



## Livelihood of Street Children and Their Quality of Life: A Cross Sectional Study in Etawah District

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** "Street children" is a term used to describe those kids who live and work in streets. Children are exposed to several hazards and catastrophe which lead them to vulnerable and pessimistic experiences. Their daily life and poor quality of life uncover them to various threats that makes them victims for drug trafficking, prostitution, organ trade and slavery.

**Material & Methods:** A cross sectional study was conducted in Etawah city from May 2017 to Oct 2018. Street children aged 13-18 years, who live and/or work on streets of Etawah. Street children were looked for at identified hotspots of street children in Etawah city like market places, railway station, stalls/dhabas/hotels etc. and they were selected for the study by Snowball sampling. Information was extracted from face to face interview using pre-structured questionnaire.

**Results:** Study enrolled 145 street children, 35% haven't attended school, 30% leave away from family. Street level vending, working in dhabas and mechanic assistant were common professions. Working children had poor quality of life.

**Conclusion:** More than four fifth of the street children were working for their survival, street level vending, working in dhabas were common occupations involved. Quality of life was poor among working street children.

**Keywords:** Street children, child abuse, Quality of Life

## INTRODUCTION

"Street children" are traditionally narrated as those children who reside and/or work on streets.<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly declared the year 1979 as the International Year of the Child (IYC). This was to focus on their particular needs and to encourage national action to preserve the children's rights especially for the most exempted. Thereafter, the priority on street children gained prominence in social science and public health.<sup>2</sup> The State of World's Children's Report for 2012 estimates that world's cities and towns have seen a magnitude of tens of millions of street chil-

dren, which is rising with global population growth, migration and increasing urbanization.<sup>3</sup>

Children of the street often remain far from family members, they work and sleep on streets. They are deprived of the basic amenities of shelter, nutrition, medical care, recreation and sleeps on the roadside.<sup>4</sup> They either self-employ as rag pickers, beggars and street vendors or work for others. Moreover, their occupation varied according to location, season and availability of work.<sup>5,6</sup>

Street children are exposed to several hazards, repetitive exposure of relentless environment and

their lifestyles leaves them more vulnerable to pessimistic experiences along with social stigma, which has a greater impact on self-esteem.<sup>7</sup> Their daily life and poor quality of life expose them to various threats that makes them victims for drug trafficking, prostitution, organ trade and slavery in numerous metropolitan cities of India.

Along with the nations pace, Etawah has also achieved notable urbanisation in the past few decades. This study looks at the situation among groups of vulnerable street children in Etawah district with the objective to study the types of occupations street children indulge themselves to support their life and to assess their quality of life based on working status.

## METHODOLOGY

A community based cross sectional study was conducted in Etawah city. The study population included street children aged 13-18 years, who live and/or work on streets of Etawah. The age group specificity was because of limitations of questionnaires used for data collection. Study was carried out from January 2017 to October 2018. Street children were looked for at identified hotspots of street children in Etawah city like market places, railway station, religious places, bus depot, construction places, stalls/ dhabas/ hotels, seasonal fairs, under bridges etc. and they were selected for the study. Study subjects were identified at known places and then further sample was achieved through **snowball sampling technique** i.e. asking the respondents for similar children who would fit the inclusion criteria of the study. As the magnitude of this hidden population is unknown and sampling frame is unavailable. In reference to the study conducted by **Nanda B et al, Edward KF et al, Gaidhane et al, Pagare D et al**<sup>8,9,10,11</sup> a sample of 150 street children were recruited in the study, based on purposive sampling.

**Inclusion Criteria:** Children aged between 13-18 years living and / or working on streets/ roadside stalls/ hotels/ dhabas/ shops etc. or spending a large percentage of their lives, including sleeping on the street and frequent presence at aggregation points even at odd hours were included in the study.

**Exclusion Criteria:** Those street children who were institutionalised in rehabilitation centre or those who were not willing to take part in the study or who were unable to provide information were excluded from the study.

On reaching the hotspots, children who meet the inclusion criteria for selection of study subjects were identified. The purpose of the study was explained

to the street children and they were invited to participate. A rapport was developed with the street children and the interviews were held in a comfortable place where confidentiality could be maintained. The data were collected by face-to-face interview using a structured interview schedule. Each interview lasted for at least 25-30 minutes. Data were collected on general demographic profile, family status, education, medical and health related issues, quality of life, substance use and behaviour. Informed written assent from child and written consent from parents or guardian was taken before the start of the interview.

## Data Analysis:

The data was analysed using MS Excel worksheet and SPSS version 24. World Health Organisation Quality of Life (WHO QOL)<sup>12</sup> was transformed into 0 to 100 score. Results are expressed in terms of Tables & graphs. Mean scores were compared using student t test. Association was studied with chi square test. A p value of <0.05 was considered significant.

## RESULTS

We approached and invited 152 children to take part in the study, among them four were not willing to take part in the study, three children left study in between the interview and weren't able to contact again. Finally, 145 street children were enrolled in the study.

Among 145 respondents, 80 (55%) of them were aged between 13-15 years. The proportion of children on street decreased with age where 80 children belonged to 13-15 years of age compared to 65 children in 16-18 years of age. The gender distribution of street children revealed that a vast majority i.e. 139 (96%) were boys. The educational status of street children revealed that 95 (65 %) street children had attended school for at least one year. The data also revealed that 35% of street children never attended school (Table 1).

**Table 1: Distribution of street children based on socio-demographic characteristics (n=145)**

Variables	Children (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	139 (95.8)
Female	006 (4.2)
<b>Age Groups (years)</b>	
13-15	80 (55)
16-18	65 (45)
<b>Educational Status</b>	
Attended school	95 (65)
Not attended school	50 (35)

**Table 2: Distribution of street children by their place of stay (n=145)**

Place of Stay	Children(%)
<b>Living Arrangements</b>	
Home (with family)	92 (63.4)
Home (Relative/ friends)	15 (10.3)
Street/footpath/ railway station with family	9 (6.2)
Street/footpath/ railway station without family	7 (4.8)
Shop/ establishment at work	18 (12.4)
Others (Dharamshalas)	4 (2.8)
<b>Types of Street Children</b>	
Street Living Children	7 (4.8)
Street Working Children	114 (78.6)
Children of Street families	24 (16.6)
<b>Work</b>	
Rag Picking	6 (4.1)
Street level vending	34 (23.4)
Dhaba/restaurants	25 (17.2)
Mechanic/ assistant	23 (15.9)
Construction	24 (16.6)
Transport company	5 (3.4)
Do not work	27 (18.6)

**Table 3: Distribution of street children's based on family and study variables (n=145)**

Variables	Children (%)
<b>Relation with the Family</b>	
Good	91 (62.7)
Average	47 (32.5)
Bad	3 (2)
Very bad	4 (2.8)
<b>Family Problems &amp; Friends (N=145)*</b>	
Drug use by a family member	54 (37.2)
Family fights	43 (29.6)
Beaten and abused by family	29 (20.0)
Trust worthy friends	106 (73.0)
Access to recreation	70 (48.2)
<b>Work Study Matrix</b>	
Work as well as study	24 (17)
Work but do not study	94 (65)
Do not work, only study	15 (10)
Neither work nor study	12 (08)

\*Multiple response

Table 2 presents the living arrangements of the study subjects. There were 92 (64%) subjects who resided along with their parents in their respective home. Eighteen study subjects (12%) resided at place of work/ establishment, followed by other

places of stay like on street with family or without family 6% & 5% respectively.

The street children in the present study when classified as per UNICEF's definition, seven children (5%) belonged to street living children, who lived on streets, footpaths or railway stations. Majority i.e. 144 respondents were street working children who were working on the streets and return to their families by night. It was also observed that most of the children were working willingly of unwillingly just to support their familial economy. Occupation decides the place of stay among few of the respondents. Majority of the respondents were involved in street level vending (23.4%) followed by various other occupation like working at dhabas/ hotels, unskilled labour, mechanic assistant which constituted 17%, 16.5% and 15.8% respectively. (Table 2)

When asked about relationship with the family 91 respondents graded as good, 47 respondents graded as average and few graded as bad and very bad i.e. 3 & 4 children respectively. Familial problems like drug use among any of the family member, frequent fights, verbal or physical abuse by the family members were also found to be contributing to the cause for living on streets. More than one third i.e. 54 of the respondents had history of substance abuse in the family, 43 (29.6%) of study subjects had frequent fights in the family, 29 (20%) study subjects experienced verbal or physical abuse by family members. Being on streets, children have gone through very tough time on streets, only three-fourth i.e. 106 respondents had friends on whom they could trust, only 70 (48%) of respondents had access to recreation facility.

Table 3 represents the work-study matrix of the study subjects. More than two-third i.e. 94 of the respondents were just working but did not study, followed by 24 subjects who worked along with their studies.

Street children working full time had poor quality of life scores both in overall quality of life and physical domain when compared to children working part time and those who are not working. The above variation in quality of life with work study matrix was found to be statistically significant (overall QOL: p = 0.03& Physical QOL: p = 0.02). (Table 4).

**Table 4: Comparison of mean score of quality of life verses Status of work of street children**

	Overall QOL	Environmental health	Social Health	Psychological health	Physical health
Full time working (85)	54.71± 10.37	45.47 ± 14.06	59.21 ± 19.03	50.53 ± 12.77	63.61 ± 10.91
Part time working (33)	59.34 ± 11.30	49.14 ± 14.15	62.37 ± 13.35	56.69 ± 14.46	69.15 ± 11.87
Not working (27)	59.42 ± 9.08	48.95 ± 14.45	65.43 ± 16.12	54.93 ± 13.55	68.38 ± 9.89
ANOVA (P values)	0.03	0.326	0.243	0.055	0.021

## DISCUSSION

The study covered a sample of 145 street children. The study sample contributed 96% of male and 4% of female street children. Skewed distribution of gender is well known fact and is supported by UNICEF's study on street children of zimbzmbwe.<sup>1</sup> Observation of smaller percentage of street girls in contrast to boys may be attributed to male dominated society, a female child is restricted household work. Save the children conducted a multi-centric study named Life on streets in major cities of India also reported (37%) less proportion of females, which ranged from 21-43 percent in various cities like Delhi, Patna, Mughal Sarai, Lucknow etc...<sup>13</sup> Another survey by save the children organisation reported 21% of female street children on the streets of Delhi.<sup>14</sup>

As far as education is concerned this study shows 65% of the street children completed at least one year of schooling. Thirty-five percent of children couldn't attend school. A census study in Mumbai also reported around 65% street children attended school. A survey report on street children in Pune reveals 47% of them were illiterate. Despite of provision of free education, street children remain deprived of basic right. This finding is similar with studies conducted by various organisations.<sup>1,13,15</sup>

UNICEF classifies street children into three categories; street living children, street working children and children of street families. Our study concluded that most of the children returned to their homes after their work either to their home or to their street families. Our study concluded that only 5% were street living children. It's also seen that street living children and street working children had more proportion of young children. This group of street children are more vulnerable and they are at higher risk of abuse and exploitation. A survey conducted in 6 major cities of India also estimates 6% of street living children, another survey in Mumbai named '**Making Street Children Matter**' also estimated 8% of street living children. Whereas a survey on the streets of Delhi has estimated 28% of street living children.<sup>13,14,16</sup>

In our study, street children are left with no option than to earn and support themselves, it was also observed that most of the street children start earning to support their families.<sup>16</sup> It was seen that 18.6% of the street children were unemployed and managed their expenses either by getting money from family or by begging. Most of the children earned their livelihood through street level vending, working as mechanic assistant, labour at constructions, rag picking etc. Urbanisation has increased vast variety of opportunities to earn and these children are vulnerable group who agrees to work less money, which makes employers to hire

them to save the cost of man power. Numerous studies have enumerated these occupations as the most common source of earning among street children.<sup>5,13,14,16</sup>

The results of this study shows that a majority of children returned to their houses after daily routine on streets, they stayed either with their parents or relatives. It was unfortunate to see 26 percent of the street children live either on footpath / railway station/ place of work/ dharmshalas etc. It was observed that these children tend to change their place of stay frequently depending on the situations. Understanding the work study matrix of street children is essential for decision making and policy implementation. In our study 26% of the street children continued their studies, among them 16% managed both work and studies. Eighteen percent of the street children did not work, 10% of them weren't even studying. It can be clearly seen that majority of the children dropped studies for earning money. These findings were in line with a survey conducted in major cities of India depicting the need for special focus on these group of children.<sup>13</sup> A census in Pune says that 50% of street children were currently studying which is way more than observed in this study, which may be because of difference in age group of children involved in survey.<sup>15</sup> **Mukherjee C** reported that 31% of street children continued schooling.<sup>18</sup> Situational analysis of major cities and Etawah reveals shows presence of NGOs in bigger cities focusing on street children has helped to an extent by providing non formal education skill training, which are lacking in this setting.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes the picture of street children is also a burden in developing city like Etawah, but the characteristics vary a little where a notable proportion of children were educated and live along with family. Even then they choose to work on streets due to various reason. Full time working children had lower quality of life in all the domains.

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