

An Account of Economic Background of Street Children in Selected Wards of Kolkata, West Bengal

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Abstract : *It is generally believed that urbanization and economic expansion are associated and they are treated as significant features of national economic growth and progress. Though, quick urbanization also poses huge challenges for the social and physical environment, particularly through the extensive poverty that results from the rapid urbanization process. It is estimated that the total number of households in slums and pavements areas of Kolkata are living in poverty. Many of the urban poor of Kolkata live in slum and squatter settlements with congested, unhealthy shelter and a lack of basic services. The present article states the economic background of the families of street children in some parts of Kolkata. The work also is an effort to determine the elementary causes responsible for the growth of street children. The paper also evaluates the working scenario and economic activities of street children in the study area.*

Keywords : *Urbanization, Economic expansion, Pavement areas, Slum, Working environment*

Introduction

Street children are the sufferers of economic development, poverty, disparity, and domestic violence, physical and psychological abuse. Every street child has a reason for being on the streets in urban areas. While some children are lured by the assurance of enthusiasm and liberty, the majority are pushed onto the street by extreme anxiety and a realization that they have nowhere else to go. In many countries, street children are considered after their main survival activities. For example, vendors, street gangs, juvenile prostitutes. Street Children is a widely used term in the English language and has other names in other countries such as in Kenya they are known as 'Parking Boys,' the Philippines as 'Pogey Boys,' Brazil as 'Pivets' and India as 'Ragpickers' (UNICEF, 2005). What is noticeable is that street children are deprived and their requirements and problems are outcomes of inadequate basic needs for survival. Street children go through the struggle of providing themselves with basic things such as food, clothing, and shelter. The requirements of street children need an understanding of who they are, what they want, what they do, and how they can be recognized (Lusk, 1989). A street child may be a 'child of the streets' who have no home

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but the streets. The family may have neglected them or may have no members left alive. Such a child has to fight for survival and might move from friend to friend, or live in shelters such as abandoned buildings. A child 'on the street' who is visiting his or her family regularly. The child might even return every night to sleep at home but spends most days and some nights on the street because of poverty, overcrowding, and physical mistreatment at home. A part of a street family who lives on the sidewalks or city squares with the rest of their families. Families displaced because of poverty, natural disasters, poor economic conditions of the nation and large family size may be forced to live on the streets. They move their goods and poor wealth from one place to another place when necessary. The children in this category work on the streets with other members of their families (Shroff, 1987).

Objectives

The main objectives of the present work are:

1. To find out the economic causes or factors responsible for the growth of street children in the study area.
2. To assess the economic conditions as well as the background of the families of street children
3. To determine the economic livelihood pattern of street children in selected wards of Kolkata Metropolitan Areas.

Methodology

The study targeted street children in Kolkata covering 24 Wards as divided into five parts such as North Kolkata (Ward No. 1 to 6), East Kolkata (Ward No. 57 & 58), Central Kolkata (Ward No. 69 to 72); Western part of Kolkata (Ward No. 133 to 139) and South Kolkata (Ward No. 97 to 101) involved interviewing a total sample of 604 street children (n) in the urban areas. 144 street children have interviewed in North, 155 respondents in Eastern Kolkata, 109 samples in Central, 82 children in West and 114 samples in South respectively. Their ages ranged from less than 6 to 16 years and averaged 12 years. There are 353 numbers of street children who are males and 251 are females and 345 street children are engaged in work and 259 are unemployed. The major techniques used in the study are interview schedules designed to investigate the situation of street children in different parts of Kolkata.

Street Children in Kolkata

The urban life of Kolkata has been attracted by the poor rural families, but they discover themselves dissatisfied because the city of Kolkata has failed to fulfill their aspirations. There is no way for these depressed and poor people to return. All these have been adding to the population of the pavements and slums. Many of them are eventually forced to look for shelter on the streets,

under the over bridge of Kolkata with their families. They cannot exist together, the children, who are half-fed and half-naked, must essentially wander about anywhere. These boys and girls who survive and work on the street are vulnerable to broad and tremendous violations of their rights. In the city of Kolkata, the gigantic numbers of children from these families, who have lost their childhood and are forced to exist in the world of offense, sadness, mistreatment and abuse. They have difficulties in accessing basic services and are physically and mentally abused. Rapid urbanization, high unemployment and poverty resulted in the increase of

the number of children on the street. Although, these children have a variety of skills related to survival and casual income generation. Their workforce remains unspoken and unrecognized by mainstream society. Due to difficulty in producing money legally, they are forced into the world of crime and conflict with local people several times. They are trapped in a cycle of poverty-violence-abuse.

Economic Factors behind the Origin of Street Children

Children may be forced to the streets due to several controlling factors, some of which are discussed below-

Poverty: Poor economic conditions are the prime factor contributing to the difficulty of street children. Poverty, job loss, high prices, declining national income, poor allocation of wealth within society and the increasing difference between the rich and the poor are all factors with a straight impact on the increase of the phenomenon of street children.

Family Crisis: Poverty and other connected life events may result in dysfunctional parenting styles. These weaken family bonds and result in an environment where parents become physically and sensitively rude to their children or towards each other.

Overcrowding: Lack of living space, poor house ventilation and unplanned population growth, etc. under which children are forced to live in slum areas without food, and other basic amenities has forced numerous children to the streets of cities (WHO, 2000).

Work Load: Abusive work in homes where domestic workers are enforced to run away as a result of being overworked, poorly paid or even subjected to other forms of mistreatment. They end up on the street trying to earn a living.

Rural to Urban Migration: Population migrates from the rural areas in large numbers and settles down in slums, shantytowns, squatter, or wherever there is vacant land available. Some of them live their life on city streets, religious centers, pavements, public places, below footbridges, parks, etc at night. The consequences of migration to the cities create a population boom in the urban area (UMP, 2000).

Economic Background of the Family of Street Children in Kolkata

The data collected about the employment status of the parents of the street children, as given in (Table 1) shows that the percentage of the parents employed is more than that of unemployed parents, that is about 66.1 percent of children's parents are employed whereas 33.9 parents are

Table 1: Parents' Employment Status

Parents Employment	Number of Children	Percentage
EmployedUnemployed	399205	66.133.9
Total	604	100

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

unemployed. Regarding earning members in the family, (Table 2) shows that about 25.7 percent of the families have one earning members in their families, 8.6 percent have three earning members, 6.3 percent of the families have four earning members, 1.7 percent have five earning members, 0.5 percent have more than five earning members in their families. 17.2 percent of the families have only two earning members in their families, and regarding the rest, 6.1 percent of the family's information was not available. (Table 3) analyze the monthly household income of street children. It shows that the majority, i.e. 34.6 percent of the families' monthly household income is above Rs. 1,000. The second largest group, i.e. 21.3 percent has a monthly household income between Rs. 751 to Rs. 1,000. 13.7 percent has a monthly household income of Rs. 501 to Rs. 750. 13.2 percent of the families are earning between Rs. 251 to Rs. 500 per month and the rest 9.3 percent monthly household income is only below Rs. 251 only.

Table 2: Earning Members of the Family

Number of Earner	Number of Children	Percentage
One	155	25.7
Two	104	17.2
Three	52	8.6
Four	38	6.3
Five	10	1.7
Six	3	0.5
Indifferent	37	6.1
Total	399	66.1

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

Table 3: Monthly Household Income

Income group(in Rs)	Number of Children	Percentage
<251	56	9.3
251-500	80	13.2
501-750	83	13.7
751-1000	128	21.3
>1000	209	34.6
Indifferent	48	7.9
Total	604	100

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

Economic Conditionsof Street Children

The street children are mostly engaged in the informal sector in the city regions of India. They are engaged in a variety of works, like working at tea stalls, hotels, garages, domestic services, etc. Besides, a number of them are self-employed like in boot polishing, street vendors, hawkers, etc. A few of them work as laborers. Begging and rag-picking is another type of activity thatmost of them live on. The study (Table 4) shows the involvement in the work situations of street children in the study area. Among the surveyed children 57.2 percent engaged in work whereas 42.8 percent of street children are not involved in any kind of work situation.

Table 4: Work Involvement of Street Children

Engaged in Work	Number of Children	Percentage
YesNo	345259	57.142.9
Total	604	100

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

Work Situations

(Table 5) gives the idea of the distribution of 345 respondents engaged in different types of work category. Tea stall, garages, and hotels account for 9.6, 1.2, 6.5 percent respectively, and rag-picking and begging are undertaken by 4.2, 11.7 percent respectively and then nearly 1.5 percent are engaged in other types of works which they keep on changing, depending upon the availability. The above analysis represents that tea stall child workers have the maximum daily income of Rs. 37.9 and boot polish child workers havea minimum income of Rs. 19.3 per day.A Lorenz Curve interpreting the inequality in the distribution of income with a Gini Coefficient value of only 0.11 indicating the low degree of disparity in the income group.Although a large number of street

Table 5: Daily Wages of the Street Children

Work Category	Number of Children	Percentage	Mean Daily Income (in Rs)
Organized Sector	2	0.3	35.5
Boot Polish	17	2.8	19.3
Hawker	25	4.1	25.3
Street Vendor	23	3.8	25.4
Rag Picking	25	4.2	25.1
Begging	71	11.7	25.6
Coolie	3	0.5	23.8
Labourer	36	6.0	36.9
Tea Stall	58	9.6	37.9
Garage	7	1.2	27.5
Hotel	39	6.5	30.9
Domestic Sources	30	4.9	23.0
Others	9	1.5	38.3
Total	345	57.1	-

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

children are illiterate, that is 24 percent. The number of those who have passed the secondary level is 3.1 percent, and 24.3 percent of street children have passed their primary level (Table 6).

Table 6: Linkage between Levels of Education and Daily Income

Levels of Education	Income(in Rs)							
	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	40-50	Total	Indifferent	Total
Illiterate	9 (1.5)	13 (2.2)	57 (9.4)	31 (5.1)	35 (5.8)	145 (24.0)	104 (17.2)	249 (41.2)
Primary	16 (2.6)	14 (2.3)	43 (7.1)	45 (7.5)	29 (4.8)	147 (24.3)	136 (22.5)	283 (46.9)
Secondary	6 (1.0)	13 (2.2)	15 (2.5)	7 (1.2)	12 (2.0)	53 (8.8)	19 (3.1)	72 (11.9)
Total	31 (5.1)	40 (6.6)	115 (19.0)	83 (13.8)	76 (12.6)	345 (57.1)	259 (42.9)	604 (100)

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August 2019)

Distribution of Income

Another useful analysis was thought to be the amount spent by the street children on themselves. Most of the children, who are in the category of the children on the street, may support their respective families. Nearly, 34.9 percent have said that they give their earnings to their parent (Table 7), 0.5 percent of street children earned money for friends, 6.8 percent earned for relatives and 3.0 percent for brothers or sisters. Only 11.9 percent have said that they earned the amount on themselves. (Table 8) represents how street children spend their income. In this figure, the maximum number of street children spends the amount of less than 20 percent. Again a minimum number of

Table 7: Sharing of Income

Distribution	Number of children	Percentage
For Self	72	11.9
For Friend	3	0.5
For Parent	211	34.9
For Relatives	41	6.8
For Brother or Sister	18	3.0
Total	345	57.1

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

Table 8: Amount Spent by Street Children

Amount (in Percent)	Number of Children	Percentage
<20	89	14.7
20-30	66	10.9
30-40	52	8.6
40-50	37	6.1
50-60	31	5.1
60-70	19	3.2
70-80	16	2.7
>80	18	3.0
Indifferent	17	2.8
Total	345	57.1

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

Table 9: Family Dependent on Children

Dependency	Number of Children	Percentage
Yes	220	36.4
No	384	63.6
Total	604	100

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

children who spend on themselves are greater than 80 percent. There is inverse relationship between amounts spends on oneself and the number of street children. In 2012, the poverty line was determined based on the minimum daily income of Rs. 32 in rural and Rs. 47 in urban areas. Since the poverty line is low, the persons below it are living in an extreme substandard of life. These poor parents are forced to send their children to beg or work on the streets to enhance or support their family. (Table 9) explains the dependence of family on street children, the value indicates that 63.6 percent of families are not dependent and 36.4 percent of families are dependent and they are earning to support them. (Table 10) interprets with satisfaction with income. 23.5 percent of the samples are satisfied with their income and 33.6 percent are not satisfied with their income. In the paid works working conditions are deplorable. Many children have to work for low or no wages and prolonged hours of work which extends sometimes even till late at night. They do not get any weekly rest or annual holiday with pay.

Table 10: Satisfaction with Income

Level	Number of Children	Percentage
Satisfied	142	23.5
Dissatisfied	203	33.6
Total	345	57.1

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

Work Ambitions

The economic independence at an early age changes the entire lifestyle of the child. Self-employed street children, as those who are working in the shop and also those who do not earn and depend on begging to know the importance of money. They are also influenced by the movies and start looking for the day when they would also move from rags to riches. (Table 11) deals with the self-aspiration as of the street children.

Table 11: Self Aspirations

Aspiration	Number of Children	Percentage
Business	255	42.2
Education	45	7.5
Film Star	7	1.2
Service	55	9.1
Any Other	170	28.1
Indifferent	72	11.9
Total	604	100

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

42.2 percent of the street children want to have their own business, 9.1 percent want to work, 7.5 percent want to have a good education, 1.2 percent of the surveyed street children want to become a film star, 28.1 percent belong to the category of other types of aspiration and 11.9 percent did not give any response. (Table 12) is a cross table between levels of education and work aspiration. Regarding levels of education, there are three categories, which are illiterate, primary and secondary. 41.2 percent belong to the first category of illiterates, out of 41.2 percent, 18.7 percent want to have their own business, 5.1 percent want to have education, 0.5 percent want to become film stars, 6.0 percent want to have work, 7.0 percent aspire for one or other type and 3.9 percent belong to the category who gave no responses. Nearly, 46.9 percent of children belong to the category of Primary level education. Out of the 46.9 percent, 17.7 percent want to have their own shops and business, 1.3 percent wants to continue education, 0.2 percent want to become film

Table 12: Relation between Levels of Education and Work Ambition

Education	No. of Children						Total
	Business	Education	Film Star	Service	Any Other	Indifferent	
Illiterate	113 (18.7)	31 (5.1)	3 (0.5)	36 (6.0)	42 (7.0)	24 (3.9)	249 (41.2)
Primary	107 (17.7)	8 (1.3)	1 (0.2)	14 (2.3)	122 (20.2)	31 (5.1)	283 (46.9)
Secondary	35 (5.8)	6 (1.0)	3 (0.5)	5 (0.8)	6 (1.0)	17 (2.8)	72 (11.9)
Total	255 (42.2)	45 (7.5)	7 (1.2)	55 (9.1)	170 (28.1)	72 (11.9)	604 (100)

Source: Prepared from Primary Survey (August, 2019)

stars, 2.3 percent want to do service, 20.2 percent belong to the other category and 5.1 percent belong to the category of indifferent. Out of 11.9 percent who had education up to secondary level, 5.8 percent want to have business and shop, 1.0 percent intend to get educated, 0.8 percent want services, 1.0 percent belong to the other category.

Major Findings

- The occurrence of street children is a common economic problem in the urban region. In Indian metropolitan cities, the fact shows an increasing tendency and the situation is like in the case of Kolkata.
- The problems of street children are responsible for several human depriving factors such as low per capita income, illiteracy, joblessness, etc.
- The reasons for being street children are poverty, family crisis, congestion, etc. but earning income for a family is the only notable reason that dealing the highest number of street children in Kolkata.
- There are different types of economic activities experienced by the working street children in the city of Kolkata.
- Street children in Kolkata metropolitan region characterized by backward families and they have a very low standard of living.
- The majority of the families of street children is economically segregated and continue themselves in the crowded slum areas and footpaths.
- The daily wages of street children do not have uniformity with the value of work. It is evaluated that the majority of the children are not satisfied with the earnings they gain for their work.
- The maximum number of street children is connected to different work situations. As a result economic activity areas differing from one place to another place in the city of Kolkata.

Conclusion

Street children and the associated group act together with various categories of the public in their daily lives. On the streets, they come together with pedestrians, hawkers, city police, shop owners, tourists, school children, etc. To the local people, these children have been treated as a nuisance. Therefore, they are associated with criminal activities such as pick-pocketing, car thefts, and various anti-social works. While this happens in some areas with little time, it is wrong to guess that all street children are involved in such criminal activities all the time. Extreme scarcity and economic exclusion create compelled them for criminal activities. Though, little proof exists to advise that street children intentionally plan anti-social activities (Schurink and Tiba, 1993). Our attitudes towards street children explain the way we interact with them. Some people panic and avoid street children

because of their unclean looks and think them, probably troublemaker. When they come into get in touch with them, they desire to give them a few coins to get free of them, although others may give money or help on humanitarian grounds. Existing on the street is a difficulty as well as a chance for survival. It is important to describe the life on the street is considered as dangerous or threatening for a child's welfare. The Government, as well as Non-Governmental Organizations, are working and preparing efforts along with possible plans and prospects for the welfare of (Below Poverty Line) street children. After everything else, consciousness should be made among the general public in contemporary society.

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