

## Adolescent Street Boys' Car Washing and Parking of Vehicles in the Harare Central Business District as Urban Resilience under Austerity Era (ASBCWPVHCBDURAE)

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**ABSTRACT** Very few academic studies have been conducted that interrogate car washing and parking of vehicles as one of the livelihood strategies of street boys of the Harare Central Business District in the face of socio-economic and political challenges. Some of the challenges have been partly induced by the austerity era. The paper adopted the child rights and child agency theories to understand the realities of these children. Ostensibly research findings suggest that, the street boys of the Harare Central Business District espoused to car washing and parking of vehicles so as to eke a living in a context faced by myriad of socio-economic and political challenges. A qualitative research methodology punctuated by street ethnography approach was utilised to generate data for this paper. The paper concludes by lobbying and advocating for a child rights based approach in implementing projects and/or programmes for street children of Harare Central Business District.

### INTRODUCTION

Ostensibly there are very few academic studies that problematize the car washing and parking of vehicles as survival strategies of adolescent street boys of Harare Central Business District in the face of adversities partly induce by the austerity era. There is dearth of studies that interrogate the car washing and parking of vehicles from the street children's perspectives. Since September 2018 to the present the Government of Zimbabwe introduced austerity measures. A cocktail of the macroeconomic adjustments that included reduction in government expenditure, monetisation, scrapping of fuel subsidies, transactions tax, introduction of interbank foreign market, banning of the multicurrency system and the reintroduction of local currency became the order of the day (Government of Zimbabwe 2019). Ironically the macroeconomic reforms and adjustments have triggered runaway inflation, which was pegged at around five percent (5%) in September 2018 to one hundred and seventy-six percent (176%) by June 2019 (Sunday Mail dated 25 August 2019). Many citizens' incomes have been significantly eroded, as the prices of goods and services have been skyrocketing with

little adjustment in their salaries. Some of the basic goods and services whose prices have gone up included bread, sugar, fuel and medical care among others. There have been critical shortages of medical drugs, cash in the banks, electricity and foreign currency among others (Sunday Mail dated 25 August 2019). However, there has been a proliferation of the informal market known as the 'black market'. In other words, there has been a thriving informal market. For example, cash has been sold on the streets where the general public is charged thirty percent more money than they are intending to cash out. Seemingly research findings suggest that in espousing to some of these challenges some of the street boys have resorted to car washing and parking of vehicles on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. Dube (1999: 133) defines survival techniques as "the ways by which the children cope with tough realities of street life". Drawing from a child rights perspective, car washing and parking of vehicles by street children demonstrate huge child rights violations prevalent on the streets of Harare Central Business District. The social actions or behaviours highlight the vulnerabilities of these boys. In other words, car washing and

parking of vehicles is a form of child labour involving the adolescent street boys of the Harare Central Business District. Conversely the behaviours associated with car washing and parking of the vehicles highlight agency of the street boys of the Harare Central Business District. The social actions demonstrate the agentic nature of street children. They were able to navigate and sustain their childhood lives through car washing and parking of vehicles in a context with multiple constraints.

### Conceptual Framework

However, previous studies by Bourdillon (1991, 1994a, 1994b, 2000, 2009), Mella (2012), Mhizha (2010, 2014, 2015), Mhizha and Muromo (2013), Chikoko (2014, 2017), Chikoko et al. (2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2019a, 2019b), Ruparaganda (2008), Wakatama (2007), Chirwa and Wakatama (2000), Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003a, 2003b), Chirwa (2007), and Dube (1997, 1999) were limited in articulating car washing and parking of vehicles as a survival strategy of these children. Therefore, there is need for an urgent updated study on car washing and parking of vehicles as livelihood strategies of these street children.

This study is informed by two important though sometimes conflicting conceptual frameworks, that is, child rights and child agency.

Bell (2012: 284) defines agency as “a process whereby individuals are able to envisage different paths of action, decide among them and then take action along a chosen route.” Chuta (2014: 02) has defined agency as “understood as an individual’s own capabilities, competences and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their life worlds fulfilling many economic, social and cultural expectations”. In simple terms agency is about choices or actions taken by individuals so as to survive or meet their daily needs (Bourdillon 2009). On the other hand, Bell (2012: 284) also defines sexual agency among youth as a “processes where young people become sexually active and the strategies, actions and negotiations involved in maintaining relationships and navigating broader social expectations.”

However, some scholars have criticised agency as it sometimes clashes with the societal val-

ue system as noted by Bordonaro and Payne (2012). For example, Chikoko (2014) observed that commercial sex work among street children of the Harare Central Business District could be regarded as ambiguity of agency. Gigengack (2006, 2008) has also noted that some of the behaviours of street children such as excessive abuse of substances lead to death, and thus self-destructive agency.

Some of the social actions associated with car washing and parking of vehicles such as stealing and substance abuse could be viewed as ambiguous of agency. The ambiguity of agency is explained on the basis that the behaviours are in contrast with societal values. In addition, the behaviour is regarded as ambiguity of agency because stealing and substance abuse affect the well being of the adolescent street boys.

The UNCRC (United Nations 1989) defines child rights into four principles namely, the best interest of the child, the right of a child to participation, non-discrimination, and the right of a child to survival and development. Save the Children (2002) also noted that the child rights perspective recognises the relationship between the duty bearer and the rights holders. Chikoko (2014), and Chikoko et al. (2018d) observed that the child rights perspective could be seen as a social contract that exists between the rights holders and the duty bearers.

Nhenga (2008) noted that in an effort to domesticate the provisions of the UNCRC (United Nations 1989) and the ACRWC (African Union 1999), the Government of Zimbabwe has enacted a number of child rights laws, policies and programmes. Chikoko (2014) also observed that some of the laws, policies and programmes included, the Children’s Act (5:06), the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23) and the Multi-Sectoral Response to Child Sexual Abuse and the National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (2016-2020) among others.

However, a number of critics or flaws have been raised against the UNCRC. Scholars such as Nhenga (2008), Bourdillon (2009), Morrow and Pells (2012) observed that the UNCRC is seen or viewed as a Western conceptualisation of childhood. In addition, Morrow and Pells (2012: 4) noted, “the UNCRC does not contain

specific rights relating to poverty and does not define the term.”

The vulnerability of the children is explained when some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District engage in car washing and parking of vehicles. In addition, the behaviours are seen as inconsistent with the provisions of the UNCRC, the ACRWC and some of the national child rights laws, policies and programmes. The behaviours demonstrate huge child rights violations prevalent on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purposive sampling was used to select or identify eight (8) participants for the study. As a result of purposive sampling, the researcher identified and targeted participants who were known to do car washing and parking of vehicles. Through purposive sampling it was easier to select the participants who were considered to be hard to reach. Babbie and Mouton (2012) and Neuman (2011) observed that purposive sampling is suitable when working with difficult or vulnerable populations such as street children and street based sex workers. The authors added that through purposive sampling it becomes easy to identify and recruit the participants in a study. Mhizha (2010, 2014) also used purposive sampling in his studies with the street children of Harare.

A number of the qualitative data collection techniques such as, life history interviews, in-depth interviews, informal conversations and semi-participant observation methods were adopted to collect the data for this study. Bell (2012) used life history interviews, in depth interviews when researching about sexual lives of young people in rural Uganda. The research findings of this paper were part of the author's doctoral fieldwork, which involved street ethnography spanning more than twelve months.

The qualitative data was analysed through thematic content analysis. The data analysis focused on themes and sub themes that emerged from the study. Some of the themes and sub themes that emerged included, car washing, parking of vehicles and substance abuse among others. Farmer et al. (2016), Garland et al. (2010), Mhizha (2010, 2014, 2015), Mhizha and Muromo

(2013), Chikoko (2014, 2017), Chikoko et al. (2019a) and Ruparanganda (2008) used thematic content analysis in their studies with street children.

Neuman (1997, 2011) defines ethical considerations as what is or not legitimate to do or what is 'moral' when conducting a research. The following ethical considerations were observed when conducting this research, that is, informed consent, confidentiality and benevolence among others. In the case of the street children of the Harare Central Business District, the researcher obtained verbal informed consent. The researcher also ensured confidentiality by using alphabetical letters instead of writing the names of the street children on data gathering tools.

### RESULTS

The research findings are presented into two major themes. These are parking of vehicles and car washing as survival strategies of adolescent street boys of the Harare Central Business District in the face of adversities partly induced by austerity measures.

#### Parking of Vehicles

The parking of vehicles is one of the livelihood opportunities of adolescent street boys of Harare Central Business District. During the informal conversations, the majority of the participants revealed that they were involved in parking of vehicles. Through car parking they earn money for survival. Tafi (not real name) had this to say:

*Elder<sup>1</sup>, life has been very unbearable for us on the streets. This has been partly because of the abolition of the multi-currency system by the Finance Minister. I do car parking on the streets but it is not easy.*

*We get a lot of harassment from City of Harare, and Easy Park official. Sometimes I navigate my way besides this onslaught from these people. For example, I now know most of these officials such that I can bribe them such that they give me access to parking of vehicle on certain points of the streets.*

During the life history interviews, one of the adolescent street boys also confirmed that he

was raising money for survival through parking of vehicles. He had this to say:

*Elder<sup>2</sup>, our lives on the streets are now difficult because of abolition of multi-currency system. I survive on car parking. However, we face a lot of problems from Easy parking officials. So for me to fight for space, I sometimes buy kirago<sup>3</sup> or musombodia<sup>4</sup>. These substances make me resilient to the onslaught I get from Easy park officials. Some of them, they fear me, when I am intoxicated such that I can operate at certain points of the streets like Karigamombe centre.*

*We make money when Easy Park officials have gone home. Sometimes we facilitate the parking of the vehicles at nightclubs such as Archipelago, Razzle and Hollys among others, and particularly those nightclubs where sex workers most frequently visit. This is because the majority of male nightclub patrons prefer places where there are sex workers.*

During key informant interviews, one of the street based sex workers, also confirmed that the adolescent street boys are engaged in car parking related activities. Jane (not real name), the sex worker added that some of the boys pay her for sexual services with the money they would earn through car parking. She had this to say:

*Elder<sup>5</sup>, some of these boys are my mhenes<sup>6</sup>. They give me money and I provide them with sex. Life is now tough in this country. Some of the boys prefer unprotected sex as they insist on real value of their hard earned money. But I charge them more. For example, I charge twenty to twenty-five bonds for chigwishu<sup>7</sup>.*

One of the social workers employed at Cesvi drop-in centre also confirmed that adolescent street boys engage in parking of vehicles as a survival strategy. She added that there are a lot of risks associated with the practice. The social worker added that some of motorists refuse to pay the boys for their services such as car parking. Some of the risks include spending their money they have earned on buying substances and on paying sex workers.

### Car Washing

It became evident that some of the street boys eke a living through car washing. During in depth

interviews, one of the boys revealed that he has been able to meet his basic needs through car washing related activities. He had this to say:

*Elder<sup>8</sup>, our lives on the streets have been difficult partly because of these austerity measures. I survive through car washing. I do have fixed charges for my services. I know life is difficult for everyone. I negotiate for prices with the mhene<sup>9</sup>.*

*The situation determines the prices. For example, during mid-week and mid-month, the prices are very low. They can be as low as five bonds per car. But during month end when they are more mhene<sup>10</sup>, I can charge around fifteen to twenty bonds per car.*

*Elder<sup>11</sup>, the form of payment or currency also determines pricing on car washing. For example, if the mhene<sup>12</sup> is paying me foreign currency like USD<sup>13</sup> or SA<sup>14</sup> rand, last week I was given three USD<sup>15</sup> by one of my mhenes<sup>16</sup>. The prices of RTGs dollars and eco cash are also different. I normally charge 30% increment for RTGs dollar payment.*

During life history interviews, one of the street boys called Jab also confirmed that life has been difficult on the streets of Harare Central Business District. He added that the survival or livelihood opportunities have been very limited to an extent that the majority of them have resorted to parking of vehicles and car washing activities. He had this to say:

*Elder<sup>17</sup>, I am involved in car washing to survive. Life is tough on the streets. It is something else. I am sometimes paid in local and foreign currencies for my services. When I am paid in local currency, I buy USD<sup>18</sup> or SA<sup>19</sup> rand, to store value, because the local currency is fluctuating on daily basis.*

*Our market does not have confidence in the local currency, which is why prices are going up daily. So for me to manage the situation, every day after getting our dues, I buy foreign currency such as SA<sup>20</sup> rand or USD<sup>21</sup>.*

During the key informant interviews, one of the motorists also confirmed that some of the adolescent street boys were the ones washing his vehicles. He added that he normally negotiates for fair prices with the boys. However, the motorist also revealed that some of the adolescent boys were known for stealing valuables during car washing. Some of the values includ-

ed cash, mobile phones and necklaces among others. He had this to say:

*Some of the boys, they are good in car washing. I normally come here for the services particularly on weekends like Saturday or Sunday, when there are few cars on the streets. Sometimes, I pay them fifteen bonds for the services. However, some of the boys also steal valuables from our vehicles. For example, one of the days, I left my dashboard unlocked and I lost my twenty USD<sup>22</sup> from these boys.*

One of the social workers employed by a local agency working for street children also confirmed that, adolescent street boys were surviving through parking of vehicles and car washing. She added that life has been unbearable for most citizens because of the austerity measures and was even worse for children on the streets of Harare Central Business District. However, the social worker also lamented that some of the street boys were accused for stealing valuables from the vehicles of their clients. She also added that the street boys were not investing some of their hard earned money properly. The social worker added that the boys were spending much of their money on buying substances and on sex workers.

## DISCUSSION

The research findings provide evidence that adolescent street boys of Harare Central Business District espoused to socio-economic and political challenges partly introduced by austerity measures through car washing and parking of vehicles. The above highlighted narratives demonstrate the agency of these children, as they were able to raise money for survival through car washing and parking of vehicles. The agency is also illustrated when they were able to engage, manoeuvre and navigate with the City of Harare and Easy Park officials. This shows that adolescent street boys, as social actors, developed negotiation skills. The ability of the adolescent street boys to know that they can have more opportunities by parking vehicles at nightclubs also demonstrates agency of these children.

The street boys also demonstrate the agency when they are able to convert their money from local currency to USD<sup>23</sup> or SA<sup>24</sup> rand or

currency. The street boys are highlighting their agency, as they are aware of the erosion of the buying power of the local currency as a result of the introduction of austerity measures. The aptitude and skills of adolescent street boys to understand national and local monetary issues demonstrate agency. The boys know that the only available options for storing the real value of their earnings is by converting the money into foreign currency.

Scholars such as Tisdall and Punch (2012) define thin agency as behaviours or social actions in a context with multiple constraints. The car washing and parking of vehicles by adolescent street boys of the Harare Central Business District, illustrate thin agency. These behaviours are the only viable options in a super structure with multiple constraints. The thin agency is also demonstrated by the street boys to convert their local currency into foreign exchange to hedge it against hyperinflation induced by introduction of austerity measures.

Bordonaro and Payne (2012) define ambiguity agency as social actions or behaviours that affect the well being of children or when the behaviours threaten societal values. With reference to adolescent street boys of Harare Central Business District, the ambiguity of agency is also demonstrated on a number of situations, for example, when the street boys engage in stealing valuables from the motorist's vehicles. Stealing is seen as against societal values in Zimbabwe. Stealing is also viewed as affecting the best interest of these children because of the risks associated with the behaviour. As cited in Chikoko et al. (2019b), one of the street boys of the Harare Central Business District called Ephraim was shot dead. The authors added that the boy was one who was involved in parking vehicles. Chikoko et al. (2019b) observed that Ephraim was shot during Oliver Mtukudzi's show when he was suspected for stealing valuables from one of the parked vehicles. Some of the risks associated with parking of vehicles could include vulnerability to being arrested when stealing valuables. In addition, there are also possibilities of being beaten or killed by the general public when they are regarded as a thief on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

However, the agency sometimes becomes self-destructive as noted by Gigengack (2006, 2008). For example, when the street boys spent their earning from car washing and parking of vehicles on substance abuse and sex. As presented above, some of the street boys were spending their hard earned cash on buying substances and on sex workers. The behaviours become self-destructive agency in the context of risks associated with substance abuse and engaging in sex, particularly unprotected sex. There are a lot of risks with unprotected sex among adolescent children. Some of them include getting or contracting the deadly HIV and AIDS disease and any other sexually transmitted infections.

The study also established that adolescent street boys are sexual beings. As sexual beings some of the street boys engage in sexual relationships with sex workers. Beazley (2003) also noted that street children of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, as sexual beings were involved in various sexual behaviours among themselves and also with those in the mainstream society.

On the other hand, the car washing and parking of vehicles by adolescent street boys demonstrates child rights violations. This could be viewed as inconsistent with the provisions of the UNCRC (United Nations 1989), the ACRWC (African Union 1999), and the national child rights laws considering the risks that are associated with the practices. The Children's Act (5:06), National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (2004 to 2009), (2010 to 2015) and (2016 to 2020) view street children including those involved in car washing and parking of vehicles as 'vulnerable.'

It becomes worrying when some of the street boys end up spending their hard earn money on substance abuse and sex workers. When the adolescent street boys engage or have sex with sex workers, such kind of behaviour is regarded as sexual abuse, violence and exploitation within the context of international, regional and local child rights laws, policies and programmes. Rather the behaviours demonstrate weak child rights institutions or structures with in the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

Drawing from a child rights perspective, the car washing and parking of vehicles by street boys of Harare Central Business District is a

form of child labour. The behaviours are not in the best interests of these children, as they expose them to a number of risks. Instead the adolescent street boys should be in school, and not parking vehicles and car washing.

As highlighted above, some of the activities associated with car washing and parking of vehicles by adolescent boys of Harare Central Business District such as stealing are seen as criminal behaviours. The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act 9:23 criminalises street childhood and stealing in Zimbabwe. In other words, street children and those who are involved in stealing and engaged in sexual activities with sex workers are viewed as 'children in conflict with the law.'

Drawing from the *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* perspective, the behaviours of street boys that are involved with stealing valuables from vehicles and spending money on substance abuse and sex workers highlight moral decadence (Samkange and Samkange 1980; Mangena 2007, 2012). In other words, the behaviours are in contrast with the value of *Ubuntu* or *hunhu* (Samkange and Samkange 1980; Mangena 2007, 2012). However, whose moral decadence or fabric should be blamed for such moral decadence? In the Zimbabwean society stealing is viewed as an abomination. Scholars such as Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) and Mushunje (2006) observed that it takes the whole village to raise a child. Therefore, it is the responsibility of Zimbabwean society to take care of its vulnerable members. The vulnerable members such as those in orphan hood, widowhood and elderly hood among others.

The study also established that the car washing and parking of vehicles are some of the survival activities adopted by the adolescent street boys of the Harare Central Business District in the face of adversities partly induced by austerity measures. Dube (1999)'s study observed that some of the street children of Harare aged around ten years and above were involved in car parking and they were known as 'parking boys'. He noted that they engaged in activities such as giving directions to motorists for parking bays and looking after the motor vehicles among others. Dube also added that the car parking was determined by age or stratified by age. He noted that the street boys of the age range of 10 to 14 years concentrated on the periphery of the Cen-

tral Business District. Dube also observed that the older boys aged probably 15 years and above occupied the lucrative part that is areas where there was brisk business, such as Karigamombe centre.

The research findings collaborate studies by Rugaranganda (2008) who observed that some of the adolescent street boys devised a number of survival techniques that including selling of parking discs to the general motorists. He noted that the boys were making substantial profits by buying parking booklets from the municipal officials and then selling them to the general public. However, Rugaranganda's (2008) research findings were not about adolescent street boys engaged in parking of vehicles as a result of the austerity measures. Rather the street boys were espousing to their harsh realities induced by the 2007-2008 socio-economic and political challenges in Zimbabwe. However, these challenges seemingly are the same with those that have been characteristic of the streets of Harare Central Business District partly triggered by the recent austerity measures.

### CONCLUSION

The paper concludes by arguing that the parking of vehicles and car washing are some of the survival strategies of the street children of the Harare Central Business District in the face of socio-economic challenges. Some of the challenges may be partly blamed on the recent move by the Government of Zimbabwe to introduce austerity measures. As discussed above, some adolescent street boys of Harare Central Business District engage in car washing and parking of vehicles so as to survive. The car washing and parking of vehicles demonstrate agency of the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Through the social actions, the street boys were able to sustain and navigate their lives in a superstructure with multiple constraints. On the other hand, the car washing and parking of vehicles by the street children also highlight the level of vulnerability of these children. Drawing, from a child rights perspective the car washing and parking of vehicles as a survival strategy demonstrates huge child rights violations prevalent on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. Some of the car wash-

ing and parking of vehicles practices are inconsistent with international, regional and national child rights laws, policies and programmes.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations have been raised or proffered in this paper. Some of them include the following.

There is need to empower the street children of the Harare Central Business District. The empowerment can take different dimensions. For example, one of the dimensions would involve access to information. Part of the information can empower street children on proper condom use to reduce risks associated with unprotected sex. Another dimension of empowerment could include the use of social protection such as harmonised cash transfer to fight childhood poverty related issues. The empowerment can also take the dimension of social and vocational skills. The street children can sell some of the skills to earn money for survival.

There is need to promote economic empowerment of street children. This could be through introducing programmes such as microfinance like lending and saving schemes. This will go a long way to promote a culture of saving among these children, in a way addressing childhood vulnerabilities.

There is need for a full implementation of child rights laws, policies and programmes to reduce risks associated with street vending. The full implementation of the child rights laws, policies and programmes will significantly reduce risks associated with car washing and parking of vehicles.

There is need for the duty bearers to provide decent survival or livelihood opportunities for street children. For example, having drop-in centres on the streets. These drop-in centres should provide food hand-outs and laundry services to the street children.

There is need to arrest sex workers who are selling sex to the street boys. In the same vein, there is need to promote safer sex practices among street boys of the Harare Central Business District.

There is also need to arrest people who sell intoxicating substances to the street children. However, it also becomes difficult to arrest them,

as selling of intoxicating substances has become a survival strategy for these people in a context characterised with multiple socio-economic and political challenges.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Elder refers to a researcher
- <sup>2</sup> Elder refers to a researcher
- <sup>3</sup> Kirago refers to highly intoxicating substances
- <sup>4</sup> Musombidia refers to highly intoxicating substances such as blue diamond
- <sup>5</sup> Elder refers to a researcher
- <sup>6</sup> Mhenes are clients
- <sup>7</sup> Chigwishu is a short session of sex
- <sup>8</sup> Elder refers to a researcher
- <sup>9</sup> Mhene is a client
- <sup>10</sup> Mhene is a client
- <sup>11</sup> Elder refers to a researcher
- <sup>12</sup> Mhene is a client
- <sup>13</sup> USD refers to United States Dollar
- <sup>14</sup> SA refers to South Africa
- <sup>15</sup> USD refers to United States Dollar
- <sup>16</sup> Mhenes are clients
- <sup>17</sup> Elder refers to a researcher
- <sup>18</sup> USD refers to United States Dollar
- <sup>19</sup> SA refers to South Africa
- <sup>20</sup> SA refers to South Africa
- <sup>21</sup> USD refers to United States Dollar
- <sup>22</sup> USD refers to United States Dollar
- <sup>23</sup> USD refers to United States Dollar
- <sup>24</sup> SA refers to South Africa

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