The Plight of Street Children and Juvenile Delinquency in Urban Tanzania: A Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT Tanzania as a developing country has been experiencing worsening impacts of the street children phenomenon in practically all its rapidly growing urban areas. Based on the review of literature, the causes of street children include general poverty, loss of family ties (due to polygamy, separation between parents), some unwelcome traditional practices (such as forced marriages, female genital mutilation), and the HIV/AIDS epidemic affecting families. In the street the children have worse living conditions since they have nowhere to live, no food and no protection. In a bid to fend for themselves they end up engaging in juvenile delinquency, causing havoc to the society. Therefore, a more detailed research is required and all stakeholders should pull their resources together so as to obtain a sustainable solution for the street children phenomenon in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Tanzania is one of the developing countries whose urban populations experience rapid growth. Rapid population growth in urban areas accounts for the increase in the number of children in the country generally. Children in Tanzania comprise about fifty per cent of the total population. Urban population is projected to increase from 15 million people in 2012 to more than 60 million people by mid-century (Worrall et al. 2017). This goes in tandem with the increase in the number of urban street children who are among the most vulnerable and marginalised members of society, often lacking access to food, shelter, healthcare, security and education (Shrestha 2009).

There is an increasing trend of children and youth leaving their families prematurely, migrating to live and work homeless on the streets in practically all urban areas of the country. Therefore, it is important to understand the predicament of these children so as to devise appropriate solutions that can help the country to do away with street children in all cities and urban areas.

In the past two decades, Tanzanian cities have undergone rapid changes that transformed the lives of the people living in those cities. The transformations resulted in a number of consequences, including increased number of urban population as a result of both urban birth, as well as rural-urban migration (Egan 2010). The impact of these transformations is felt by all city communities generally, especially the urban poor. One of the most salient impacts is the increasing number of urban children; especially street children, which is an acute problem.

Study Objective

The general objective of this study was to investigate the plight of street children and juvenile delinquency in Tanzania. Therefore, the researcher specifically attempted to identify the causes of street children in Tanzania, investigated the problems faced by street children in urban areas; tried to understand the coping mechanisms of street children in urban Tanzania that lead them to juvenile delinquency; identified the challenges faced by various actors in dealing with the street children phenomenon; and came out with possible solutions to address the issue in the country.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a research approach that involved mainly secondary data analysis, especially in the form of literature review. Therefore, the researchers carefully went through theoretical work that was done by previous scholars on the subject matter. This helped researcher to understand the phenomenon of street children glo-

bally and locally, in terms of its causes, risks the street children are subjected to, and intervention mechanisms that were used in attempt to deal with the matter. So the researcher mainly carried out library work whereby various sources, such as books, NGOs as well as government reports, journal articles and periodicals were consulted to inform the work. Therefore, a number of cases, themes, theories and concepts were referred to.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Who are Street Children?

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist, but it did not mean that children were neglected, forsaken nor despised. The idea of childhood should not be confused with affection for children. It corresponds to an awareness of a particular nature of childhood that distinguishes between a child and an adult person. So as soon as the child could live without the solitude of her or his parent or guardian she or he belonged to adult society (Ariers 1979).

A child is identified in terms of age limit. According to UNICEF (LLC 2001), age limits are a formal reflection of society's judgment about the evolution of children's capacities and responsibilities. Some take it as a criterion for assigning tasks and responsibilities to different age groups in the society. In most developing countries, childhood is often seen as something continous, and the case of child work, for example, is a common practice (Bromley and Meckie 2009).

The inter-NGO programme for street children and street youth in the early 1980s, defines street children as "those for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults".

There are two main versions that distinguish between real street children and children who are working on the street. Real street children, also known as children of the street, refer to children who are homeless, and streets in urban areas are their source of livelihood, where they live and sleep. These comprise a much smaller number of children who daily struggle for survival alone, without their families. Although they are often referred to as "abandoned", they too might also have abandoned their families, tired of insecurity, and rejection and aged up with violence, their ties with their families have now been broken (Bromley and Meckie 2009; Tacon 1985).

On the other hand, "children on the street" are children who work and live on the streets in the daytime but return home at night where they sleep, although some of them occasionally may sleep on the streets (UNCHS 2000). Their family support base is so weakened that they must share the responsibility for family survival by working on city streets and marketplaces, and the home ceases to be their centre for play, culture and daily life.

However, the two groups sometimes overlap and make the definition confusing since it is not uncommon to find "children of the street" still having links with their families and some "children on the street" often sleep on the street (UNICEF 2001).

A great deal of research has been done in the last two decades regarding the causes, effects, and characteristics of street children in Asia, South America and Africa. Generally, the causes of children going to live on the streets away from their families are rooted in poverty, hunger, family and neighbourhood violence, family dissolution and in the breakdown of traditional supportive community structures (Gracey 2002).

Most literature has approached the matter from a risk and vulnerability perspective, but not enough emphasis has been placed on the competencies, strengths and resilience processes of the children as well as what can be done to foster the healthy development of these children, so they can reintegrate into their respective societies (Ayuku et al. 2003; McAdams-Crisp 2006; McAlpine et al. 2009).

Childhood as a Social Construction

The most common approaches to study children include the scientific approach, the applied approach and the social constructionist approach. Social constructionism is an approach that seeks to understand how children and child-

hood knowledge is constructed, by whom, why and the purpose that it would serve (Norozi and Moen 2016). The proponents of social construction expounded that reality in social affairs (as opposed from the natural world), is social knowledge which guides our behavior, but the researchers all have different views of it (Berger and Luckman 1966). Therefore, social construction does not exist from reality, but rather from one's own ideas and therefore it is subject to change over time.

Social construction also offers alternative ways of uncovering some phenomena about children and childhood. It can be defined as a "theoretical perspective that explores the ways in which reality is negotiated in everyday life through people's interactions and through sets of discourses" (James and James 2008).

Why Do Children End Up in the Street?

The increasing number of children living on the street around the world is a result of societal breakdowns in family and community cohesion, and it thus falls on all international governments and civil society organisations to focus more on prevention, family and community cohesion at source.

In order to best address the issue of street children, it is good to understand why these children leave their homes and families into the streets. One of the major causes for the children to end up in the streets is poverty (Abebe 2009; Bourdillon 2006; Manjengwa et al. 2016). In search for life and due to economic hardships at home, some children end up in the streets. It has been documented that a quarter of the world's children live in poverty and that childhood and poverty often go together (Farnfield 2002).

Other reasons that cause children to end up in the streets include the failure of rural livelihoods, harmful traditional practices, hostile stepparents, peer pressure, lack of opportunities for social mobility and uncaring home environments (Abebe 2009). In explaining the problem of stepparenthood, literature has also indicated violence at home as one of the reasons why especially girls end up in the streets (Manjengwa et al. 2016). In Zimbabwe, the HIV and AIDS epidemics have been one significant cause for chil-

dren being orphaned and ending up in the streets (Manjengwa et al. 2016).

Although most children who beg on the streets are orphans due to HIV/AIDS, the majority of them live with one (80%) or both (67%) parents (Abebe 2009). So in these cases, children are securing the family livelihoods, contributing to the family income by begging ensuring that the basic needs of the children can be met and helps the children to fulfil a socially meaningful role in everyday life.

Sometimes the children end up in the streets because of social factors. For example, they find that they are bored at home, and in the street they can spend time with their friends. The friends that they spend time with often are the ones influencing the children to end up becoming street children.

Moreover, the rising culture of capitalism is also identified as one of the causes of street children. This is coupled with the declining significance of indigenous values (Kilbride et al. 2000). In that line of argument, it is stated that the structural adjustment projects had clear effects to the lives of the poorest populations in developing countries, especially women and children (Kilbride et al. 2000).

Causes of Street Children in Tanzania

The issue of street children in Tanzania is, to a large extent, a socio-economic system. Street children are a result of abject poverty of their families. In Tanzania, just like in many other African countries, children who do not feel safe and supported at home will not stay there. They will migrate into the street and integrate themselves with other street children. Street children are seen by the community as hooligans or ruffians and are to be avoided. Some see vulnerable children as orphans, the result of their parents' misconduct as they died of HIV/AIDS. Consequently, they are not given opportunity to live and act as children. So, over time, children begin to identify with the projections of the community, losing in the process, their self dignity.

There is a significant relationship between poverty, violence in the home, and participation and engagement in school as to whether a child will flee the comfort of the family for the vulner-

ability of living alone on the street. A study which was conducted in northern Tanzania by McAlpine et al. (2009) showed that if a child experiences too much abuse and not enough support from their family, they would rather risk living on their own on the street than stay in that environment.

A number of children ran to the street as a result of traditional malpractices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriages. These constitute some form of violence to children, hence they seek refuge outside their families and at times they cannot get the assistance they need, consequently ending up on the street.

Also, some studies have shown that families that have strained relationships which lead to loss of their collaborative ties and low degree of social cohesion have higher chances of producing street children (Rajani and Kudrati 1996).

"My name is Sylvanus and I am 17 years old. When I was young I lived in a family with my three brothers. My mother married many times and I do not know who exactly my father is. My mother's second husband said to her that she should go and find out who my father is because there were many conflicts in the family. She showed me many different men and I went to live with them each for two to three months. This made me think that any man who I live with is my father. When I had been sent to live with one family, my mother got sick and when I went to see her, my family told me that she had already died. I decided to run to the streets because the family I was living with were beating me and always asking me who my father was." ….(Johnson 2005: 6).

According to the Global Giving Foundation there are about 437,500 street children in Tanzania. Many of them live on the street because of the violence and abuse they experienced at home. Many more face daily violence and abuse on the streets from different people including business people, sex tourists, fellow street children and even some civil servants as well as those working in law enforcement.

Problems Encountered by Street Children in Tanzania

The street children in urban Tanzania face a number of problems that remain unsolved despite some government interventions in the country as a whole (Olutora 2009). The main problems faced by these children are a result of high risks they are exposed to in their daily lives on the street.

Firstly, street children face poverty generally. Both urban and rural dwellers face abject poverty that make the situation even worse on the side of street children. Most of these children cannot afford their basic needs, namely, food, shelter and clothing.

Secondly, lack of education. Majority of street children cannot attend school although primary education is offered free of charge. They cannot attend classes since they have no assurance of the other requirement for school and life generally. As a result, the time that would have been used in school is therefore put to use in providing for their basic needs through various coping mechanisms, such as begging in the street, doing petty jobs in homes and business premises (like cleaning cars, cutting grass, carrying luggage and others), collecting recyclable waste, and others revert to petty theft and robbery.

Thirdly, there is a problem of poor health service. The street children are not covered by any form of health insurance. Although the government is making concerted efforts to provide good health services to the people, it has not been able to reach out to this group. As a result, most of them are in constant suffering from various communicable diseases such as fever, skin diseases, accidents, injuries as well as STIs (Amury and Komba 2010). This situation is in line with the statement made in the UN Children's Fund that street children are among the most invisible, and therefore, hardest children to reach with vital services, such as education and healthcare, and the most difficult to protect (United Nations Children's Fund 2006). Therefore, special health policies, programmes and services are required in order to meet the needs of street children.

Fourthly, street children are in greater danger of abuse of all forms (physical, psychological as well as sexual abuse). Most notably, the street children are in constant battles against sexual abuse by adults and even fellow street children. Although this happens everywhere in the country, in the large cities it is even worse.

Community Perceptions About Street Children in Tanzania

For a long time, communities' perception about street children in Tanzania, just like in most other countries in Africa, has been negative and characterized with stereotypes. Most urbanites suspect that street children are potential thieves, or they can bring to society havoc, health and social disasters. Street children are, in most cases viewed as potential criminals.

Street children are seen as a problem and threat to a society. As a result, instead of being viewed as children with problems who need help from the society they are being victimised (Corsaro 2011). They end up engaging in menace activities for a living instead of going to school. The street children practically in all urban Tanzania go without shelter, food, urban protection, and the like. These children are deprived of the nurturing and love that should have been obtained in a family life (Lugalla and Mbwambo 1999). The communities' negative attitude towards street children in urban areas and the country generally account for the poorly designed and inefficient intervention programs as an attempt to address the street children phenomenon in the country.

Attempts to Address the Street Children Phenomenon

The phenomenon of street children in Tanzania is alarming. However, in different periods, a number of concerted initiatives have been made to arrest the problem. This involves efforts made by various stakeholders including religious organizations, NGOs, individuals and the government authority.

A number of orphanages centres have been established that provide for those who have lost their parents for one reason or another. Also, those who left their homes for well-founded reasons are also taken care of in various centres that operate under NGOs, CBOs and religious organisations.

In addition, the government has established and reviewed various laws and policies to protect children so as to reduce occurrence of street children in practically all regions of the country. However, some reports have shown that this has not been so effective yet. At the national level, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare bears the responsibility to coordinate all issues regarding the welfare of most vulnerable children. Basically, the national steering committee for most vulnerable children (MVC) was formed in this regard so as to ensure transparency, efficiency and collaboration.

Moreover, the Ministry of Health and Social welfare has devised a child development policy which aims to educate the public regarding children's rights as well as various ways of caring for the children in the country. This includes guiding, protecting and supporting children generally. However, the policy document is not so clear regarding the MVC as it carters to all children generally without putting specific provisions for this special group.

So the approaches to address the issue of street children in Tanzania could be categorized into two, namely, the institutional approach and the centre-based approach. The institutional approach was akin to a correctional approach whereby street children were seen as wrong doers who should be removed from the streets, constricted for some time and possibly rehabilitated. However, the institutional approach has not been so successful.

On the other hand, the centre-based approach assumes that it is possible and desirable to remove street children from their street environment for at least short periods. Some individual children would make use of these centres purely on a voluntary basis. So much will depend and be determined by the centre's ability to meet the needs of these children. Majority of such centers are run by NGOs and religious organisations. These centres provide the children with the basic needs, including health and education needs, further education or vocational training and offer opportunities for the street children to express their problems and needs so that they can obtain the desired sort of support and advice.

However, more research is required to understand the applicability, effectiveness, problems and challenges faced by the various stakeholders in the course of helping street children.

CONCLUSION

Street behaviour or the street children phenomenon is a big problem in various cities in the world, but it is even worse in Sub-Saharan African countries. Tanzania as a developing country has been experiencing worsening impacts of street children phenomenon in practically all its rapidly growing urban areas. In the big cities, the family, which is considered to be a key socialisation agent, has collapsed due to poverty as well as structural social changes. As a result, many children have turned to the street where they have engaged in various menial activities. Another sub group of urban street children are the result of rural urban migration. Such children have run from poor life conditions in the rural areas to seek a better life in bigger cities.

In summary, based on the review of literature that was conducted during this study, the causes of street children include general poverty, loss of family ties (due to polygamy, separation between parents, etc), some unwelcome traditional practices (such as forced marriages, female genital mutilation, etc), and the HIV/AIDS epidemic affecting families.

Therefore, there is need for concerted efforts by all stakeholders to understand the street children phenomenon starting from the source so as to devise better solutions of helping them and preventing the problem from recurring. Frequent mayhem between government law enforcement agents and the street children can be reduced and done away with through a careful investigation of the matter coupled with training of law enforcement personnel as well as urban officials.

In order to obtain a long-term solution of living in cities free from street children there is need for more detailed research and collaboration among all stakeholders to pull together their resources and time so as to address the street children phenomenon as a team.

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