

## Sex for Drugs: A Case of Street Children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe (SDSTHZ)

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**ABSTRACT** Very few academic studies have been conducted that interrogate narratives around sex for drugs among the street children of the Harare Central Business District in the face of socio-economic challenges. Some of the challenges have been partly induced by the austerity era. The paper adopted the *Ubuntu* or *unhu*, child rights and child agency theories to under the realities of these children. Research findings ostensibly suggest that the street children of the Harare Central Business District espoused to sex for drugs in a context faced by myriad of socio-economic challenges. The sex for drugs demonstrate agency of the street children. The behaviours are also seen as thin agency given the limitedness of survival options of these children. Conversely, the sex for drugs among street children highlight the level of child rights violations prevalent on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. 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 programmes or projects for street children of Harare Central Business District.

### INTRODUCTION

Street children as sexual beings engage in various risky sexual behaviours (Beazley 2003; Grugel and Ferraira 2012; Tyler and Melander 2013). Substance abuse is a global phenomenon affecting children in street situations (MacDonald 2014; Tyler et al. 2011; Gigengack 2006). Makaruse (2010) defines substance abuse as taking too much of a drug, taking a drug too often or taking drugs or substances for wrong reasons. The paper problematises narratives around sex for drugs among the street children of the Harare Central Business District in the face of socio-economic challenges partly induced by austerity measures. Ostensibly there are very few studies that have been conducted to interrogate sex for drugs among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Research findings suggest that sex for drugs is a common practice among street children of Harare Central Business District. Utilising the child rights perspective, sex for drugs highlights the level and extent of vulnerabilities of street children on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. Drawing from a child agency theory, sex for drugs by the street children

demonstrate the agentic nature of these children. The agentic nature of these children is illustrated by their ability to influence their childhood experiences. In addition, it shows that the street children of the Harare Central Business District are social actors. However, sex for drugs also illustrate thin agency of these children given limited survival options of these children. The social actions also highlight ambiguity of agency because of two levels. The first level, is explained when sex for drugs is seen not in the best interests of these children. At another level, sex for drugs involving street children of Harare Central Business District is in contrast with societal expectations among the Shona people.

### Study Objectives

1. To provide updated literature on narratives around sex for drugs among street children of the Harare Central Business District.
2. To offer recommendations on how to arrest risks associated with sex for drugs among street children of the Harare Central Business District.

### Conceptual Framework

Previous studies by Bourdillon (1991, 1994a, 1994b, 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), Ruparanganda (2008), Wakatama (2007), Chirwa and Wakatama (2000), Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003a, 2003b), Chirwa (2007), Dube (1997, 1999) were limited in articulating narratives around sex for drugs among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Therefore, there is need for an urgent updated study on sex for drugs narratives among these street children.

This study is informed by two important though sometimes conflicting conceptual frameworks of 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: 2) has defined agency 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). 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 value 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) has also noted that some of the behaviours of street children such as excessive abuse of substances leads to death, and thus self-destructive agency.

The sex for drugs phenomenon among the street children of the Harare Central Business District could be viewed as ambiguous agency. In addition, the actions could also be part of the notions of self-destructive agency because of a number of risks that are associated with the behaviours.

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. The Save the Children Alliance (2002) also noted that 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), 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: 04) 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 sex for drugs phenomenon. 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 and three (3) key informants for the study. As a result of purposive sampling, the researcher identified and targeted participants who were known to be deviant in

terms of sexual behaviours and also abusing substances. Through purposive sampling it was easier to select the participants who were considered to be hard to reach ones. 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 key informant interviews were adopted to collect the data for this study. Some of the key informants included social workers now employed by the Department of Social Services, Cesvi, former Streets Ahead among others. Similarly, Bell (2012) used life history interviews and 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, pimping in exchange of sex and drugs, sexual relationship with people selling drugs, selling sex to raise money for substance among others. Farmer et al (2016), Garland et al (2010), Mhizha (2010, 2014, 2015), Mhizha and Muromo (2013), Chikoko (2014, 2017) and Ruparanganda (2008) used thematic content analysis in their studies with street children.

Neuman (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, including 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 let-

ters instead of writing the names of the street children on data gathering tools.

## RESULTS

### Street Girls Engage in Sexual Relationships With People Selling Drugs

The research findings suggest that sex for drugs is a reality among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. During the informal conversations, one of the street girls had this to say:

*Elder<sup>1</sup> my life has been something else (sobbing). I engage in sexual relationships with Jazmen<sup>2</sup> in exchange of drugs. I am addicted to these heavily intoxicating substances such as chamba<sup>3</sup>. Since I am addicted to these drugs, when I do not have money, I am fucked in exchange of the substances. For example, today, I did not have money for chamba<sup>4</sup>, that man (pointing at him), has fucked me in exchange of substance.*

During the in depth interviews one of the street girls also revealed that she engages in sexual relationships with people who sell drugs on the streets. She said the following:

*One of the days, I was fucked by the people who sell chamba<sup>5</sup>. We had unprotected sex, that day in exchange of chamba<sup>6</sup>. Normally the price or cost of chamba<sup>7</sup> is equivalent to one session of sex. So when we had unprotected sex that day, it was in exchange of the superior grade of chamba<sup>8</sup> called maheads<sup>9</sup>. So if I want to have maheads<sup>10</sup>, I normally offer unprotected sex to these people.*

One of the vendors selling intoxicating substances also confirmed to having sexual relationships with some of the adolescent street girls in exchange of substances. During the key informant interviews he said the following:

*(While laughing) There is nothing for maha-la<sup>11</sup> these days, particularly in Zimbabwe. Life is hard in our country. If they want my stuff they have to pay. If they do not pay me money, I will fuck them. I have been fucking them too hard in exchange of my stuff (chamba<sup>12</sup>). Yesterday, I fucked XX (referring to one of the street girls). We had nyoro<sup>13</sup> for maheads<sup>14</sup>.*

### Street Girls Engage in Selling Sex to Raise Money for Substances

The research findings suggest that some of the street girls of the Harare Central Business

District engage in selling sex so as to raise money for intoxicating substances. During in depth interviews, one of the street girls had this to say:

*Elder<sup>15</sup>, I sell sex to raise money for survival and also for the substances. Our lives on the streets are tough. So I sell sex to raise money for the substances. For example, I cannot function fully, when I am not intoxicated. What do you expect me to do? I then go for chigwishu<sup>16</sup> or pungwe<sup>17</sup> to have the money for the intoxicating substances.*

*I also engage in oral or unprotected sex, as they are associated with more rewards. Nyoro<sup>18</sup> or blowjob<sup>19</sup> pays better than protected sex. In some instances, if you get a good mhene<sup>20</sup>, you can be paid in USD or SA rand, and not Zimbabwe dollars.*

During the informal conversations, one of the street boys confirmed that some of the street girls were addicted to intoxicating substances such as *chamba*<sup>21</sup> and blue diamond among others. He added that the street girls would engage in transactional sex so as to raise money for buying the intoxicating substances. The street boy also lamented that such kind of girls were the ones responsible for spreading sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

In addition, during the key informant interviews, one of the social workers employed at Cesvi also confirmed that some of the street girls were involved in selling sex with a view to raise money for intoxicating substances. Some of the intoxicating substances included cannabis, blue diamond and *chitongo*<sup>22</sup> among others. The social worker expressed concern on how the street girls have become addicted to drugs and sex. She had that some of the girls were involved in unprotected sex and other risk sexual behaviours in order to buy intoxicating substances.

### **Street Boys Engage in Pimping in Exchange for Sex and Drugs**

The research findings also suggest that some of the street boys of the Harare Central Business District engage in pimping in exchange for sex and drugs. During the informal conversations one of the street boys had this to say:

*Elder<sup>23</sup>, I engage in pimping with some of the sex workers in the various bases in Avenues area.*

*The sex workers do not want to pay me money. Instead they offer me substances and sex.*

During the key informant interviews with some of the sex workers plying the Avenues area, it was noted that some of the adolescent street boys were working hand in glove with the sex workers. One of the sex workers had this to say:

*The street boys are our partners in crime. They provide security for us when we have mhene<sup>24</sup> that refuse to pay us our due. We engage the migundurus<sup>25</sup> and they fight the mhene<sup>26</sup>. Some of the fights would include physical fights or making a tyre punch of the mhene's<sup>27</sup> vehicle.*

*In exchange for such services, I pay them through having sex and buying them substances particularly chamba<sup>28</sup> or chitongo<sup>29</sup>. If we have enough money, we buy chapomba<sup>30</sup> for them. After having chapomba<sup>31</sup> together we sometimes subsequently enjoy ourselves with sex.*

*Particularly that one (pointing at one of the boys), he enjoys having a fuck after taking some intoxicating substances. He is a nice guy. I enjoy his company.*

During the key informant interviews, one of the field-based social workers also confirmed that some of the street boys were providing pimping services to Avenue based sex workers. She added that the boys were paid in kind, for example, through sex and substances particularly intoxicating ones. The social worker also observed that some of the street boys end up contracting sexually transmitted diseases because of their risky sexual behaviours with street based sex workers.

## **DISCUSSION**

As highlighted above, street children of the Harare Central Business District engage in sex for drugs behaviours. Utilising the child rights concept, the sex for drugs demonstrate multiple vulnerabilities of street children of the Harare Central Business District. The sex for drugs by adolescent street girls of the Harare Central Business District suggests child rights violations. The sex for drugs phenomenon illustrates that street children of the Harare Central Business District are addicted to drugs/substances and sex. However, the sex for drugs among children in street situations contravenes the provisions of the UNCRC (United Nations 1989), the ACRWC (African Union 1999), the Children' Act (5:06), the

Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23) and the Domestic Violence (5:16).

In line with the provisions of the Children's Act (5:06), street children are considered as children in need of care because of their circumstances. Some of the circumstances such as living on the streets where there limited parental supervision. Limited access to basic needs such as food. The children in need of care is also further explained when they engaged in the various sexual behaviours and also abuse substances. Such circumstances increase their chances to further abuse, violence and exploitation.

In terms of Criminal Law (Codification and Reform Act (9:23), the street children who engage in sex for drugs are viewed as children in conflict with the law. This is on the basis that there is criminalisation of sex and abuse of drugs among children particularly in Zimbabwe. Children including those in street situations are not expected to engage in sex and also abuse substances in Zimbabwean society.

It contravenes the provisions of the UNCRC (United Nations 1989), the ACRWC (African Union 1999) and the Children's Act (5:06) among other child rights laws and policies, as sex for drugs phenomenon affects the well-being of these children. Rather sex for drugs exposes the street girls to the different forms of vulnerabilities to sexual abuse, violence and exploitation. For example, some of the girls were exposed to risky sexual behaviours such as unprotected sex, multiple sexual relationships and sexually transmitted diseases as a result of sex for drugs phenomenon on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

Drawing from a child agency theory, the sex for drugs phenomenon illustrates the agency of the street children of the Harare Central Business District. As social actors, they exploit the availability of resources to their advantage in terms of exchanging substance and sex, pimping for sex and substances and transactional sex to buy substances among other behaviours under difficult circumstances thus indicating thin agency as noted by Tisdall and Punch (2012).

In addition, the behaviours of associated with sex for drugs also are considered a part of ambiguous agency as noted by Bordonaro and Payne (2012), as they clash with societal values. Among the Shona people children including those in

street situation should be asexual. The ambiguity is also explained when the behaviours are threatening the well-being of the children. Sex for drugs phenomenon threatens the well-being of the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Sex for drugs phenomenon is strongly condemned in Zimbabwe. Rather it is seen as an abomination in Zimbabwe.

The sex for drugs among the street children of the Harare Central Business District could also be explained with the context of self-destructive agency. Scholars such Gigengack (2006) referred to risky behaviours as self-destructive agency. The self-destructive agency is explained in the context of risks associated with the sex for drugs phenomenon. Some of the risks included exposure to multiple sexual partnerships, unprotected sex and sexually transmitted diseases among others. In other words, as a result of sex for drugs, the street children of the Harare Central Business District have been exposed to the different forms of sexual abuse and violence.

Utilising the *Ubuntu* or *unhu* philosophy sex for drugs among street children of the Harare Central Business District demonstrates moral decadence. The sex behaviours among minors are in contrast with the moral values of the Zimbabwean society (Mangena 2007, 2012), Samkange and Samkange (1980). In Zimbabwean society, children including those living and staying on the streets are not expected to engage in sexual behaviours and also engage in abuse of substances. Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) observe that it takes the whole village to raise a child. Therefore, in a situation where the street children of the Harare Central Business District engage in sex for drug, it is the society to be blamed. The society has the responsibility of raising morally up right citizens including street children.

Similarly, Chikoko (2014) observed that some of the street girls of the Harare Central Business District were involved in transactional sex as a result of substance abuse. He added that some of the girls used substances to facilitate transactional sex. The author cited incidences where some of the girls engaged in transactional sex to buy substances. Some of the intoxicating substances included cannabis.

Chikoko (2014) noted that some of the street girls of the Harare Central Business District who were involved in transactional sex practised ex-

tortion with heavily intoxicated clients. He added that the girls raised money for survival through extortion apart from commercial sex work. He cited an example where the street girls would give intoxicating tablets to their clients. Chikoko (2014) added that in cases where the clients were heavily intoxicated the street girls would steal valuables such as cash and mobile phones among others from the clients.

### CONCLUSION

The paper concludes by arguing that street children of the Harare Central Business District engage in sex for drugs related behaviours. The sex for drugs highlights the agency of these children. However, the actions or behaviours are considered ambiguous of agency. They are considered as ambiguous of agency because of two issues. Firstly, sex for drugs among minors in Zimbabwe poses a lot of risks to street girls. Risks such as contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS, unwanted pregnancies and unprotected sex among others. Secondly, the behaviours of street girls associated with sex for drugs threatens the well-being of the society. The sex for drugs phenomenon among the street children of the Harare Central Business District is also considered as self-destructive agency. It is considered self-destructive agency because of some of the risks highlighted above. Drawing from a child rights concept, the sex for drugs phenomenon associated with street children of the Harare Central Business District demonstrates the level of child rights violations. The behaviours illustrate the level and extent of vulnerabilities of the street children to child sexual abuse, violence and exploitation on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper came up with a number of recommendations to arrest risks associated with sex for drugs among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Some of them include the following:

1. There is need to align the local child rights laws, policies and programmes with regional and international ones. For example, the Children's Act (5.06) to be aligned with Af-

2. There is need to fully implement child rights laws, policies and programmes so as to arrest risks associated with sex for drugs among street children of the Harare Central Business District.
3. There is need to implement social protection programmes targeting street children of the Harare Central Business District. Some of the social protection programmes could include Basic Education Assistance Module, harmonised cash transfer programme, and Assisted Medical Treatment Order among others. This can go a long way for ensuring that the street children can live a dignified life.
4. There is need for social budgeting so as to raise money resources for street children of the Harare Central Business District. Through social budgeting process, more resources will be raised and set aside for meeting the needs and rights of those on the streets.
5. There is need to establish substance abusing rehabilitation centres that are accessible by the street children of the Harare Central Business District. The substance abuse rehabilitation centre could be established in one of the drop-in centres on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

### NOTES

- 1 Elder refers to a researcher
- 2 Jazmen are people peddling or selling substances on the streets of Harare
- 3 Chamba is cannabis
- 4 Chamba is cannabis
- 5 Chamba is cannabis
- 6 Chamba is cannabis
- 7 Chamba is cannabis
- 8 Chamba is cannabis
- 9 Maheads is a type of cannabis
- 10 Maheads is a type of cannabis
- 11 Mahala is a street lingo for nothing
- 12 Chamba is cannabis
- 13 Nyoro is a street lingo for unprotected sex
- 14 Maheads is a type of cannabis
- 15 Elder refers to a researcher
- 16 Chigwishu is a short session of sexual intercourse
- 17 Pungwe is a longer session of sexual intercourse normally lasting a night

- 18 Nyoro is street lingo for unprotected sex  
 19 Blowjob is a street lingo for oral sex  
 20 Mhene is a client  
 21 Chmaba is cannabis  
 22 Chitongo is one of the intoxicating substances  
 23 Elder refers to a researcher  
 24 Mhenes are clients  
 25 Migundurur refers to street children  
 26 Mhene is a client  
 27 Mhene is a client  
 28 Chmaba is cannabis  
 29 Chitongo is one of the heavily intoxicating substances  
 30 Chapomba is one of the heavily intoxicating substances  
 31 Chapomba is one of the heavily intoxicating substances

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