

The Growing Phenomenon of Street Children in Tehran: An Empirical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the increasing phenomenon of street children in Tehran. It focuses on the challenges and risks these children encounter and the overall implications on the general populace and the country as a whole. The study adopted both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were qualitative design (face-to-face interview). The population include all street children in Tehran. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select a total of 3725 street children for this research. Information gathered was coded, categorized and analyzed using EZ Test Software to quantify the results and demonstrate the frequency of responses to the open-ended questions relating to the research interest. The study found that there are two categories of street children in Tehran (children of the street and children on the street), they experience several challenges such as extortion, exploitation, rape, and harassment. Furthermore, they engage in different activities to get money or survive. The study concludes that disrupted socioeconomic structure of families and the influx of different categories of people into the cities are the major causes of the phenomenon. The study, therefore, recommends that addressing the socioeconomic challenges should be the first approach toward ending the menace.

Keywords: Family Structure, Poverty, Security, Socioeconomic, Street Children, Tehran, Urbanization

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, Iranian society has been experiencing rapid changes in the demographic structure and socioeconomic condition. There has been an increase in the population growth rate, economic instability, unemployment, income inequality, and poverty among others (Ardalan et al., 2002). In addition, the development and expansion of cities which resulted from internal migration of (unemployed) people from different corners of the country in search for a better living condition and influx of refugees from neighboring

countries are also among the challenges the Iranian authorities have been struggling to cope with in the recent past years (Sadollahi, 2016).

The state of affairs in Iran according to Haddad and Moghadam (2011) is largely responsible for the various social issues the country is presently facing. For instance, one of the emerging social phenomena is the alarming increase in the number of unrestrained children that wander around the streets and public places in major cities (Vameghi, 2006). Rahbari (2016) observed that children from the lower class families living in cities such as Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Kerman increasingly drop out of school or stop attending school and are compelled by their parents and guardians to work because they cannot provide for their basic needs. Furthermore, some of the children are abandoned or left alone to look after themselves, while others run away from home to escape from the horrendous conditions (Zand and Rahim, 2011).

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In Tehran (focus of this study), children are found on the roadside and public places such as markets, subways, and bus stations. Some engage in selling petty items while many begs for money and food. Hoseini (2005) reported that the average age of these children is between 6 and 10 years old; they were either forced to work to support the family or have no one to cater for their needs, as a result, they left home to survive. Sadollah (2016) and Vameghi et al. (2011) stressed that most of these children are from divorced or single-parent households, abusive or unhealthy family. Furthermore, a significant number of their parents lack the necessary skills or educational qualification to be gainfully employed. Many of them live in slums while even more are homeless.

The dangers inherent in children living and wandering the street environment are immense. It makes them vulnerable to all sort of abuses, diseases, use and abuse of drugs, and other antisocial behaviors (Joel and Jessie, 1999). However, the phenomenon of street children and the potential threats they may pose to the Iranian society, particularly in the area of national security, has not received adequate attention and/or appropriate measures from the authority (Sadollah, 2016). Moreover, the actual number of street children in Tehran and other cities in Iran is not known, this is due to the lack of official figures. Furthermore, empirical academic research that critically examined the existence of these children, the challenges they encounter and the implications on the general welfare of the citizenry is scanty.

It is against this background that this study focuses on the rapid increase in the number of children living and working on the streets of Tehran, the risks they are susceptible to, and the likely dangers they may later constitute to the country, most especially at this critical time of increase in the recruitment of young people by terrorist organizations around the globe. They could easily be recruited by terrorist groups to incite radical attacks. In addition, it has become necessary to research into this issue due to the general public's casual attitude toward the street children. The objectives of this study, therefore, are to:

- a. Investigate the major causes and challenges encountered by street children in Tehran
- b. Examine how street children in Tehran survive (the various activities they engage in)
- c. Find out how the street environment has influenced their behaviors (such as using and abusing drugs/substances and other delinquent behaviors)
- d. Examine the likely implications of their presence, and provide recommendations on possible ways to address the issue.

2. CONCEPTUALISING STREET CHILDREN

A range of attempts has been made by academic scholars and the international community to define street children. Nevertheless, there is a lack of consensus among researchers on a single accepted definition. Among the various attempts are the definition given by the Inter-NGOs Programme for Street Children and Youth, where street children is defined as “any girl or boy...for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings and wasteland) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults” (Benitez, 2011. p. 7). Ennew cited in Arthur (2013. p. 19) defines street children as “those for whom the street more than their family has become their home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults.” The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) describes street children in two main categories; children on the street and children of the street (UNICEF, 2001).

The first category refers to those children who spend a large number of hours on the streets during the day but later return to their parents or relations at night and who maintain good family ties. Most of them work to support the income of their family with the consent of their parents. The second category refers to those children who permanently live on the street with loose family contact, they might have for one reason, or the other ran away from home and abandoned their relatives or have been abandoned by their family. They live with other homeless children and adults on the streets; begging or working is their only means of surviving or getting money (UNICEF, 2001). A new category that emerged lately is the children born on the street by parents who are also of the street (usually teenage-parents), making them street families (Lugalla, 1995).

The problem of street children is a universal phenomenon. It is not restricted to a particular geographical location (Benitez, 2011). In fact, countries around the world (most especially developed nations) throughout their various phases of development had experienced the challenges of homelessness and street children; many are still battling with how to cope with the situation till today (UNICEF, 2001). This, therefore, explains the fact this menace is not a new phenomenon around the world. Literature revealed that terms such as the runaway youth, street waifs, stray children, and street urchin amongst others were the common names given to street children during the industrial revolution and urbanization in Europe (Cunningham, 2014). For instance, it was reported that there were over 30,000 street children

living and working in the streets of London in 1848 (Laura Del Col, 1988). Similarly, 7 million children were homeless and living in the streets of Russia in 1922; also in the United States of America, evidence showed that thousands of street children lived in the streets of America in the 1970s (Kozol, 2012). Today, the phenomenon of street children is still being experienced all over the world. It is prevalent in India, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Iran, Brazil, Nigeria, Australia, France, and other parts of the world (Benitez, 2011).

Although UNESCO estimated that around 150 million children now live on the streets across the globe today, the exact number of street children is still unknown (Sana' a, 1999). Analysts have questioned this figure and called it a number game. However, Benitez cited in Arthur (2013. p. 28) noted that "the exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world." The numbers are increasing as the global population and urbanization grow, and there is continued economic instability with the living condition of the people getting much more unbalanced or undesirable. Thus, the major factors responsible for the increase in the phenomenon of street children globally can be attributed to the world's population explosion, socioeconomic stress, and terrible situations that families encounter due to industrialization and urbanization that often distort the family structure which forced parents to neglect their traditional roles as caregivers (Lugalla and Mbwambo, 1996; Le Roux and Smith, 1998).

2.1. Risks and Challenges Street Children Encounter

The challenges street children face and the devastating impact on them vary depending on the category. In general, street children have difficulties in getting basic needs such as good source of food, shelter, clean water, clothing, and health care for themselves. They suffer from lack of parental supervision and protection (even for those that keep good contact with families), as a result, they lack good moral, cultural and emotional supports children need to grow (Lugalla and Mbwambo, 1996). They are prone to abuse, exploitation, and extortion by adult and law enforcement violence (Patel, 1990; Nte et al., 2000).

Most of these children are known to be very hard working as they struggle to survive through their daily activities. Some of them sell on the roads, subways, highways, and railway stations; while some others engage in car-washing, shoe-shining, and other petty activities to feed themselves and take care of other needs (UNICEF, 2007). While doing these, many have been killed by diseases and crushed by cars and

trains. Many were found dead on the pavements and other places they sleep, as a result of exposure to cold and harsh weather, while many have been the victims of gang violence, rivalry, and drugs (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009). In addition, they often grow up to be members of gangs, street adults, and readymade labors to be recruited to foment troubles (Bapat and Agarwal, 2003). This is apparent in many African and South-American countries where politicians, drug lords, and rebels recruit children as thugs and fighters to wreak havoc (Furley, 1995).

Furthermore, street children (most especially girls) are forced to grow up and mature quickly. As a result, they are exposed to unprotected sexual behaviors that make them vulnerable to infections and sexually transmitted diseases (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009). Many street girls do offer sex to the street gangs in exchange for security, shelter, and other needs; they are often forced with threats that cannot make them refuse any unsafe sexual intimacy (Lugalla and Mbwambo, 1996). In addition, they often easily fall prey to traffickers who promised them a better life and living condition abroad (UNICEF, 2001).

In addition, for security purpose, street children form peer networks or groups among themselves with leaders and group norms. Members of each group are expected to obey the norms and pledge allegiance to the group. The group, in turn, protects and shelter members in time of trouble and need. Some of the groups engage in risky activities such as drug dealings, robbery, and theft to survive. In addition, some of the groups later developed to be gangs as members grow into adults (Le Roux and Smith, 1998). However, peer group formation among street girls is quite different from that of boys. Lugalla and Mbwambo (1996) reported that street girls usually build their group and group leadership around a member who has a sexual or intimate relationship with a leader among the boys.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Setting/Location

The setting of this study is Tehran. Tehran is the capital city of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is one of the 31 provinces of Iran located in the north of the central plateau with an area of 18,909 km² (7301 m²). The population of Tehran is 8.3 million (around 18% of the entire population of Iran). In addition, Tehran is one of the richest provinces in Iran; it accounts for at least 29% of the country's gross domestic product and the most developed. Furthermore, Tehran is the administrative, commercial, and financial center of Iran.

All nooks and crannies (public, open, and hidden places) such as roads, markets, slums, and other imaginable places where street children live or carry out their daily activities in Tehran were surveyed. This was done to ensure that the study captures a significant population of street children in Tehran.

3.2. Population and Sampling Techniques

The population of this study includes all categories of street children in Tehran. Purposive and snowball sampling technique was used to select a total of 3725 street children as respondents for this research. The combination of these two methods allows the researcher to reach a wide range of these children. Using a single sampling method might not have provided access to this wider respondents. It should be noted that 3800 street children were initially surveyed; however, some of them later withdrew from the survey voluntarily.

3.3. Data Collection

This study used both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source was a cross-sectional survey research design. The face-to-face interview was used to collect (qualitative) data from the respondents. The interviews were conducted in the Persian language with the assistance of 8 research experts. The interview questions were divided into two segments - the first covered the demographic information of the respondents, while the second focused on the issue of life and surviving on the street. Among the questions, the interviewed covered include: How do you feed yourself or get food? What type of works or activities do you engage in and how often? What are the problems you usually encounter? Have you ever tried cigarette or other substances, how was the 1st time like?

In addition, the secondary sources include both academic and non-academic literature published in journals, books, newspapers, magazines, and internet. The literature was analyzed to present a clear understanding of the existence and challenges of street children in Tehran and Iran as a whole.

3.4. Analysis

The information gathered was coded, categorized and analyzed using EZ Test Software in generating simple percentage distributions on some factor analyses of the responses to the open-ended questions relating to the research interest. Furthermore, thematic analysis was used to further present the views of some respondents. EZ Test Software is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program used in quantifying the results of a study, demonstrating the frequency of responses to each question. In other word, it links code with text or data to perform complex model building.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic distribution of the respondents is presented in Figures 1-3. From the chart, it can be observed that 75% of the street children were male and 25% were female. This

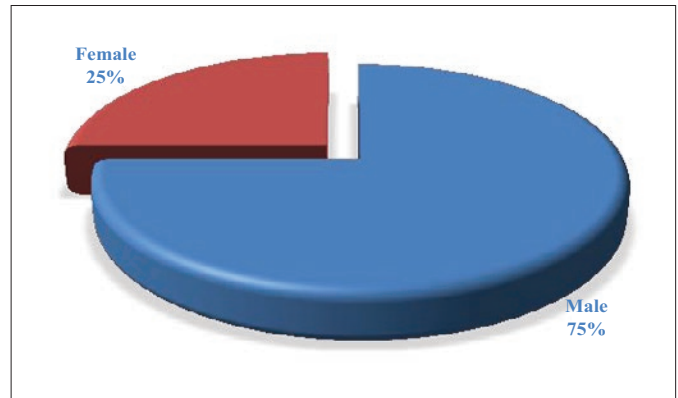


Figure 1. Gender of the respondents.
Source. Researcher’s Field Survey, 2017

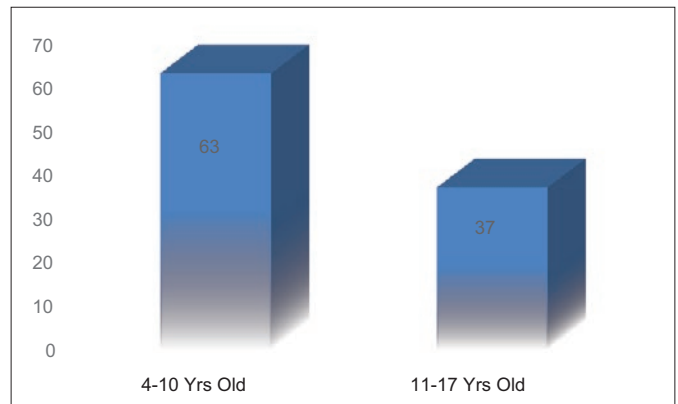


Figure 2. Age distribution of the respondents.
Source. Researcher’s Field Survey, 2017

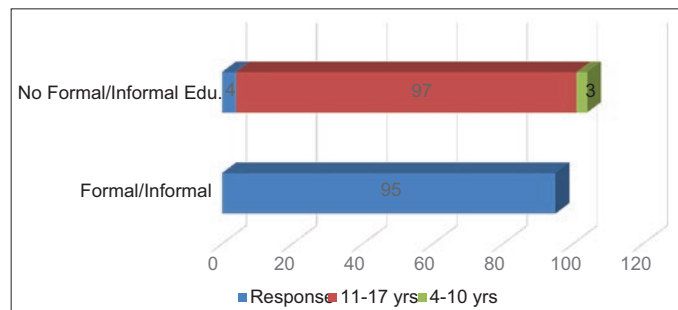


Figure 3. Educational background of the respondents.
Source. Researcher’s Field Survey, 2017

result indicates that the majority of the respondents that participated in this research were boys. In addition, the age distribution of the respondents was categorized into two: 4–10 years old and 11–17 years old. The majority (63%) are between the ages of 4 and 11 years old and 37% fall between the ages of 11 and 17 years old. Moreover, 96% of these children had not or never attended any formal or informal school, while only 4% had attended school (at a basic level) but dropped out due to financial challenges of their parents. Furthermore, 97% of those who had attended basic schools were between the ages of 11 and 17 years old and 3% were between the ages of 4 and 10 years old. These indicate that the majority of the street children in Tehran do not attend formal school or informal vocational training.

In addition, 72% of these children still have both parents alive; 68% of the said 72% still live with both parents; and 42% live with one parent due to divorce or separation. Furthermore, 28% were orphans, 25% of the (28%) orphans have lost both parents, 48% have lost their fathers and 27%

have lost their mothers [Figures 4-6]. Moreover, while 74% of these parents have no meaningful means of income (jobless), 26% have casual jobs (such as driving job, selling petty items, and cleaning jobs) that earn them meagre income [Figures 7]. These results imply that the majority of the street children in Tehran have at least one parent alive and that the majority of their parents do not have a significant source of income.

These findings, therefore, corroborate the results of the State Welfare Organization of Iran where it was reported that street children in the major cities in Iran came from families and parents with poverty, low incomes or unemployed, divorced or single-parent households, abusive or unhealthy union, and host of others (Hoseini, 2005). Furthermore, the findings agree with the results presented by Vameghi et al. (2011) where they reported that 50–55% of homeless or street

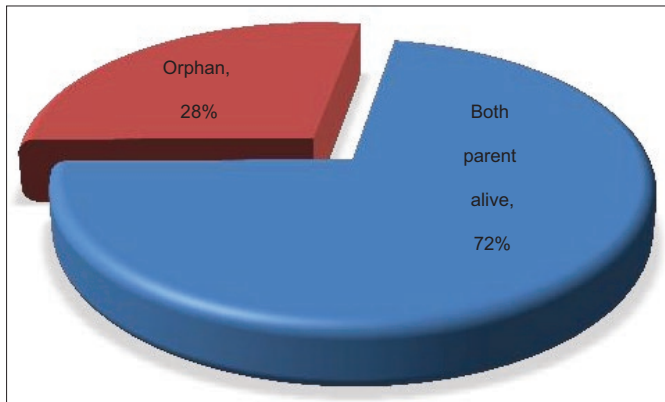


Figure 4. Parental information of the respondents.
Source. Researcher’s Field Survey, 2017

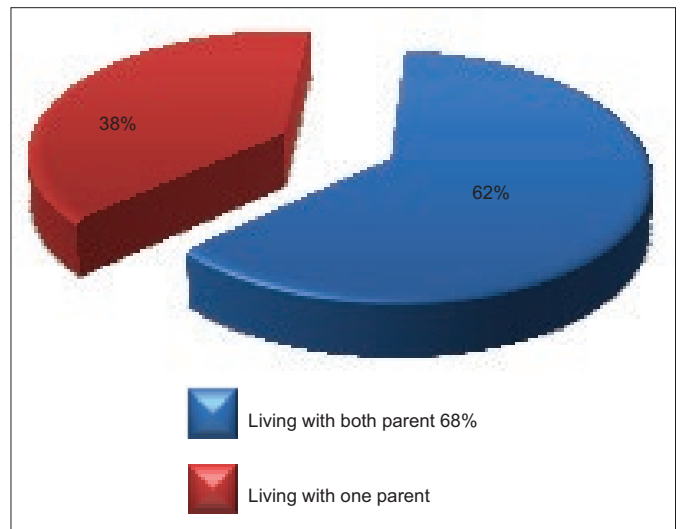


Figure 6. Distribution of Respondents Living with parent.
Source. Researcher’s Field Survey, 2017

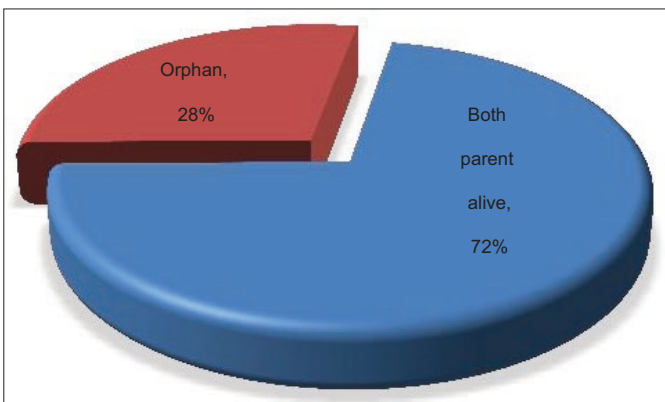


Figure 5. Distribution of Respondents who have lost at least one parent.
Source. Researcher’s Field Survey, 2017

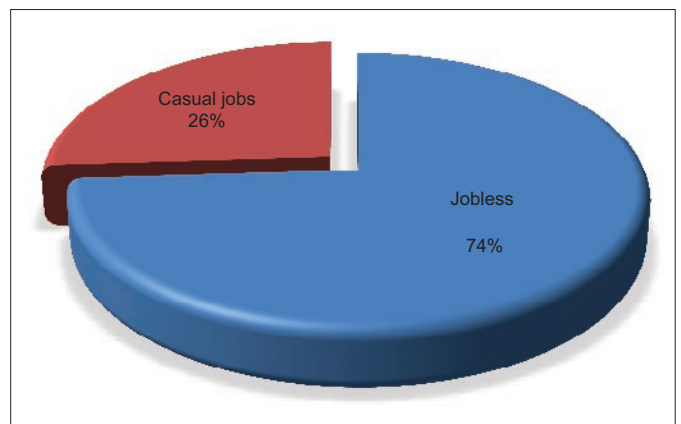


Figure 7. Respondents’ parent employment.
Source. Researcher’s Field Survey, 2017

children in Iran had lived with divorced or separated parents. Moreover, Lugalla and Mbwambo (1996) and Le Roux and Smith (1998) also found that the major factors responsible for the increase in street children globally include but not limited to the poor socioeconomic condition which has put a large number of parents in unbearable situations that make it impossible to provide the basic needs for their children.

Moreover, 83% of these children were Iranian, while 17% were Afghan [Figure 8]. This indicates that a significant number of street children in Tehran came from Iranian families, while a handful of them came from Afghan families living in Iran. This finding, therefore, invalidates the result reported by Moradi et al. (2015) where they found that 73.7% of the street children in Tehran were sons and daughters of migrants from Afghanistan and other neighboring countries, while 26.3% are from Iranian family. Moradi et al. only

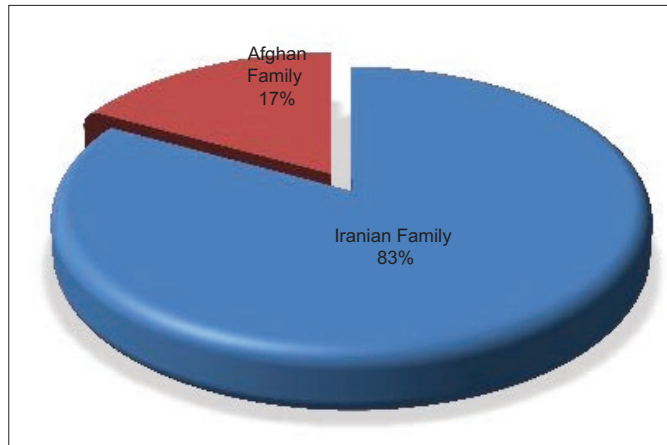


Figure 8. Respondents' country of origin

Table 1: Distribution of respondents on the category of street children

Category of street children	Frequency (%)
Children on the street	2384 (64)
Children of the street	1341 (36)
Total	3725 (100)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2017

considered a few samples in their study (<500 street children in Tehran) to arrive at this conclusion. This position is, therefore, invalid; as the findings of this study clearly revealed that 83% of street children surveyed were Iranians, while only 17% were children of migrants from Afghanistan.

In addition, the result revealed that there are two categories of street children in Tehran: Children on the street and children of the street. The first category constitutes 64% of street children in Tehran [Table 1]. Usually, they return home between 11 pm and 12 am to sleep, though some in this category reported that they sleep outside sometimes. The majority (73%) of them also reported that their parents sent them to sell goods or beg for money on the street, while 27% reported that they go to the street because there is nowhere or place to go during the day (e.g., school). Therefore, the major reason why many of them go to the street is to support the family income and/or to get money to provide for the basic needs of their parent and younger ones [Table 2].

However, 36% belongs to the second category - those that do not go back home at all [Table 1]. The majority (56%) of children in this category have lost at least one of their parents and have no one to provide for their basic needs, 44% either run away from home (due to such factors as abuse, maltreatment, and constant fight between the parents) or have been abandoned by their parents or family. The major reason this category reported for living or working on the street was that "they needed to survive" [Table 2].

Furthermore, respondents reported that they engage in different activities to get money and feed themselves. While 42% reported that they sell petty items such as handkerchief, socks, belt, nail cutter, shaving blade or razor, cookies, flowers, and fruits, cigarettes (including hooker and shisha ingredients), 26% engage in scavenging activities such waste collectors. Furthermore, 12% reported that they run errand for people who give them money, and 20% reported that they beg for money [Table 3]. However, it was gathered from the interviews that nearly all of the street children in Tehran had begged for money (particularly when they are new in the

Table 2: Distribution of respondents on the reasons for roaming (working or living) on the street

Reasons for roaming on the street	Children on the street (64% of the respondents)	Children of the street (36% of the respondents)
Get money to support the family with parent consent	1740 (73%)	0
Idleness	644 (27%)	0
No one to cater for the basic needs due to loss of (at least one) parent	0	751 (56%)
Run away from home (due to abuse, maltreatment) or abandoned by family	0	590 (44%)
Total	2384 (100%)	1341 (100%)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2017

system) to raise little capital to start a trade. Furthermore, most of them resort to begging when their financial condition or sales seem bad. These findings indicate that street children in Tehran struggle such as every other person to earn a living through buying and selling as well as begging for money.

Besides, it was observed that some of the children have some items such as cigarette, razor in their pockets. Most of them claimed that these items are among the things they trade. This, therefore, led us to ask questions about the use and abuse of substances. It was found that most of the boys (82% of both categories of street children) had either used/smoked or currently smoke cigarette; gisak and taryak (locally made substances); hashish and cannabis, while 18% had not used drugs or currently smoke. However, 32% of the girls (both categories) had either used or are at present using substances, while 68% had not used or presently using substances [Table 4]. In addition, it was also observed that most of the street children (both boys and girls) who sell petty items are reported to be agents that distribute or sell cigarette and other illegal drugs such as cannabis, opiate, and addictive prescription drugs such as tramadol. These results imply that street children are among drug users in Tehran. In addition, illegal drug dealers make use of these children to distribute their products. This is perhaps due to the fact that children will draw no suspicion or police attention.

These findings, therefore, validate the results reported by Rahbari (2016) and Zand and Rahimi (2011) where they found that street children in major cities in Iran engage in the use and abuse of drugs and other illegitimate activities such as theft, shoplifting, and pick-pocketing. Similarly, a research conducted on street children in Kerman, Zand and Rahimi

(2011) reported that street children in Kerman province of Iran persistently engage in delinquent activities such stealing, fighting, smoking and substance use, and abuse. In addition, Ahmadvani et al. (2002) reported that common among street children in Iran is the use or abuse of alcohol and/or substance together with a cigarette and prostitution.

Moreover, since most of these children had used or currently using drugs, it was assumed that there are possibilities that they may also engage in other delinquent behaviors. From the responses to the question on whether they had engaged in delinquent behaviors such as stealing, shoplifting, and pick-pocketing, it was found that a significant number of street children (both boys and girls in all categories) in Tehran had engaged in such delinquent activities. While 67% (boys and girls) confirmed that they had engaged in stealing, shoplifting, and pickpocketing, and there is the possibility of engaging in those crimes if the opportunity presents itself again, 33% reported that they had not engaged in such activities [Table 5]. Furthermore, 31% of girls had engaged in prostitution (i.e., allowing street adults to be intimate with them for security and/or financial purposes) [Table 6]. However, most of them consider the act as a way of survival, rather than as prostitution.

Furthermore, the result also indicates that street children in Tehran are facing a range of challenges which often expose them to harsh living condition and make them vulnerable to serious health and social problems. Common problem reported was extortion and exploitation by adults. Some of them claimed that *“some of the older people collect money from us, we must give them money at the end of every day.”* *“I must give money to some older people before I can sleep in the lodge (usually under bridge or hut) during the winter and spring. We do not go there during summer, we sleep together (with other children) outside (in front of stores) because the weather condition is not bad.”* Furthermore, some reported that *“we keep our money with some of the store owners in the market, but anytime we go to them to collect it, they give us little money and promised to pay the rest in the future.”* Similarly, some noted that *“we used to keep our money with some people before, they spend it and never give it back. We do not trust anybody again, we spend all our money or keep it somewhere safe.”* Many of them stated that *“we*

Table 3: Distribution of respondents' activities on the street

Activities	Frequency (%)
Selling petty items	1565 (42)
Scavenging	968 (26)
Running errand	447 (12)
Begging for money	745 (20)
Total	3725 (100)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2017

Table 4: Distribution of respondents' response to use and abuse of drugs

Items	Street boys (75% of all the respondents)	Street girls (25% of all the respondents)
Yes	2291 (82%)	298 (32%)
No	503 (18%)	633 (68%)
Total	2794 (100%)	931 (100%)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2017

Table 5: Distribution of respondents' response on engaging in delinquent behaviors such as stealing, shoplifting, and pickpocketing

Items	Frequency (%)
Yes	2496 (67)
No	1229 (33)
Total	3725 (100)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2017

Table 6: Distribution of respondents' response to engaging in prostitution

Items	Frequency (%)
Yes	289 (31)
No	642 (69)
Total	931 (100)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2017

bury our money in the ground because some people will collect it from us (they often search us every night) and steal from us."

In addition, all the respondents admitted that health problems are a major challenge. Some reported that *"we get sick many times, our friends take us to the pharmacy. We pay money (usually token) and they give us medication."* Some noted that *"we have lost our friends because of sickness and diseases."* *"Some were killed by cold, train, bus and attack or beaten by some groups. We do fight sometimes with people that do not belong to our group, who want to dominate or take control of our market area (territory)."* This finding reveals that street children in Tehran are at serious risk and that boundary or territorial rivalry exists among street children in Tehran.

In addition, most of the street girls reported that *"some of us are often raped, harassed, and physically abused by boys and adults on the street."* Furthermore, some reported that *"they have no choice than to be intimate with some of the adults in order to be allowed to sleep safely and protected from any attacks and harassments."* Similarly, some stated that *"if you failed to be intimate with them, it is even more dangerous out here, because one will be exposed to all sort of molestation. However, engaging in sexual intimacy with a member of a group will make you feel safe and have strong confidence that there is someone to fight for you and even provide for your basic needs when you don't have."* However, younger girls see this condition as terrible and hard to survive. Furthermore, it was observed that the majority of the children surveyed were suffering from skin and ear infections, and mouth and teeth related diseases. These findings are in consonance with the result submitted by Ahmadkhani et al. (2002) and Ardalan et al. (2002) where they found that street children (most especially girls) in Iran experience sexual and violent abuse from both the general

public and peers. Furthermore, Ghasemzade (2003) reported that there is the prevalence of various health challenges among the street children across the globe.

5. IMPLICATIONS

The growing phenomenon of street children in the major cities of Iran requires urgent attention than it has received in recent times. These children are allowed to live and grow on the street without a proper direction or acquiring of any skills and education that may shape their future. Very soon many of them will grow up to be street adults with ambition and aspiration for good and prosperous life without having any meaningful skills and education that may be used to attain their dreams. They will somehow feel deprived and may want to achieve their desires at all cost. Therefore, the only available means would be turning to illegal or unlawful activities. Furthermore, the street adults will somehow have children who will then be raised in the same way, thereby multiplying the threat and challenges.

Moreover, the fact that street children are prone to infections and diseases - including sexually transmitted and other contagious diseases, their presence and association with the public could result in disease outbreak in communities where they live and work. In addition, one major dilemma that disrupted many communities in Africa and South America is the recruitment of children as soldiers or fighters (Furley, 1995). Literature revealed that the menace of child soldiers started with the recruitments of street children (Kopoka, 2000; Bayden and G. S, 1997). These children are readymade laborers awaiting anyone who may need their services. They already possess all the essential elements to make them warriors, armed robbers, cultists, political thugs, and above all terrorists. Thus, they can easily be recruited by the enemies of the state to cause internal violence.

The overall implications of all these are that there would be an increase in the number of indiscriminate rapes, gang attacks and violence, and the emergence of drug lords which would make communities and its people unsafe. People may find it difficult to go out or carry out their daily activities freely as a result of fear of gang attacks. Consequently, the national economies and productivity and foreign investment would be affected. Thus, as long as these children remain on the street, they will continue to pose threats to the national security of the country.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The phenomenon of street children across the globe is a social problem that needs to be studied within the social context

and subjected to social solutions. As literature revealed, the phenomenon resulted from the undesirable socioeconomic condition and urbanization that encouraged the influx of different categories of people into the cities. Hence, to keep these kids away from the street, more efforts need to be directed toward creating more employment opportunities in the country. Since the public sector cannot accommodate everyone, the authority should design a self-reliance policy such as entrepreneurial and vocational training programs for both educated and uneducated Iranians. Furthermore, a favorable business environment with small and medium credit or loan services, favorable tax system, and other measures that will allow business to thrive should be put in place. These will make Iranians job creators rather than job seekers. In addition, those who are coming into the country as refugees should be incorporated into the programs and should be encouraged to engage in activities that will keep the country safe.

In addition, child-care responsibility policy is an important program government at all levels in Iran should introduce and enforce. Parents should be held responsible for their children in terms of provision for the basic needs. Proper enforcement of such policy will reduce the number of unsupervised children wandering the street. Moreover, the establishment of an institution equipped with modern educational and vocational facilities to educate and train children who are already on the street would be an important approach to rehabilitate and give them a future. Some of the children reported that they have been “arrested, remanded and sometimes handed over to their parents or relations.” This approach will only keep them away from the street for a while. This is because most of these parents sent them to work so as to support the family. However, when such children are caught, they should be taken to this institution to learn one or two things based on their capabilities so as to make them productive.

Finally, the NGOs and other stakeholders need to work with the government to sensitize the general public about the dangers in allowing these children on the street. They should also make sure that the rights of children as specified in the various legislations and treaties are well protected to avoid any forms of abuse and violence against the children.

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