"Strolling" as a Gendered Experience: A Feminist Analysis of Young Females in Cape Town

Desiree Hansson
Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town

Abstract

This paper uses a feminist perspective to investigate the daily lives of girls who "stroll" on the streets of Cape Town, South Africa. The dynamics of daily street life are described and group composition and individual roles are demarcated. The common assumption that girls who enter the streets are caught up in prostitution rackets, and that this explains why fewer girls are found on the streets than boys, is rejected. Reasons for the presence of fewer girls are on the streets are sought in their home backgrounds instead.

Keywords: street children; girls; South Africa

Introduction

From the first recent South African publication on "street children," explanations based solely on micro-level factors, such as "individual problems," or meso-level factors, such as "familial pathology" have been deemed inadequate (Schärf et al. 1986). Subsequent writings have continued to consistently include "the underlying structural dynamics" (Schärf et al 1986, 264), or the social, economic and political macro-forces which give rise to and which shape the phenomenon of "street children" (e.g., Cockburn 1988; Richter 1988b; Peacock 1990). The continuing importance of such macro-level analyses was again reiterated in 1989 at the first International Symposium on Street Children in the Third World (Bekker 1989). What is striking, at least to a feminist, is the absence of gender from the list of macro-forces which are included in explanations of "street children." Race and class are routinely noted as crucial to such explanations, yet gender, just as central an organizing principle in our society, is systematically neglected. Since social life is, inter alia, a gendered experience, if we are to avoid a distorted understanding of the origins and experiences of "street children," then we cannot ignore the impact of our gendered social organization.

A standard feature of contemporary literature on those referred to as "street children" is the statement that little is known about female "street children" (e.g., Ward 1987; Swart 1988). It was this paucity of knowledge which prompted me to address the topic in this paper, especially in view of the fact that neither of the two large scale studies of female "street children" in greater Cape Town had been published at the time (Smith 1987-8; Keen 1989). Furthermore, I was aware that the data which had been generated from these investigations were rich sources of information on gender relations, yet had not been analyzed from a feminist perspective. Thus, in addition, to the lack of published information on female "street children" in general in South Africa there is at present an absence of feminist analysis.
Contemporary South African society is male-dominated, although it must be emphasized that the relative power of males and females is also shaped by race, class and age (Walker 1990). Thus, all social relations in this society are gendered, including those involved in street life. Although there have been many suggestions made that young females who are engaged in street life are different from such males in some way, these ways have not been dealt with systematically or in any depth. For example, Richter merely states that ‘[street children] are mostly boys, [and that] few girls live on the streets in the same way as the boys do’ (1988b, 1). Elsewhere I have argued that the currently accepted conception of “street children” in South Africa is problematic because it is phallocentric in so far as it reflects the male experience of street life. It hence excludes all female experiences and characteristics which do not fit this male construction and renders many young females engaged in street life, invisible. This paper then, is an attempt to bring the neglected experiences of such females into view. More specifically, it is an examination of the ways in which street life is gendered and male-dominated for a particular group of young females in greater Cape Town.

I have also argued previously that even if those young females engaged in street life who have previously been excluded from head counts of “street children” were to be included, there would still be fewer females than males.7 The second concern of this paper is to begin to address the question of why this is the case.

My approach, in this paper, is feminist, for it is feminist social theories which have provided the intellectual tools for developing a gendered understanding of all aspects of social life (Simpson 1989). I am using the term feminist in the broad sense: ‘...feminism comprises various social theories which explain the relations between the sexes in society and the differences between women’s and men’s experience’ (Ramazanoglu 1989, 8). However, feminism also involves political practice for, ‘all versions of feminism assert that the existing relations between the sexes, in which women are subordinated to men, are unsatisfactory and ought to be changed’ (Ramazanoglu 1989, 8). I have not named the specific feminist theory from which I am working, because the perspective I have taken here is one which is still developing in South Africa (Bozzoli 1983; Walker 1990). This approach is historical and focuses on the hows and whys of women’s oppression in various historical times and contexts (Walker 1990). It does not accord class, gender or race theoretical dominance, but includes all of these forces as central factors which continue to play the major roles in shaping women’s oppression. However, the relative roles played by each of these forces are taken to be both dialectical and dynamic over time (Bozzoli 1983; Walker 1990).

Background

During the early 1900s there was broad public concern in South Africa over the issue of homeless and destitute children, which gave rise to the establishment of the Society for the Protection of Child Life in 1908 (Keen 1989). To date, the first known record of “street children” in South Africa is a report which was published in 1917 about children in Cape Town by this Society (Peacock 1990). Much later, in 1957, a newspaper article referred to the phenomenon of “street children” in Johannesburg (Peacock 1990). The first research findings on “street children” were published in 1986, although the field work for this study had been started a number of years before (Schärf et al. 1986). It was not until the late 80s, however, that “street children” all over South Africa began to attract systematic attention from the press, academics and social service workers.
Since the mid-80s in South Africa, a discourse has been developing around the social phenomenon which is now known world-wide as the “street child.” The term “street children,” however, is one coined by outsiders. Those to whom this term is applied have devised their own names: in Johannesburg and Durban they call themselves the malunde, meaning those of the street, or the malalapipe, those who sleep in the pipes (Richter 1988b); whereas in Cape Town, they are the strollers (Schärf et al. 1986). It is this latter group, the strollers of greater Cape Town, who constitute the main focus of this paper. Strolling refers to the way of life of the “street children” of greater Cape Town. Although strolling is a rich complex of social processes, in short three particular activities have come to distinguish strolling from other forms of street life, that is: aanklop (begging from pedestrians and motorists, as well as door-to-door from households in the immediate vicinity of a strolling area); parking (directing motorists to vacant parking spaces), and glue sniffing (the inhalation of various volatile substances, most commonly glue, thinners and petrol, for their intoxicating effects). In addition, these people see themselves as young and often use this criterion to distinguish themselves from bergies or adult “vagrants” (Smith 1987-8; Keen 1989). To date, no researcher has reported a person over the age of 30 years who defines her/himself as a “street child” or characterizes her/his activity on the streets as strolling.

Organization and Survival Strategies among Those Who Stroll

In order to understand the experiences of those who stroll, it is necessary first to examine the ways in which these people organize themselves and the types of survival strategies they utilize. The term band is used here to reflect the flexible structure of the organizational forms which are adopted by those who stroll and the fluidity of their composition. It has been argued that it is this very flexibility of structure which allows strollers to survive in the highly dynamic environment of the streets of urban commercial areas (Bothma 1988).

The two activities known as parking and aanklop generate the bulk of the daily income for most of those who stroll (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). These are low-risk activities, that is, activities which do not generally attract undue police attention, or negative reaction from members of the host community in which strolling takes place, but which render stable, yet relatively low financial returns (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). By comparison, although theft, robbery and the selling of sexual services render high financial returns, they are considered to be high-risk activities for those who stroll. Such activities pose a risk not only for the individual, but also for the band as a whole, as they heighten negative public reaction from host communities and hence, result in increased police harassment. It is for this reason that stroller bands tend to limit their engagement in high-risk activities, unless they are unable to generate sufficient income to survive through low-risk activities (Bothma 1988). It is common, then, for bands to discuss and plan the execution of the high-risk activities of theft and robbery very carefully. In contrast, the selling of sexual services is not usually considered to be a band matter. Decisions to engage in this type of activity are made by the individuals and are rarely discussed in bands. Unlike low-risk income, that which is generated from high-risk earnings is not pooled for use by bands, unless times are very bad. Although most high-risk earnings are retained for individual use, it is also common for those who earn large amounts by performing high-risk activities to share some of this money indirectly, by purchasing luxuries for the band as a whole.
Four organizational forms have been observed consistently among those who stroll (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). The most common and most structured form is that comprising a relatively stable core of full-time strollers, organized into a loose hierarchy of authority. Such bands are headed by a self-proclaimed, older, male leader and his girlfriend. In the middle of the hierarchy are older females and males, usually couples, and at the bottom are young males known as guards. Since these younger males are more successful at acquiring money through aanklop and parking, on account of their more innocent and vulnerable appearances, their role is to earn the daily basic income for the band. In exchange they are allowed to join the band, work in its area, share in its camaraderie and benefit from its protective network.

Although stroller bands do not have fixed territories which are defended violently, as is the case with street gangs (Schärf et al. 1986), at any one time each band generally works in a clearly defined area which has good prospects, in particular financial (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). Strollers are very aware that there is a level of parking and aanklop which is tolerated by each host community (Bothma 1988). For their survival, stroller bands thus attempt to keep their activities below this level so as to avoid retaliation, which usually takes the form of public complaints, followed by police arrests or removal by social workers (Bothma 1988). However, such “tolerance” on the part of host communities rarely lasts for lengthy periods, because the environments in which strolling takes place are dynamic and changes in these environments produce changes in the level of tolerance on behalf of host communities (Bothma 1988). Generally, a band will continue to work a specific area as long as prospects remain positive and will typically move only when harassment by authorities becomes too threatening, or when financial prospects diminish (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). Parking lots are common working areas because the most stable daily source of income for those who stroll is generated from parking. To illustrate: for some months a band of strollers worked a supermarket parking area, where they engaged in aanklop and parked cars. They eventually moved from this area, however, when the local authorities changed the system from free to paid parking. This was due to the fact that customers became less willing to pay strollers for their assistance in finding vacant parking spaces. Subsequently, customers began to complain to the supermarket authorities about the strollers, which resulted in increased police surveillance of the area (Bothma 1988).

Since strollers are generally in their late-teens, they are not usually as successful at acquiring money by aanklop and parking as younger strollers are (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). They therefore play less of a direct role in acquiring a band’s daily income. Instead, their central role is that of organizing, regulating and monitoring the bread-and-butter income generating activities of a band (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). According to Bothma (1988), their role is to ensure a more efficient and lucrative system of basic provisioning. This usually involves ensuring that entire parking areas are covered as long as there is business so that opportunities are not overlooked; and making sure that all those who have strolled in a band’s working area during the day contribute to the pool of daily income (Bothma 1988). Band leaders also see to the security of their band by making sure that an area which is being worked is watched for police presence and that those who are working are warned of imminent threat (Bothma 1988). Thus, leaders usually contribute less actual money to the band, but are seen as contributing in other important ways (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988).

On the whole, leadership positions afford leaders higher status and greater say in band decision-making, rather than greater material advantage (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). Although leaders are self-appointed, their authority seems to be
challenged rarely by members or by outsiders, and they are for the most part accepted as leaders due to their superior street experience, gender and age (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). Smith (1987-8) found that only one out of the five leaders in her study maintained his authority by threat and use of violence. It seems that dissenting members simply leave bands and either start their own bands or join up with others (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). This is not to imply that those who stroll do not conflict physically, but rather to suggest that such confrontations are not common with regard to matter of leadership.16

Those who work in a band’s area during the day are generally required to contribute a portion of their earning, usually the majority of what they make from low-risk activities, to a group pool (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). At points during a working day, individuals usually hand over at least a portion of their earning to the band leader’s girlfriend, who is then protected if the band is threatened (Bothma 1988). This is a security strategy, since individual members run the risk of being picked up by the police or social workers at any time. So for example, if the police appear, a band will split up and move off in many different directions to distract police attention, thus allowing the female who has been entrusted with the band’s money to make a safe getaway (Bothma 1988). At the end of a day’s work, those who have contributed to a band’s pool of income meet to discuss their preferences about the ways in which this money is to be spent. Such discussions are somewhat democratic, with all members, no matter their status, having at least some say in what is finally purchased (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). There is, however, evidence to suggest that a band leader and those who contribute more to the band’s daily pool of income have a greater say in the way in which the band’s money is spent (Smith 1987-8). Furthermore, on occasion, older members take on what appears to be parental authority,17 which affords them greater say in ensuring that necessities, such as food, take priority over luxuries, such as intoxicants (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). The band leader’s girlfriend then usually plays the important role of actually purchasing goods on behalf of the band.

The three other organizational forms which have been observed among those who stroll are very loosely structured small groups, couples and loners. The small groups comprise mainly of female part-time strollers, who are commonly siblings or close friends who live in the same neighborhoods and/or attend the same schools when they are not strolling. These small groups do not have leaders or a clear division of labor. Instead, older female strollers in these groups who have more experience at strolling, tend to teach less experienced strollers about street life. Dyads made up of older male-female couples have also been observed. At times members of small groups and couples stroll temporarily with more structured bands, especially during periods in which they sleep on the streets, but usually they stroll as individuals or in pairs, in areas which are not being worked by established stroller bands. Finally, a number of loner strollers have been observed. These are older females who stroll on a full-time basis and who make most of their daily living by engaging in high-risk activities, mainly the selling of sexual services, and to a far lesser extent, through theft and robbery. Shoplifting is the most common form of theft among females who stroll, and the typical type of robbery is that of robbing men who come to buy sexual services. One interviewee described this latter process as follows: ‘when a man comes and he wants to have me, I say to him that he must first give me money…when I have my money, I leave his car saying that I want to pee [urinate]…I [then] climb out [of his car] and I am gone’ (Smith 1987-8, Interview 13). Although, as the name implies, loner female strollers usually stroll alone, they often come together to socialize and sleep with strollers from more established bands at night, both for companionship and protection (Smith 1987-8).
Research to date has shown consistently that from the perspective of those who stroll, the major attraction of strolling is that it affords individuals who have previously endured subjugation relatively high levels of personal autonomy (e.g., Schärf et al. 1986; Smith 1987-8; Keen 1989). At the same time, however, strolling is a cooperative way of life. Those who stroll are individualistic in some ways, yet in others, they are highly altruistic (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988; Keen 1989). In addition to the cooperative aspects of strolling mentioned above, strollers also often pool their money to pay bail for fellow strollers and regularly provide those among them who are incarcerated with food and clothing. Their cooperation also extends beyond individual bands. For example, bands regularly socialize together often by way of feasts which are hosted alternatively by one or other band (Bothma 1988); and there is an elaborate communications network across stroller bands, via which relevant information, especially regarding police activities, is circulated (Smith 1987-8). This balance between personal autonomy and cooperation is most clearly mirrored in the organization and functioning of stroller bands. Although there is a loose hierarchy of authority and status, some division of labor and clear rules, the rules are few and most bands do not operate in an authoritarian manner, as do street gangs for example (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988).

Some Gendered Aspects of Strolling

Despite the apparently non-authoritarian structure and functioning of stroller groups, all is not “equal” for males and females who stroll. Females are not allowed to lead bands and there is a gendered division of strolling-labor in which females perform unpaid, low-status domestic labor and are afforded less access to more stable, low-risk income-generating activities.

Females are not accorded the authority to lead bands, as leadership is viewed as a male prerogative. The closest they may come to such a position of authority is through the derived status of a boyfriend who leads. Thus, the most important position accessible to females in more structured bands is as the girlfriend of a male leader. In this role she becomes keeper of the band’s daily earnings, plays a central role in working out their daily budget and purchases their provisions. She may also play the typically feminine role of ‘silent decision maker’ (Bothma 1988, 35), in which she is expected to take responsibility for performing certain leadership functions, yet is not acknowledged as a leader. To illustrate: in one of the bands observed, the leader’s girlfriend was required to keep male members who were intoxicated out of public view and prevent them from engaging in high-risk activities while in this state (Bothma 1988). This was an essential task, since reckless thefts or robberies and public inebriation rapidly draw the attention of the police.

Among those who stroll, street experience is highly valued and is seen to derive from strolling for lengthy periods and also from strolling on a full-time basis (Smith 1987-8). Since males usually start strolling at younger ages than females and are also more likely to stroll full-time, it is male strollers who tend to be accorded the superior status and authority associated with being street-wise. It is this “fact” which is typically used to justify the exclusion of females from band leadership positions.

The relationship between the full-time and part-time strollers is clearly a power relation in which full-timers are dominant. That there are more male full-time strollers than female also means that males outnumber females in the more structured bands which have authority and control over the most lucrative working areas. If part-timers, most of whom are female, wish to stroll in the
working area of a band of full-timers, they have to join up with the band temporarily and abide by its norms, especially acceptance of the band leader’s authority and making the required monetary contributions to the band’s daily income.\(^{20}\) (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988).

Certain income-generating activities are viewed by those who stroll as appropriate to a specific gender. Parking is perceived to be a predominantly male activity, with the result that females spend less time parking and more time in aanklopl than do males. The justification for this difference is that males are seen to be capable of earning more money from parking than are females. Recent evidence (Bothma 1988), however, suggests that this is a phallocentric myth, which simply justifies males dominating in the sphere of activity which carries more status and which generates the most stable and highest income of the low-risk activities (Bothma 1988). The only lucrative, yet high-risk, income-earning activity in which females predominate on a regular basis is the selling of sexual services.\(^{21}\) Theft and robbery, which are also high-risk, high-return activities, are considered to be more appropriately conducted by males.\(^{22}\) (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988; Keen 1989). The selling of sexual services is a high-risk, but low-status activity among those who stroll. It is not discussed openly and earnings from this activity are not shared directly within bands (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988). By contrast, it is not only considered to be socially acceptable for those who have engaged successfully in theft and robbery to brag about their escapades and to share their spoils openly within their bands, such activities also earn increased status.

Females who stroll alone or with their boyfriends, separately from more structured bands, are left with a very limited range of income-generating opportunities on the streets. Since more organized bands usually occupy the most lucrative working areas for aanklopl and parking, few of these females are able to earn enough to survive by aanklopl alone, especially if they are older. The majority of females, then, are left with the options of joining organized bands, or becoming partners to males in couples. In intimate relationships females have relatively less autonomy than males, but are more assured of having their subsistence needs met. Those females who wish to remain more autonomous by strolling as loners must run the higher risks associated with earning a living by selling sexual services on a regular basis.

Females who stroll full-time and those part-timers who live on the streets intermittently and stroll as part of a relatively structured band, even though older and street-wise, tend to take on the domestic chores of the entire band. It is they who wash the clothes and prepare food for consumption by the group (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988; Keen 1989). Even females who stroll in couples typically do their boyfriends’ washing and prepare food for both parties. Since they perform these functions on behalf of males, females are not expected to generate as much income as are males in a band. By implication then, females have less time to earn money and since they already have less access to more stable income-generating activities, they are more dependent on males for their subsistence requirements. As lower earners they also have less status and less say in decision-making than do males.

The majority of females who stroll full-time, and even part-timers, are expected to carry the double burden of unpaid domestic and paid labor. What seems clear this far, is that as in other spheres of life, females who stroll are accorded less access than males to positions of authority and status and are expected to fulfill functions which are less valued socially than the functions fulfilled by males. In order to enjoy a more stable income and safer lifestyles, females must sacrifice
their autonomy and occupy dependant roles in relation to males. If females are to achieve a greater degree of personal autonomy from males, they are left with the option of running greater risks both in generating income and in living on the streets.

All of the females interviewed emphasized that the streets were a particularly dangerous place for them, especially late at night and for females on their own (Smith 1987-8; Keen 1989). The threat of violence, especially sexual abuse, from males on the streets is a central and real fear for females who stroll— in the words of one of the interviewees:

*It is most dangerous when you are strolling and the skollies [gangsters] want to hijack you, they want to have sex with a girl. That’s what we’d tell a new girl, to be careful, she must walk in a group like us and not walk alone especially at night when all the gangsters are out….The most dangerous people are rapists* (Keen 1989, Interview 15).

Fifty-nine percent of the females whom Keen (1989) interviewed were personally acquainted with at least one other female who had been raped while on the streets, and a number knew of females who had been gang-raped. Furthermore, at least five of those interviewed by Smith (1987-8) and Keen (1989) had themselves been raped. Male strollers, male street gangsters and adult males from the broader community, including male police officers, were noted as the main sources of threat to females on the streets. As one interviewee aptly commented: ‘the men are out of hand on the street’ (Keen 1989, Interview 2). It seems that, like the majority of other females, the most common way in which females who stroll seek to protect themselves from the threat of male violence is by forming intimate bonds with particular males, in this case boyfriends who stroll. By far the majority of female strollers have boyfriends, and they expect these males to protect them from other males (Smith 1987-8; Keen 1989). This was expressed clearly by one of the interviewees who said that what she disliked most about strolling was:

*the men who pester you so, that I don’t like. Many boys have tried to rape me and T [girl friend], but they never managed to do it, [because] T’s boyfriend knew them and he had to talk so nicely for us* (Keen 1989, Interview 14).

As is the case with other females, however, the very males with whom females bond for protection against ‘strange’ males, frequently become a threat to these females (Stanko 1990). Females who stroll commonly face the threat and actual use of violence at the hands of males with whom they are intimately involved. Thirty-five percent of those interviewed by Keen (1989) admitted that their boyfriends physically abused them regularly. Of further concern is the finding that, like the majority of females, those who stroll accept violence from males with whom they are intimately involved as legitimate: 89 percent felt that it was a man’s right to hit a woman. Although 25 percent of these females did limit the acceptability of male violence to situations in which a woman had been rude to a man, 19 percent actually felt that violence was an expression of a man’s love for a woman, and only 11 percent believed that it was not acceptable for a man to hit a woman, under any circumstance (Keen 1989).

It also seems that females who stroll are likely to remain in “gender appropriate roles” in which they will be subordinated to males. The majority (94 percent) of those interviewed by Keen (1989) saw themselves as being dependent upon males as protectors and/or providers for their long-term, future welfare. Even though all of these females wished to enter waged labor, the large majority also
planned to become wives (88 percent) and mothers (94 percent). Furthermore, most (77 percent) of the types of jobs they hoped to enter were those deemed appropriate to their gender, which afford lower status and lower pay, than the equivalent options for males.

**Suggested Reason for Fewer Females in Street Life**

The findings from Smith’s (1987-8) and Keen’s (1989) studies have not been derived from samples distorted by the phallocentrism of excluding females who stroll on a part-time basis, those who are older than 16 years, and/or those who engage in activities like domestic labor and the selling of sexual services. Yet, both studies showed that females begin strolling later in their lives than males, and that relatively fewer females than males end up living on the streets permanently. It is the question of why this gender difference exists, that is now addressed.

It should be noted that I start from the basic assumption that people exercise agency within a set of structural and ideological constraints which are historically specific. I would suggest that the reasons for the gender difference under discussion lie both in the structural and ideological constraints which shape the options accessible to young, “black,” working class females in contemporary South Africa. Furthermore, I would propose that female perceptions of the relative accessibility and attractiveness of different options are important ideological constraints which are frequently overlooked. In other words, it is not just the actual existence of options, but people’s perceptions of these options which must be considered. The postulate, then, is that a fuller understanding of young females who stroll is to be found in the dialectical relations between young females’ actions and their internalized perceptions of options; and the perceptions and actions of others, in particular those in authority over them. Given the nature of the available research on females who stroll, however, such a comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. The suggestions which follow are thus preliminary in nature and somewhat sketchy.

It has been argued consistently that females are subject to greater social control, particularly informal, than are males (Hutter and Williams 1981). More specifically, among the most effective informal controls aimed at ensuring that females fulfill gender appropriate roles are those which are internalized within the psyches of the females themselves.

*Modern society has seen the emergence of increasingly invasive apparatuses of power: these exercise a far more restrictive social and psychological control than was heretofore possible....In contemporary patriarchal culture, a pantoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment (Bartky 1988, 78-9).*

Female children are raised to believe that they are less capable than males of surviving autonomously, that is, without adults and males. They are also afforded fewer opportunities to do so. Hence, they come to experience themselves as more vulnerable (especially when alone in public spaces), less resilient (Stanko 1990), more dependent and in need of greater protection than males.

*Women’s lives rest upon a continuum of unsafety...they share a common awareness of their particular vulnerability. For the most part, women find that they must consistently negotiate their safety with men. Worry about personal safety is one way women articulate what is means to be female (Stanko 1990, 85-6).*
As one of the interviewees explained: ‘...girls can't react like boys. The boys will perhaps fight back, but girls can't. She is the softer one’ (Keen 1989, Interview 1). As they grow up, females learn to accept that males enjoy, among other advantages, greater personal autonomy, sexual freedom, physical mobility and economic opportunity than do females. All of the females interviewed by Keen (1989) were acutely aware of the superior advantages associated with being male. In fact only 19 percent noted any advantage associated with being female (Keen 1989). The most commonly expressed (53 percent) advantage of being male was that of greater economic opportunity (Keen 1989). These interviewees felt that it was more acceptable and easier for males to find employment, and that males avoid having to carry the double burden of performing both unpaid domestic work and paid labor. With regard to the superior personal autonomy afforded to males, interviewees said that they felt males were afforded greater latitude in their life choices, behavior, and even with regard to their physical appearance. Twenty-nine percent also added that they believed that males were more physically resilient than females.

All of those interviewed mentioned repeatedly that females are more constrained by social expectations of personal hygiene and physical appearance than are males. One interviewee commented that the reason there are fewer females than males on the streets is that: ‘...boys don't mind what they look like, [but] girls want to wash and be clean’ (Keen 1989, Interview 7). These females, like others, were aware that much of their value to males hinges on their physical appearance. Maintaining their physical attractiveness to males is of even greater importance, since many of these females are dependent in some way on males for their very survival. In fact, the problem of being unable to maintain a suitable standard of personal appearance and hygiene on the streets is one of the most frequently cited reasons (80 percent) for female strollers returning to their homes of origin or entering a shelter (Smith 1987-8; Keen 1989). This sentiment is captured in the following interviewee’s comment:

I thought I can't stay on the streets any longer. My clothes weren't clean every day and I was dirty and I can't walk around dirty every day (Keen 1989, Interview 1).

It has been reported consistently that physical, sexual and psychological abuse within the domestic sphere are major factors contributing to children’s decisions to begin strolling, especially on a full-time basis (e.g., Schärf et al. 1986; Smith 1987-8; Richter 1988a; Swart 1988; Keen 1989). As one interviewee put it: ‘I don't think that a child who is happy would go and live on the road’ (Keen 1989, Interview 14).

From the perspective of a female child who has internalized a sense of vulnerability and dependency, leaving home for the streets must appear to be an unattractive option, even when compared to an abusive home environment. I would suggest, then, that young females are more likely than males to tolerate more physical, psychological and sexual abuse with their families, and for longer periods, before leaving home becomes a likely alternative. Unfortunately, the data available does not enable a comparative assessment of the length and extent of the abuse which is experienced by females as compared to males who decide to stroll. What is clear is that the majority (53 percent) of female interviewees experienced long-term abuse before they left their homes to stroll (Smith 1987-8; Keen 1989). A substantial proportion (38 percent) of the females interviewed described home situations in which they had experienced long-term abuse and explained that they had finally come to the streets to stroll as a last resort, after some particularly negative experience: for example, sexual abuse by
a male parental figure, frequently a step-father or boyfriend of the child’s mother; a very severe beating; being forbidden to pursue a special interest; or the sudden permanent or temporary absence of a female member of the household who had previously afforded the child some protection from abuse by a male/s in the household. A further 15 percent did not mention any final precipitating event, but said that they had experienced long-term abuse at home and intimated that they had taken to the streets to stroll when they could no longer tolerate further abuse.

Female interviewees also saw females taking to strolling in order to escape particularly negative conditions in their homes of origin, but they saw males as strolling for more positive reasons; that is, in order to enjoy increased personal autonomy [83 percent of their reasons] (Keen, 1989). This finding may not provide support for the hypothesis advanced above for it may simply be a reflection of females’ perceptions of males’ reasons, and not an accurate rendition of the actual reasons why males stroll. However, other findings would indicate that this is not the case. Both Smith’s (1987-8) and Keen’s (1989) samples of females characterized strolling in less positive ways than males who have been interviewed (Schärf et al. 1986; Swart 1988). These females highlighted more negative than positive aspects of strolling, including inter alia, being vulnerable to abuse, having to live without adequate shelter, food, clothing and means to maintain personal hygiene. In contrast, males who have been interviewed have tended to emphasize the positive aspects of street life, such as the excitement of this way of life and the freedom to live as they choose (Schärf et al. 1986; Swart 1988).

Although young females may remain in abusive situations for longer than young males due to their greater sense of vulnerability and hence, reticence to leave the relative protection of their homes, there does appear to be one consistent factor which enables such females to overcome this feeling sufficiently to at least experiment with strolling, and that is: hearing the personal experiences of someone who has strolled, particularly a close female friend, and receiving the support of such a person while learning to stroll. The majority (55 percent) of those females interviewed had been introduced to strolling in this way by young acquaintances or friends who had themselves strolled (Smith 1987-8; Keen 1988). In fact, half of those females who were full-time strollers when interviewed had started strolling on a part-time basis and once they had learned how to stroll, they had taken to full-time strolling. It may be argued then, that females’ greater sense of vulnerability and dependency may keep them from strolling until they are older and may be one of the central reasons why many females stroll part-time before taking to the streets on a full-time basis.

Even if female children from impoverished homes do reach a point where they want to leave, their families may be less willing to given them up to the streets. Female children are valuable in the domestic political economy of economically deprived families in which both parents, and in fact all adults, must earn if the family is to survive. In such families, it is the female children, if present, who are most often required to perform the unpaid work of child care and domestic labor. This is probably one of the reasons why parents seem to fetch young females who leave home for the streets, or request the police or social workers to return females to their homes of origin, more frequently than is the case with young males (Smith 1987-8).

The income-generating activities in which strollers engage are part of what is known as the “informal” sector of the economy. South Africa is at present experiencing an economic recession. Unemployment levels are particularly high in
both the “formal” and “informal” sectors of the economy. Due to a complex range of historical forces, including, inter alia, influx control and the sexual division of labor, females have been the last workers to enter the paid job market in this country (Bozzoli 1983; Budlender 1991; Hansson 1991b). As a result, males tend to dominate paid employment, both in the “formal” and “informal” sectors, including the most desirable income-generating “informal” activities associated with street life. Since a small proportion of paid work is deemed appropriate for females, generally the lowest paid jobs and those which offer the poorest working conditions, already limited employment opportunities are reduced further for females (Budlender 1991).

If young females do decide to leave their homes, whether because they must contribute to the family income, or because they can no longer tolerate conditions in their homes, they are faced with fewer opportunities for survival outside of the family than are young males. The three main options which seem to be available to young females are domestic service, attachment to a male who is able to provide financial support, or selling sexual services. The latter may not in fact be an attractive option, given the social taboos and high risks associated with “prostitution.” Young females may thus remain in their homes for longer periods and tolerate negative conditions for longer than young males, as at least some of their subsistence needs are more likely to be met. Historically, both in North America and in Britain, running away has been associated with youthful hope for a better life. Similarly, young people who take to street life in present day South Africa may be responding to increasingly desperate living conditions and the hope symbolized in the anti-apartheid struggle which has been waged by an empowered “black” youth (Richter 1988b). Young females, however, may require more hope and/or more desperate conditions before they make the choice to engage in street life.

Females who come to stroll find a sphere of activity which has already been organized by males to serve their interests and one which is male-dominated. On the streets it is the full-time strollers who have control over the most lucrative working areas. The length of street experience is one of the crucial determinants of status and authority among strollers. Since males tend to begin strolling at younger ages and are also more likely to be full-time strollers, it is males who usually have greater street experience and hence, are accorded more authority than are females. As full-timers, males are more likely to be members of established bands, which means that they have access to the most lucrative working areas.

Young females whose families need them to contribute to family income may not take to strolling because they are able to find paid employment as domestic workers outside of their homes of origin (Goode 1987; Swart 1988). Similarly, those young females who live in abusive situations may not feel the need to leave home in order to escape such abuse, as they may find paid employment as live-in domestic workers outside of their families of origin (e.g., Keen 1989, Interview 15).

**Concluding Comments**

In this paper I have examined some of the ways in which the experiences of females who engage in street life are gendered, and more specifically, how they are subjugated in relation to males. In addition, I have explored some of the conditions under which females decide to engage in street life, the paths they take in coming to the streets and the conditions which they face while living and/or working on the streets.
In sum, I have suggested the following tentative explanation for the finding that females are generally older than males on the streets and fewer in number: it seems that most young females take to strolling in order to escape, either temporarily or permanently, from abuse in their families and/or to contribute to the income of their families. At present in this country, fewer young females may be able to contribute to the incomes of their families because, as females, they have less access to employment opportunities and because many are kept within their families to perform unpaid domestic labor. Those females who are able may find paid employment as domestic workers outside of their families of origin. By comparison, relatively more young males may be able to contribute to their families’ incomes, due to the gender specificity of domestic labor and the relatively greater range of economic opportunities available to young males. South Africa is presently experiencing an economic recession and employment opportunities in both the “formal” and “informal” sectors of the economy are limited. Even young males are therefore likely to experience difficulty finding paid work at this time. For those young males who must contribute either to their own or to their family’s subsistence requirements, strolling may be one of the few feasible options available. Under worsening economic conditions, this may explain why more and younger males are now taking to strolling.

Young females who are unable to find employment as domestic workers, those whose families cannot support them as unpaid domestic laborers, and/or those who do not want to continue to tolerate abuse in their home may be left with the option of strolling in order to survive. Strolling is, however, male-dominated, and there are few stable options for income generation by females. This combined with the fact that young females may feel themselves to be vulnerable, may make strolling less of an attractive option for young females than it is for young males. Strolling may thus only become a feasible option if abuse or family economic needs increase, or if such females are able to overcome their apprehension about street life. This process may take time and involve contact with others who have experience in strolling and a trial period of part-time strolling. By implication then, more young females are likely to stroll part-time and to be older when they start strolling, than are males.

In closing, I would emphasize that although this paper has focused on the oppression experienced by young females who stroll, these people are not passive victims, nor are they romantic characters. They are, however, young females who have created a means to survive under extremely negative conditions and who fight back, even when abused physically by those whom they trust.

Endnotes
1. This article reprinted with permission from the University of Cape Town, Institute of Criminology, 1991 (Occasional Paper Series 2/91). The Institute website is http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/criminology.
2. The author wishes to emphasize that she does not condone racial discrimination. The sole reason for the use of racial terms in this paper is that the state policy of apartheid in South Africa has produced real differences in the life experiences of people of different skin colors, which cannot be ignored in a critical analysis of this nature. The term “black” is used in this paper to refer to those people who were until June 1991, officially classified by the South African Nationalist Government as “black,” “coloured” and “Indian.” It should be noted, however, that the official state classification of “black” referred only to those who were more popularly termed “African.” The term “coloured” was used to refer to those of mixed racial heritage.
The introduction to this paper was first presented as part of Hansson (1991a).

3. Throughout this paper terms which are considered by the author to be problematic have been placed in double quotation marks. Single quotation marks have been reserved to indicate quotations.

4. The following are some of the macro-factors which have been mentioned: the unequal distribution of wealth; the Nationalist government's policy of influx control and the associated migrant labor system as well as its policy of forced removals under the Group Areas Act; inferior social welfare and education for "black" people; escalating urbanisation and political conflict, especially in "black" schools since 1976.

5. The first investigation of female “street children” in South Africa was conducted by Mathilda Smith in Cape Town, between 1987 and 1988, under the auspices of the Institute of Criminology, at the University of Cape Town. The author participated in this research. The Institute wishes to thank the Ford Foundation Cadetteship Scheme for their financial contribution to this research.

6. With this latter purpose in mind, I approached the researchers concerned requesting that they make their raw data available to me. Both generously agreed. This data comprised interviews which had been conducted with 41 different females engaged in street life in greater Cape Town area at the time. Twenty-four of these females were interviewed by Mathilda Smith, between 1987 and 1988 while they were on the streets. The remaining 17 were interviewed by Jane Keen during 1989 while they were staying at a shelter. I thus wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mathilda Smith and Jane Keen, for it was their pioneering work which made this paper possible. I also wish to thank Wilfried Schärf who has encouraged the investigation of this neglected field.


8. Throughout this paper, terms which have particular colloquial meaning have been italicized and their meanings have been explained the first time they have been used in the text.

9. When research was first started in the early eighties, aanklop referred only to door-to-door begging from suburban households (Schärf et al. 1986). Research conducted in the late eighties, however, shows that the term aanklop is now used by those engaged in street life to include begging from pedestrians and motorists on urban streets (Smith 1987-8).

10. Intoxicants are placed in plastic soft-drink containers, known as pinies. One end of a piece of cloth is put into the substance and the other end is kept outside the mouth of the container. These containers are then carried around inside the shirt, which enables a carrier to place her/his face inside her/his shirt and inhale the substance whenever s/he chooses, without being too obvious (Schärf et al. 1986). Glue sniffing is seen by those who stroll to be a necessity, an integral part of their daily lives, unlike the use of alcohol, dagga (marijuana) and mandrax (methaquilone) which is viewed as a luxury (Smith 1987-8). Sniffing takes place consistently throughout the day and night, and especially at night to ward off fear and cold (Schärf et al. 1986).

11. Other such activities include doing odd-jobs like sweeping the pavement in front of shops, washing cars, carrying hawkers’ goods and performing casual domestic labour (Bothma 1988). It should be noted, however, that these kinds of work are not necessarily regularly available to those who stroll and hence, are not as common economic activities as are parking and aanklop.

12. To illustrate: whereas aanklop and parking are likely to generate between 10 and 20 rand on a good day, selling sexual services to a single client can earn between 30 and 50 rand.

13. Typical luxuries include alcohol, dagga and take-away foods (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988).

14. Six such bands were observed by Smith (1987-8) and Bothma (1988), in comparison with six loners and two couples.
15. Most leaders are looked up to by other males in their bands as role models, and their opinions carry great weight (Bothma 1988).
16. Smith (1987-8) came across only one incident in which a female part-timer clashed physically with a male band leader, over leadership issues.
17. Smith (1987-8) has pointed out that the more structured stroller bands function as surrogate families in a number of ways. Band leaders and their girlfriends tend to act as parents. Band leaders usually seek to ensure the safety of younger band members and their girlfriends take on the role of making sure that younger band members eat properly and are adequately clothed.
18. The reader is referred to Appendix I for summaries of the trajectories into strolling and the patterns of strolling which characterised those interviewed by Smith (1987-8) and Keen (1989). These data were first presented as part of Hansson (1991a).
19. However, it should be noted that both age and gender are also important independent influences on social position. In other words, older males are accorded more authority and status than younger males and females of all ages. In practice, individual part- and full-timers join up with bands and leave as they wish, usually with very little ado (Smith 1987-8; Bothma 1988).
20. Nevertheless, it has been shown that the majority of males who stroll do sell sexual services at times (Schärf et al. 1986).
21. As has been mentioned earlier, females do engage in theft and robbery, but to a lesser extent than males.
22. In particular, 18 percent of interviewees noted that males enjoyed greater sexual freedom than females.
23. A further 12 percent of the female interviewees said that they had started strolling because they had wanted to avoid negative circumstances at school; 7 percent because they had no place to live, and 5 percent because they needed to earn money.
24. Bozzoli (1983) proposes this idea of domestic economies being more or less resistant to giving up members of each gender to paid employment outside the domestic sphere.
25. Even the street gangs are male-dominated and at best may offer young females some form of subsistence only through dependence in intimate relationships with male gangsters.
26. Sixty-five percent of the females interviewed by Keen (1989) said that they would fight back physically if a man, including a boyfriend, ever hit them. The available data does not allow one to ascertain whether or not these females would actually fight back, but there is consistent evidence that most females who stroll do engage in physical conflict with males (Smith 1987-8; Keen 1989).
27. Although strolling is against shelter policy all of the females who stay at the shelter do stroll intermittently, and on part-time basis. At times they do sleep on the streets overnight, which is known as naggies vang (catching nights).

References


Appendix I

Summaries of the patterns of strolling and the trajectories into strolling taken by a sample of females interviewed by Smith (1987-8) and Keen (1989).

1. PART-TIME STROLLING

1.1 Home and school contact

1.1.1 Before A started strolling she had run away from home on a number of occasions, after she had been physically abused by either her father or her older brother. She began strolling on a part-time basis when she was about 12 years old. This was shortly after her parents divorced and her mother left the family home. Around this time a few of A's school friends told her about strolling and took her and her younger brother to the streets, where they showed them how to stroll. When interviewed, A had been strolling part-time for two years, but she still attended school and lived with her mother and her mother's boyfriend. Although A's parents knew that she strolled, they had made no attempt to prevent her from doing so.

1.1.2 B started strolling on a part-time basis when she was about nine years old, after she had been sent by her mother to fetch her older sister and younger brother from the streets. When interviewed, B had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for three years, but only at times when she had gone to fetch her siblings from the streets. She still attended school and lived at home. Although B's parents knew that she strolled, they had made no attempt to prevent her from doing so.

1.1.3 C started strolling on a part-time basis when she was about 12 years old, after her school friends had shown her how to stroll. Prior to this, C had run away from home many times, due to physical abuse by her mother. When interviewed, C had been strolling part-time for a year, but she still attended school and lived at home. Her mother did not want her to stroll and had had her returned by social workers frequently.
1.1.4 D started strolling on a part-time basis when she was about 12 years old, after she had met up with some strollers while she had been truanting. When interviewed, she had been strolling on a part-time basis for about two years, but she still attended school, although intermittently, and lived at home. D’s mother knew that she strolled, but had not attempted to stop her.

1.1.5 F started strolling on a part-time basis when she was 13 years old, after a neighborhood friend had shown her how to stroll. F had only been strolling for one day when she was interviewed. She still lived at home and attended school. F’s mother knew that she strolled, but had not attempted to stop her.

1.1.6 G started strolling on a part-time basis when she was about seven years old, after a boarder had shown her how to stroll. When interviewed, G had been strolling for four years, but still attended school, although intermittently, and lived at home. Her parents were aware that she strolled and had fetched her from the streets on a number of occasions.

1.2 Home contact, but no school contact

1.2.1 H started strolling on a part-time basis when she was 14 years old (only one day before she was interviewed). About six months before she was interviewed, H’s parents had taken her out of school and had sent her to the city in order to earn money for her family. Since that time, H had been in paid employment, but the day before she was interviewed, H had been evicted from the flat which she had been sharing with a sex-worker, because she had refused to do sex work. H had then taken to the streets to earn enough money to return to her home of origin.

1.2.2 I started strolling on a part-time basis when she was about 16 years old, after she had run away from home and had come to stay at the shelter. Originally, I had run away from home, because her father had remarried and her step-mother had ‘bullied’ her. I had to do all the domestic work and her step-mother had favored her own children over I. At this time I could not stay with her mother because her mother did not have a permanent place to live. I learned to stroll from other females while living at the shelter. When interviewed, I had strolled intermittently and on a part-time basis for a year; she no longer attended school but had regular contact with her mother.

1.2.3 Originally, J became a full-time stroller when she was about 12 years old, after she had run away from home due to long-term physical abuse by both her step-father and her mother. J had lived on the streets for about three months before going to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, J had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for about eight months, while living at the shelter. Although J no longer attended school, she had some contact with her family of origin.

1.2.4 K first started strolling on a part-time basis when she was 15 years old because she said she needed to earn money. While K had lived at home she had been physically abused by her aunt and mother over a long period of time. After a few months of part-time strolling, K had come to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, K had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while living at the shelter. K no longer attended school, but had some contact with her family of origin.

1.2.5 Originally, L first started strolling full-time when she was 13 years old. She had come to the streets with her mother to live, because her father and his family
of origin had refused to allow them to live in the family home any longer. While L had lived at home she had been physically abused by her paternal aunts over a long period. L had lived on the streets with her mother for about a year, at which point her mother left the streets. L then came to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, L had been living at the shelter for about a year and during this period had strolled intermittently and on a part-time basis. L no longer attended school, but had some contact with her family of origin.

1.2.6 Originally M started strolling full-time when she was about 15 years old, after she had run away from home due to long-term physical abuse by her mother and her mother’s boyfriend. M had then lived on the streets for a few months before she had come to stay at the shelter. M had run away to the streets once before this, but she had been returned home by her mother. When interviewed, M had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while living at the shelter. M no longer attended school, but had some contact with her family of origin.

1.2.7 Originally N started strolling full-time when she was about 13 years old, after her mother had thrown her out of the family home during a bout of drunkenness. N had then strolled full-time for about three months before she had returned home. About a year after this incident, N’s mother had again thrown her out of the house and this time N had decided not to return home. She said that she had felt ashamed that her mother had been sexually involved with a male “vagrant.” After spending a few months on the streets, N had come to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, N had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while she had been staying at the shelter. N no longer attended school, but had some contact with her family of origin.

1.2.8 Originally O started strolling full-time when she was about 14 years old, after her father had forced her to leave her job as a live-in domestic worker and return to the family home. Since she had experienced long-term physical and verbal abuse by her father, when he forced her to leave her job O decided to leave home and came to the streets. O had strolled full-time for about five years before she had come to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, O had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while she had been living at the shelter. O no longer attended school, but had some contact with her family of origin.

1.2.9 Originally P first started strolling part-time when she was about 15 years old, after leaving school. She had begun strolling after staying the night in the city following late night dances. While living at home, P had experienced long-term physical abuse by her mother and step-father. About 18 months before being interviewed, P had decided to live on the streets and she had strolled full-time for about a year before she had come to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, P had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for about eight months, while she had been living at the shelter. She no longer attended school, but had some contact with her family of origin.

1.3 No home or school contact

1.3.1 Originally Q started strolling full-time when she was 17 years old, after her mother had taken ill and a number of male boarders had begun to abuse Q physically. Q had spent almost a year living on the streets, before she had come to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, Q had been strolling intermittently and
on a part-time basis for a few weeks, while she had been living at the shelter. Q no longer attended school and did not have contact with her family.

1.3.2 Originally R started strolling full-time when she was 13 years old, after she had run away from home due to long-term physical abuse by her father and discriminatory treatment by her step-mother, who had forced R to perform domestic labor and had favored her own children over R. The year before R was interviewed she had run away from home twice and had come to the streets where she had lived for a time, before returning home of her own accord. However, a few months before being interviewed, R had heard about the shelter while she had been living on the streets, and had come to live at the shelter. When interviewed, R had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while she had been living at the shelter. R no longer attended school and did not have contact with her family or origin.

1.3.3 Originally S started strolling full-time when she was in her mid-teens, after having left home and school, but she would not speak about the reasons for this decision. S had lived on the streets for a few years before she had come to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, S had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while she had been living at the shelter. S no longer attended school, nor did she have contact with her family of origin.

1.3.4 Originally T started strolling full-time when she was 14 years old, after her cousin with whom she had been living could no longer provide her with accommodation. Since T’s mother had returned to the Transkei and she had lost contact with her father after her parents had separated, T then spent about five months living on the streets, before going to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, T had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while she had been living at the shelter. T no longer attended school, nor did she have contact with her family of origin.

1.3.5 Originally U started strolling full-time when she was 14 years old, after U’s parents had left their children and U and her siblings had been evicted from their Council house for not paying the rent. Having nowhere to live at this point, U had strolled full-time for about a month, before she had come to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, she had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while she had been living at the shelter. U no longer attended school, nor did she have contact with her family of origin.

1.3.6 Originally V started strolling full-time when she was 14 years old, after she had run away from a children’s home, where she had been placed due to her parents’ alcohol abuse. V would not speak of her reasons for running away from the children’s home. V had strolled full-time for about a month before she had come to stay at the shelter. When interviewed, V had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months while she had been living at the shelter. V no longer attended school and had no contact with her family of origin.

1.3.7 Originally W started strolling part-time when she was nine years old, but she would not speak about her reasons for doing so. W had strolled part-time for about three years, before she had come to stay at the shelter. W had eventually decided to return home but had come to the shelter instead because her mother abused alcohol and had behaved in ways which had shamed W in her neighborhood. When interviewed, W had been strolling intermittently and on a part-time basis for a few months, while she had been living at the shelter. W no longer attended school and had no contact with her family of origin. W’s mother knew that she strolled and wanted her to return home.
1.3.8 X became a full-time stroller when she was about 15 years old, after she had been abused sexually by her step-father. At seven years of age X had run away from home, due to physical abuse by her step-father, but she had been returned home by her mother. X’s step-father had continued to abuse her physically until she had run away to the streets when she was 15. Throughout X’s schooling her mother had kept her away from school regularly so that X could take care of her younger siblings. X had lived on the streets for a year before she had come to live at the shelter. When interviewed, X had been strolling on an intermittent, part-time basis for a few months while she had been living at the shelter. X no longer attended school and did not have contact with her family, because she feared her step-father’s abusiveness.

2 FULL-TIME STROLLING

2.1 No home or school contact

2.1.1 AA became a full-time stroller when she was 15 years old. She had found out about strolling when she had truanted from school with a school friend, in order to spend time with this friend’s uncle, who was a street hawker. Although AA had been physically abused by her father for a long period while she had lived at home, she had not run away. However, when she was 15 years old she had run away to the streets and had become a full-time stroller, after her father had forbidden her to continue participating in a First Aid Corps. AA's father had been a drug merchant at the time and in retaliation AA had stolen his cache of mandrax (methaquilone) and had run away from home with a school friend. When interviewed, AA had been living on the streets for two years, no longer attended school and she had no contact with her family of origin. AA felt that she could not return home; she feared that her father would harm her. Her parents had made no attempt to return her to her home of origin.

2.1.2 BB started strolling on a full-time basis when she was about 12 years old, after she had run away from home. She would not speak about her reasons for leaving home, however. When interviewed, BB had lived on the streets for ten years and did not have any contact with school or her family of origin.

2.1.3 CC became a full-time stroller when she was about 16 years old, although she had been strolling on an intermittent full-time basis from her late childhood years. CC had first run away from home and had joined up with a street gang when she was five years old, because her step-father had begun abusing her sexually. After this she had run away many times, usually after being sexually abused by her step-father, or physically abused by her step-father and her mother. Each time she had run away, she had lived on the streets for a time and had then returned home of her own accord. During the times she had stayed on the streets she had learned how to stroll from other strollers. CC’s mother had died a year before she was interviewed and CC had then taken to strolling full-time and had cut all contact with her step-father. CC had never attended school on a regular basis as her mother had kept her out of school so that CC could earn money for her mother to buy alcohol. When interviewed, CC no longer attended school.

2.1.4 DD became a full-time stroller on an intermittent basis when she was 18 years old, after she had been told by the authorities that she was too old to remain at school. She had then lived on the streets for about a year, but had returned home to stay for short periods. When she was about 19 years old, however, DD’s mother had died and her step-father had then refused to allow her to stay in his home at all. DD had begun living on the streets permanently, where
she had been for about a year when she was interviewed. At the age of seven, DD had started running away from home, because she had not liked school and her parents had returned her to school frequently. During her late childhood years, DD and her sister and two brothers had joined a street gang. While they had been on the streets, DD had learned from strollers how to stroll. At the time she was interviewed DD had no contact with her step-father and no longer attended school.

2.1.5 EE became a full-time stroller when she was 18 years old. She would not speak about her reasons for leaving home. When interviewed, EE had been on the streets for about five months and no longer attended school or had contact with her family of origin.

2.1.6 FF became a full-time stroller when she was about eight years old, after she had run away from home because her older brother had started abusing her physically. For the next 11 years FF had run away from home and school regularly and had lived for periods on the streets. Until she was 13 years old, FF’s family had her returned home by police or social workers when she ran away to the streets. When interviewed, FF had been strolling full-time for six years, and she no longer had contact with her family, nor did she attend school.

2.1.7 GG started strolling on a full-time basis when she was about nine years old (only a few weeks before she was interviewed). GG had run away from home and school and had been shown how to stroll by a female cousin, but she would not speak of her reasons for leaving home. During the period in which interviewing took place, GG was arrested by the police and returned home by a social worker.

2.1.8 HH became a full-time stroller when she was about 15 years old, after she had become used to strolling on a part-time basis over a two year period. HH had first started strolling part-time when she was 13 years old. She had run away from home and school because a male teacher had tried to abuse her sexually. HH had also been abused physically by her step-father for a long period while she had been living at home. After running away, HH had gone to live with adult friends, where she had met a stroller who had shown her how to stroll. When interviewed she had been living on the streets for two years, had no contact with her family, and no longer attended school.

2.1.9 II became a full-time stroller when she was about 14 years old, after she had been sent to a school for those with learning difficulties. It was here that II had heard about strolling from school friends. While II had lived at home, an older brother had abused her physically over a long period. When interviewed, II had been living on the streets for a year, no longer attended school and had no contact with her family of origin.

2.1.10 JJ became a full-time stroller when she was 14 years old, after she had left school. This had happened only a few weeks before she was interviewed. However, JJ had strolled on a part-time basis for six years from the time she was eight years old after a female relative had shown her how to stroll. When interviewed JJ no longer attended school and had no contact with her family of origin.

2.1.11 KK became a full-time stroller when she was 15 years old, after she had decided to leave school because she had failed an end-of-year examination. This had happened only a few weeks before she was interviewed. However, KK had strolled on a part-time basis with a female school friend for a year before she
decided to stroll full-time. When interviewed KK no longer attended school and did not have contact with her family of origin.

2.2 Home contact but no school contact

2.2.1 LL became a full-time stroller when she was about 14 years old, after she had been expelled from school for ‘chasing teachers.’ While living at home LL had been physically abused by her step-father over a long period. When interviewed LL had been living on the streets for three years, but had at times spent periods living at home, usually after her mother had sent LL’s sister to fetch her. When interviewed, LL no longer attended school, but she still sometimes took money home and helped with the domestic work when she stayed with her family.

2.2.2 MM became a full-time stroller when she was about 15 years old, after her husband had died in a train accident and she had been left to provide for their young infant. When interviewed MM had been on the streets for about a year, no longer attended school, but still had contact with her mother, who was taking care of MM’s baby at the time.

2.2.3 NN started strolling full-time when she was about 16 years old, after she had been released from a children’s home to attend her father’s funeral. However, from the age of nine years, NN had been truanting in order to stroll part-time with her younger brother and sister. They had been shown how to stroll by a neighborhood friend and at times they had slept on the streets. When interviewed NN had been living on the streets for three years, no longer attended school, but still returned home to stay at times.

2.2.4 OO started full-time, but intermittently, when she was about 15 years, after she had left school because she was ‘unhappy.’ From the age of five, OO had been strolling part-time with her younger brother and older sister. They had been shown how to stroll by a neighborhood friend and at times they had slept on the streets. When interviewed, OO no longer attended school and had been living on the streets intermittently for a year, although she still returned home to stay regularly, where she would help her ailing mother with the domestic work.

2.2.5 PP started strolling full-time when she was about 13 years old, after she had been abused physically by teachers at school. However, from the age of 11, PP had started truanting from school in order to stroll part-time with school friends. When interviewed PP had been living on the streets for a year, no longer attended school, but still had intermittent contact with her family.

2.2.6 RR started strolling on a full-time basis, although intermittently, when she was about ten years old. At this time, RR had left school because a teacher had told her that she ‘stank’ and subsequently she had been shown how to stroll by two neighborhood friends. When interviewed, RR no longer attended school, but still returned home at times to stay.