



STUDY ON STREET CHILDREN IN MAURITIUS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The phenomenon of street children is fast becoming a problem worldwide and Mauritius is no exception. Unfortunately many stakeholders remain in a state of denial as to its pertinence and in some cases, don't even acknowledge the existence of street children on the island. The problem stems from the lack of consensus on the definition of street children.

The most common definition of a street child is "*any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and/or sources of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults*" (inter-NGO, 1985). However, many stakeholders reduce the definition to just one aspect of the problem - that of "street living children" - and fail to recognize that the term "street children" is a fluid concept with multiple faces and that the causes of the phenomenon overlap with each other such that it is difficult to pin point one aspect of the phenomenon. It is even less relevant to isolate a single cause which could globally explain life on the streets.

However, the phenomenon is related to the broader socio-economic and cultural reality of a country and must therefore be interpreted in light of the specific local context. The definition of street children in Mauritius is necessarily different from the more documented cases of countries like Mexico or the Philippines. In light of the increase in the number of children living in situations of social exclusion in Mauritius, more emphasis should be on the problematic of children which put them in situations similar to those of street living children elsewhere in the world. The need for conducting a specialized study on the issue of "children in street situation" in Mauritius arose from a number of reasons, primarily:

1. The lack of specialized studies on the issue of street children in Mauritius and the lack of accurate statistics on the size of the problem;
2. The scarcity or total absence of data on the characteristics of children in street situation, including, how they spend their time, why they remain in the streets, the reasons for neglect and exposure and other such information;
3. The absence of appropriate policies for protecting these children so as to avoid the pitfalls of delinquency, substance abuse, HIV /AIDS etc.

Thus this study was carried out with the following objectives:

Study objectives

General objective

The overarching objective of this study is to define and quantify the street children phenomenon in Mauritius in view of finding appropriate solutions to the related problems.

Specific objectives:

1. To define the socio-economic and cultural profile of a child in street situation.
2. To identify what type of support, guidance or life skills they need in order to avoid the pitfalls of delinquency, substance abuse and HIV /AIDS and to succeed in life.
3. To identify the community structures and government institutions that can contribute in their assistance and follow-up, and determine in what way they can be of help
4. To propose a line of action that can be taken to effectively help the child in street situation of Mauritius by the various potential actors

Methodology

The study was done in two phases:

The aim of phase 1 was to determine the characteristics of the profile of a child in street situation. This phase was a descriptive cross sectional and retrospective study that looked at time T and in the past to determine the profile and dynamics of the street children and the street children phenomenon in Mauritius. It was both quantitative and qualitative.

The aim of phase 2 being was to estimate the total number of "children in street situations" in Mauritius. This was done by the capture -recapture method.

Findings

From the results of this study it was estimated that there are about 6780 children in the "street situation" presently in Mauritius. They basically correspond to one or more of the following criteria.

- Criteria 1: Child above 15 years old, not going to school and not working
- Criteria 2: Child below 16 years old and is working for economic reasons even if going to school
- Criteria 3: Attending school but chronically absent from school for unjustified reasons (ex. for more than 10 days per school semester)

- Criteria 4: Both parents absent in the lives of the child (dead, physical separation ex expatriation for economic reasons etc.)

These criteria are supposed to be warning signs for the community. They do not automatically put a child into danger, but the findings of this study suggest that the likelihood of children in one or more of these situations encountering street life and its related hazards is particularly high.

Given that parental absence emerges as a major push factor, the increase in divorce as documented by CSO (2009) and the number of parents (mostly men) moving out in search of jobs represents a cause for concern that the number of "children in street situation" is likely to increase. Immediate triggers follow from situations of family breakdown and/or economic deprivation and include such things as family violence and hunger. The root causes thus lie with the factors that bring about pauperization of the families in the first place. By every standard, the street children phenomenon was found to have multiple and interdependent causes; economic, social and policy.

The inherent dangers of being in the street situation: economic deprivation, lack of adult protection and inadequate socialization etc., render children extremely vulnerable and they have to develop survival mechanisms to cope with these hazards. It is when these survival mechanisms - such as pick-pocketing, prostitution, drug abuse, etc - are noticed (i.e. when they become a nuisance to the general public) that street children are thrust into the limelight. Unfortunately these symptoms of the phenomenon are often confounded with the root causes of the problem, that is, the reasons why children escape from responsible adult control and support. Hence, authorities respond with repressive actions such as sending the children to special reformatory institutions.

The poor conditions of some of these institutions and poorly adapted programs lead to further isolation, stigmatization and deprivation. A vicious circle is quickly formed as these lead to further social exclusion. Consequently, there is a tendency to single out poverty as the main cause of the phenomenon, which is then misleadingly labeled as a problem of the poor. Poverty is evidently not the only reason behind the problem. After all, not all "children in street situation" are from poor families and many children from poor families are not in the street situation.

In Mauritius, there are very few NGOs that are specifically dedicated to working with the population of children in street situations. SAFIRE is one of few and its mission is getting the children off the street situation for a start and later, either reintegrating them into their families, home/communities or finding other secure environments where their basic needs—for physical safety, medical care, nutrition, counseling, education, recreation, and spiritual growth—can be met. However given the immensity

of the problem and the need for urgent action there will be need for more institutional capacity building in the domain.

Conclusions

In Mauritius, the problem of street children or children in street situation is mainly one of "children on the streets" and/or "street working children", since the greater majority of the children interviewed had a home to retire to at the end of the day. They are driven onto the streets by multiple factors, key among which are the poor parental presence in the lives of the children, and the poor socio-economic situation of their families. This is further compounded by a situation where the family unit of father, mother and children is being displaced by mono-parental child up-bringing. In some cases, the parents were actually absentee landlords or simply dead. The absentee landlords were mostly economic migrants who had left the island for greener pastures or those who have had to leave due to incompatibility with their partners. These children who are so left in the precarious conditions are exposed to a series of hazards, which go from psycho-physical abuse, to outright aggressions in the streets, drug use, exploitation for economic reasons etc. Some of the victimization of the children come from very close members of the communities, prominent among which were family members, employers and their peers on the street. The vulnerability of the children results from their relatively little experience and ignorance in relation to the danger that they are exposed to in "street situations". Their development of their capacity to handle such issues is of utmost importance which justifies HIV prevention and life skills programs in their favour.

The family has a great role both in pushing the children into the streets and can be the key actors for taking them out of the streets, for as stated above, up to 49.1% of the children who are working declared having been pushed into working by family members. In fact, 66.7% of the working children actually had the family member who looked for the work for them. This shows a relatively high tolerance of child labour within the family. Parents need to be greatly capacitated to be able to assume their role and their responsibilities for their children.

Recommendations

In view of all of the above, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Policy makers must be sensitized to the issue of children in street situations and the societal hazards to which they are exposed. The subtle nature of the phenomenon means that it has so far been obscured. The children on the streets

of Mauritius need to be given particular attention by the concerned authorities because they are at risk of exposure to various societal hazards especially given the relatively more discrete nature of the phenomenon.

2. Given the low level of knowledge on hazards (such as HIV/AIDS, early pregnancies, abortion, substance abuse, school dropout, child abuse and related rights etc.), assistance programme should include special activities aimed at informing and educating street children on these hazards..
3. Reintegration programs must include professional orientation to develop and strengthen the children's professional aspirations. This will motivate them to pursue their studies and make the necessary effort to stay on track.
4. There is a need to sensitize the children on the availability of the child support services available and on the rights of the child. Given the relatively low knowledge of the children on which institutions to turn to in case of problems, within any assistance program, there should be included campaigns to sensitize them on possible sources of assistance. The program should foresee home visits as a means of ensuring that the children are not being maltreated and that their integration/reintegration is effective.
5. All institutions and organisations potentially concerned by the street children phenomenon must develop linkages and work in networks to facilitate referral of services. Building bridges between child support organisations and the health service is especially important.
6. A multi criteria evaluation, which takes into consideration, which takes into consideration the child's level of precariousness as well as his/her potential of personal development, must guide the selection process for assistance programmes. This will include the following:

- Criteria 1:** Child above 15 years old, not going to school and not working
- Criteria 2:** Child below 16 years old and is working for economic reasons even if going to school
- Criteria 3:** Attending school but chronically absent from school for unjustified reasons (ex. for more than 10 days per school semester)
- Criteria 4:** Both parents absent in the lives of the child (dead, physical separation ex expatriation for economic reasons etc)

7. Given the importance of the role of parents in the child's up-bringing, any child support programme must be accompanied by a component to strengthen the family's capacity for better up-bringing of their children. "States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child." Special attention has to be given to mono-parental households
8. Advocacy has to be intensified to ensure the effective implementation of the Mauritian legislature in the domain of child labour and other child related abuses.
9. Further studies should be made to identify and evaluate the institutional capacity of local bodies, public/private that can help out with the re-integration of these children into the society.
10. Given that most of the children were either in primary school or were primary school drop-outs, the interventions of support programs should concentrate mainly in the primary school. Special efforts should be made to keep these children in school where not only do they run less risk of getting into trouble, but also stand to benefit by their personal intellectual development that open up better horizons for them in the future.

1 Background and Introduction

The recent decades have witnessed the growing concern for the rights and welfare of children. These concerns were marked by the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by the UN in November 1989 followed by the adoption of the Organisation of African Unity's Charter. There is a real need for increased vigilance given the constant rise in the number of street children across the world, especially given their increased exposure to other hazards like HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, child labor, early pregnancy etc. Street children are considered to be among the MARPs (Most at Risk Populations) for the HIV/AIDS disease given their sexual behaviour and their vulnerability to various forms of abuse including sexual abuse and injection drug use among others. All of these are major predisposing factors to HIV infections or other STIs. In fact Dube (1997) found out that both street girls and boys have risky sexual activities that make them vulnerable to HIV infection. There is thus a need to focus on this category of children in the fight against HIV/AIDS because of their hard-to-reach nature coupled with their increased vulnerability.

By every standard, the street children phenomenon has multiple and interdependent causes; economic, social and political. The inherent dangers of being in the street situation: economic deprivation and lack of adult protection and inadequate socialization etc., make "children in street situation" extremely vulnerable. When pushed into the difficult street situations, they develop survival mechanisms to protect themselves from such aggressions. The children mostly come to the limelight only when such survival mechanisms, such as pick-pocketing, prostitution drug abuse are noticed etc. That is when they become a nuisance to the general public. Unfortunately these symptoms of the phenomenon are often confounded with the root problem which is the underlying problem that made them escape from responsible adult control and support. The most common reaction is repression, further exclusion in the name of putting them into special reformatory institutions. The poor conditions of some of these institutions and poorly adapted programs only lead to further isolation, stigmatization and deprivation. A vicious circle is quickly formed as these lead to further poverty. Most authorities are quick to index poverty as being the main cause of the phenomenon, which is often wrongly tagged as a problem of the poor. Poverty is evidently not the only reason behind the problem. After all, not all "children in street situation" are from poor families and many children from poor families are not in the street situation.

From a good number of official reports in Mauritius Island, there is evidence that the recent years have seen an increase in the dislocation of family cohesion and consequently a decline in parental presence within the lives of their children.. This has partly been attributed to increasing divorces and high levels of economic hardship. In an effort to meet the material needs of members of the family parents have had to leave their families behind in search of economic El Dorados. This has led to an almost social dislocation. Some parents have practically resigned before their responsibility towards their children. Those who have had to move out into the wider world to fend for this very family, have at times had to leave the children either with family relatives or a single parent and thus leading to a decline in adult control/support. Some of the children from such families out-rightly fall victim to societal predators of all sorts and are at times pushed on to the streets in order to survive. As was also described by Gilbert Vogt Inde (1995), in cases where mothers are left to fend for themselves and for their children, they are often obliged to take refuge by a male companion often

under conditions of duress. For the same economic reason some of the companions decline from taking charge of children that are not his. This may lead to total rejection and outright brutality in some cases. The mother is thus put into a dilemma, having to make the choice between the children and her companion. Some of them resort to sending the children back to their grandparents when the latter are willing to receive them. In other situation, the children have no option than to fend for themselves in the “streets”. These children who are often left under conditions of uncontrolled freedom, consequently go everywhere except where they are supposed to go. They fail to attend school thus jeopardizing their chances of a better life in the future.

From all of the above it is evident that the number of “children in street situation” is likely to increase as more and more parents (mostly men) are moving out, in search of jobs elsewhere, leaving their family behind. Poverty is evidently a key factor that pushes the children into the street situation. However more direct ones that immediately push the child out of the family bounds may include, family violence and hunger. The root causes thus lie with the factors that bring about pauperization of the families in the first place. Until the root causes are identified and dealt with, all interventions will be addressing just the symptoms and will consequently be short lived.

In Mauritius, there are very few NGOs that are specifically dedicated to working with the population of children in street situations. SAFIRE is one of few and its mission is getting the children off the street situation for a start and later, either reintegrating them into their families, home/communities or finding other secure environments where their basic needs—for physical safety, medical care, nutrition, counseling, education, recreation, and spiritual growth—can be met.

In line with the general concern for the rights and welfare of children, the Government of Mauritius and other local partners like MFPWA and Safire, with the assistance of local and International donors like Rogers and the Global Fund for Health, are making some efforts to ensure that the children of the land are taken care of timely and correctly. The presence of street children in Rodrigues is signaled by various organizations but this is less clearly the case in Mauritius Island. There is no clear idea as to the amplitude of the problem or the mechanisms involved. In fact some authorities are in the state of denial as to the existence of street children on the Island. The problem stems from the lack of consensus on the definition of street children. Many stakeholders reduce the definition to just one aspect of the street children problematic, which is that of “street living children” as we will see below. Unfortunately there is a failure to recognize that the terminology of “street children” is not a rigid category but a whole panel of situations related to the socio-economic and cultural realities of each country, characterized by a host of factors ranging from parental neglect, various forms of child abuse, school absenteeism to actual ‘street life’ situations. The definition of street children in Mauritius is believed to be different from those street children in Mexico or the Philippines but special attention has to be given to them as the number of children living in situations of social exclusion is on the increase. It is thus evident that, more emphasis should be on the problematic of children which put them in situations similar to those of street living children elsewhere in the world. Like Gilbert Vogt Inde (1995), and for the purpose of this study the more encompassing and less pejorative and irreverent terminology of ““children in street situation”” will be used interchangeably with “street children” to mean the same thing. Given the complex nature of the problem of street children or “children in street situation”, it was thus necessary to carry out specialized studies on these children, if the factors and dynamics of the problem were to be well understood. This is an unavoidable prelude to determining correct strategies for the fight against HIV/AIDS, one of the many hazards that the “children in street situation” are exposed to under the

conditions described above. As Anne Hatloy & Anne Huser (2005) rightly put it, determining who the children are is the first step in designing policies to identify them, understand their needs, improve their life in the cities, or reintegrate them into their home communities.

1.1 Purpose of the study

From the presentation above it is clear that to better address the problem concerning “children in street situation” and/or marginalized children; it is important to first understand their profile and the different categories into which they will be classified. Though in general literature the terminology of “street children” is used to describe these children living without their fundamental Rights as stipulated in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, they are not necessarily comparable to what they will represent in other countries of the world. The need for conducting a specialized study on the issue of “children in street situation” in Mauritius Island arose from a number of reasons, primarily:

1. The lack of specialized studies on the issue of street children in Mauritius and the lack of accurate statistics on the size of the problem;
2. The scarcity or total absence of data on the characteristics of children in streets situation, including, how they spend their time, why they remain in the streets, the reasons for neglect and exposure and other such information;
3. The absence of appropriate policies for protecting these children so as to avoid the pitfalls of delinquency, substance abuse, HIV /AIDS etc.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of street children

The most common definition of a street children is “any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and/or sources of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults” (inter-NGO, 1885). This definition was formulated by Inter-NGOs in Switzerland in 1983.

UNICEF as quoted in Mexico Child Link Trust has defined three types of street children:

- **Street Living Children:** children who ran away from their families and live alone on the streets.
- **Street Working Children:** children who spend most of their time on the streets, fending for themselves, but returning home on a regular basis.
- **Children from Street Families:** children who live on the streets with their families.

Amnesty International categorizes street children as follows¹:

- **Children on the street:** Children on the street are those engaged in some kind of economic activity ranging from begging to vending of manufactured commodities of food. Most go home at the end of the day and contribute part of their earnings for the economic survival of the family unit. They may be attending school and retain a sense of belonging to a family or household. Because of the economic fragility of their families, these children may eventually opt for a permanent life on the streets.
- **Children of the street:** Children of the street actually live on the street. Family ties may exist but are tenuous and maintained only casually or occasionally. Most of these children have no permanent residence and move from place to place and from town to town.

Muchini (1994), quoted by UNICEF (2002) in a study on street children Zimbabwe, observed that even though the distinction between children on the street and children of the street is useful, some overlaps and grey areas still exist given that, from the definitions given, the same children can fit into 2 categories.

Opoku (1996) as quoted by Project Concern International Zambia (2002) categorized “street” children into 3 economic groups: children on the street, children of the street, and abandoned children. According to him, children on the street are those engaged in some kind of economic activity ranging from begging to vending of manufactured commodities or food. Like the “street working children” by UNICEF definition or the “Children on the street” by Amnesty International

definition, he found out that most of the “Children on the street” go home at the end of the day and contribute part of their earning for economic survival of the family unit. They may be attending school and retain a sense of belonging to a family or household. Because of the economic fragility of their families, these children may eventually opt for a permanent life on the streets. According to same author, the children of the street actually lived on the street. Family ties may exist but are tenuous and maintained only casually or occasionally. Most of these children had no permanent residence and moved from place to place and from town to town. He defined the abandoned children as those that were entirely without a home and had no contact whatsoever with their families. Some of these were children abandoned at a very early age who had little or no knowledge of their families. There was therefore very rarely a successful way of reintegrating them into their original home environment

EDMH (2009) classified street children into 2 categories: street working children and street living children in ‘A survey on “children in street situation” in Juba’. These 2 categories of children were then analyzed separately.

Zuberi (2005) in a study conducted in Eastern and Southern Africa in 65 towns and cities revealed that 87% of street children work on the streets during the day and return to their home at night; just over 8% of the children work and live on the streets.

UNICEF (2002) in a study on street children in Zimbabwe revealed that the majority of children interviewed were “children of the street” while 31.4% were found to be “street working children”. Around 12% were children who slept on the streets and their homes. According to UNICEF, the latter group represents the grey areas. UNICEF further states that this is a stage of transition which all street living children pass through; sleeping both at home and on the street, the child finally choose the street when home conditions were no longer supportive due to critical incidences like the death of a parent or guardian or due to increasing poverty or child abuse.

As stated in the introduction above, the problem of street children should not be held hostage by a polemic on the terminology used to name the phenomenon. There should be more emphasis on the problems of the children, the contributing factors, the dynamics involved and how best to solve the problem. Gilbert Vogt Inde (1995) used a more encompassing terminology to talk of this category of children which is “Enfants en Situation de Rue” or ““children in street situation””. As the author pointed out, contrarily to the other terminologies like street children, children on the street, children of the street or street living children, this terminology does not only decriminalize the child, but also emphasizes the important role played by the surrounding situations that lead to the child moving onto the street as a preferred place of abode or survival. It focuses more on the causes of the phenomenon. So for the purpose of this study the terminology will be used to address the problem irrespective of whether children are sleeping on the streets or not

2.2 Methodologies used in previous studies in quantifying street children

Muir (1991) as quoted by Project Concern (2002) in a study on street children in Lusaka said, “Street youths can be difficult to quantify, for they range on a continuum from those who live at home and spend a great deal of time ‘hanging out’ to those who live on the street often in abandoned buildings

and underground parking lots and whose financial and personal support comes from street life.” This difficulty in estimating the children was also highlighted by Gilbert Vogt Inde (1995) in similar studies, especially given the high mobility between towns, or between the homes and the streets.

Project Concern International Zambia (2002) used a purposive sampling method to reach the children, with a set of predefined criteria given to the interviewers prior to the conduct of the interview in ‘a rapid assessment of street children in Lusaka’. Similarly, EDMH (2009) used purposive sampling to reach the children targeted in a survey on “children in street situation” in Juba. The study used methods such as focus groups discussions and semi structured interviews to gather information from the street children, police officers, community leaders, women working in the market and medical staff.

In the study on street children in Zimbabwe by UNICEF (2002), the contacts were established with the children using snowball sampling. Initial contacts were made through the help of social actors. Further information on these street children was obtained through focus group discussions.

Similar study on street children and child labor in Tbilisi by World Vision Georgia (2007) was conducted using participatory observation. Furthermore, interviews were made using structured questionnaires as a research tool.

2.3 Findings about street children profile from other studies

2.3.1 Demographic characteristics of street children

Considering the ages of the children, Richter, L.M. (1996), in his study of street children in South Africa, found that they were between 7 and 18 years of age, with the majority being between 13 and 16 years old. A study conducted in Eastern and Southern Africa by Zuberi, F. (2005) in 65 towns and cities also revealed that street children ranged from 6 to 17 years, the majority being 9-14 years old. ILO/IPEC (2000) showed that 50-70% of the total number of street children in Russia St Petersburg were under 13 years old. Research on ‘Street Children in Peru (n.d)⁹ estimated that around 3% of children living on the streets are less than 6 years old .

Looking at the sex of street children, most studies show a predominance of the male sex within the population. Zuberi, F. (2005) found that 74% of the street children were male and the rest were girls. Project concern International Zambia (2002) in the study quoted above (in Lusaka) revealed that 80% of the children interviewed were boys.

2.3.2 Parental presence/support/control

Looking at the different levels of parental presence in the life of the children, Project Concern International Zambia (2002) found that most children living on the streets in Lusaka are orphans: 22% had lost both parents, 26% had lost their father and 10% had lost their mother. Meanwhile, UNICEF (2002) in the study on street children in Zimbabwe also revealed that out of the 31.4% “on the street” children, “most were staying with at least one biological parent while others were staying with members of the extended family”. However, Kacker L. et al (2007), in a study on child abuse in India found that 65.9% of the street children lived with their families on the streets.

Bustmantee D cited in Schraeder A et al (1999) found in Peru that 90% of street children come from rebuilt families (families with a step father or s step mother), mono-parental families, or from rural

families that had given their child to other people (relatives or not) to be raised by the latter in the city.

According to EDMH (2009), the majority (64%) of interviewed “street living children” are orphans and only 40% of street living children maintain relationships with their families.

2.3.3 Street children’s involvement in economic activities

The rapid assessment of street children in Lusaka by Project Concern International Zambia (2002) concluded that 50% of these children were engaged in some kind of economic activity, going to the extremity of prostitution (1%) while 1 out of 5 resorted to begging.

“Street working children” were also found to be involved in economic activities such as bottle collection followed by shoes polishing, selling & wood collection in a survey on street children in Juba conducted by EDMH (2009). The study also found that the economic activities in which the “street living children” are involved are similar to those carried out by street working children. Most of the money earned is spent on basic necessities.

The study on street children in Zimbabwe by UNICEF (2002) revealed that 45.7% of children interviewed were beggars while 14.7% were vendors and 21.2% guarded cars. More than 60% of them used their money to purchase food, be it street living children or street working children.

It came out from the Tbilisi study conducted by World Vision Georgia (2007) that the majority of the children are hired workers and are not allowed to manage the funds they earn. The main activities of the latter are begging, physical labor and minor theft.

In Russia, St Petersburg according to ILO/IPEC (2000), street children collect bottles and refuse and sell berries & mushrooms. Meanwhile, 10-30% of them were found to be involved in illicit activities. So generally literature documents an active participation of these children in some form of economic activities in spite of their tender ages.

2.3.4 Attendance of school and other institutional by the street children

Project Concern International Zambia (2002) revealed that the majority of street children in Lusaka were not aware of institutions taking care of children and only about 1/3 of them had been to a centre while around 15% were staying at one. It was also found that it was more difficult to convince girls to go to a centre, but once they are there, they are likely to stay there more than boys. About 75% of children interviewed were not attending school. The main reason for drop outs was financial constraints.

EDMH (2009) revealed that only 65% of street children in Juba attend school and the main reason for the others not attending was related to financial problems. According to the study on street children in Zimbabwe conducted by UNICEF (2002) only 25.5% of the “street children” had ever been to school. This tendency is also confirmed by the rapid situation assessment of street children in Cairo and Alexandria conducted by UNODCCP (2001) and which revealed that 70% of those children who are not attending school dropped out while the remaining had never been to school.

2.3.5 Reasons for the children being in streets

According to EDMH (2009), the reasons evoked by “street living children” in Juba for moving to the streets are mainly lack of parental care (39%), followed by economic problems (26%), pull factors

(like entertainment) and family problems, representing 17% each. Meanwhile in a similar in Zimbabwe conducted by UNICEF (2002), street children cited the following as reasons for being on the streets; the need of earning income, being orphaned, abuse by step parents/relatives, inadequate care and support by parents or guardians and peer pressure.

In Tbilisi, World Vision Georgia (2007) revealed that the main reason for children ending up on the streets is the difficult social and economic situation in which they live.

The Cairo and Alexandria study by The United Nations Control for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2001) also revealed that street children cited the following similar reasons as being major and direct causes for them being on the street: 82% due to child abuse at home/work, 62% due to neglect, 36% due to peer pressure, 16% due to sensation seeking and 8% to join other brothers and sisters.

2.3.6 Common hazards encountered by the street children

Sexual and reproductive health issues

The rapid assessment of street children in Lusaka conducted by Project Concern International Zambia (2002) found a good number of these children to be sexually active, with as much as 3.6% of boys and 9.5% of girls declaring having had a sexually transmitted infection. 14 out of 222 street girls interviewed reported having at least once been pregnant. Meanwhile, in the Zimbabwe study by UNICEF (2002), 26.2% of the street children reported they have had sex within the previous six months and 14.3% of them reported having had an STI. Over 38.5% of these children could identify at least 3 symptoms of STI's. 50% of them could identify at least 3 ways one can become HIV infected. 56.6% of the children interviewed declared having been victim of child abuse. A similar survey on street children in Rwanda by Save the Children (2005) also revealed that more than half of the boys and more than three quarters of the girls, including 35% of those under 10, admitted they were sexually active, 63% of the boys said they had forced the girl to have sex with them; 93% of the girls reported having been raped.

Kacker L et al (2007) as quoted in Consortium for Street Children (June-August Statistics Compilation) found that the overall incidence of physical abuse among street children, either by family members or by others or both, was 66.8% across the states in India. Out of this, 54.62% were boys and 45.38% were girls. Furthermore, out of the total number of child respondents reporting being forced to touch private parts of the perpetrator's body, 17.73% were street children. 22.77% reported having been sexually assaulted. Mith Samlanh/Friends (2001) in a survey on substance use among street children in Phnom Penh among vulnerable children, including street children, found that 88% had had sexual relations with tourists.

It is estimated that between 15-20% of street children in Vietnam are HIV positive according to UNICEF (2003).

Out of school and street children in Nepal say their involvement in sexual activities started within the first three months of their being on the street, while some reported exposure to sexual activities, according to Save the Children (2005)¹⁶. The same study reveals that in

Pokara, Nepal, 80% of the boys and 90% of the girls living on the streets were sexually abused by hotel and restaurant owners and by people in places of work.

An in-depth analysis of the situation of working children in St Petersburg revealed that 20% of those involved in prostitution were below 18 years of age (ILO/IPEC (2000)).

In Bucharest, Romania, 42% of the street children were sexually abused between the ages of 6 and 12 according to Save the Children (2005).

Street-involved youth in Canada are typically runaways with a history of sexual and physical abuse and they are highly vulnerable to sexual victimisation. They are often actively recruited by pimps and coerced into the sex trade, and to support themselves many engage in begging, drug trafficking, theft, prostitution or survival sex (offering sex in exchange for food, shelter, drugs), according to Save the children (2005).

Substance abuse

UNICEF (2002) reported that 40.9% of street children in Zimbabwe declared that they were taking intoxicants, the majority of them being “children of the street”. In the Lusaka rapid assessment conducted by Project Concern International Zambia (2002), nearly 25% of children interviewed were involved in substance abuse.

Other difficulties faced by street children

EDMH (2009) found that 32% of street children interviewed in Juba declared that hunger is the main difficulty they have to cope with, followed by violence (30%) and medical issues (22%).

In the rapid assessment of Lusaka by Project Concern International Zambia (2002), more than 50% of street children reported being exposed to violence on the streets.

Extreme cases of child abuse with fatal outcomes are not uncommon. ABC Trust (no date) as quoted in Consortium for Street Children (no date) recounted that in Brazil, 4611 street children were murdered between 1988-1990 followed by a series of street children being killed during the past years.

3 Study Design

As stated in the introduction, given the absence of previous studies in this area, it was anticipated that difficulties would be likely to reach the street children. The magnitude of the problem is still unknown and drawing out a random sample from an unknown/hidden population can prove very challenging. Given the situation above, this study was done in two phase:

Phase 1 being for the definition of the profile of a child in street situation

Phase 2 being for the quantification of the “children in street situation”.

Thus this study is carried out with the following objectives:

3.1 Study objectives

3.1.1 General objectives

The main objectives of this study are to define and quantify the street children phenomenon in Mauritius in view of finding appropriate solution to the related problems.

3.1.2 Specific objectives:

1. Defining the socio-economic and cultural profile of a child in street situation as should be for the future.
2. Identifying what type of support, guidance or life skills they need in order to avoid the pitfalls of delinquency, substance abuse and HIV /AIDS and to succeed in life.
3. Identifying the community structures and government institutions that can contribute in their assistance and follow-up, and determine in what way they can be of help
4. Proposing a line of action that can be taken to effectively help the child in street situation of Mauritius by the various potential actors

More practically the study aimed at bringing answers to the following research questions:

- Is there a problem of street children or “children in street situation” in Mauritius?
- If such a problem exists:
 1. Who are the street children and what are their characteristics, in terms of age, gender, level of education, family size, health status, place of residence, family situation, exposure to domestic violence or discrimination, how do they spend their time, and what types, if any, of punishment is practiced against them, etc?
 2. What is the magnitude of the problem?
 3. To what extent does it correspond to the international and regional definitions?
 4. Is there a specific particularity in the Mauritian context in relation to this problem and what are these particular features?
 5. What are the most important economic, social, and political causes behind the street children phenomenon in the island?
 6. What difficulties and dangers do street children in Mauritius face?
 7. Who can contribute to help the street children and how?

3.2 Stakeholders' Engagement Process:

There was an active implication of the major stakeholders from the start, through the implementation of the study to drawing major conclusions as a means of getting their commitment to the process and the outcomes. In fact the major stakeholders were identified and were regularly informed and consulted as the study went on. Among the major stakeholders were the following:

- 1 The Ministry of Education and Human Resources
- 2 The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development & Family Welfare
- 3 The Central Statistics Office
- 4 The Ombudsperson for Children's Office
- 5 The UNAIDS
- 6 The UNDP
- 7 The Ministry of Health and Quality of Life
- 8 CSR Funders (Rogers)
- 9 The Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment
- 10 The National Empowerment Foundation
- 11 The Mauritius Research Council
- 12 The Child Development Unit
- 13 Youth Network of Mauritius
- 14 Safire
- 15 The Mauritius Family Planning and Welfare Association
- 16 Ministry of Youth and Sports

The questionnaire was sent to them for review and contributions to make sure that all their concerns were taken into consideration and approved. During the study, the stakeholders were convened to working sessions during which they were informed of the process, progress of the study and on the preliminary results. It is in this light that some of the members were convened to a final briefing where the results of the study will be presented for their information and feedback. The final version of the report was drawn taking into consideration their comments and suggestions.

3.3 Study design type

This study was a descriptive cross sectional and retrospective study that looked at time T and in the past to determine the profile and dynamics of the street children and the street children phenomenon in Mauritius. It is both quantitative and qualitative.

3.4 Elaboration of Tools

Based on the terms of reference for the study, a series of research questions were identified and a study protocol was elaborated to present the steps that the study had to follow. Concomitantly, a questionnaire was elaborated to provide data that will answer the major research questions as raised in the above mentioned Terms of Reference, highlighted by the research team and further discussed with the major stakeholders.

3.5 Potential Users

This study is for exploitation by policy makers and managers of the social system in Mauritius who are in charge in one way or the other of ensuring the welfare of Mauritian Children. It is designed to help identify areas of problems within the society and to pull the attention of such leaders in the hope that they can come up with adapted solutions to them. It will also provide a baseline situation that could be used in the future to evaluate the impact of any corrective interventions that might be put in place.

3.6 Study procedure

As earlier stated, the study was divided into two phases. The first phase had as main objective of defining the street children in a Mauritian context (dynamics and profile) while the second phase focused on the quantification of the street children.

3.6.1 Phase 1: Definition of the street children profile.

3.6.1.1 *Sampling method*

The sampling methods were different depending on the phase of the study. For the first phase, a wide range of non-probabilistic alternatives were considered for selection and after much thought, purposive sampling was identified as being the best sampling technique, especially given the hard-to-reach nature of the “children in street situation”.

The purposive sampling was done with a main *purpose* in mind being to ensure that the respondents in fact meet the basic criteria of being marginalized or in a precarious condition. For this, we used the snowball method. Originally, children considered in marginalized or in precarious conditions and who were already being followed up as such by NGOs were recruited and interviewed. Subsequently, they were asked to recruit other children in difficult conditions similar to theirs that they know of.

3.6.1.2 *Sample within the Population of Mauritius*

The sample consisted of 940 Mauritian individuals aged 5 to 19 sampled within the settlements in which the NGOs were present. The regions within which the children were interviewed are as follows:

District	Sub regions
Port Louis	Saint Croix
	Briquetterie
	Cite La Cure
	Roches Bois
	Tranquebar
	Cite Vallijee/Cassis
Pamplemousses	Triolet
	Baie du Tombeau
Riviere du Rempart	Goodlands
Flacq	Bel Air
	Caroline
Black River	Cite La Ferme
	La Valette

District	Sub regions
	Bambous
Plaines Wilhems/Moka	Camp Le Vieux
	Barkly
	Cite Kennedy
	Trefle
Savanne	Souillac
	Camp Diable
	African Town
	Batimarais
	Benares
	L'Escalier
Grand Port	Mahebourg and Annexed regions
	Plaine Magnien and annexed regions
	Anse Jonsee
	Providence
	Bambous Virieux and Annex
	Cluster-Rose Belle

3.6.1.3 *Selection Criteria and Recruitment of Respondents*

The methodology involved the selection of units within each locality or settlement in which the NGOs were present. Children who were already being taken care of by the NGOs were recruited for interview. They were thus identified as living in conditions of hardship with some form of disconnection from parental or responsible adult control/supervision within his/her normal milieu. Subsequently, they were requested to summon their peers who happen to be in the same conditions of hardship like them, be it if they were being taken care by an NGO or not.

3.6.1.4 *Setting of Respondents' Recruitment*

The various settings for recruitment of respondents were markets, streets, playgrounds, workplace, abandoned structures etc.

3.6.1.5 *Questionnaire administration modalities*

Distribution and collection of the questionnaires: The distribution of the questionnaires was carried in such a way that would ensure the study progresses evenly across all identified regions and target groups. Based on the number of expected respondents per locality, the interviewer was given enough questionnaires to ensure no stock outs during this exercise.

Data collection and languages of the questionnaires: The data was collected by an interviewer administered, structured questionnaire. The questionnaire, though in English, was administered in Creole for ease of understanding. During the training of interviewers, the latter were given opportunities to read the questions and ask them immediately in creole to their counterparts. They could thus have common understanding of the questions and expected answers.

Study Supervision: At the level of each of the NGOs involved in data collection, a supervisor who was competent in using the tool was responsible for the monitoring and the provision of technical assistance to the interviewers during the data collection exercise.

Respondents' incentives: Each of the respondents was given a packet of noodle ("mine Apollo") and a juice. This was to serve in the latter stage as the unique item for the capture recapture method that was to be used.

3.6.1.6 Data Entry and Analysis

The research team organized and entered the data using a SPSS software program. After entry of the data, the statistician went on to clean the data, that is, catching and correcting errors before the data are analyzed. Manual checks were done on the filled forms as a means to catch incorrect skip patterns, unreadable marks on the questionnaires, wrong codes and blank questions. This greatly reduced or eliminated inappropriate items, and eliminated inconsistent or unusable responses or items for which respondents had selected conflicting answers (e.g. both "agree" and "disagree" are marked). The software program created a database to organize the information.

Based on the research questions and pre agreed dummy tables, the statisticians generated necessary analysis tables and graphs for commenting, drawing conclusions and recommendations by the team.

3.6.2 Phase 2: The quantification of "children in street situation"

It is worth remembering that the methodology used in this phase for the quantification of street children was the capture recapture method. A brief questionnaire that contained questions related to the major criteria identified in phase one as being essential for the profile of "children in street situation", was administered and used here by the interviewers to children aged 5 to 19 years in randomly selected communities in Mauritius Island. The questionnaire helped determine who of the children aged between 5 and 19 years was a child in street situation and who was not.

3.6.2.1 Sampling method

In the second phase, we needed enough sample units to ensure that all the districts were represented in the sample. Special care was taken to ensure that there was a fair representation of poverty pockets and non-poverty areas. The list of poverty regions were identified based on the listing provided by the National Empowerment Foundation. Out of the 225 pockets of poverty, 40 were randomly selected. Out of the 170 non-poverty villages and towns, 40 non-poverty towns/villages were also randomly selected. 37 children were randomly selected from each sampling frame which sums to 1,500 children being selected from pockets of poverty and 1,500 from non-poverty pockets.

3.6.2.2 Combined Sample and Reweighting

The final sample consisted of 2910 individuals aged 5 to 18 years of age. All units within the raw sample were then reweighted with an appropriate sample weighting algorithm so as to correct for over sampling within the pockets of poverty.

The weighting procedure ensured that the final sample of 2910 individuals is representative of the combined population of the poverty and non-poverty areas aged between 5 and 18 years.

3.6.2.3 Selection Criteria and Recruitment of Respondents

During the training of interviewers, the latter were trained on the necessity to do a systematic non-bias sampling in the bit to avoid the tendency of going only for children who they suspect or no to be in street situation. They systematically interviewed all children between the ages of 5 and 19 years who accepted willingly to be interviewed and or with the permission of their parents where feasible.

3.6.2.4 Setting of Respondents' Recruitment

The settings for recruitment of respondents were markets, streets, playgrounds, workplace, abandoned structures etc. Contrary to the first phase, homes were also targeted here.

3.6.2.5 Questionnaire administration modalities

Experienced and skillful interviewers from known networks were identified and trained to deploy various survey techniques. Many of them already had experiences in face to face surveys, dealing in sensitive issues. As earlier stated, in anticipation of the capture-recapture method, a unique object (mine Apollo) was distributed to all known street children that were interviewed in phase 1.

In phase 2, data was collected via face to face interviews using interviewer administered questionnaires. In line with this method, children who had been captured (provided with "Mine Apollo" in the first phase) were actively identified via a question that was administered at the end of the interview.

The selection of interviewers was based on the following criterion:

- ✓ Command of the Creole language (written and oral)
- ✓ Field experience with children
- ✓ Field experience working in deprived regions
- ✓ Availability during the entire duration of the survey from 8 am to 8pm including Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays
- ✓ Easy human contact

Distribution and collection of the questionnaires: The distribution and administration of the questionnaires were planned and executed to ensure that the study progresses simultaneously across all identified regions and target groups. Based on the number of expected respondents per locality, the interviewer was given enough questionnaires to ensure no stock outs during this exercise.

Languages of the questionnaires: The questionnaire, though in English, was administered in Creole for ease of understanding. During the training of interviewers, the latter were given opportunities to read the questions and ask them immediately in creole to their counterparts.

Study Supervisors: At the level of each of the NGOs involved in data collection, a supervisor who was competent in using the tool was responsible for the monitoring and the provision of technical assistance to the interviewers during the data collection exercise.

Respondents' incentives: Each of the respondents was given juice.

3.6.2.6 Calculation Methods (capture recapture)

Profile of the child in street situation

For the purpose of this calculation and with inspiration from the profiles of a street child or child in the street situation as defined in the first phase of the study, the second phase identified any child interviewed as such if by virtue of his/her conditions of living, attitudes and/or practice, escapes from parental or other responsible adult control/supervision and who is currently exposed to any of the major hazards identified earlier as constituting a danger for him/her in these conditions and that can retard or interrupt his/her physical, mental and social development (drugs, prostitution, child labour, sustained physical and psychological trauma, malnutrition, poor hygienic conditions etc). Being in the absence of parental or responsible adult control/supervision involved time spent in the streets, in the field, at working sites or other such places for leisure, economic reasons, security reasons or otherwise.

Calculation formula

Considering the following:

- The number of children in street situation “captured” during the first phase= a
- The number of children in street situation “captured” during the second phase= b
- The number of children in street situation “captured” during first phase and “recaptured” during the second phase=c
- The number of children in street situation in Mauritius = N

From theory on capture recapture method, it can be concluded that the proportion of all “children in street situation” that were captured during the first phase is the same as the proportion of all “children in street situation” identified during the second phase who had been captured during the first phase. This is represented in the formula below.

$$\frac{a}{N} = \frac{c}{b}$$

Consequently, by the rule of three $N = \frac{a \times b}{c}$

3.7 Major Short Comings of the Study Methodology and How They Will be Dealt With To Minimize The Consequences

The first disadvantage of the techniques employed to gather information from the targeted sample is that we are likely to overweight subgroups in the population that are more readily accessible.

The following are identified as shortcomings inherent to the methodology used in this evaluation:

Underreporting/Over reporting

The physical presence of the evaluators could influence response, producing a false picture of the true situation.

To minimize this:

- Interviewers were trained on how to approach sensitive issues for which the respondent could have difficulties in giving direct answers in their presence. For example, by ensuring respondents on the secrecy around responses given.
- The questionnaire also carried mutually cross verifying questions to enhance the reliability and validity of answers provided by the respondents.

Recall Bias

During this study, the respondents were often called upon to recall on events that might have taken place many years in the past. Efforts were thus made to maximize consistency in the answers. For this, the interviewers were trained on how to assist the respondents in looking back into their past as far as possible. Methods such as the use of major annual events to recall times of past experience were used.

4 Findings

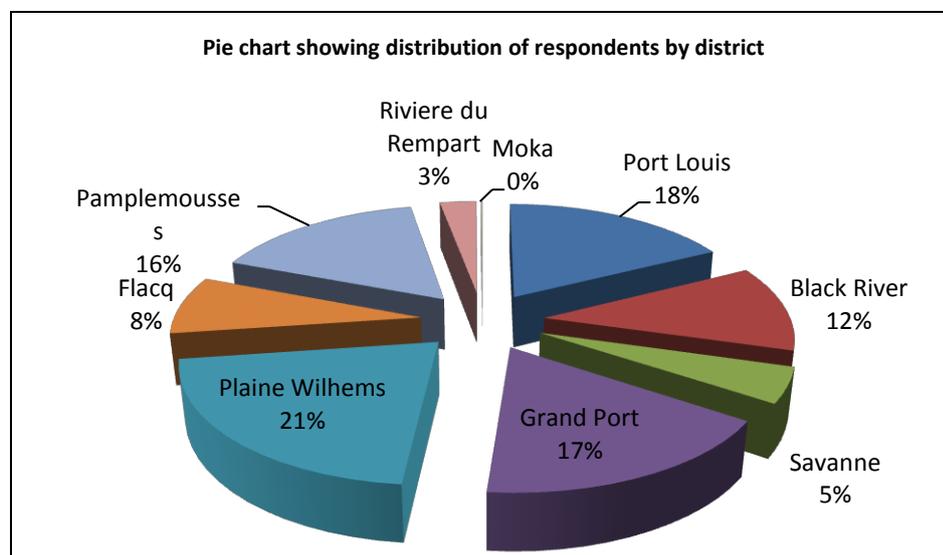
4.1 Findings related to phase 1 of the study: Defining the profile of “children in street situation” in Mauritius Island

The total number of children interviewed was 945. However, after data cleaning, it was noted that 5 individuals interviewed were aged above 19 and were excluded from the analysis.

4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of Children

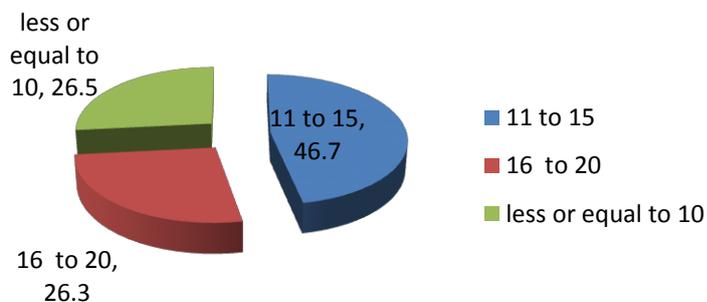
The geographical distribution of the children interviewed is shown in the pie chart below. The sample is made mostly of children living in Plaine Wilhems, Port Louis, Grand Port and Pamplemousses (72.2%).

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by district



62.9% of children interviewed were male while the rest 37.1% were female. The study further revealed that 73.6% of the 940 children were aged below 16 at the time of the interview and that the average age of the respondents was 13 years (12.95), while the ages ranged from 5 to 19 years.

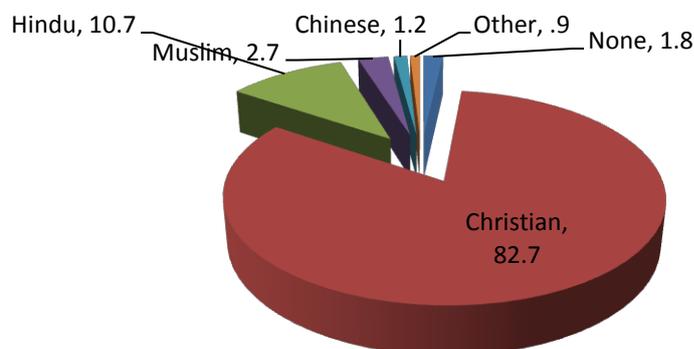
Figure 2: Distribution children by age group



10 respondents representing 1.2%¹ of the sample mentioned that their birth had not been declared.

The majority of interviewees, representing 82.7%, belonged to the Christian community while 10.7% belonged to the Hindu community. Detailed ethnic belonging can be found in the diagram below. 'None' in the diagram represents non respondents.

Figure 3: Pie chart showing percentage of children by ethnic belonging

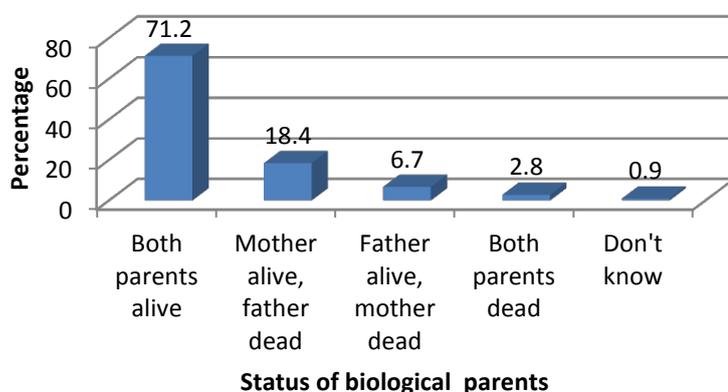


4.1.2 Family Situation of the children

Out of all children interviewed, 18.4% declared that their father was not alive and 6.7% declared that their mother passed away, giving a total of 25.1% with only 1 parent alive. 2.8% of the respondents of phase 1 declared that both parents of theirs were dead, while 0.9% (8 children) was not aware of the status of their parents. See below the graphical presentation of this information below. In all 27.9% of the respondents had at most one parent alive.

According to the declarations of the children who lived in households, the average number of children within those household was 4.27.

Figure 4: Bar chart representation of the status of parents for the children interviewed

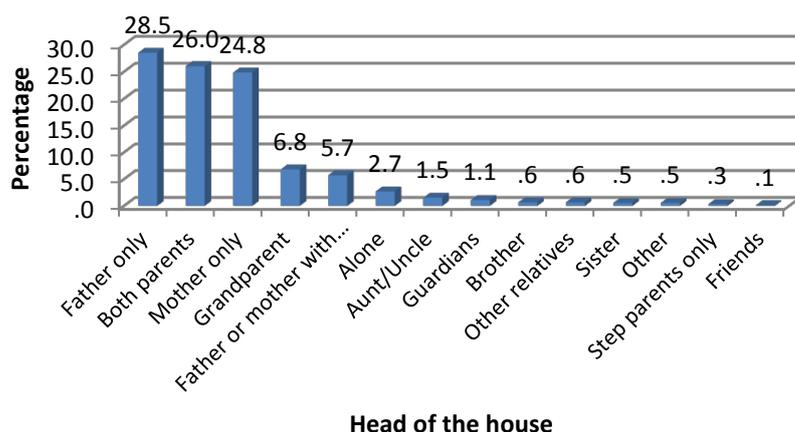


Looking at the status of the head of the household where the “children in street situation” were living, 26.0% of respondents declared that they were living within households headed by both

¹ 1.1% excluding non-responses

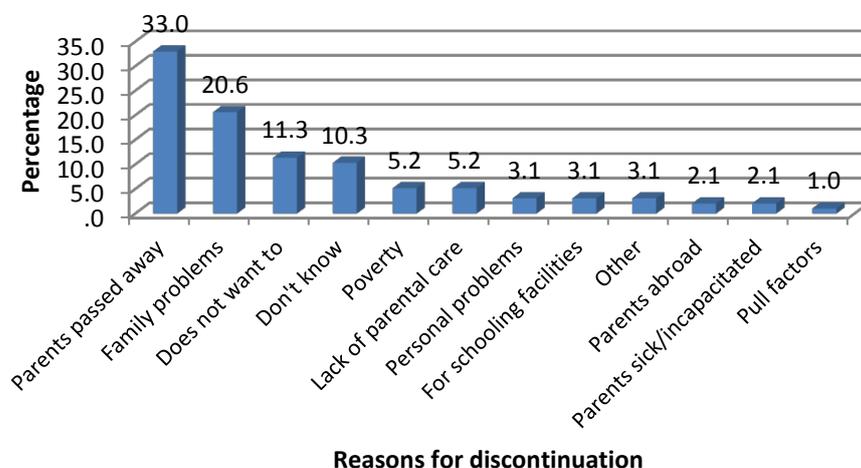
parents. Further breakdown shows that 28.5% and 24.8% of all the respondents live under households headed by the father only and the mother only respectively, giving a total of 53.3% of mono-parental households. It was also noted that 5.7% of these children are living under households headed by 1 of their parents accompanied by a step parent, while 6.8% of them live within households headed by their grandparents. Finally, 5.2% of them were living under households headed by relatives, members of immediate family, friends and others. 2.7% declared that they were living alone.

Figure 5: Bar chart representation of the persons heading the household in which the child in street situation is living



For those children not living with their parents at the time of the interview, in 33% of cases, it was because their parents passed away. 20.6% were not doing so because of family problems and 11.3% simply because they do not want to live with their parents for undeclared reasons. The graphical presentation below provides more details concerning the main reasons why the children were not living with their parents, see the graphical presentation below.

Figure 6: Bar chart showing the various reasons for not staying with parents by the children



4.1.3 Conditions of housing and access to basic utilities

20 of all the children interviewed were not living in a family milieu. Various places of living for these children are detailed in the table below. In total thus, these 20 children were the street living children.

Table 1: Places where children who live outside the family milieu spend their nights

Place where they spend their nights	Frequency
Shelter/charitable institutions	2
In the street	2
In a car park/bus station	1
At a mosque/church	3
In a mobile house	5
In a deserted/under construction building	2
Rental house	5
Total	20

Around 10% of respondents were found to be living in conditions lacking basic necessities like electricity, proper toilet and/or pipe-borne water system.

Table 2: Availability of basic utilities within places where the children live

Utilities available	Frequency	Percentage
Toilet, water system and electricity	712	79.2%
Toilet, water only	49	5.5%
Toilet and electricity only	36	4.0%
Toilet only	17	1.9%
Water system and electricity only	33	3.7%
Water system only	3	0.3%
Electricity only	37	4.1%
No utility at all	12	1.3%
Total	899	100.0%

4.1.4 School Attendance

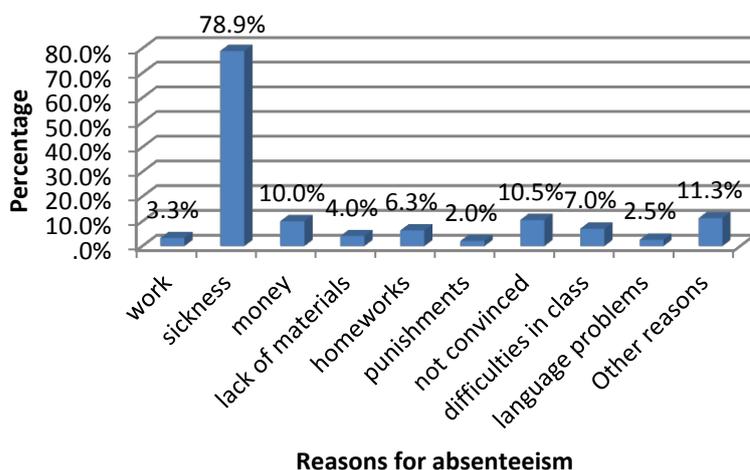
School enrollment rates

36.2%² (334) of all interviewees (5-19 years) were not attending school at the time of the interview. While education statistics in Mauritius is showing an enrolment rate of 69% among the 12-19 population, the study reveals that enrolment rate was only 49.5% among these children interviewed

² 35.5% excluding non-responses

within the same age group. Among the 588 (63.8%³) who were currently attending school, 67.6% declared having been absent from school, at least once during the term preceding the interview day. It is worth noting that illness was the most prominent of the causes of absenteeism followed by the lack of money, the lack of conviction in the need to go to school and difficulties with classes. The details of the distribution of the reasons for being absent are presented graphically below.

Figure 7: Bar chart representation of the reasons of absenteeism by percentage



School truancy

Among the 588 respondents currently attending school, 134, representing 23% of children bunked school during the term preceding the interview date. The average number of bunked days during the term was found to be 5.47 days.

School dropouts

Among the 334 children who were not currently attending school, 13.3%⁴ (39) never attended school. This implies that 4.15% of the children in the general sample of 940 children never attended school. 255 of the 334 children (88.3%⁵) who were not currently in school had started education but stopped at some point.

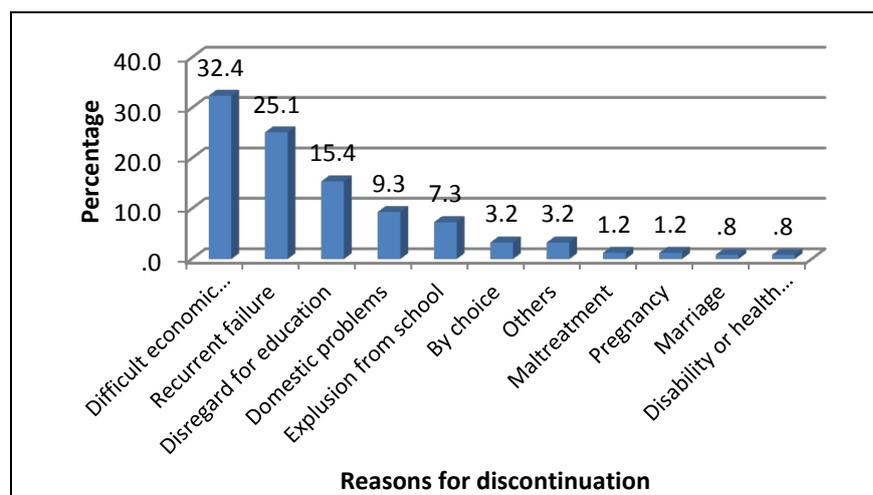
32.4% of those who started and stopped did so due to difficult economic conditions and 25.1% stopped due to recurrent failures. 15.4% left school because they have a disregard for education while 9.3% did so because of domestic problems. It is interesting to note that issues like pregnancy, early marriage, maltreatment, workload and personal choice were also amongst the factors that led to school drop outs. The diagram below provides a graphical presentation of the main reasons why the children left school at some point.

³ 62.6% excluding non-responses

⁴ 11.7% excluding non-responses

⁵ 76.3% excluding non-responses

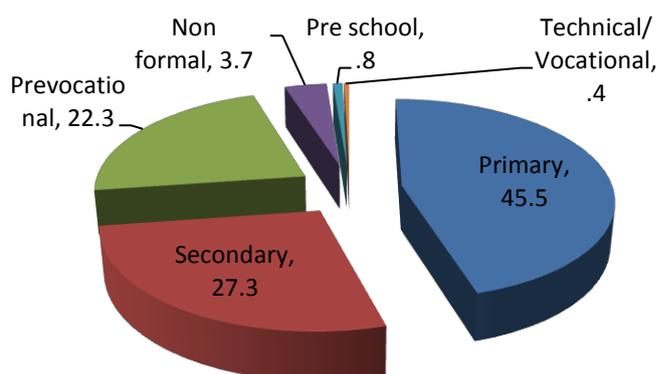
Figure 8: Bar chart displaying reasons for school discontinuation by percentage



Level of education at moment of dropping out

The school dropout points are detailed below. As high as 45.5%⁶ (110) of school dropouts occurred at primary level while 27.3% and 22.3% occurred at secondary school level and prevocational school level respectively. The rest were non-formal, pre-primary, technical or vocational training drop outs. 46.2% (114) of school drop outs interviewed manifested their desire to continue their education, while 53.8% (133) did not wish to resume school.

Figure 9: Graphical representation of school drop out point for those who started and stopped education at some point



4.1.5 Involvement of street children in economic activities and the related reasons

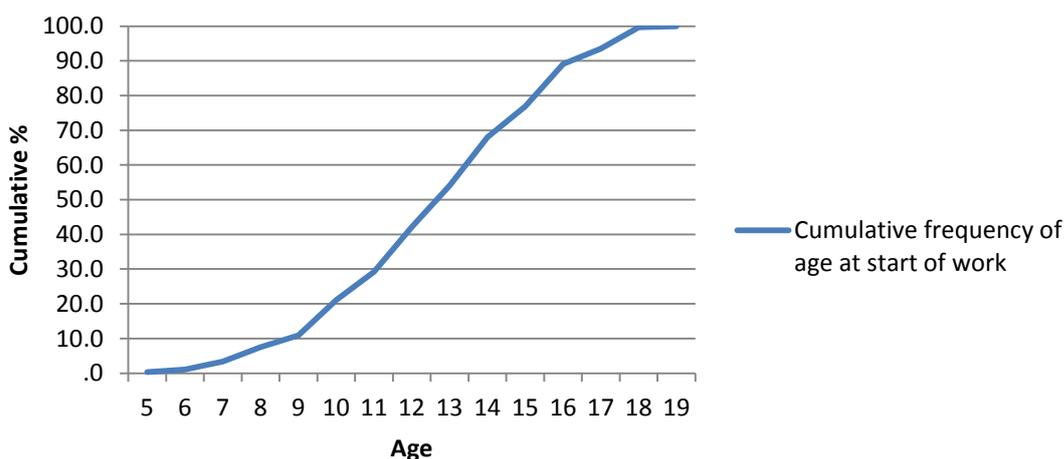
35.0%⁷ (308) of interviewees were found to be involved in economic activities. The average age at which they started working for economic gains was found to be 13.03 years and ranged from 5 to

⁶ 43.13% excluding non-responses

⁷ 32.8% excluding non-responses

19. The cumulative % curve below shows the distribution of the ages at which a certain population of the children has started to work. The Mauritian Law⁸ condemning employment of an individual below 16 years of age, it is worth noting that 76.9% of those working have started to do so before reaching 16.

Figure 10: Cumulative frequency curve for the age at which the children started to work

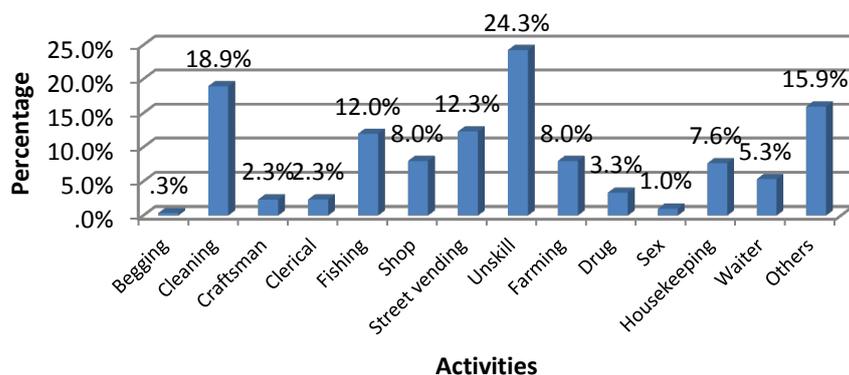


40.5% of those who were working did it on almost every day basis while 16.7% and 42.8% respectively work on a seasonal and occasional basis.

Regarding the types of economic activities, 18.9% were involved in cleaning, 24.3% in unskilled works such as (carriers in the market, dish washers, unskilled labourer in masonry etc.), 12.0% in street vending and 12.0% in fishing. It should be noted that 3 children (15, 16 and 17 years of age respectively) out of the 308 respondents were involved in sex trade while 10 of them have recourse to drug trafficking as a means of survival. The diagram below provides a full picture of the types of economic activities in which the children are involved in.

⁸ Employment Rights Act, Act no. 33 of 2008, 19th Feb 2008

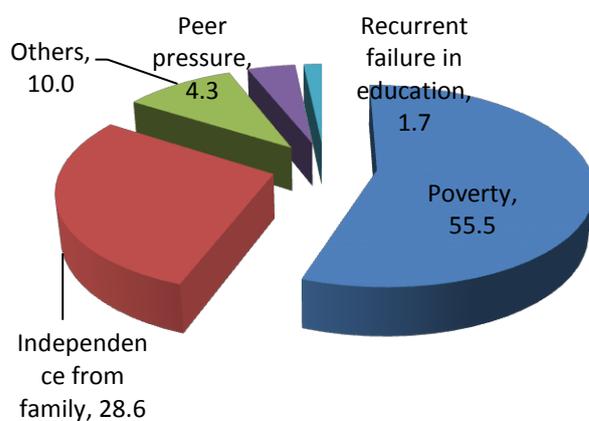
Figure 11: Bar chart representation of the types of economic activities in which the children were involved in



Main reasons for working

The main reasons that pushed the children to be involved in economic activities was poverty of the household for 54.2% of them, while 27.9% evoked the fact that they wanted to be independent from their family. The rest evoked reasons like recurrent failure in school, peer pressure etc. See details in pie chart below.

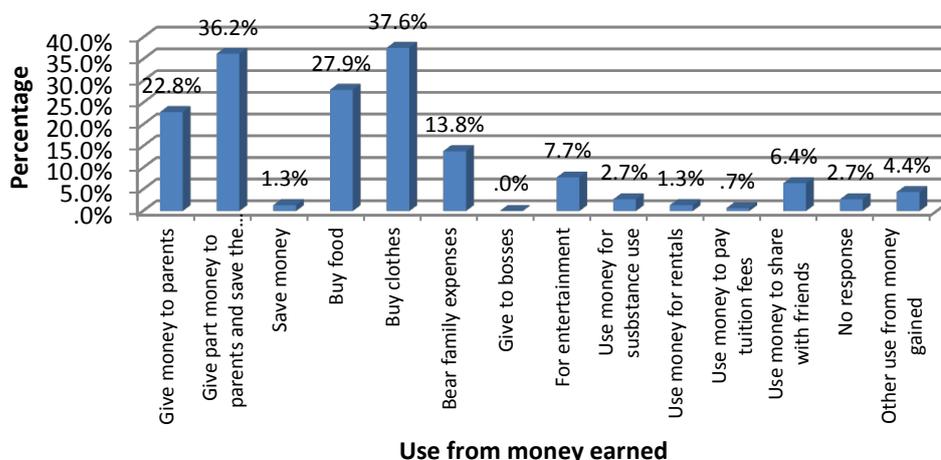
Figure 12: Pie chart showing the main reasons why the children were working (as evoked by themselves)



Use made of the money earned

Regarding the use the children made of the money they earned, 59% of them responded that they were giving all or part of the money to their parents. 27.9% of them were using the money to buy food, while 2.7% (8 children) were using the money for purchasing illicit substances. Further details on how the children use the money they earn can be found in the diagram below.

Figure 13: Bar chart showing how the children used the money they earn from economic activities



Nature of the earnings by the street children for providing child labour

Out of those who were working, 75.6% were receiving a financial gain and from their declaration, the average monthly gain was MUR 3532.62 and ranged from MUR 100 to MUR 20000 for an average of 6.36 hours per day. It is worth noting that 33.2% of children were working for a financial gain not higher than MUR 2000. Moreover, 68 respondents, representing 22.1% of those who were working were neither earning a salary, nor a gain in kind.

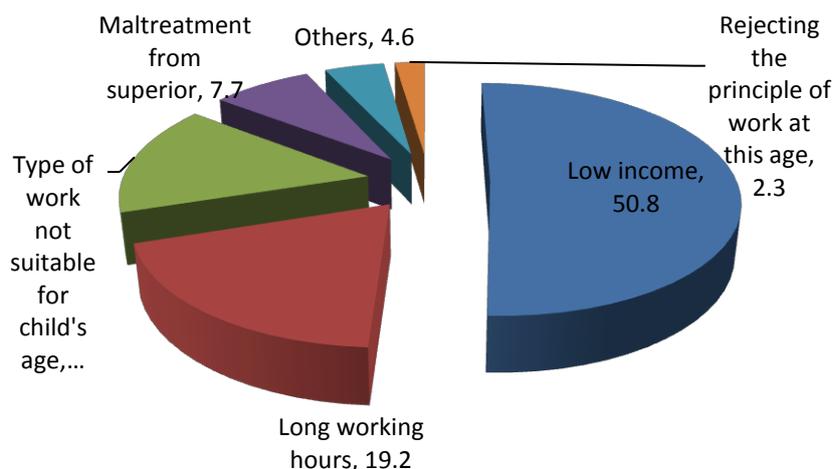
Table 3: Table displaying various forms of gains by the street children from working

Gain	Number of children	Percentage
Salary, Gain in kind and meal allowance	10	3.2%
Salary and meal allowance	34	11.0%
Salary, gain in kind	4	1.3%
Salary only	185	60.1%
Meal allowance and gain in kind	1	0.3%
Meal allowance only	5	1.6%
Gain in kind only	1	0.3%
Nothing at all	68	22.1%
Total	308	100.0%

Level of satisfaction by the street children with the work they do.

Out of those who were not working, 51.4% of respondents were totally satisfied with their jobs while 26.0% and 22.6% were somewhat satisfied and not satisfied at all respectively. The reasons for their dissatisfaction (those who are somewhat satisfied or not satisfied at all) are presented in the pie chart below. Prominent among them were low income (50.8%), long working hours (19.2%), unsuitable type of work (15.4%) and maltreatment from superior (7.7%).

Figure 14: Pie chart representation of the reasons for dissatisfaction



Mechanisms for getting the street children into working for gain in cash or kind

61.0% of those children who were working declared that no one convinced them to start working while 25.5% and 6.3% revealed that they were pushed by core family members and relatives respectively to start working.

It was further noticed that 23.1% and 30.2% respectively were helped by family members and friends to get a job. The diagrams below provide more details about who convinced and helped the children to find a job.

Figure 15: Person who convinced the child to start working

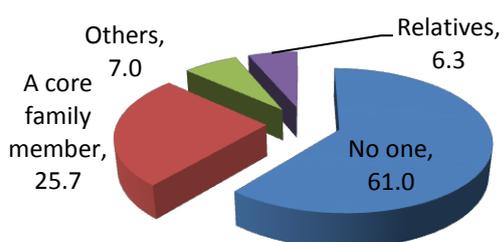
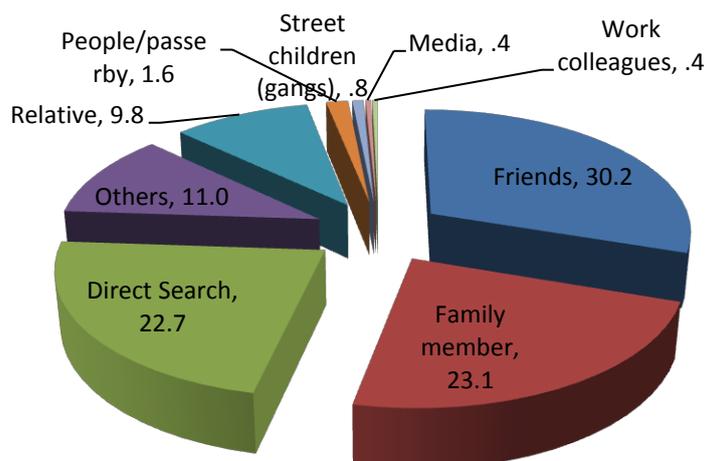


Figure 16: Person or way the child used to get a job-Pie chart representation



51.6% of the working children declared knowing other children being used to do jobs in the same way as them.

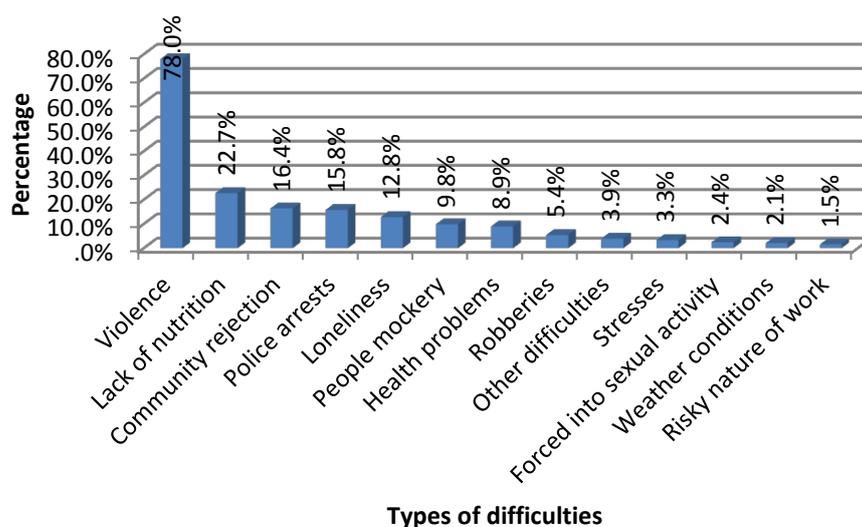
Close to 21% of them stated that someone tried to stop them from working. Among the persons who tried to stop the child, there are family relatives, police officers and social workers. So, as high as 79% of the working children had never been discouraged by any adult. Furthermore, 6.6%⁹ (19 children) of them declared that they have had a work accident at one moment or the other in the past, 15 of which said that they were provided with medication

4.1.6 Difficulties and hazards encountered by the “children in street situation”

39.5% of children interviewed declared that they were facing difficulties/maltreatment. The types of difficulties faced by the children are presented in the bar chart below. The difficulty with highest frequency is physical violence followed by lack of nutrition, community disapproval and police arrests.

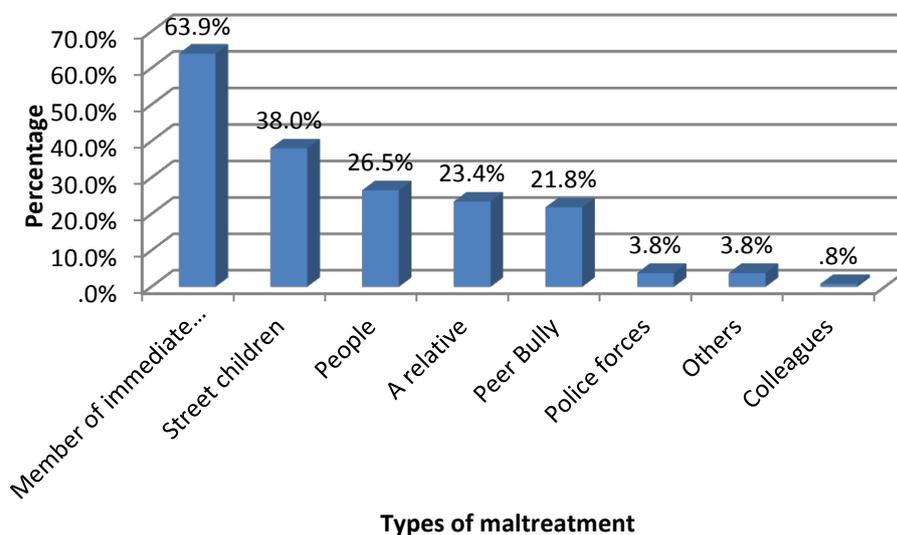
⁹ 6.2% excluding non responses

Figure 17: Types of difficulties faced by child by percentage



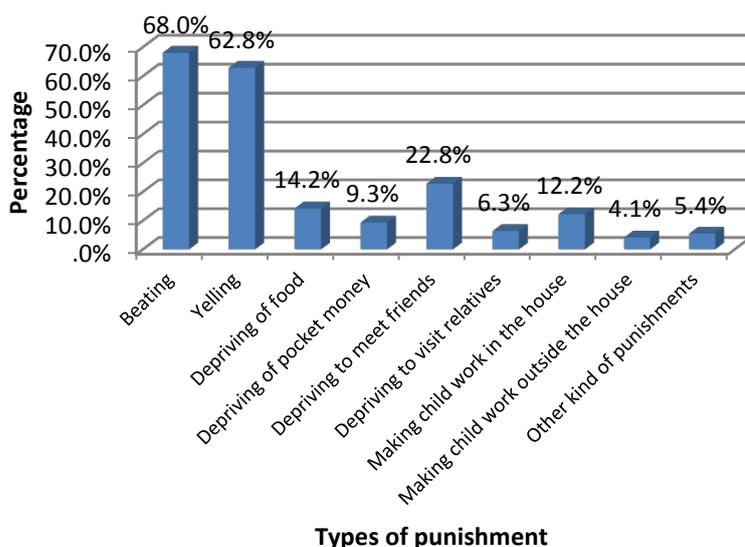
Most children who admitted are subject to maltreatment revealed that they were maltreated by members of their immediate family. Prominent among the others were other street children, passers-by, other relatives and peers. The forces of law and order were rarely mentioned. See details in graph below.

Figure 18: Bar chart presentation of the persons maltreating the child



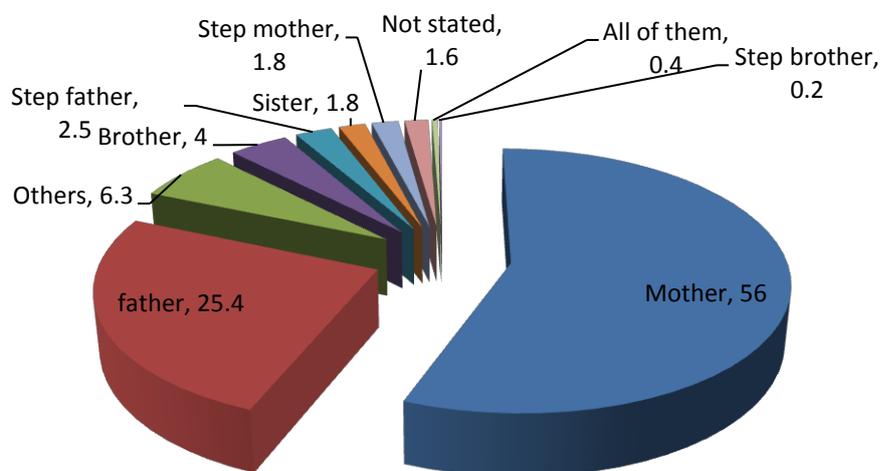
49.8% of children interviewed declared that they were subject to punishment at home. The most frequent amongst the types of punishment were beating and yelling, depriving them of meeting friends. It is worth noting that 14.2% of those who are subject to punishment at home were deprived of food. The types of punishment are presented graphically below:

Figure 19: Types of punishments faced by children by percentage



It was found that the mothers and fathers were the most commonly cited as being responsible for punishing the child. See pie chart below for the details of those responsible for the punishment of the children.

Figure 20: Pie chart representation of the persons punishing the child



4.1.7 Knowledge on social institutions in charge of child welfare

Evaluating the knowledge of the street children on the institutions that exist in their communities and that take care of problems of their likes, it came out that on 31.7% of children mentioned that they were aware of any such structures taking care of children living in precarious conditions. 8.8%¹⁰ (73) have at least once been taken care of by such social structures in charge of child welfare. The majority of them (84.7%) were brought there by either a social worker, a family member or by

¹⁰ 7.8% excluding non-responses

themselves. These children declared that they were provided with counselling, shelter and materials by the institutions. However, only 64.8% of those who had been taken care of by the structures want to go back there or will encourage other children to join.

Figure 21: Cross tabulation between types of services received and level of satisfaction

Type of service	Satisfaction level						
	Good but I don't want to go back there	I want to go back there and I call for supporting it and sending children there	I want to go back there but do not encourage anyone to do so	They treated me badly	Others	Missing	Total
Shelter	12	3	1	5	2	0	23
Counseling	9	41	1	1	4	3	59
Employment	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Material assistance	5	7	0	0	2	1	15
Financial	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Another way	1	3	1	0	0	2	7

From the table above, it is noted that counselling was the service most frequently received by the children followed by shelter provision and material assistance. Of the 23 children who received shelter, only 3 (13.04%) were ready to go back or recommend their peers to do the same. On the contrary, with counselling, as high as 41 (73.21%) thought the services good enough to want to go back for them or recommend their peers to do the same.

26 children mentioned that they had filed at least a complaint against those who abused of them or maltreated them. The outcome of the complaint is detailed in the table below:

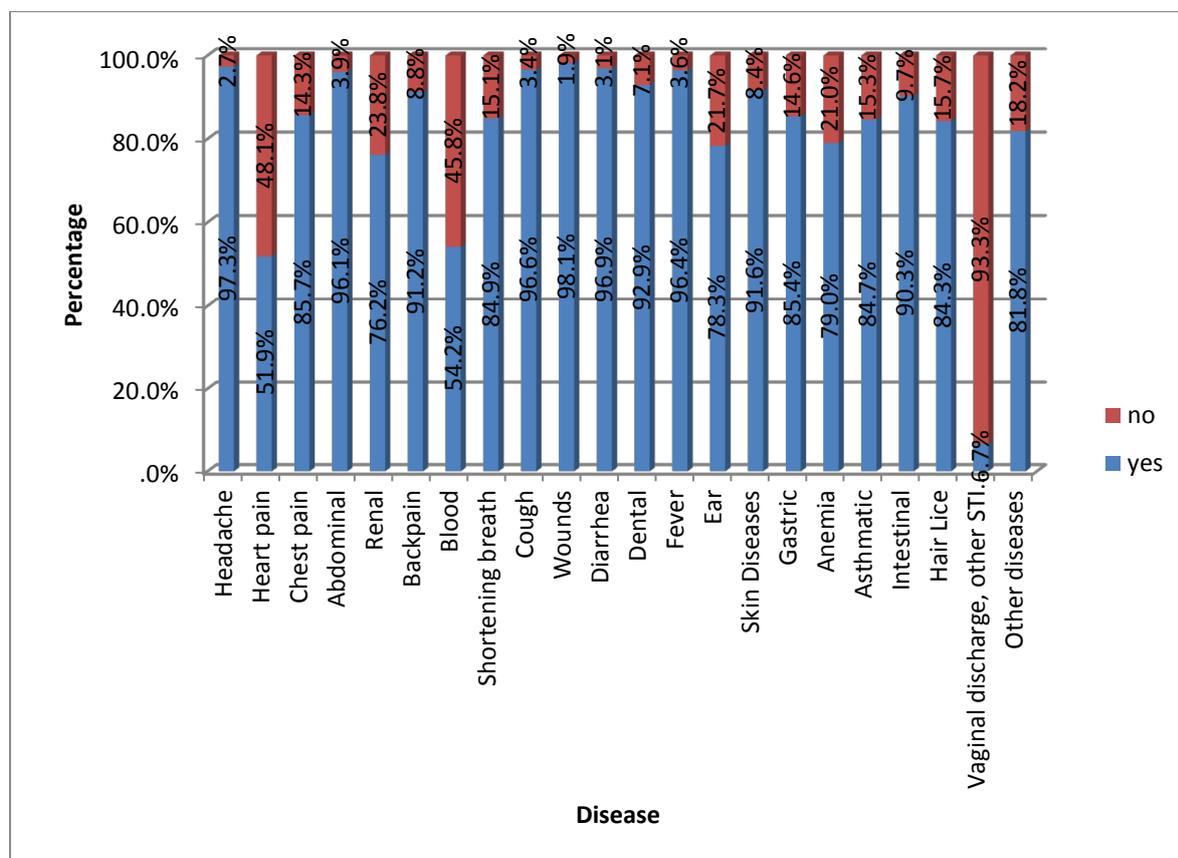
Figure 22: Outcome of complaint filed against those who abused of the child

Outcome of complaint	Frequency	Percent
They ignored the complaint	4	15.4
The complaint is still being processed	2	7.7
The perpetrators were reprimanded	12	46.2
The perpetrators were declared not guilty	2	7.7
The perpetrators were imprisoned	4	15.4
I don't know	1	3.8
No response	1	3.8
Total	26	100

4.1.8 Health issues encountered by street children

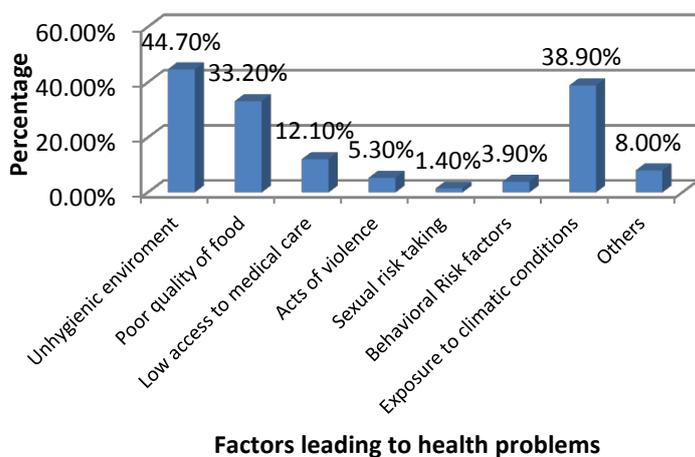
The investigation also looked at the health issues encountered by the street children on whether or not they were provided with any treatment. The diagram below shows which percentage of children has received medication/proper treatment for the various diseases they may have come across. Of high concern are STI symptoms and Heart pain. Generally, it is noticed that, with the exception of urethral discharge, blood in urine and heart pain, when the street children have any other health related condition, the majority resort to appropriate treatment centers.

Figure 23: Stacked bar chart showing the percentage of children who received treatment for the various disease symptoms they may have had



According to the children with health problems, the leading factors behind the health problems were unhygienic conditions, poor quality of life and/or inadequate food and exposure to climatic conditions.

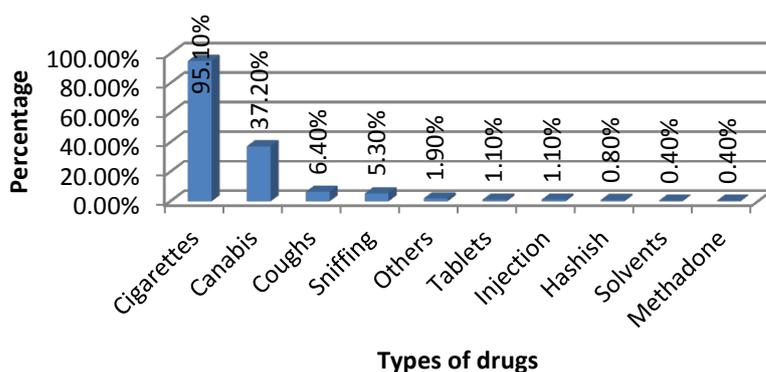
Figure 24: Bar chart representation of the perception of children regarding the factors leading to health problems they encountered



4.1.9 Implication of the street children in substance abuse

In relation to substance abuse, 271 children, representing 30.2%¹¹ of the sample declared that they were either smoking and/or taking other illicit hard drugs. Further enquiries on the type of substances they consume revealed that 95.10% of them were smoking and 37.20% were taking cannabis. Moreover, 3 children (1.10%) were involved in drug consumption through intravenous means and 6.40% were taking codeine based cough mixtures. In all, 109 (11.59% among all interviewees) reported using at least one kind of hard drugs like hashish, cannabis, injection drugs, solvent aspirations etc.

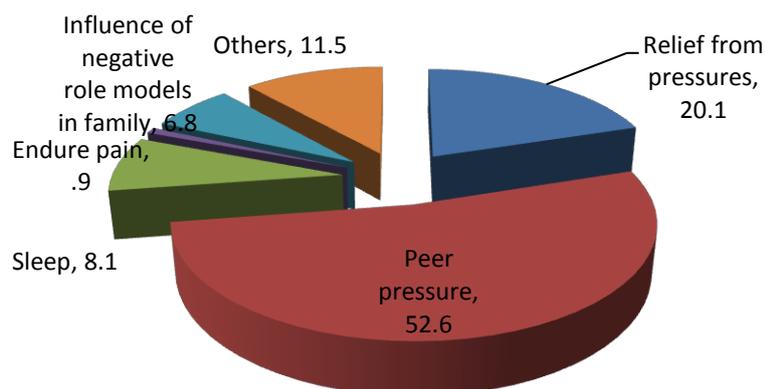
Figure 25: Types of drugs consumed by various children by percentage



According to the declaration of the street children, the main reason for drug consumption is detailed in the pie chart below. Most prominent reasons were peer pressure (52.6%), relief from street pressure (20.1%), lack of sleep (8.1%) and influence of negative role models in the family (6.8%).

¹¹ 28.8% excluding non-responses

Figure 26: Various reasons for drug consumption presented in a pie chart



4.1.10 Availability and cost of illicit drugs

In assessing the availability and accessibility of the aforementioned illicit substances to the street children the study found out that 74.2% of all interviewees declared that drugs were readily available. 77.4% declared that they found the substances to be too expensive. The pie charts below show more details on the perception of the children regarding availability and cost of drugs.

Figure 27: Pie chart representation of the children’s perception regarding physical accessibility of drugs on the market

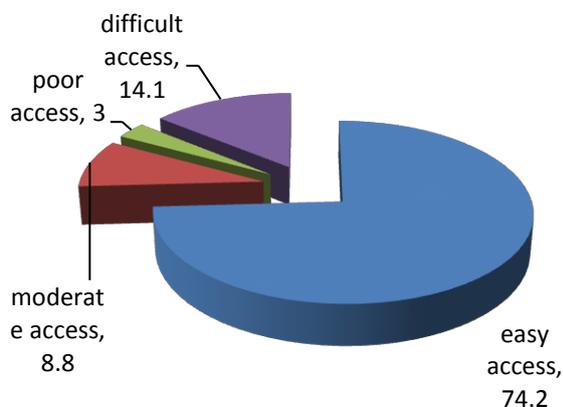
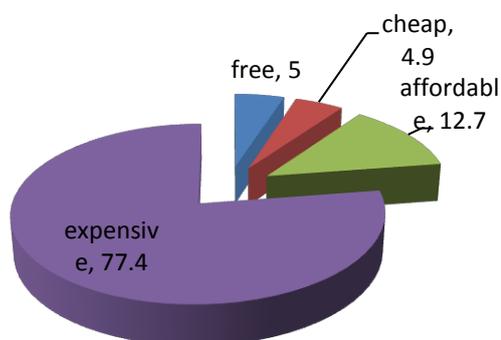


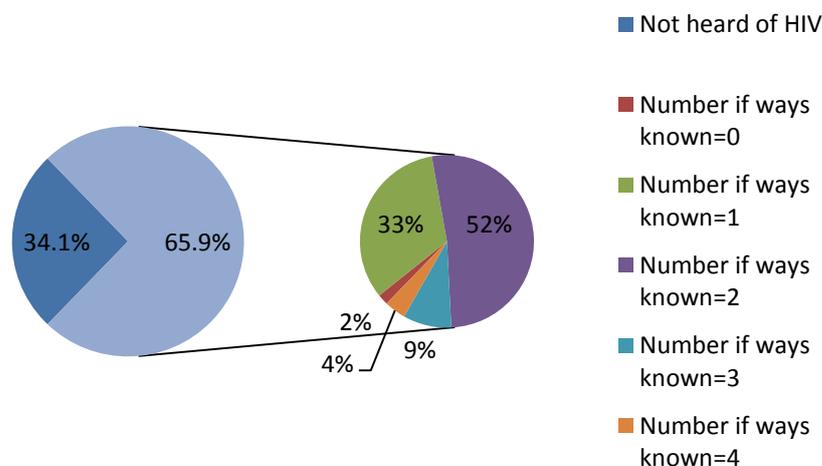
Figure 28: Pie chart representation of the children’s perception regarding price of drugs on the market



4.1.11 HIV AIDS knowledge

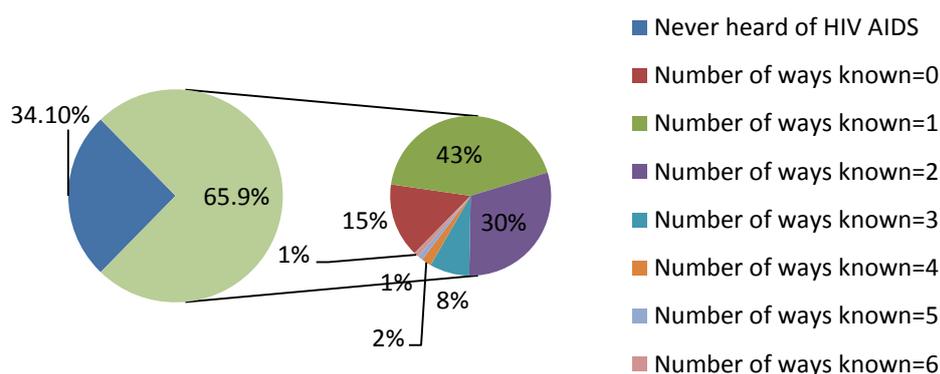
In relation to the knowledge on methods of transmission of HIV, 65.9% of respondents stated that they had heard of HIV/AIDS but only 4% of them knew of the 4 major methods of transmission (sexual, contaminated instruments, blood transfusion and mother to child transmission). Mother to child transmission and blood transfusion were the least frequently cited means of transmission (11.1% and 15.6% respectively). Sexual intercourse and sharing of contaminated instruments were relatively better known as modes of transmission of HIV by the children (80.0% and 73.6% respectively).

Figure 29: Pie to pie displaying percentage of respondents who could cite various numbers of ways of transmission of the pathology among those who have heard of HIV/AIDS



In relation to the knowledge on methods of prevention of HIV, only 1% spontaneously cited all the major methods of prevention (abstinence, fidelity, condom use, avoiding to share sharps) Abstinence, avoiding sex with multiple partners, prostitutes, anal sex were the least frequently cited means of prevention (9.2%, 14.4%, 7.8% and 3.6% respectively). Condom use and use of clean syringes were relatively better known as modes of prevention of HIV by the children (64.3% and 45.9% respectively).

Figure 30: Pie of pie chart displaying percentage of respondents who have heard of HIV, who could cite various numbers of ways of prevention of the pathology



4.1.12 Knowledge of signs and symptoms of STI

Looking into the knowledge by the children in relation to STI, it was found that only 19.6%¹² (168) of interviewees declared having heard of STI. 27.2% of those who had heard of STIs were not aware of

¹² 17.9% excluding non-responses

the signs and symptoms of the infection. Among the remaining (72.8%), the symptoms mentioned are presented below. Urethral discharge and burning pain were among the most frequently cited (33.5% both). These were followed by sores, painful urination (dysuria) and weight loss (20.9%, 20.9% and 15.8% respectively).

Figure 31: Bar chart showing the percentage of various symptoms known among those who have heard of STIs

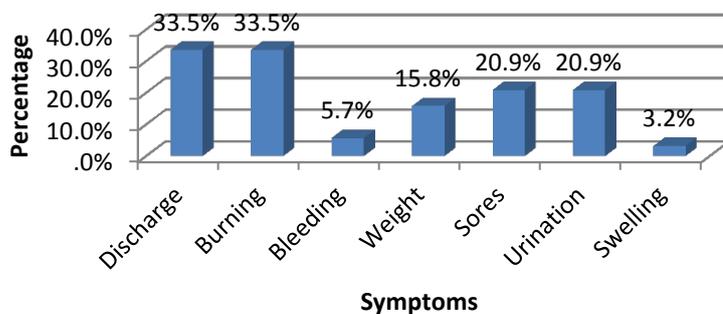
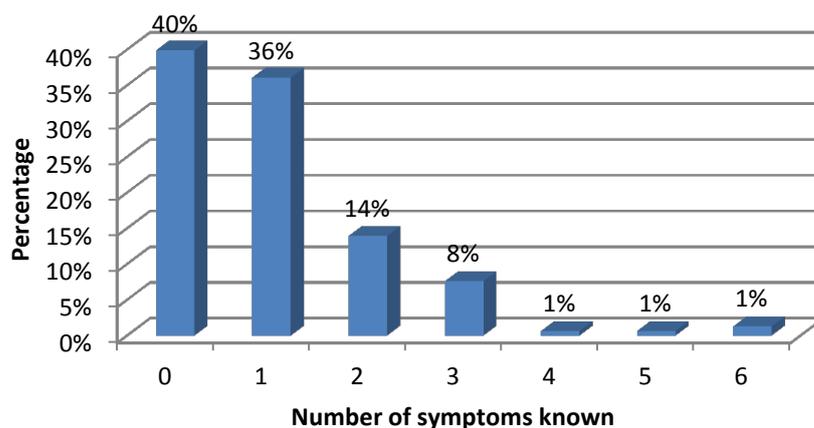


Figure 32: Bar chart displaying percentage of respondents who could cite various numbers of symptoms of the pathology among those who have heard of STIs



42.2% (372) of 881 respondents who provided information declared that they have either a girlfriend or boyfriend (not necessarily sexually involved). Sex wise breakdown shows that 14 out the 154 male respondents had a male partner while 136 had female partners. For the girls, 66 out of the 74 respondents had male partners while 8 had female partners.

Figure 33: Sex distribution of gender of sexual partners

		Sex of respondents		Total
		Male	Female	
Gender of sex partner	Boy	14	66	80
	Girl	136	8	144
	Both	4	0	4
Total		154	74	228

Among all 940 respondents, 21.3% (200) declared that they have had sexual intercourse (16.1% did not respond to the question). The average age at first sexual intercourse was found to be 13.80 years and ranged from 6 years old to 19 years. It is worth noting that 78.8% (152) of those who have had sexual intercourse did it before 16 years of age while 89.1% (172) had their first sexual intercourse before reaching 18.

Looking at the age difference between the respondents and the persons with whom they had their first sexual intercourse, it was found that the female generally had sex with somebody older than them. 92% of girls had their first sexual intercourse with somebody older than them while only 27% of boys had their first sexual intercourse with someone older than them.

A more detailed analysis of the age difference shows that 10% of girls had their first sexual intercourse with someone who was at least 11 years older than them and 26% had it with someone who is at least 7 years older than them.

Figure 34: Cumulative percentage curve of the number of children having sex by age

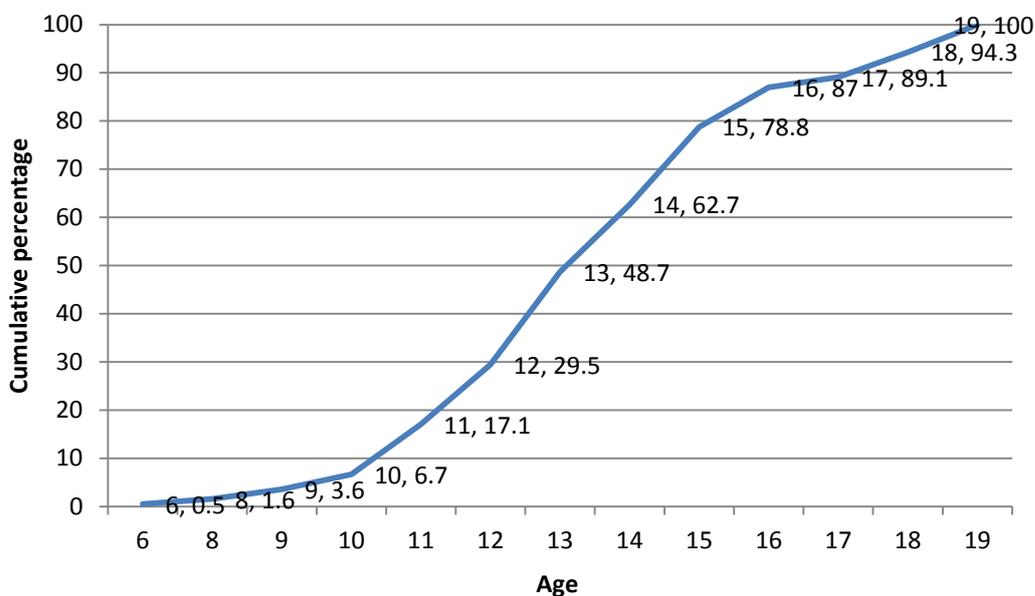
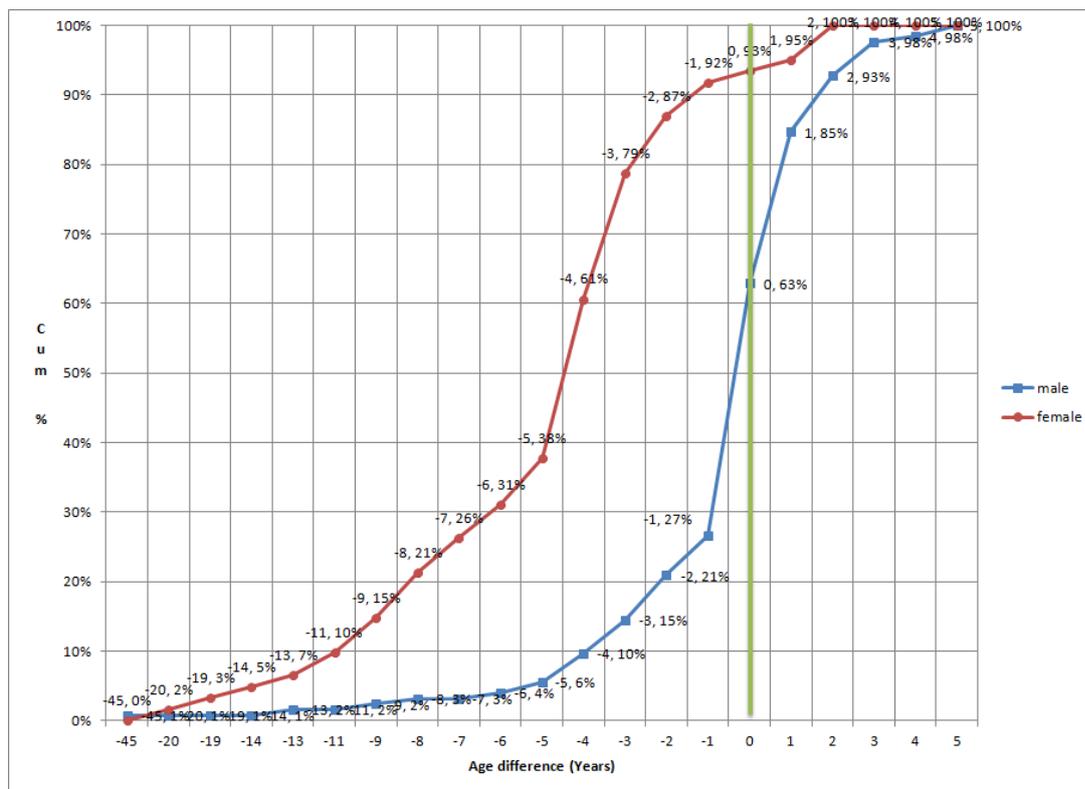


Figure 35: Cumulative percentage curve of the number of male/female who had sexual intercourse versus the age of his/her partner



The main reasons given by the respondents for having first time sex are detailed in the table below. The most prominent reasons were to please themselves (34.6%), to please partner (18.8%) and the desire for experience (30.9%). It is interesting to note that reasons like the desire to coerce partners into marriage, encouragement/forcing by family members as well as partners were also mentioned.

Figure 36: Table displaying the frequency and percentage of main reasons for first time sexual intercourse as evoked by the children

Reasons for first time sex	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent (excluding non-responses)
To please myself	66	33	34.6
To please partner	36	18	18.8
Desire for experience	59	29.5	30.9
Need for materials	2	1	1
Peer pressure	5	2.5	2.6
Wanted to force partner into marriage	1	0.5	0.5
Forced by partner	4	2	2.1
Encouraged/Forced by family members	3	1.5	1.6
Don't know	12	6	6.3
Others	3	1.5	1.6
Sub Total	191	95.5	100
No response/Unrecorded	9	4.5	
Total	200	100	

10% (20) of those who had had sexual intercourse declared that they had something in return (money, food, clothes, mobile phones, mobile cards and a bear) for their first sexual intercourse. Of these 20 children, 16 were female and 4 were male. Out of the 16 female, 9 were below 16 years of age while only 1 of the 4 male was also below 16 years of age.

4.1.13 Pregnancy and abortion

The total number of girls who already had sexual intercourse in the sample was 67. Out of them, 28, representing 47.5%¹³ of those who ever had sexual intercourse had been pregnant (8 non-responses). The outcomes of the pregnancy are detailed below. It is worth noting that 32.1% of those who got pregnant ended up with an induced abortion while 39.3 % carried their pregnancy to term delivery. Note that 1 female respondent, who was 14 years of age, was still pregnant at the time of the interview.

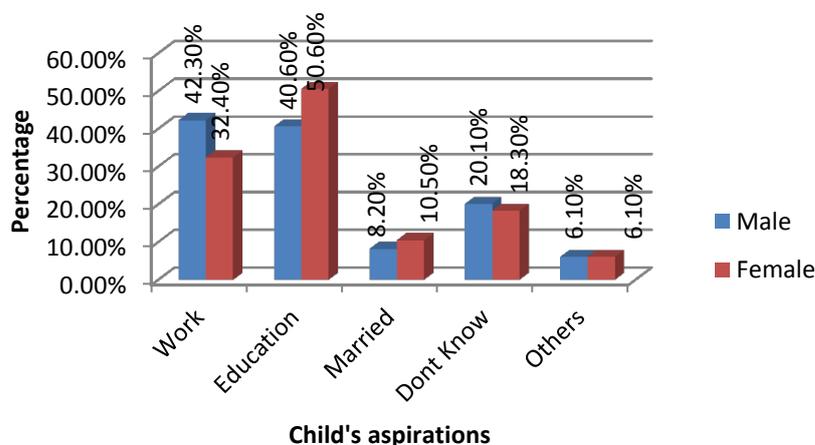
Table 4: Outcome of delivery among those girls who fell pregnant

		Frequency	Percent
Outcome of delivery	Term Delivery	11	39.3
	Premature delivery	3	10.7
	Induced Abortion	9	32.1
	Spontaneous abortion	4	14.3
	<i>Sub Total</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>96.4</i>
	Still pregnant	1	3.6
Total		28	100.0

4.1.14 Child's aspirations for personal development

In response to the question on what their immediate plans for the future were, 44.4% of the children mentioned that they would want to continue their education if given the opportunity while 38.5% said that they would rather continue working. 9% preferred to get married.

Figure 37: Percentage and frequency distribution of the respondents by aspiration and sex



¹³ 41.8% excluding non-responses

Generally, the female respondents were more ambitious in continuing their education than the male respondents who often preferred to go into the workforce. Only 40.6% of males and 50.60% of females were interested in pursuing their education while 42.3% of male and 32.40% of female were more interested in getting into the workforce. Other options for the future included marriage and the girls seemed more interested than the boys to go into marriage.

4.2 Findings related to phase 2 of the study: Quantification of “Children in Street Situation” in Mauritius island

As stated above the operational definition of a child in street situation, being in the absence of parental or responsible adult control/supervision involved time spent in the streets, in the field, at working sites or other such places for leisure, economic reasons, security reasons or otherwise. Consequently the following criteria were highlighted as being the basis for determining who was in such situation:

- Criteria 1: Child above 15 years old, not going to school and not working
- Criteria 2: Child below 16 years old and is working for economic reasons even if going to school
- Criteria 3: Attending school but chronically absent from school for unjustified reasons (for more than 10 days per school semester)
- Criteria 4: Both parents absent in the lives of the child (dead, physical separation ex expatriation for economic reasons etc.)

It is worth noting that these criteria are supposed to be warning signs for the community. They do not necessarily automatically put a child into danger or the street situation. However by every indication in this study, a fairly good number of those children in these situations sooner or later find themselves in difficulties of one for or the other. In other words, there was a strong correlation between the criteria and the children of phase one of the study and who were being taken care of by local NGOs.

Applying the four major criteria above the study came out with the following figures

Table 5: Estimation of the street children population using capture recapture method

Criteria 1 or 2 or 3 or 4	Count	Estimation
Number of street children from the first phase (= a)	316	6780
Number of street children from the second Phase (= b)	472	
Number of street children from the first phase recaptured in the second phase (=c)	22	

Considering that the number of “children in street situation” in Mauritius = N and applying the formula for the calculation of target population by the capture/recapture method elaborated upon above whereby

$$\frac{a}{N} = \frac{c}{b}$$

Consequently, by the rule of three

$$N(\text{The number of children in street situation in Mauritius}) = \frac{a \times b}{c} = \frac{316 \times 472}{22} = \mathbf{6780}$$

Taking into consideration a fifth criteria, which was the exposure of the “children in street situation” to at least one of the major dangers identified in the study and enlisted above (substance abuse, prostitution, sexual abuse, physical abuse etc.) the calculation came out as follows

Table 6: Estimation of the street children population already involved in at least one of the various dangers

Criteria 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 AND at least 1 danger	Count	Estimation
Number of street children from the first phase (= a)	231	4312
Number of street children from the second Phase (= b)	280	
Number of street children from the first phase recaptured in the second phase (=c)	15	

$$N = \text{The number of children in street situation already exposed to danger in Mauritius} = \frac{a \times b}{c} = \frac{231 \times 280}{15} = 4312$$

By deduction 63.6% of the children identified as being in the street situation during the second phase were already exposed to at least one of the hazards mentioned.

Investigating the impact of living area (poverty or non-poverty) on the likelihood of being in street situation

It was noted that 303 children out of 1586 in poverty regions and 169 children out of 1311 in non-poverty regions turned out to be classified as street children based on the criteria established above. As such, a chi square test was conducted to determine any possible difference between these 2 regions in terms of proportion of children in street situation present. The test showed that 1% level, there is strong evidence to conclude that that these 2 regions are different in terms of the presence of children in street situation (very low p-value, see appendix 7.5 for details).

Investigating the impact of living area (poverty or non-poverty) on the likelihood of being in street situation and being exposed to one of the major hazards

Within the phase 2 samples, it was noted that 89 of the 1311 children interviewed from non-poverty regions (6.8%) and 191 of the 1586 children interviewed from poverty regions (12.04%) had the right profile of a child in street situation and who had been exposed to one of the major hazards. A chi square test indicates that the difference between these 2 regions in terms of proportion of street children is highly significant (evidenced by a p-value of 0.000). See appendix (section 7.5) for details.

5 Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 The street children phenomenon in Mauritius

As in the study conducted on street children in Rodrigues, the present study clearly revealed that “children in street situation” do exist in Mauritius mainly in the form of “children on the street” or “street working children”. There were only 20 (4.2%) of them who were street living children as shown above. The vast majority had a home to return to at the end of the day. While today we may be talking more of “children on the street” or “street working children”, than of “street living children”, we must keep in mind that there is a very thin line between those that end up in a home and those that sleep in the streets. The likelihood or risk of the former 2 groups eventually slipping into the “street living children” category is real. All it takes is a critical incident for the children to take to the streets as a permanent residence: a rape, a physical abuse, a family conflict between parents etc. As Opoku (1996) found in Lusaka, their early exposure to drugs, easy money, sexual pleasures or even the worsening of living conditions at home among other factors could be contributing factors to this transition. This is also confirmed in a study done by the UNICEF (2002) in Zimbabwe. In fact, within the present study, as many as 231 of the 316 “children in street situation” (73.1%) interviewed in phase one of the study and 280 of the 472 identified as being in street situation in phase 2 (59.3%) were found to have already been exposed to one or the other of these hazards. By the calculation it is estimated that there are about 6780 children in the “street situation” in Mauritius and of these, it can be expected that about 4312 of them (63.6%) are already exposed to one of the major dangers, notably substance abuse, prostitution, child labour and other forms of physical and psychological abuses.

The phenomenon of “children in street situation” in Mauritius, similarly to the case of Rodrigues, was found to be strongly associated with a series of socio-cultural and environmental factors that put the children at risk of certain hazards in their daily life. These children are generally excluded from the socio-economic amenities of the community. They are exposed to neglect and aggressions of various sorts from the family and the outside milieu that pushes them into further exclusion, which is this time orchestrated by the children themselves in reaction to the aggressions. They thus variably react by getting into a state of depression, running away from school, or from the family, getting involved with gangs or having recourse to substance abuse etc. as seen above. This is in line with the findings of UNICEF (2002) in a study on street children in Zimbabwe. These children who thus ostracized subsequently fall into a vicious spiral of exposure to aggression–isolation–exclusion – further exposure to aggression.

The phenomenon generally affects males more. Looking at their profile, 62.9% of the children interviewed were male while 37.1% were female. Most studies in other countries showed similar trends. For example, Zuberi F. (2005) in a study in Lusaka found out that 77% of the “children in street situation” were male.

5.1.1 On economic background

The street children phenomenon is complex and multifaceted and cannot be simplistically interpreted as a consequence of poverty. Nonetheless, this study makes it very clear that belonging

to a poorer community, significantly increases the probability that a child will fall into the street situation and will be exposed to the many hazards that the children often encounter.

5.1.2 On parental support/control

Irrespective of the economic situation of the parents, their effective presence in the lives of the children was found to be of capital importance for their balanced development. Unfortunately, the parental situation around these children in street situation was found to be relatively fragile. In spite of the fact that 71.2% of the children in phase 1 of this study had both parents alive, only 26.0% of respondents were living with both parents in their houses. 39.5% of these children were in the houses headed by a mother alone or other family members or friends. So, they are economically and in terms of parental support or control disfavoured. This puts them in a precarious situation, which allows further abuse by the immediate environment and also leads to their involvement into activities that further weaken them. As stated by EDMH (2009) 39% of street children in Juba were found to be in the street situation mainly due to the lack of parental care. Given an average of 3.26 children per family (as compared to 3.7 in Rodrigues), in a context where 74.6% of the children live with at most one of their parents, it is no doubt that the parental support/control is ineffective or totally absent.

Looking at the relationship between parental presence and the occurrence of various hazards, the present study showed that at 1% level of significance, there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that involvement in economic activities is dependent on the presence of parents (See Appendix, section 7.2). In other words, the study provides strong evidence that the absence of parents from the child's life is a common factor that predisposes them to start working. At 1% level of significance, this study rejects the null hypothesis (See Appendix, section 7.3) that work periodicity is not dependent on parental presence. In other words, the presence of both parents is likely to reduce the duration/frequency of child involvement in any form of income generating activities.

The analysis of the relationship between parental presence and the subjection of children to any form of maltreatment was also analyzed (See Appendix, section 7.4). The relationship between parental presence and being subject to any kind of maltreatment was found to be highly significant, indicating that presence of parents is an important factor determining whether the children are subject to maltreatment or not.

The family proved to have some roles both in pushing the children into the streets and can thus be the key actors for taking them out of the streets. 6.3% of the children who were working declared having been pushed into working by family members. 23.1% of the working children who were pushed into working by family members actually had the family member look for the work for them. This shows a relatively high tolerance of child labour within the family. As such programs supporting the children have to be accompanied by programs targeting the families to strengthen their capacity for the better up-bringing of their children. It is worth recalling that the rehabilitation process of a child in street situation has to include reconciliation with the family as a prelude to their reintegration into the family and society at large.

5.1.3 Hazards street children are exposed to in Mauritius

As in many other studies cited in this document, the children in street situation of Mauritius were found to be exposed to many hazards on a daily basis. Prominent among them were child labour for income generating reasons, physical violence abuse, hunger, psychological violence both from the community and peers, sexual abuse and diseases (like gastro-intestinal, STI, lung infections and skin infections). Like in other afore-mentioned studies, 3 cases of sex work were mentioned. The early exposure to sexual activities coupled with their naivety and low level of knowledge related to sexuality does not only put them at risk of STI, but also at risk of early and unwanted pregnancies. It is therefore unsurprising that 28 of the 67 girls (47.5%¹⁴) who stated being sexually active, acknowledged having been pregnant. Furthermore, 32.1% of the reported pregnancies ended up in an induced abortion under dubious and risky conditions.

Substance abuse was not uncommon. In fact 109 of the “children in street situation” in phase 1 of the study reported using hard drugs like hashish, cannabis, injection drugs, solvent aspirations etc.

Child labour is evidently a major problem here: the findings of this study reveal that “children in street situation” spend the great part of their time working to survive and at times to ensure the survival of their families. Even within their homes, they were involved in household chores. As many as 35.0% of those interviewed declared being involved in income generating activities for a mean duration of about 6.36 hours per day. This is to be expected given the rather fragile family structures observed above. As was stated by the children themselves, their implication in these activities is often done with the instigation and complicity of parents and other close family members alike.

Having to work leaves these children with little or no time to partake in activities that are necessary for their personal development – such as playing and studying. They put a lot of pressure on the child and could constitute the triggering factor to send them into the streets. The average age at which the child started to work was found to be 13.03 years, the minimum and maximum being 5 and 19 years respectively, which is considered to be very low compared to the 16 years minimum age authorized by the Mauritian Law¹⁵. It is worth noting that 76.9% of these children were below 16 years. The situation is all the more alarming when taking into consideration that some of the children had resort to extreme and dangerous activities such as prostitution, drug selling or even begging as a means of survival.

Contrary to Rodrigues, children who worked for income generation were better paid as they worked for an average of 6.36 hours per day and for an average income of MUR 3532 per month – a monthly salary higher than the legal minimum salary of 2248 MUR (EPZ sector minimum wage). It is however worth noting that as many as 22.1% of the street working children received no payment at all for their labour. These findings, when compounded, and coupled with the fact that 79.4% of the working children in Mauritius (as against 91.8% in Rodrigues) reported that no one ever tried to stop them from one working, suggest that Mauritian society has a high level of tolerance for child labour.

5.1.4 Knowledge on HIV/AIDS and STI

In a context of relatively high prevalence of HIV/STI, awareness of the risk factors is of the utmost importance. Unfortunately the level of knowledge of the means of transmission of HIV among

¹⁴ 41.8% excluding non-responses

¹⁵ Employment Rights Act 2008

children in street situation was found to be relatively lower than that of the general population. Only 65.9% of the children have heard of the disease as compared to the 99% results of the *Study on Behaviours related to HIV and AIDS in young Mauritians aged 15-24*. Moreover, only 4% of those who have heard of the disease could spontaneously name the four major methods of transmission of the infection (Sexual intercourse, blood transfusion, mother-to-child and using of contaminated instruments). Their being more versed with the sexual transmission and the transmission of contaminated instruments is indicative of the emphasis made by communicators on these methods. The level of the knowledge of these children in relation to the means of prevention of HIV was also low as only 4% of them could spontaneously name at least the four major methods of prevention of the infection.

It is however interesting to note that derivative means of prevention like partner testing, avoiding sex with known infected persons, avoiding blood contact, use of physical protections, fidelity and the use of medicine were mentioned though relatively less often. However, some erroneous notions like skin protection, smoking/alcohol consumption and avoiding casual contacts with infected people were also mentioned. These persistent erroneous ideas coupled with the total lack of knowledge in related matters by about 34.1% of them are indicative of the fact that the present system of child education and upbringing is still lagging in terms of informing the children on such key issues which constitute elements of their very survival. This is even more essential for the children in street situations who are often exposed very early to such hazards.

5.1.5 Knowledge on and use of child support systems in Mauritius

Where there are support services for children in difficult situation, it is essential to let the children know of their existence and how they can resort to them. In Mauritius, only 31.7% (as against 16.2% in Rodrigues) of children in street situation were aware of any institution taking care of children living in precarious conditions. In spite of the existence of such structures, 91.2%¹⁶ of the street children had never been taken care of by any of them, while the remaining 8.8%¹⁷ declared having at least once been received by any child care institution for their problems. 26 children had once filed a complaint against those who abused them. Of these, 4 reported that the complaints had been ignored and one declared not being aware of the outcome of the complaint while 2 declared that their perpetrators were declared not guilty. This is often the case where family members or close family friends are involved, and where greater concern is for the preservation of the family image than for serving justice. Under-the-table arrangements are thus privileged.

5.1.6 Professional aspirations of the street children

In general the children were found to have relatively low aspirations in the field of education. Only 40.6% of males and 50.60% of females were interested in pursuing their education compared to 42.3% of males and 32.40% of females who were interested in getting into the workforce. Other options for the future included marriage, particularly for girls. The general low level of future aspiration means that there is little motivation to make necessary efforts towards personal improvement. As child psychologists will confirm, a child is better focused on his or her personal development when he/she has a clear idea of what he/she wants to become in the future. There is the need for a dream and the desire to accomplish the dream for them to be better focused.

¹⁶ 92.2% excluding non-responses

¹⁷ 7.8% excluding non-responses

5.1.7 Profile of the Mauritian street child

Based on the findings of this study, the common characteristics observed in street children interviewed have been used to develop a set of criteria to identify street children. These will be helpful to institutions providing child support services, NGOs and policy makers in developing and implementing more effective programmes aimed at addressing the specific issues faced by street children. Furthermore, these criteria can be used as an early warning tool to identify children at risk of falling into street situations and of being exposed to the dangers of the street. The criteria used included the following:

1. **Low presence of biological parents in the lives of the children.** 74% of them of the children were living with only one or none of the parents (24.8% with mother, 28.5% with fathers only and 20.7% with other family members, family friends or alone).
2. **Involvement in economic activities, development of survival mechanisms.** 35.0% were found to be involved in economic activities.
3. **Not attending school and/or chronic absenteeism.** 36.2 % were not in school permanently. 23% of those who were attending school were chronically absent from school for unjustifiable reasons (bunking) during the last semester (above ten days)

The presence of these criteria, singly or in combination, is indicative of high vulnerability of the children and constitute a warning sign of possible exposure to street related hazards – substance abuse, child labour, STIs, unwanted pregnancies, etc...

5.2 Conclusions

In Mauritius, the problem of street children or children in street situation is mainly one of “children on the streets” and/or “street working children”: most of the children interviewed had a home to retire to at the end of the day. They are driven onto the streets by many factors, key among which is the poor parental presence in the lives of the children, and the poor socio-economic situation of their families. This is further compounded by a situation where the family unit of father, mother and children is more and more being disrupted in favour on mono-parental child up-bringing. In some cases, the parents were actually absentee landlords or simply dead. The absentee landlords were mostly economic migrants who had left the Island for greener pastures or those who have had to leave due to incompatibility with their partners. In such precarious conditions, children are exposed to a series of hazards, ranging from psycho-physical abuse to outright aggressions in the streets, drug use and exploitation for economic reasons etc. Some of the victimization of the children come from very close members of the communities, prominent among which were family members, employers and their peers on the street. The vulnerability of the children results from their lack of experience and ignorance in relation to the danger that they are exposed to in “street situations”. The development of their capacity to handle such issues is of utmost importance, thus the justification of an HIV prevention programmes in their favour.

The family context emerges as a strong determinant of a child’s vulnerability to being pushed into the street, and must therefore also be seen as one of the most important factors to be addressed as a means to the child’s reintegration. Parents were also found to be pushing the children into economic activities and even helping them to find the job. Parents need to be greatly capacitated to be able to play this role for the children

Recommendations

In view of all of the above, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Policy makers must be sensitized to the issue of children in street situations and the societal hazards to which they are exposed. The subtle nature of the phenomenon means that it has so far been obscured. The children on the streets of Mauritius need to be given particular attention by the concerned authorities because they are at risk of exposure to various societal hazards especially given the relatively more discrete nature of the phenomenon.
2. Given the low level of knowledge on hazards (such as HIV/AIDS, early pregnancies, abortion, substance abuse, school dropout, child abuse and related rights etc.), assistance programme should include special activities aimed at informing and educating street children on these hazards..
3. Reintegration programs must include professional orientation to develop and strengthen the children's professional aspirations. This will motivate them to pursue their studies and make the necessary effort to stay on track.
4. There is a need to sensitize the children on the availability of the child support services available and on the rights of the child. Given the relatively low knowledge of the children on which institutions to turn to in case of problems, within any assistance program, there should be included campaigns to sensitize them on possible sources of assistance. The program should foresee home visits as a means of ensuring that the children are not being maltreated and that their integration/reintegration is effective.
5. All institutions and organisations potentially concerned by the street children phenomenon must develop linkages and work in networks to facilitate referral of services. Building bridges between child support organisations and the health service is especially important.
6. A multi criteria evaluation, which takes into consideration, which takes into consideration the child's level of precariousness as well as his/her potential of personal development, must guide the selection process for assistance programmes. This will include the following:

Major criteria

- Criteria 1: Child above 15 years old, not going to school and not working
 - Criteria 2: Child below 16 years old and is working for economic reasons even if going to school
 - Criteria 3: Attending school but chronically absent from school for unjustified reasons (ex. for more than 10 days per school semester)
 - Criteria 4: Both parents absent in the lives of the child (dead, physical separation ex expatriation for economic reasons etc)
7. Given the importance of the role of parents in the child's up-bringing, any child support programme must be accompanied by a component to strengthen the family's capacity for

better up-bringing of their children. Special attention has to be given to mono-parental households

8. Advocacy has to be intensified to ensure the effective implementation of the Mauritian legislature in the domain of child labour and other child related abuses.
9. Further studies should be made to identify and evaluate the institutional capacity of local bodies, public/private that can help out with the re-integration of these children into the society.
10. Given that most of the children were either in primary school or were primary school drop-outs, the interventions of support programs should concentrate mainly in the primary school. Special efforts should be made to keep these children in school where not only do they run less risk of getting into trouble, but also stand to benefit by their personal intellectual development that open up better horizons for them in the future.

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7 Appendix

7.1 Cross tabulation between person who convinced the child to start working and the person who helped the child to get a job

			Person who helped the child to get a job									Total
			Friends	Media	Direct Search	Family member	People/pass erby	Relative	Work colleagues	Street children (gangs)	Others	
Person who convinced the child to start working	No one	Count	40	1	52	17	3	12	1	1	19	146
		Expected Count	44	0.6	33.6	33.6	2.3	13.9	0.6	1.2	16.2	146
	A family member	Count	12	0	5	40	0	9	0	1	4	71
		Expected Count	21.4	0.3	16.3	16.3	1.1	6.8	0.3	0.6	7.9	71
	Relatives	Count	9	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	2	16
		Expected Count	4.8	0.1	3.7	3.7	0.3	1.5	0.1	0.1	1.8	16
	Others	Count	15	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	19
		Expected Count	5.7	0.1	4.4	4.4	0.3	1.8	0.1	0.2	2.1	19
	Total	Count	76	1	58	58	4	24	1	2	28	252
		Expected Count	76	1	58	58	4	24	1	2	28	252

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	109.072 ^a	24	.000
Likelihood Ratio	111.117	24	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.654	1	.103
N of Valid Cases	252		

a. 25 cells (69.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

7.2 Cross tabulation between parental presence and involvement in economic activities

amended_parental_presence * Involvement in economic activities Crosstabulation

			Involvement in economic activities		Total
			Yes	No	
amended_parental_presence	both parents	Count	45	169	214
		Expected Count	75.0	139.0	214.0
	one parent	Count	186	290	476
		Expected Count	166.8	309.2	476.0
	one parent with step	Count	24	27	51
		Expected Count	17.9	33.1	51.0
	no parents	Count	51	81	132
		Expected Count	46.3	85.7	132.0
	Total	Count	306	567	873
		Expected Count	306.0	567.0	873.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.847 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	27.259	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.676	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	873		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.88.

7.3 Parental presence and work periodicity

amended_parental_presence * Frequency of work Crosstabulation

			Frequency of work			Total
			Always	Seasonably	Occasionally	
amended_parental_presence	both parents	Count	8	14	23	45
		Expected	18.0	7.6	19.4	45.0
		Count				
	one parent	Count	78	32	73	183
		Expected	73.3	30.9	78.8	183.0
		Count				
	one parent with step	Count	11	1	12	24
		Expected	9.6	4.1	10.3	24.0
		Count				
	no parents	Count	24	4	22	50
		Expected	20.0	8.4	21.5	50.0
		Count				
Total		Count	121	51	130	302
		Expected	121.0	51.0	130.0	302.0
		Count				

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.314 ^a	6	.005
Likelihood Ratio	20.183	6	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.003	1	.157
N of Valid Cases	302		

a. 1 cells (8.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.05.

7.4 Parental presence and physical maltreatment

amended_parental_presence * at least one type of maltreatment Crosstabulation

			at least one type of maltreatment		Total
			Not maltreated	Maltreatment	
amended_parental_presence	both parents	Count	175	66	241
		Expected Count	141.6	99.4	241.0
	one parent	Count	282	212	494
		Expected Count	290.2	203.8	494.0
	one parent with step	Count	29	24	53
		Expected Count	31.1	21.9	53.0
	no parents	Count	58	80	138
		Expected Count	81.1	56.9	138.0
Total	Count	544	382	926	
	Expected Count	544.0	382.0	926.0	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	35.956 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	36.594	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	32.844	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	926		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 21.86.

7.5 Investigating the impact of living area (poverty or non-poverty) on the likelihood of being in street situation

c1_2_3_4 * Area Crosstabulation

Count

		Area		Total
		poverty	non poverty	
c1_2_3_4	Not street children	1283	1142	2425
	Street children	303	169	472
Total		1586	1311	2897

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.319 ^a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	19.866	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	20.630	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	20.312	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	2897				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 213.60.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

7.6 Effect of region (poverty and non-poverty region) on presence of children in street situation and exposure to major hazards

Area * c1_2_3_4_danger Crosstabulation

Count

		c1_2_3_4_danger		Total
		Not street children	Street children	
Area	poverty	1395	191	1586
	non poverty	1222	89	1311
Total		2617	280	2897

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.693 ^a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	22.096	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	23.327	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.686	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	2897				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 126.71.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table