



## PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF STREET CHILDREN AND THE EFFECT ON THEIR EDUCATION IN CAMEROON

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### ABSTRACT

This study dwells on the psychosocial needs of street children and goes further to demonstrates the effects of these needs on their educational Rights in the Society. The provisions of psychosocial needs for street children, is not only a vector for their education but equally assist in their social insertion in the society. The study is qualitative in nature it attempts investigates the reasons why the persistence of children living on our streets despite strategies put in place to advert this situation. The participants for the study included fifteen street children and three key informants from the rehabilitation centers. Fifteen individual interviews were conducted all of them boys. Ten of these children were hosted by the “Institute Camerounaise de l’Enfance” (ICE) Betamba in the Mbam et Kim Division. Three of the them found in ‘Centre d’Ecoute et transits’ and two from Foyer d’Esperience all centers in Yaounde, Mfoundi Division which were still living in the streets but pending recruitment in one of the rehabilitation centers. The participants were aged between 10 and 15 years. The consent of the participants was obtained from their supposed responsible surrogates from the ICE Betamba and from the Educators of Centre d’Ecoute et transits Yaounde. All these centers are all found in the Centre Region of Cameroon. Findings from the study revealed that poverty, lack of basic needs, dysfunctional family settings, authoritative parenthood, family violence, deprivation of school needs, inadequate upbringing of children are not only the causes for persistence of this phenomenon in the Cameroonian setting but equally these psychosocial factors deprive these children from their Rights to education. It was found out that the provisions of basic needs as well as the effective psychosocial support for these children will not only enhance their Rights to education but reintegrate them in the society. It was equally revealed that it would be good to provide parents with training on effective child upbringing in terms of the effectiveness of parental affection and guidance that will lead to self-esteem for the children.

### KEYWORDS

Psychosocial needs, Street children and Education.



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## Introduction

The phenomenon of street children is a constantly growing global challenge with over tens of millions of them found across the world (UNICEF, 2009). It could be said that globally, street children are considered as children in need of special focus. Volpi (2002), on her part equally observed that this phenomenon is making unexpected appearances in areas or regions of the globe where it has never existed. The presence of these children on our streets has attracted the attention of welfare organizations, non-governmental organization not leaving out international bodies. It is for this reason that the United Nations General Assembly in its *Resolution 47/127*, of 18<sup>th</sup> December 1992 explicitly pays attention to the plight of street children.

This world organization expresses concern about the growing number of street children and the squalid conditions in which they are forced to live. In the light of this, it urges governments to respect fundamental human Rights particularly the rights to live and take urgent measures to combat torture and violence against street children and restore the full participation of street children into the mainstream of the society and to provide them with adequate nutrition, shelter, care, love and education. Education is recognized globally not only as a lifelong learning process and human development, but as an essential ingredient in the fight to reduced poverty and promotes development in all spheres of life (Kimuyu et al, 1999). They further stated that countries rely on education in the aspiration to scale up their economy and provide high quality life to all her citizens by 2030. Education steers development in all aspects of life.

At the individual level, a child who has access to quality primary education has better chances in life as education provides the child a solid foundation for continued learning throughout life and also equip the child with skills to lead to a productive life in the society. Scanlon et al (1998) argues, that the education of these children is of vital importance because without education, it is apprehended that these children can become a source of violence and delinquency in the society. Mvesso (1988), on his part advocates for social integration of these children by providing them with some form of non-formal education which will lead to their reintegration into the mainstream of the society. It is through education that they can become productive in the society, join their families, becomes autonomous, helpful to themselves. But the then, who is a street child? UNICEF (2009), defined their categories of street children, firstly street living children who run away from their families and live on the streets, secondly street working children they spend most of their time on streets, fending for themselves and returning home on regular basis and thirdly children from street families these are children who live on streets with their families.

In the Cameroonian setting it is difficult to give the exact number of children living on our streets. But it is observed that in study carry out by (Ndoumbe Manga, 1993; Mengue, 2003), in our urban centers it did not only revealed the existence of the phenomenon but equally depicts that there exist several category of children living on our streets who are at risk. In another study carried out by Mengue, (2003), in the cities of Douala, Ngaoundere, Garoua and Maroua it was revealed that there is a spontaneous growth of the number of children living on our Camerronian streets. Recognizing the existence of these children on our streets, Cameroon in December 1979 laid down the conditions for the creation and functioning of public and private social centre which cater for the needs of vulnerable group especially street children. It is in this direction that some organization group such as Hotpec and Borstal institute in Buea, Centre Social Edimar in Yaounde, Foyer d'Esperience, Institute Camerounaise de l'Enfance Betamba and Global Education and Environmental Development Foundation Group just to name a few were created to cater for the needs of these children.

The study seeks to examine the psychosocial needs of these children and how it affects this rights to education, despite efforts made in the area of the care, protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

**1. Materials and methodology**

**2.1 The Population**

The population of the study is made up of 15 street children all boys from rehabilitation centers. Two of these center namely Centre d’Ecoule et Transist and Foyer d’Esperience are found in Yaounde and ICE Betamba is found in Ntui in the Mbam et Kim Division all of the Centre Region of Cameroon. Ten of these children were recruited from the Institute Camerounaise de l’Enfance Betamba, former street children. To be included in the study, they first had to live at least a year in the street, this qualified them for the interview of the study. Three of these children came from Centre d’Ecoule et transist Yaounde pending recruitment into rehabilitation center, two street children from Foyer d’Esperience equally pending recruitment into a center. The three key informants are Educators coming from two other centers.

The fifteen children were between the ages 10 and 15 years. The characteristics of the interviewees are presented in an anonymous way using codes to identify them. In order to validate the results from the interviews from the fifteen (ex) street children, further interview with three key informants from CAO Bepanda, Douala located in the Littoral Region and Centre Social Edimar Yaounde.

**Table 1. The Socio-demographic characteristics of participants (Ex-street children)**

<b>Codes of Participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Parental status</b>
AG	10	Male	ICE Betamba	Orphan
DU	13	Male	ICE Betamba	Orphan
SW	14	Male	ICE Betamba	Divorced
YU	13	Male	ICE Betamba	parents
GO	14	Male	Foyer	Unknown Father
AO	13	Male	d’Esperience	Orphan
ZL	14	Male	ICE Betamba	Single parent
JI	13	Male	Foyer	Orphan both
SI	12	Male	d’Esperience	parents
UR	15	Male	ICE Betamba	Divorced
WU	15	Male	ICE Betamba	parents
BO	14	Male	Center d’Ecoule	Non-orphan
PK	12	Male	ICE Betamba	Orphan
WT	13	Male	Centre d’Ecoule	Orphan
NT	14	Male	ICE Betamba	Divorced
			ICE Betamba	parents
			Centre d’Ecoule	Single parent
				Orphan
				Orphan

Source: Researcher 2023

The interviewees are from two Regions of Cameroon, namely the Centre and Littoral regions. The participants are all boys which is a dominate situation elsewhere around the world when the phenomenon of street children is concern.

### ***The Research approach***

The interviews with ten boys were conducted in the ICE Betamba where they were living and are still live as former street children. The other five boys, two were interviewed in Foyer d'Esperience and three in Centre d'Ecoute et transits Yaounde. The informed consent was obtained from all of them in agreement with their Educators and Caregivers in the respective centers, especially because of their ages. The interviews with the ten street children took place in March, for the other five it in April and with the key informants it took place in June all in 2023. The interviews of 15 street children and the three key informants were conducted in French language and recorded.

### ***Technique of Data analysis***

The records were transcribed and the data was translated from French into English language. Interviews were read several times both in French and English languages and this was of paramount importance in identifying the themes. The data analysis was based on the general inductive model that aims to give direction to raw data and make sense to it. This analysis was inspired by “basic interpretative research” which assist in the understanding of the inferred meaning given by the participants about the phenomenon. The identification of themes and subthemes in what is expressed by participants was also carried out. It consisted of the location of points of views and narrations as they were given by participants in response to the questions relating to the psychosocial needs leading to their movement to the streets and how this is affecting their education, and lastly strategies to effectively address the situation.

The process of coding was conducted, every line, paragraph and section of the text was coded in a specific way. During the coding process, the definition continued to be challenged and some new codes were developed when their properties were not fitting the existing codes. There was a move between data and the analysis and the aim was to develop fully overreaching categories for each individual group code. Throughout the analysis, the categories were refined sub-categories were compared and combined into broader dimensions. For purposes of efficiency during the analysis of data and to improve the credibility of the results, interviews were given to other researchers for blind parallel coding check. The process continued until no new code was emerging.

## **Results of the study**

### ***Reasons why the children left their homes for the streets***

#### ***3.2. Socio-economic factors***

Participants interview reports indicates that poverty was one of the principal reason why children were force to leave the homes for the streets. Self-reporting by participants showed that because of poverty, their basic needs such as food, clothing, basic school needs like books, pen/pencils and fees, and medical care were not able to be provided by their parents. *This situation was raised by ten cases out of fifteen children. When I got to the school going age, my grandfather died. I stayed with my uncle and because of poverty; he could not provide me with books/pencils and pens and uniform to go to school. The neighbours tried to give me some clothes, but I equally needed money school fees. When I came back from school, I found nothing to eat. (ZL).* Interview reporting from informants,

showed that socio-economic needs caused by poverty include lack of food, clothing, medical care and basic school needs. These are some of the causes why the children were forced to drift to the streets.

### **Psychosocial causes**

The most prominent factor causing children to leave the home for the streets is the psychosocial factors causing dysfunctional family settings. Self-reporting by the participants mentioned dysfunctional family, it means children are never happy, parents always quarrelling and fighting, one or both parents are alcoholic or on drugs, children stay without supervision. These factors were identified in thirteen cases of fifteen and in twelve cases out of fifteen respectively. *Most often, during school period my father only took me to the farm to work, if I refused, I am forced to do so without complaining and sometime I resist and beaten might be the next option (BO). There was no opportunity for me to study, because my father always asks me to go to the farm with him. To him farming was the only activity that I could carry with him instead of going to school(AO).My uncle was care free man; he did not assume his responsibilities as a parent, or give advice to his children. (WT).*

*My parents always fought with each other. When I was only 9 years old, I started understanding that there might be a better place than our home. The place is the street. When I got to the street, I didn't find any place to sleep and I return home. By that time the hunger, conflicts and other problems in my family made me decide to definitely leave and never come back. I saw friends smoking I equally copied. Drinking alcohol and consuming other drugs(AG).It is not the first the first time that I have come to the street. After the death of my parents, I was received by my aunt. The time that I spent in this family I did not have any affection and care. This is the reason I could not study until I decided to go back to the street. After three months in the streets I was received by the Centre d'Ecoute et transits Yaounde. Here in the center we were received two time a week. Here food was provided to me, soap to wash my dresses, educative talks on lessons how to return back to my family (NT). I was given lessons on hygiene and sanitation, behaviour in the society, going back to my family and how to return back to school. I discovered that it was good and if I have some assistance, I will go back to school (UR).*

According to Key informants, psychosocial causes for children to leave their home for the streets, conflict in the families, absence of both or one of the parents because of death, lack of basic needs and lack of necessary care in the family. *What they teaching me in this center it is good. If I have someone who can help me, I will go back to school (SI).*Key informants some of them like going to school. Measures to re-educate the parents on child upbringing and parental responsibility is necessary.

### **Strategies which can be used to effectively address the phenomenon of street children in Cameroon The Provision of basic needs.**

Adequate provision of basic needs such as food, water, clothing and medical care by parents to their family will assist to keep the family healthy and enhance their social cohesion in the society. *When I return from school, many a time I do not have food to eat (UR). I go to school at time without eating. I am force sometimes to follow my friends to search for food to eat (SI).When I don't have food in the house I go round to do petite job to have money to buy bread and eat (AG).* Key informants parents should endeavour to provide basic needs to the family to prevent children from going out of their house in search for this need.

### ***Effective Psychological support***

Street children need effective psychological support from parents. *I don't like being on the street but life is better there is better than in my family. I wish I could find someone to care for me, help me study stop drug consumption and provide me with food. I am sure I can leave street life (JI).If our basic needs are provided we will leave the streets.. What they are teaching me in this center it is good. If I have someone who can help me, I will go back to school, I, beg our municipality to help us study (SI).*Key informants some of them like going to school. Measures to re-educate the parents on child upbringing and parental responsibility is necessary.

### ***Parent Education on child protection, promotion and Care***

Parents should be taught about proper upbringing of children. *Parents should be taught how they can provide upbringing to their children and give birth to children they are able to take care (DU). Parents need to be counselled so that they can bring up their children well and try to satisfy their basic needs (PK). Educate the parents about child upbringing, care and affection, follow up of street children and about satisfying all their basic school needs (SW). The way to end street life is to give me what I don't have namely basic needs such as food, medical care, clothing, School needs, care, and parenthood. If I have them, then I will leave the street (ZL).*Key informants proposed that parents must be educated, sensitized on the notion of child upbringing and they should be redirected to be effectively responsible. The should be equally be assisted to fight poverty.

### ***Fight against dysfunctional family setting (domestic violence).***

Participants strongly suggested that fight against violence especially towards the women and children and authoritative parenthood should be avoided. This means situation such as quarrelling and fighting, parents becoming alcoholic and the consumption of drugs/or father either in prison. *The participants themselves equally found out that notion of children living on the streets is very challenging for the children, therefore it requires strong measures to advert the situation(NT).*Key informant the street children phenomenon remains a big challenge to the children and the community and that it requires strong strategies to address the situation such as education and training.

## **Discussion**

### ***Education as a Right for Street Children***

The state of Cameroon not only adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and other related Conventions that deals with the Rights and welfare of children, at the same time recognize the fact that education is not only a right but a Fundamental Human Right that must respected and provided to children in general and to the underprivileged or the marginalize especially the street children.

According to UNICEF (2006), education contributes to achieving the public good and developing and maintaining healthy, open, transparent, tolerant, just, non-discriminatory, and inclusive societies that provide an environment conducive to the realization of human rights. It further upholds the fact that education is particularly important for vulnerable such as street children, marginalized, and disadvantaged groups, including indigenous people, girls and women, minorities, persons with disabilities and persons living in poverty because it is not only a vector for empowerment, but it give them access to other rights so that they can equally and fully play their role in the society like other citizens. Education is one of the basic and fundamental human rights of which street children are

largely deprived of and this deprivation needs to be considered as potential source of the violation of Human Rights.

One of the rights that street children are often deprived of, is the right to education. It is not only a right on its own, but a fundamental Human Right that enables the personal growth and development of the child and the progress of the society at large. The children's rights are not only recognized by street children themselves but they insist on these rights. The international street children's Day observed in Islamabad the capital of Pakistan on April 12, 2014, where more than sixty children belonging to the slum of the capital city and receiving education of the out – of – school children's school (OSCS) demanded measures from the government for their demands, these children expressed a strong desire to receive education in order to become responsible citizens and rehabilitated in the society. The United Nations convention on the Rights of the child enacted in September 1989 described important areas of the rights and interests of children; some of these rights which are very significant they are health, education and the provision of social amenities. Education is one of the basic and fundamental human rights of which street children are largely deprived of and this deprivation needs to be considered as potential source of the violation of Human Rights.

#### *Education as a vector for the Acquisition of other skills for street children*

UNICEF (2006), contends that the right to education is not only a human right in itself, but also a vector to empowerment, a multiplier, and transformative right. It further stated that these rights include a right to education, right in education, and a right through education. Education and training plays an important role in advancing individuals' physical, mental, mental, spiritual moral and social development and families and communities to transmit social and cultural values and practices, while respecting human rights. In a study carried out by Manga (1992), on behalf of the Ministries of Social Affairs and Women Empowerment and the Family in Yaounde and Douala it shows that 71.5% of children on the streets who used this means (informal economy) for survival are school dropouts. These high dropout rates increase their gradual drift to the streets and finally they are being matriculated as streets children. Therefore, access to education to these children means development of their skills, social development and consequently reverting to normal life in the society just like their peers.

In a study carried by Cumber and Tsoka-Gwegweni (2016), it was found out that the educational level among street children in Cameroon remains a challenge as a majority of them have just primary school level or drop out and are not able to earn much income on the streets to meet up with their basic needs. The study equally reveals that over 77.4% of these children dropped out from primary school and 21.3% had no formal education. These children need support to develop skills that they can be used to integrate into the society.

It is on these grounds that Tchombe (2002), strongly upholds that for any pragmatic interventions to prevent the drifting of children to the streets, social policies should be put in place make amenities available, create opportunities to improve family life and provide vocational skills to these children. She further upholds fact that, while preventive interventions are essential to curb the flow of children into the streets, those already facing the hardship of the street life need immediate opportunities for their progress, self-fulfillment and development through education which takes the form of practical life skills programs. children. These programs should include indoors sports and cultural activities like swimming, games, dancing singing and football competition, thereby improve the coping measures, self-esteem and the quality of life for these children.

### *Access to Education for Street Children*

Education is the greatest legacy that a Nation can give to her citizens especially the youths. It is in this light that Akanle (2007), upholds that “the development of any nation or community depends largely on the quality of education received by the citizens of such a nation”. It is for this reason that the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon, 1996 made primary education compulsory and guaranteed all children's right to education, without discrimination. The Constitution assigned the state responsibility for the organization and supervision of education at all levels. The law of Orientation of Education No 98/004 of 1998 guarantees equal access to education without discrimination. In its article 7 stipulate that the State guarantees equal opportunities for all to access education without discrimination of sex, political, philosophical, and religious opinions, social cultural and linguistic or geographic origin or remoteness. Following a 2000 presidential decree, public primary education is tuition-free. In addition to the above legislation, Law 004/022, passed in 2004, regulates the provision of private education. In 2004, the Cameroonian government elaborated a sector wide approach document on education as a road map to achieve universal primary education by 2015 (Ministries of Education and Finance 2004). This roadmap did address access to education for all children without discrimination, as stipulated in the Salamanca Declaration of 1994, which encourages governments to stipulate that children of all abilities be enrolled in regular school (Ndamé, 2012; Tukov, 2008; World Vision 2007).

The Plan of Action adopted in 2002 in a United Nations Special Session on children sets out three necessary outcomes, namely the best possible start in life for children, access to a quality education, including free compulsory primary education and ample opportunities for children and adolescents to develop their individual capacities and skills. Hawes (1982), further upholds that no society can escape the responsibility of planning the education of the children who grow up in that society. Therefore, it is incumbent on States, Governments and Communities to collectively promote and create educational and other social facilities that will give children living on the streets, the opportunities to develop and participate fully in the mainstream of their society. The African Union commemorated the 21<sup>st</sup> Day of the African Child in 2011, the Executive Council of the Union adopted by Decision N° EX.CL/Dec. 569(XVII) dwelt on the following theme; “*All Together for Urgent Action in Favour of Street Children*”. The council states that the phenomenon of children living on the streets is a multi-dimensional obstacle to the development of the child at different levels including educational, health and psycho-emotional.

The Convention on the Rights the Child 1993 had committed governments to draw up National Education Plans providing education for all children which fall in line with Jomtien Declaration in 2000. The integration of these children into our educational system, it will give them access to learning facilities, they will exploit their talents, develop skills, their social development and consequently return to their respect families. These children in difficult circumstances need to participate in active life of the society. Mvesso, (1998), on his part advocates for social integration of these children by providing them with some form of non-formal education which will lead to their reintegration into the society. He went further to qualify this notion of giving these children a form of education and training as universal civilization. It means each child within the global context is given the opportunity to exhibit and excels his/her talents, aptitudes and capabilities when and how it fit appropriately. This act will not only assist these children to improve upon their personal life or experiences, but it will enable them to re-gain their rightful places within the context of the globe.



## Conclusion

The study, present factors influencing the street children phenomenon in Cameroon. It reveals that these factors are not radically different from causes in other Countries around the world especially the developing the nations. The study revealed that socio-economic factors related to poverty, lack of food, lack of shelter, lack of basic school needs, and psychological causes such as dysfunctional family settings, alcohol, drugs consumption and authoritative parenthood and some of the major causes for the phenomenon. Key informants affirm that, socio-economic factors and psychological causes are responsible for the persistence of the phenomenon in our Cameroonian setting. They equally went ahead to affirm that this have a negative effect on the education of these children. Strategies should be put in place such as effective psychological support for these children, redirecting parents to their responsibilities, fight against family/domestic violence and put up programs to empower the parents economically. More efforts to satisfy the basic needs of the children, effective support for their studies and the creation of outreach services to recuperate children before they are fully matriculated as street children. It would be necessary to educate parents on the notion of child upbringing, parental affection and guidance of children.

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