
<td>National Commission for Child Welfare and Development</td>
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<td>NDAIC</td>
<td>National Drug Abuse Information Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPARC</td>
<td>Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNAIDS</td>
<td>United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
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<td>UNODC</td>
<td>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<td>WCRWC</td>
<td>Women’s Commission on the Right of Women and Children</td>
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Abstract

A number of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have implemented successful interventions to ameliorate the street child phenomenon. However, Pakistan’s efforts for eradicating the problem have been limited and it is estimated that 70,000 street children currently exist in the country. There are a plethora of complex factors that have coalesced to create a socio-economic climate conducive to the persistence of street children. The US war in Afghanistan which began in October 2001 led to the immediate influx of approximately 200,000 Afghan refugees into Pakistan, and of the 1.5 million refugees that crossed the border in 2001 an estimated 59% were children. The Afghan children are discriminated against in terms of employment opportunities and physical and sexual abuse and exploitation. The survival of a street child is substantially defined by severe socio-economic instability and deprivation leading to high risk coping strategies. Evidence indicates that 90% of street children in Pakistan are involved in inhalant abuse; this combined with risky sexual behaviour and vulnerability to disease, makes street children one of the most ostracised and marginalised social groups in the country. Despite preventative measures from the national government and rehabilitative projects sponsored by non-governmental organisations, policies and programmes in Pakistan are both quantitatively and qualitatively inadequate. Examples of successful interventions internationally, in terms of preventative programmes and rehabilitation through education and vocation, provide lessons for Pakistan.
CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

Many countries across the world have had to deal with the difficult social phenomenon that is street children. Although it is difficult to categorize a group of individuals with such varying circumstances, the definition of street children cited by the United Nations is “Any boy or girl...for whom the street, in the widest sense of the word...has become his or her habitual abode or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults” (UN 2008). A widely accepted set of definitions, commonly attributed to UNICEF, divides street children into two main categories and in this paper the term street children refers to children who belong to both:

1) Children on the street are those engaged in some kind of economic activity during the day but return to their family home at night (UNICEF 2008).

2) Children of the street actually survive entirely on the street, or outside of a normal family environment (UNICEF 2008).

The population of Pakistan is estimated to be over 172 million people of whom almost 40 percent are under the age of 15 years (CIA 2009). In a country where there is political fluctuation, economic instability and the only form of stable growth is in terms of the population, poverty has become an inevitable problem. It is estimated that there are 70,000 street children in Pakistan, surviving in the major cities and urban centres, making them one of the largest and most neglected social groups in the country (Asian Human Rights Commission 2005). This report aims to critically analyse: 1) the socioeconomic reasons behind the occurrence of street children in Pakistan, 2) the health, safety and security situation of this ostracized social group and 3) the current interventions in place to help them.

The breakdown of the 70,000 street children in Pakistan by major cities is as follows: Karachi 8,000, Lahore 7,000, Peshawar 5,000, Rawalpindi 3,000, and Quetta 2,500 (Iqbal 2008). As 70% of the population of Pakistan lives in rural areas, the majority
of street children are thought to be in transition between rural villages and major cities, surviving on the streets in small towns throughout the country (Iqbal 2008). The vast majority of these children are surviving ‘on the street’ and return to their family homes at night (93%) with a small percentage considered entirely ‘of the street’ (7%) (Ali et al. 2004). Estimates suggest that 80% of the street children are male and 20% are female (Ali & Muynck 2005). However, due to selection bias and decreased participation of girls due to social norms, studies of street children in Pakistan have more polarized samples with 96% male and 4% female participants (Sherman et al. 2005, Towe et al. 2009). The age range for street children in Pakistan is 5-18 years old with the mean and median age being 9 and 13 years old respectively (Ali & Muynck 2005).

Research suggests that there are a multitude of complex factors which cause children to leave their homes, including: poverty, unemployment, physical and sexual violence, and broken families (Tufail 2005). Economic instability is a large contributing factor as inadequate family incomes have forced children to seek employment in the informal economy (Ali et al. 2004). However, many children indicate that they leave home to reside or work on the street to “escape dysfunctional families, physical battery, neglect, sexual abuse or out of a desire for freedom rather than socioeconomic problems” (Price 1989). This paper will critically analyse these reasons and one of the major focuses will be on the recent influx of Afghan refugee children into Pakistan post the war in Afghanistan and how this has influenced the situation for street children.

The common ailments of street children in Pakistan include: injuries, respiratory and skin infections, dermatological conditions and malnutrition (Ali & de Muynck 2005). These children are also at increased risk of acquiring sexually-transmitted diseases such as HIV due to their exposure to high risk sexual behaviour (Muhammad & Zafar 2006). However, “arguments exist for a paradigmatic shift towards understanding childhood as a distinctly diverse life phase influenced not only by biological or psychological features but also by resilience and environmental factors. This shift involves considering children as agents of their own development, who during times of great adversity consciously act upon and influence the environments in which they exist” (Boyden 2003). This section also includes a case study which highlights how the easy availability and relatively cheap price of industrial adhesives has made volatile inhalants abuse a major problem among street children across Pakistan.
Currently there is a lack of commitment to a comprehensive scheme to tackle the street children situation as the government policies and private institutions that exist to help children are inadequate both qualitatively and quantitatively (Tufail et al. 2004). In Pakistan there is lack of an adequate data collection mechanism within the state which has led to a lack of awareness about the number of street children in the country. In order to fully understand the limitations of the current interventions in Pakistan, effective programs which have been implemented in other countries will be analysed in terms of their applicability in Pakistan.

1.2 Methodology

This report is based on reviewing and critically analysing literature on the street children phenomenon with a specific focus on Pakistan. A broad range of literature from text books, medical journals, government reports and online databases were reviewed in depth to gather relevant information regarding the street children situation in Pakistan. Some of the online databases used to assemble a range of literature include: The UCL catalogue, Pubmed, Eldis, The British Library Catalogue, Web of Science and J-Stor. Additionally public reports on street children were used such as: Pakistan Ministry of Health and Education reports, UNICEF reports, donor publications such as the Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) data and World Bank reports. Data on street children in Pakistan was also collected from local Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and international agencies such as the Consortium for Street Children.

A critical approach was adapted to analyse every article and cross-referencing was conducted for accuracy, in particular for non-peer reviewed donor, NGO and government material which could have been influenced by underlying motivations and bias. Much of the statistical information on street children in Pakistan is from small non-random samples using questionnaires conducted by NGOs. Although this data is vulnerable to bias, the information was considered credible due to its consistency with findings in many other larger studies of street children conducted globally. The appendix contains a table outlining the study type, sample size, main findings, and strengths and limitations of all the peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed studies on street children in Pakistan that were used in this report.
Chapter 2 – The causes for the occurrence of street children in Pakistan

Research suggests that a multitude of push and pull factors combine to cause children to leave home and earn a living or live on the streets in Pakistan (Hyder 2007). Push factors include poverty, large family size, family violence, abuse and exploitation at home, urbanization and inadequate parental guidance (Ali et al. 2004). Pull factors include financial opportunities and a desire for independence due to the excitement and glamour of living in cities (Ali et al. 2004). These reasons can be divided into three main themes which are discussed systematically in this section: economic factors, family factors and personal factors.

2.1 Economic Factors

Pakistan is a developing country in South Asia with a population of 172 million and a per capita gross national income of US$ 420 (World Bank 2003). According to the World Bank, poverty remains a serious concern in Pakistan as 33% of the population live below the absolute poverty line (US$1 per day) and this has particular implications for children in Pakistan as 43% of the total population is under the age of 15 years (Government of Pakistan 2004). Most of the research conducted globally regarding the street child phenomenon indicates that poverty is the single most important factor in influencing children to leave their homes (WHO 2001). In a study of 108 street children in...
the Pakistani cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, 75% of interviewed children cited poverty as the primary reason for being on the streets; inadequate family incomes forcing them to seek employment in the informal economy (Ali et al. 2004). Similarly, studies in Brazil indicate that in 82% of cases, economic needs of the family were the primary cause for children to be on the streets (Rosa et al. 1992). However, it is less clear in Pakistan because studies carried out there are hampered by small sample sizes and geographical bias towards major cities, making results less representative of the whole country.

Economic need is often cited as being the cause for children to live and work on the streets as parents cannot afford the costs of education and are forced to send their children to the streets (Densley & Joss 2000). This both fulfils the family's need for financial contributions as the child works to increase the total family income, and maximizes the purchasing power of the existing income by finding a life on the streets and thus reducing the size of the household (Roux 1996). For decades, the Pakistani state has approached the concept of development by focusing on urbanization by locating industries in major cities and providing unequal distribution of resources with a distinct rural-urban disparity which combine to systematically displace people to towns and cities (Tufail 2005). Rapid industrialization and urbanization amplify societal stress and increase levels of unemployment leading to the collapse of the family structure and so more children end up on the streets (Densley & Joss 2000). The recent economic crisis has put substantial strain on the family structure in Pakistan as higher inflation levels have made basic food products significantly more expensive (Mukhtar 2008). Lack of food availability in the home was one of the most commonly cited reasons for living on the street in Pakistan (KABPS 2004; Ali et al. 2004).

2.2 Family Factors

Large international studies have found that the majority of street children left home in order to escape dysfunctional families and lack of parent care in the form of neglect and physical and sexual violence (Price 1989). Although the studies in Pakistan are generally small, they do indicate that children are affected by neglect, and verbal, physical and sexual abuse (AMAL 2004). Societal attitudes towards child abuse are important as reports imply that physical punishment in Pakistan is still considered
normal, illustrated by the relatively low 1,439 reported cases of physical and sexual abuse against children in Pakistan from January to November 2002 (AMAL 2004). A study of 503 street children in Karachi indicated that violence (17.3%), parental behaviour (12.7%) and drug addiction (9.7%) were quoted to be more important reasons for leaving home than being forced to work and support the family financially (5.9%) (KABPS 2004). However, this study fails to appreciate the level of overlap between these factors and does not specify what is meant by parental behaviour, which often incorporates both violence and drug addiction; indicating that the attitude of parents is in fact one of the most important factors causing children to live on the streets.

Some of the major reasons cited for the occurrence of street children in Pakistan include parental arguments and split or broken families (Tufail 2005). This is supported by larger studies in other countries such as Cameroon where it was found that 71.4% of interviewed street children came from unstable home backgrounds where parents are either temporarily or permanently living in separation, or where parental quarrels and fights are frequent (Matchinda 1998). The study in Cameroon concluded that the economic crisis that many families face in the country is not a major factor responsible for children abandoning their home; rather it is authoritarian parenting which is at fault (Matchinda 1998). Children are frequently beaten in Pakistan for minor offences such as bad behaviour at home or poor performance at school. It is unlikely that this would cause children to run away from home unless the beatings are either regular or severe as physical repercussions appear to be the social norm and thus most children probably expect corporal consequences. Neglect of children is more likely to affect numbers of street children and is strongly influenced by large family size which is also implicated as a factor for causing children to leave home (Murrel 1974). Family planning and reproductive health services remain out of reach for millions of Pakistanis and so the total fertility rate persists at a high level of 4.1 children per woman; additionally, a study of 10,023 women of reproductive age indicated that 24% of recent births were unwanted (Hardee & Leahy 2008). This study implies that negligence becomes an issue as women are forced to support children they may not have necessarily planned.
2.3 Personal Factors

Evidence suggests that many children in Pakistan make a personal decision to live and work on the streets to acquire autonomy (AMAL 2004); however one of the largest studies conducted in Pakistan indicated that the desire to gain freedom and independence was quoted by only 5.4% of the interviewees indicating that is was not an important enough reason for leaving the house (KABPS 2005). This desire is linked to the economic situation although there are deeper connotations as Pakistan is governed by strict Islamic principles, and children have little scope to act on their natural instincts and inclinations. Some of the street children (2.4%) described how they had run away from home due to love and attraction for the opposite sex, which was not tolerated in their home (Tufail 2005). Another commonly cited personal reason for street life is the glamorized portrayal of the city in popular media such as cinema and television (AMAL 2004). With a lack of social activities in the community and lack of recreational support within the home, many children, particularly those in rural Pakistan, are excited by the thought of vibrant city life. Although these personal characteristics appear to be quite important, additional studies in Pakistan have indicated inconsistencies in results. The fluctuating numbers regarding the impact of poverty, family, and personal desires on numbers of street children exemplifies the need for more studies in Pakistan and larger sample sizes as contradictions in results make it difficult to draw overall conclusions.

Children living in urban settings are particularly at risk to peer pressure as prior friendship with street children significantly increases the chances of a child leaving their home and living on the streets (Matchinda 1998). This is supported by studies in Pakistan which indicate that the influence of peers and friends is the second highest cited reason influencing street children’s decision to leave home (19.7%), second only to poverty (26.4%) (Tufail 2005, KABPS 2004). Another issue related to urban living is drug abuse and a study of street children in Brazil indicated that drug use is a strong factor pulling children to the streets due to easy availability and lack of supervision (Abdelgalil et al. 2004). This was supported by the fact that drug abuse and addiction was cited as reasons for leaving home in all major studies of street children in Pakistan (AMAL 2004, Tufail 2005, KABPS 2004).
A commonly noted cause for a child to leave their home was a lack of trust in the societal system due to abuse within the walls of institutions believed to protect and serve them; such as madrassahs (religious schools) and formal educational establishments. Child abuse by religious clerics and teachers in the form of rape, sodomy, excessive caning and verbal abuse are still reported regularly in Pakistan (AMAL 2004). Economic deprivation in Pakistan is partly attributed to a lack of education and this unacceptable behavior reduces the faith of children in these institutions. This led to the development of the Education for All (EFA) policy, part of the global EFA program; a collaboration between government and civil society that aims to increase quality of life and reduce the number of street children through universal primary education which is supported, supervised and regulated by the state.
Case Study - Invisible Individuals: The influx of Afghan Street Children

It is evident that a large number of children living and working on the streets in Pakistan are refugees who originated from neighboring war-torn Afghanistan (AMAL 2004). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that in 2001 there were approximately 2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and in the months immediately following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, at least an additional 200,000 crossed the border (UNHCR 2002). “Afghan refugees and migrants had fled armed conflict, persecution, drought, inter-family and inter-tribal conflict and economic deprivation in the decades following the 1979 Soviet invasion; and in 2001 were fleeing Afghanistan due to fears of American retaliatory military action and fighting between Northern Alliance and Taliban Forces” (WCRWC 2002).

Propelled into an already problematic economic situation with extremely high levels of competition for the most basic levels of employment, refugee families from...
Afghanistan that settled in urban centres were further neglected by official development assistance which concentrates only on those inhabiting the official UN camps outside the cities (AMAL 2004). More than 1.5 million refugees were assisted by UNHCR in Pakistan in 2001 and of these 59% were children and adolescents under the age of 18 years (WCRWC 2002). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 3.6 million children work in Pakistan of which tens of thousands are Afghan children (HRW 2003); as such thousands of Afghan children now work the streets as principle wage-earners for their families functioning as street vendors and garbage pickers (AMAL 2004).

Troubled by years of responsibility for Afghan refugees, the Pakistan government has not been particularly welcoming and the lack of aid from the international humanitarian community meant that most refugees had to integrate into already struggling, pre-existing urban refugee communities in Pakistan (WCRWC 2002). With minimal means to support their families, many of the poorest parents from refugee populations are forced to send their children to work in industries such as carpet weaving, brick making or survive as domestic servants for richer families (WCRWC 2002). The children who end up working in these sectors are the relatively fortunate ones as economic pressures have increased for all Afghans in Pakistan due to job losses since September 11 2001; when these jobs are no longer available children end up on the streets begging for money or working as garbage pickers and street vendors (AREU 2005). The influx of Afghan refugees, and in particular Afghan children, post 2001 has both directly and indirectly increased the number of street children in Pakistan. Indirectly, the Afghan children who do find employment are effectively saturating the job market and increasing competition making it more likely for other children to reside on the streets when sent away from home to financially aid their families. Directly, the Afghan children from minority groups, such as the Hazaras or the Tajiks, are more likely to end up jobless on the streets among the Pashtun majority in Pakistan as they often face deeper discrimination and fewer employment opportunities (WCRWC 2002).

There are a number of complex factors which contribute to the presence of Afghan children on streets in urban centres. At first it was thought that this would be a problem only in certain parts of the country close to the border, in the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) or Balochistan; conversely a study of street children in the eastern cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad revealed that, in terms of ethnicity, 70% of
the children were of Afghan origin (Ali et al. 2004). This indicates that the Afghan children are moving within the country to major cities and are therefore less likely to consider traveling long distances to return to their home country. Most of the street children in Rawalpindi and Islamabad had migrated in the recent past (91%); 37% came directly from Afghanistan, 32% from NWFP and 30% from other areas of the northern Punjab province in Pakistan (Ali et al. 2004). Once these children settle on the streets in urban areas many of them push heavy carts of supplies along the roads, some sell food or accessories, countless collect various forms of garbage to be recycled for money and others resort to begging on streets and buses (WCRWC 2002). Health outcomes for homeless children in Pakistan were previously poor due to limited resources and weak health infrastructure, the influx of Afghan refugees in recent months has placed further strain on the infrastructure worsening the situation for street children across the country (Strathdee et al. 2003).

The main explanations for increasing numbers of Afghan refugees, particularly Afghan children, in Pakistan include: high birthrates among Afghans, continuous cross-border migration, and increasing levels of urbanization in Pakistan (Kronenfeld 2008). In order for these individuals to integrate with local communities and avoid living on the streets, there have to be concentrated efforts to socio-economically support Afghan refugees. The lack of national government assistance and international community support means that civil society, in the form of local NGOs, is conducting most of the work to reduce numbers of Afghan street children in Pakistan. The Centre for Street Children and Women is an Afghan organization based in the Pakistani city of Peshawar; the centre provides a safe respite from street life and offers hope and concrete skills for a better economic future (WCRWC 2002). Shuhada is an Afghan NGO which has worked for years to provide medical, educational and economic assistance to Afghans in Afghanistan and Pakistan by collaborating with numerous schools, health clinics and hospitals (WCRWC 2002). The Water Environment and Sanitation Society operates two drop-in centres for street children in the city of Quetta where young people can have food and attend a variety of literacy and numeracy classes in order to increase their basic level of education (WCRWC 2002). The UNHCR has recently funded a project, the Social Volunteers Foundation, to reduce numbers of street children in Pakistan by helping children to read and write and teaching vocational skills such as tailoring, beauty therapy and pottery (Tan 2008).
Chapter 3 – The health and safety situation for street children in Pakistan

Constant exposure to the street-life environment, poor hygiene and sanitation, a lack of medical care, risky behavior and economic deprivation increase the incidence of disease among street children (WHO 1993). Harassment by enforcement authorities is also a major problem that the street children have to encounter and society’s attitude towards them is arguably their greatest obstacle (Densley & Joss 2000).

3.1 Health Situation

A study in Pakistan indicated that only 27% of interviewed children were having three meals a day and when asked to indicate two services they would like to have on a priority basis: food and toilet facilities – neither education nor medical treatment were mentioned (Ali et al. 2004). The situation for Afghan street children is especially poor; 57% of Pakistani street children had access to toilet and bathing facilities, as the majority of them returned to their family homes at night, compared to just 23% of Afghan children, who had no form of permanent housing (Ali et al. 2004). Common medical complaints among street children included fever (42.1%), respiratory problems (25.8%) and generalized pains due to injuries (17.3%) (KABPS 2004). Although it is difficult to accurately conduct health status measurements on street children populations due to their mobility, a study was carried out in Pakistan to measure the height and body weight of 200 street children to determine their nutritional status. The prevalence of underweight children was 29.5%, wasting 13%, stunting 35% and severe malnutrition 35% (Mian et al. 2002). International studies have shown that street children have a broad range of health problems but generally do not consult for treatment (Pande 1993). A study of 40 school age (8-14 year old) children looking at health seeking behaviour among street children in the two Pakistani cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad indicated that the main barriers to seeking medical help were: low self-perceived severity of illness (19%), self-medication (5%), long waiting times (25%), financial cost of treatment (35%), negative attitudes of service providers (5%) and their inferior status (11%) (Ali & Muynck 2005).

Inefficient sewage disposal in major cities has led to increased incidences of diarrhea, typhoid, and cholera amongst urban communities in close contact with sewage pipes and refuse dumping areas (Feenstra et al. 2000). Garbage picking is one of the
most common forms of work for street children in Pakistan and a lack of waste management means that hazardous materials such as medical syringes and needles are dumped into open rubbish tips; increasing the risk of physical injuries, and infections such as hepatitis B and C (Ahmad 2004). The street children are at increased risk of acquiring HIV; exemplified in a study conducted in Lahore, Pakistan, which indicated that a very high proportion of street children were engaged in high risk drug use and sexual behavior (Towe et al. 2009). The main group of people at high risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS in Pakistan are injecting drug users (IDUs); a recent study of 400 current IDUs in Sargodha, Pakistan, found an extremely high prevalence of 51.3% for HIV positive individuals (Emmanuel et al. 2009). Another study of on the behavioural profile of 501 IDUs in Pakistan indicated that 20% reported having regular sex with street children making them highly vulnerable to HIV transmission (Zafar & Hasan 2002). This has been exacerbated by the war in Afghanistan which influenced the incidence of infections associated with drug abuse in Pakistan as needle sharing practices increased (56% to 76%) due to a lack of regular supplies from across the border and increased military pressure on the Afghan-Pakistan border interrupting the flow of drugs (Strathdee et al. 2003). Furthermore, condom use among adolescent street children in Pakistan is very poor; 10.7% report having used a condom in the past, 9.3% use them regularly, and the remaining 80% do not currently use condoms nor have they used them in the past, making them highly susceptible to HIV transmission (KABPS 2004).
3.1.1 Street Children’s Resilience

“Children have considerable inner resources for coping with adversity and several researchers have found that a significant proportion of children exposed to difficulties within their families and communities remain resilient” (Boyden 2003). In terms of emotional health, the lack of an adequate relationship with an adult caregiver poses the greatest problem for most street children due to difficulties in developing emotional security and trust (le Roux 1998). Some doubt has been cast on whether children need enduring security and stability in their social milieu in order to flourish, and their level of resilience and resourcefulness has too often been rejected (Boyden 2003). This theory has also been challenged by the adaptive nature of children and street children’s ability to adopt one another as models allows for cognitive and affective needs to be met (Richter 1988). Research supports the notion that young people are resilient and are capable of healing their psychological wounds given the correct, nurturing environment in the post-trauma phase (Garmezy 1983). The main challenge of this commitment is the ability to provide an environment for street children, who are often trapped in a vicious cycle that shows no prospect of them surviving off the streets.

Street children’s emotional vulnerability relates to their agency and the development of autonomy through freedom and independence are consistently reported as both their goal and highest value (le Roux 1998). Achieving their independence by living on the streets, these children may develop strong attributes of autonomy and self-reliance which explain why resilient children display few of the intellectual or emotional handicaps normally associated with street life (Richter 1988). There is clearly a paradox between evidence showing developmental risk and vulnerability across psychological and social areas; which emphasize negative traits such as low self-esteem, apathy, and fatalism on the one hand, and on the other, characteristics such as resourcefulness, adaptability, and coping skills of street children (Donald & Swart-Kruger 1994). One explanation is that psychologically and physically fitter children may be more likely to make the decision to move to the streets (Aptekar 1994); a study conducted in Bangladesh indicated that there were no significant psychological health differences between street living and home living children in Dhaka although street children tended to be taller and heavier with greater energy reserves (Greksa et al. 2006).
3.2 Safety and Security Situation

Physical and sexual abuse of street children in the form of abduction, beatings, rape, sodomy, torture and even murder is reported by several NGOs working in Pakistan (Hyder 2007). A report on the prostitution of boys in Lahore and Peshawar found that street boys are particularly vulnerable to all forms of abuse and sexual exploitation. Some of the boys choose to become commercial sex workers due to the need for basic necessities such as food, clothing and accommodation whilst others are forced into the trade after being kidnapped (Muhammad & Zafar 2006). The report also indicated that children from the Afghan refugee community are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse due to their extreme poverty and lack of protection and parental supervision (Muhammad & Zafar 2006).

The number of reported child abuse cases in Pakistan did increase substantially between 1998 and 2003 although this trend may have been due to better reporting (Hyder 2007). Additionally, the healthy worker affect can bias results as researchers are more likely to communicate with healthy and confident children rather than suspicious, sick and withdrawn children which are often the ones that have been abused. Some reports suggest that street children are in fact safer on the streets due to physical abuse and sexual exploitation at home (Tufail 2005). Street children often join gangs, which increases their safety by acting as a deterrent against abuse and harassment by police, adults and other street children (Kudrati et al. 2008). However, hostile public attitudes, such as the widely held view in Pakistan that street children are criminal delinquents, are responsible for the cruel and inhumane treatment that they receive and human rights violations including the failure to be protected from degrading treatment and the arbitrary loss of liberty (Le Roux 1998).

A report on juvenile justice in Pakistan indicated that street children were often beaten by policemen and that Afghan children were particularly at risk from police harassment and arrest (AMAL 2004). The police in Pakistan “are perceived not as an instrument of rule of law, rather as a corrupt, insensitive and highly politicized force, operating mainly in the best interests of the powerful” (Suddle 2003). This was supported by a study in Pakistan which indicated that 61% of interviewed street children declared having been harassed and physically abused by the police or had their daily earnings
taken away; of which the vast majority were of Afghan origin (71%) in comparison to Pakistani origin (29%) (Ali et al. 2004). With the police and judicial system working against them, the safety and security of the street children is compromised and this can often lead to widespread violence and ultimately death as exemplified by the killing of street children in Brazil. It was estimated that two to four street children were killed by ‘death squads’ everyday in Brazil between 1986 and 1993 (Lalor 1999) and due to social and judicial neglect, a similar situation occurred in Pakistan.

3.2.1 The Javed Iqbal Incident

“I am Javed Iqbal, the killer of 100 children…I hate this world, I am not ashamed of my actions and I am ready to die. I have no regrets. I killed 100 children.”

These were the last words of a man who, on the 16th of March 2000, was found guilty of murdering 100 street-living boys in Lahore, Pakistan. He initially drugged and abused each victim, then killed them by strangulation, and disposed of the evidence by cutting their bodies into pieces and dissolving them in a vat of acid. During his trial, Iqbal explained that nobody ever notices the disappearance of a street child – he went on to proclaim that he could have continued to kill 500 street children before anyone took any action. In the end, Javed Iqbal actually sent photographs of his victims along with a confession letter to the police after his target of 100 children had been achieved. The incident revealed a number of unpleasant truths about the frailty of the family structure and lack of a social support network for street children. Furthermore, it exposed the poorness of the police response as parents of 17 of the victims had reported their missing children, yet only one report was registered. Even when Iqbal arrived at the police station and confessed to killing 100 children, he was treated as a mental patient and told to leave the station.

3.3 Public Perceptions and Developmental Consequences

The developmental consequences of street life can be summarized using Maslow’s theory regarding the hierarchy of human needs. Maslow theorized that basic needs are necessary for survival and that meeting a single need acts as a motivator to increase capacity and direct energy towards achieving the next need. This process continues until an individual affects the broader community in which he or she lives by reaching their highest level of human potential which is self-actualisation regarding personal growth and fulfillment (Case-Smith 1996). The basic physiological needs of food, water, shelter and security are the initial requirements of this hierarchical system and are not easily accessible on the streets and so as street children grow into adulthood the lack of these basic needs puts them at a great disadvantage of ever fulfilling the higher level needs of belonging or self-esteem (Hatting 1998). Without an intact, healthy sense of self they will never regard themselves as competent and valued by society, nor will they attain or achieve personal goals as they inevitably spend a significant proportion of their time acquiring basic needs such as food and water (Densley & Joss 2000). The annotated diagram below represents Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and indicates the barriers that street children face when attempting to attain higher level needs.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- **Biological and Physiological needs**
  - basic life needs - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, etc.

- **Safety needs**
  - protection, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc.

- **Belongingness and Love needs**
  - family, affection, relationships, work group, etc.

- **Esteem needs**
  - achievement, status, responsibility, reputation

- **Self-actualization**
  - personal growth and fulfilment

Source: Abraham Maslow 1943

Neglected by their society and deprived of family stability; they are often stigmatized reducing their self-esteem and potential for personal growth.

They often have low self-esteem as an individual’s status is determined by their work in the community or their role in the family.

For those that do not have family homes to return to, there is a lack of stable and dependable relationships in their lives.

They are vulnerable to abuse and harassment from their peers, the public, and the police.

Attainment of these basic needs utilizes the majority of their time and energy.
Case Study - An Escape from the Streets: Solvent Abuse among Street Children

The struggles of street life have been associated with high risk coping strategies such as drug abuse for many years (Foster et al. 1996). One particular type of drug abuse which is beginning to plague the street child community in Pakistan is solvent abuse. More accurately known as Volatile Substance Abuse (VSA), it has been defined as “the deliberate inhalation of gases, chemical fumes, or vapours for mind-altering and recreational purposes” (National Institute on Drug Abuse and Addiction 2009). Street children around the world are reported to sniff glue in countries such as India, Russia, Kenya, Ukraine, Morocco, Brazil, Bolivia, Thailand and Romania (Clifford 2007). Pakistan reportedly has one of the largest communities of solvent abusing street children as there are estimated to be a total of 27,000 street children in the four provincial capitals of the country: Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta; the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) indicates that 90% of the street children found in these four cities were abusing solvents (UNODC 2004). This issue is further complicated by the sensitive nature of the problem in a conservative country, difficulties in accessing the street child population due to their mobility, and the ignorance of local authorities regarding the subjects (UNODC 2004).

Substance abuse among street children in cities around the world has been characterized by the use of inexpensive and accessible drugs such as alcohol, cannabis and solvents (Meadows 1996, Carlini-Cotrim 1996). In a conservative Islamic state such as Pakistan the availability and accessibility of alcohol and cannabis are heavily reduced, yet the prevalence of solvent abuse is alarmingly high due to volatiles being common byproducts of several urban industries. Street children in Pakistan tend to use ‘Samad Bond’ glue, an industrial adhesive found in local hardware stores and shoe repair shops, and at 50 Pakistani rupees (UK£0.50) for a large container, it is both cheaper and more openly available than illegal drugs (Khan 2007). The major reasons given for inhalant use among street children are: reduction in hunger, peer pressure and acceptance, and as a coping strategy for emotional escape (Baldivieso 1996). A study of substance abuse among street children in neighbouring India indicated that 68.7% of interviewed subjects reported substance use in their family and it was significantly associated with domestic violence and maltreatment of the child prior to commencing life...
on the streets (Pagare et al. 2003). Another study in Brazil indicated the importance of education by reporting that regular attendance at school decreases the risk of delinquent acts and drug use; the prevalence of regular inhalant abuse was 40% among street children and only 4% among children attending school (Foster et al. 1996). However, these results may not necessarily be transferable to the Asian-subcontinent as the study in India indicated that literacy level and regular school attendance were in fact not significantly associated with substance use (Pagare et al. 2003).

The medical consequences of solvent abuse among street children in Pakistan are: chest infections, breathing difficulties, generalized weakness, gastric upsets and headaches (UNODC 2004). Furthermore, regular volatile substance abuse can have much more profound effects on long term health as chronic renal disease was very common among inhalant abusing street children in Turkey (Olgar et al. 2008). The emphasis on regular abuse is significant as a study of solvent abusing street children in Lahore, Pakistan, noted that of the 73.4% of children that reported current glue-sniffing, 93.0% reported daily glue-sniffing (Sherman et al. 2005). Long-term effects of solvent abuse include neurological, pulmonary, and hepatic toxicity as well as more severe conditions such as respiratory depression and even sudden death (Meadows 1996). Furthermore, substance abuse is associated with increasingly risky behaviour; street children in Pakistan described glue-sniffing as the starting point for drug abuse, moving on to harder drugs such as heroine (Iqbal 2008). The levels of HIV among street children is inextricably linked to inhalant abuse as they often engage in exchange sex to pay for drug purchases (Towe et al. 2008). The social consequences of solvent abuse for street children include group violence over solvents, police threats, community neglect and
being outcaste by their families due to drug addiction (UNODC 2004). Ultimately the stigma of being a poor street child and a drug user potentially fuels their perception of the public’s hatred towards them and thus drives them into further entrenchment in the street culture (Sherman et al. 2005).

The Azad Foundation, a Karachi-based NGO, has been working to raise the profile of street children in Pakistan since 2000 and in 2005 opened the Dastak drop-in-centre. It is the only facility of its kind in Karachi and provides rudimentary health care, hot meals, basic reading and writing tuition, and moral support and counseling to help children stop solvent abuse (IRIN 2005). The Promise House shelter in Karachi takes a much more direct approach and provides street children with a free supply of glue – the dosage is gradually decreased in an effort to wean them off glue before they turn to harder drugs such as heroine (Ebrahim 2004). These projects are under-staffed and under-funded so are not sufficient to deal with the problem on a local city-wide basis let alone on a national scale. One step forward is to deal with the roots of the problem and possibly restrict the age of purchase on solvents, although age restrictions on other products, such as tobacco, in Pakistan have not been successful in the past (Clifford 2007). The UNODC, in collaboration with UNAIDS and UNICEF, started a project in 2006 in Karachi and Lahore called ‘Drug abuse treatment and HIV/AIDS prevention for street children with solvent abuse problems in Pakistan’ (UNODC 2009). Although the project has been successful in certain provinces, future strategies should aim to bring together local government entities, international agencies, and NGOs to empower the target community itself and enable holistic programming and progression in prevention, care and support.
**Chapter 4 – Interventions and policies to help street children in Pakistan**

Historically, interventions followed the ideology that street youths were criminal delinquents and their removal from society and placement in correctional facilities was the only way to deal with them (Carizosa & Poertner 1992). Eventually it was realized that this approach was not effective and a new model, linked closely to the education model of Paulo Freire (1970), emphasised the need to educate and empower children. The education approach is based on the understanding that street youth were ‘normal’ children forced by societal inequality to survive under difficult circumstances and most of them came from disturbing levels of poverty; acknowledging that the street child phenomenon is more about structural dysfunction than personal pathology (Karabanow & Clement 2004). The greatest barrier to the educational approach in Pakistan is societal attitude – people in the judiciary, the police, the media, and business believe that street children are a group of irredeemable delinquents who represent a moral threat to civilized society (Hyder 2007).

**4.1 National Government Response**

The subject of street children and the magnitude of the issue have not been officially acknowledged by the government of Pakistan. However, steps towards prevention have been taken by increasing education, reducing poverty and protecting children from abuse and exploitation; which are considered as core problems of the street child phenomenon.

**4.1.1 Education**

Research in Pakistan indicated that weak legislation on elementary education was a primary factor influencing the increase in street children in urban centres across the country (Hyder 2007). According to article 37 of the Pakistani constitution, “The state shall remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory primary education within the minimum possible period” (GOP 1986). Over 20 years later this statement is still far from reality as approximately 37% of boys and 55% of girls have never enrolled at a school and the youth literacy rate is around 58% (Solene et al. 2005). Pakistan joined the UNESCO run world-wide program called Education for All (EFA) in 1991 in order to
ensure that all children could complete a quality primary education by 2015, though it remains one of the 28 countries unlikely to meet this goal in time. In addition to insufficient enforcement of legislation, inadequate availability and accessibility of educational institutions, poor quality of education, and high costs of school uniforms and equipment prevent street children from attaining primary education (Tufail 2005). Furthermore, the EFA program focuses solely on primary education which ends at the age of 10 and the number of 10-16 year old children is estimated to account for 83% of street child population in Karachi (KABPS 2004). In general there is a sense of complacency in Pakistan regarding the problem, which is reflected in the government’s decision to allocate 2.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education – less than half of the 5% spent on the military, and a rather mediocre effort compared to neighbouring China’s 4% and India’s 5% dedication to education (World Bank 2006). In order to improve this situation Pakistan has recently committed to the Dakar Declaration of universal access to education (2000) and created a National Plan of Action for 2015 after specific Education Sector Reforms from 2001-2005 (Pakistan MoE 2008).

4.1.2 Poverty-Reduction

Studies in Pakistan indicate that the majority of children are on the streets to either earn money to take back to their families or aim to gain financial independence (Ali et al. 2003). The government of Pakistan intends to deal with this problem by implementing a Poverty Reduction Strategy to accelerate economic growth and maintain macroeconomic stability by investing in human capital and expanding social safety nets (Tufail 2005). The major limitation of this approach is that investment in human development is constrained by financial resources which are dependent on integrated approaches with collaboration between the public and private sector. Recent political unrest due to ongoing military tensions with neighbouring India, Taliban influences in the north of the country, and terrorist attacks in major cities such as Lahore and Islamabad means that poverty reduction may not currently be a priority for the government. Although this poses bleak prospects for the most neglected sectors of the society, such as street children, there are ongoing targeted interventions which aim to alleviate some of the economic pressures on poor families. Notable institutions established by the government include the Small and Medium Enterprise Bank, Micro-Finance Sector Development Program and the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (Tufail 2005). The
micro-credit schemes are aiming to improve quality of life in the rural areas of Pakistan which, if successful, could help to reduce urbanization which is one of the major causes for increasing numbers of street children in cities across the country. Part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy includes the Food Support Program which is designed to mitigate the recent rise in inflation and subsequent increase in food prices; as lack of food availability was a major reason for leaving home this could potentially reduce runaways.

4.1.3 Protection

Until recently, the issue of child abuse and exploitation was not accepted as a problem of Pakistani Society. The common perception was that being an ideological nation-state following Islamic principles, the society was somehow immune to immorality and even if there was a problem in terms of child protection, its magnitude was so small that society as a whole could remain oblivious. The 70,000 street children in Pakistan have rapidly become a considerable protection issue as they live and work on the streets and are at high risk for a myriad of physical and psychological problems due to abuse and exploitation (Pakistan NCCWD 2008). In section 25 of the Pakistani constitution it states that “All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law” (GOP 1986). Furthermore, the government of Pakistan made international commitments by signing and ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 and the optional protocol of the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (Pakistan NCCWD 2008). Articles 32-36 of the CRC explicitly indicate that it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that children are protected against violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of all forms (CRC 1990). The government of Pakistan has vowed to take a rights-based approach to aiding vulnerable children by increasing their participation in intervention schemes and plans to adopt legislative and regulatory measures to protect children on a provincial and national scale (NCCWD 2008). However, these reforms are highly dependent on human and financial resources – both of which are less likely to receive international assistance and investment due to the current socio-political situation in Pakistan.
4.2 Non-Governmental Organisations Response

Despite the number of street children in major cities across Pakistan, the overall number of major agencies dedicated to helping them remains inconsequential (Consortium for Street Children 2007). A small number of NGOs have initiated limited rehabilitation and support services in urban areas; however there is no data to determine either their accessibility or their effectiveness (Hyder 2007).

4.2.1 Street Shelters

The **Azad (Freedom) Foundation** is the largest and most reputable NGO working with street children in Pakistan. The drop-in centres and night shelters that it has established provide children with good food, basic education, and medical care (Azad Foundation 2004). Still, many of the shelters are left abandoned due to lack of resources and others have considerable congestion and overcrowding, leading to a lack of sleeping space and limited food and facilities (Tufail 2005). Although many street children utilize voluntary agencies, anecdotal evidence suggest that there are many children who avoid contact with such agencies due to criminal or anti-social behavior or who use shelters simply to obtain food and clean clothing (Kerfoot et al. 2007). After considerable work with street children, Fabio Dallapé admitted that the success rate of such institutions in taking children off the street is limited due to the inability of children to identify with the institution (Dallapé 1988).

**SOS Children** is a UK-based international charity that has created SOS villages for orphans and street children in Pakistan. Working in Karachi and Lahore, SOS Children has been particularly effective as they conduct community outreach programs which aim to reach the most vulnerable children residing on the streets (SOS Children 2005). The main problem with this project is sustainability as its work is highly dependent on foreigners sponsoring children and providing resources. Most organizations working with street children in Pakistan are plagued by financial problems, they depend largely on donor funding which is notoriously uncertain and whilst funding is often available for initial capital development, donors may refuse to take care of running costs (Shorter & Onyancha 1999). These financial factors threaten the survival of some organizations as sustaining adequate services depends on external support.
4.2.2 Street Support

A more focused project is the **Swat Youth Front** (SYF) which aims to deal with the root causes of street children in the northern district of Swat by assessing the socio-economic situation and implementing increased educational institutions. SYF in collaborative partnership with the Ministry of Education in Pakistan, have been running 63 Non-Formal Basic Education schools since May, 1999. By March 2003 3,032 students had completed their primary education from these schools and at present 3,840 students are enrolled, among which 65% of the students are street children (Consortium for Street Children 2007). The greatest threat to the sustainability of this project is the geo-political situation in the northern region of Pakistan, where Swat is situated. Recently there has been an influx of Taliban forces into the region that have shut down several schools, forcing young boys to attend madrassahs and girls to stay at home.

The **Nai Zindagi (New Life) Trust** was established in 1990 and has recently focused on helping street children with drug addiction through rehabilitation programs and counseling sessions (Nai Zindagi 2003). Despite these efforts, due to a lack of both coordination among organizations and networking with the national government, the implementation of systematic support for street children is currently not feasible and there is a considerable duplication of efforts (Hyder 2007). Alternatively, a series of small projects may be more successful than a vast all-embracing system due to difficulties in administration and financing and its susceptibility to corruption and inefficiency (Shorter & Onyancha 1999).

Street children enjoy an AIDS awareness class at a shelter in Peshawar
The Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) believes that the problems of street children cannot be resolved through a piecemeal, project-wise approach. “Specializing in advocacy on child rights, supported by awareness raising, research, and capacity building it aims to influence decision-makers and lawmakers to bring about legal and policy reforms that protect and promote child rights, and motivate the general public to bring about a change in negative social attitudes” (Consortium for Street Children 2007). Despite SPARC moving in the right direction it suffers from a common ailment amongst NGOs; the lack of trained staff – in addition to having a small body of social workers, most of the staff have not been trained to handle street children (Solene et al. 2005). Moreover, monitoring and evaluation of these programs is either inconsistent or non-existent, making it very difficult to assess any progress or the overall impact achieved (Hyder 2007).

4.3 International Responses to Street Children – Lessons for Pakistan

It is important to understand that rather than costly, small, private projects it may be more effective to develop long-term, large-scale programs to re-integrate street children into their communities through their original families or extended family members and foster families (Dallapé 1996; Dybicz 2005). Ideally this would involve a series of steps including trust and rapport building with children through outreach street work, encouraging them to leave the streets, and identifying and aiding children to avoid negative aspects of street life such as substance abuse (Le Roux 1996). While such comprehensive interventions to deal with street children may seem impossible to implement in Pakistan’s impoverished setting, evidence of successful programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America suggest that they are possible.

4.3.1 Rehabilitation through Education

The education approach has been poorly received in Pakistan due to lack of resources and a negative perception of formal education by street children. The Loreto Day School in Sealdah, India, has managed to overcome the problem of overcrowded classrooms and poor resources in an original way – by educating children as teachers, who are then sent out to remote areas and slum quarters to teach the illiterate (Nieuwenhuizen 2008). By 1995 some 600 child teachers had brought literacy to an
estimated 10,000 children and the school project was the winner of the 1994 UNESCO-backed Noma literary prize (UNESCO 1995). Another approach is taken by the Concordia Project in the Philippines which decided to tackle the lack of life skills in formal state schools and increase the relevance of education to street children by offering alternative teaching which shows children how to learn rather than what to learn. Learning becomes a participatory activity and lessons are drawn directly from street children’s experiences of urban poverty and survival (Caparas 1998). For education to be effective in Pakistan teaching must engage street children; due to rules, regulations and rigid organization, formal conservative schools are not designed to meet the psychological and educational needs of street children (Blanc 1994).

Successful programs have formulated their own educational curriculums and have concentrated on empowering children. The act of learning is as important as the actual knowledge absorbed and this theory is clearly exemplified by the Bouaké project in Côte d’Ivoire where the notion of success and failure do not even exist (Blanc 1994). The Bouaké project aimed to provide the most ostracized street children with school education and from 1984 to 1992 a total of 320 young people, aged 8 to 18, were located of which 224 (70%) were successfully enrolled in schools (UNESCO 1995). Organizations working with street children in Pakistan must learn to understand the needs and attitudes of the children; organizers of the CEDRO project in Peru observed that a child fresh off the streets is unlikely to have a particularly long attention span and so classes focus on the meaning of trust and friendship with the hope that scholastic skills will follow (Vasquez 1994). Their original approach to street children’s education has made them one of the most successful projects in Peru. Nearly 90% of the street children that have been located are currently participating in their programs, 25% have rejoined their families, and 30% are regularly attending school (UNESCO 1995).

4.3.2 Reinsertion through Vocation

Many street children in Pakistan have dropped out of school or have never attended school at all, forced to work in order to support their families. Vocational training has the advantage of producing immediate results and satisfaction, and in a poverty-ridden country such as Pakistan, the possibility of a small, but psychologically significant, income (Smart 2003). A good example of rehabilitation through work is the
Atelier Bon Conseil (ABC) in Togo where the fundamental principle is that when a child works, it produces a good or provides a service which helps the child to develop into an active member of society (Nyassogbo 1997). The project in Togo exemplifies the benefits of ending exploitation and increasing partnership through participation; as the children learn and earn, they simultaneously build confidence and self-esteem (Gbogbotchi et al. 2000). The ABC project has been very successful in training several street children, on average 120 apprentices receive training in various crafts at the centre over a four year period and some have gone on to set up their own businesses and even mentor other younger apprentices (UNESCO 1995).

In Pakistan one of the major problems was the public’s negative perception of street children as worthless criminal delinquents. Projects, such as the Don Bosco in Medellín, Colombia, that encourage productivity and income appear as answers to this problem as they keep children occupied and provide them with an income – both practices that depress the need to be involved in criminal activities (Volpi 2002). In addition to the street children that earn money simply to support their families, many children in Pakistan work in order to gain financial independence and they require encouragement without patronization. The Boys’ Society of Sierra Leone is completely devoid of any notion of paternalism and charity; the educators encourage autonomy by helping children realize that they deserve the income they receive and that by working they are part of the production cycle and thus sound members of society (Bennett 2000). This approach has made The Boys’ Society highly attractive to street children in Sierra Leone; within 5 years of being founded the organization had 648 children registered with the project (UNESCO 1995).

4.3.3 Utilization of the Streets

The idea of using the streets as a means of reintegration should not be seen as a defeatist acceptance of the problem. It is highly effective to accommodate street life into child development; successful programs globally accept that street children have suffered in some way, but rather than reject the past, they capitalize on the street children’s experience which provides them with practical skills such as boldness and resourcefulness (Smart 2003). The most effective way to empower street children is to create a sense of action out of their constant and pressing aim to survive and creating a
positive environment around the streets, as done by the HLM Montagne Project in Senegal. The founders of the project, with help from street children, turned a shack into a school, organized training activities, a theatre group, sewing classes, and a recreation centre (UNESCO 1995). One of the most neglected groups within the street child community is young girls and the project in Senegal was very successful in engaging with them. Realizing that on-the-job apprenticeships in crafts such as carpentry and welding were reserved for males, they established afternoon classes that focused on pottery, dress-making and knitting for females (UNESCO 1995).

Pakistan is in great need of people to take similar steps to account for all categories of street children and accept that the streets can be the perfect place for street children to commence work and gain vocational skills. In neighbouring India, through the Bosco Project in Bangalore, the streets have been made to produce positive results in the face of poverty as street children organized themselves into a cooperative and advocated for income assurance and protection (Nieuwenhuizen 2008). The power for change lies within the community, as emphasised by the Paaralang Pang-Tao Project in the Philippines which successfully restructured a dumpsite, created a school, and established a training and theatre workshop through street children (UNESCO 1995). Most organizations find it difficult to convince children to leave the streets and enroll in schools, however when the Paaralang Pang-Tao Project decided to establish an educational institution on a previous dumpsite where street children had been dwelling for decades, over 100 children wanted to enlist (UNESCO 1995). This may be the way forward as through acting, recycling, and lessons, the dumpsite is no longer a source of despair; rather it is a source of inspiration, for both the street children and their society.
Chapter 5

5.1 Conclusion

Economic deprivation and urbanization have traditionally caused a constant flow of children onto the streets of major cities in Pakistan as inadequate family incomes have forced children to seek employment in the informal sector (Ali et al. 2004). Family factors such as abuse and exploitation have further complicated this issue and with the total fertility rate remaining at 4.1 with several recent births being reported as unwanted (Hardee & Leahy 2008), the risk of neglect is ever-present. The rise in the number of street children in Pakistan is primarily due to the influx of Afghan refugees; more than 1.5 million refugees were assisted by UNHCR in Pakistan in 2001 and of these 59% were children (WCRWC 2002). A significant number of these children end up on the streets as exemplified by a study in Rawalpindi and Islamabad which indicated that 70% of the street children interviewed were of Afghan origin (Ali et al. 2004). The new arrivals that do find work saturate the job market and increase the chance of other economically deprived children to reside on the streets. Furthermore, the Afghan children are discriminated against in Pakistan, are less likely to be employed, and therefore more likely to resort to street vending and begging. A growing child population in times of poverty and instability, with limited economic opportunities, makes increases in street children in Pakistan inevitable.

The recent economic crisis and subsequent increases in levels of inflation in Pakistan have decreased accessibility of basic foods which will worsen the health situation of street children: 44% of street children were already found to suffer from stunting, wasting, or malnutrition (Mian et al. 2002). The levels of HIV considered to be rising in Pakistan and the street child population is at particular risk due to their drug abusing practices and engagement in risky sexual behaviour (Towe et al. 2009). The afghan children are especially affected as they are discriminated against and are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation (Muhammad & Zafar 2006). The poor police response to street children and their community’s complacency and neglect has compromised their safety and security, as exemplified by the Javed Iqbal incident in 1999. The UNODC reports that 90% of street children in Pakistan are now sniffing glue; in addition to the physical and mental health effects of inhalants abuse, this practice
adds to the stigma of being a street child and potentially fuels streets children’s perception of the public’s hatred towards them (Sherman et al. 2005). Ultimately, these factors combine to denote that the health and safety situation for street children in Pakistan is deteriorating.

With their numbers increasing and their health and safety situation deteriorating, street children in Pakistan are in great need of appropriate policies and interventions. Government policies on education, poverty-reduction, and protection are well-intentioned however their practical implementation has been limited due to lack of political commitment and enforcement. Furthermore, the government has not formally acknowledged the problem of street children in Pakistan, which is partly due to the lack of accurate data collection methods meaning there are ambiguities regarding their total numbers. A limited number of local and international NGOs have attempted to assist the street children in terms of their health, safety, and social wellbeing however there is no data to determine either their accessibility or their effectiveness (Hyder 2007). Overall the policies and interventions in place to deal with street children in Pakistan are both qualitatively and quantitatively inadequate; they are incapable of measuring, let alone managing, the street child phenomenon. The current political climate in Pakistan makes it difficult to imagine prioritization of street children in the foreseeable future, however the way forward entails learning lessons from examples of successful interventions internationally.
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