

**STREET CHILDREN IN MAFIKENG, NORTH- WEST
PROVINCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL
EXPERIENCES.**

KEITUMETSE CHARLOTTE KGOKONG

2012

**STREET CHILDREN IN MAFIKENG, NORTH- WEST PROVINCE: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL EXPERIENCES.**

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18031021

Dissertation (article format) submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
in Masters of Social Science in Research Psychology at the North- West University
(Mafikeng Campus)

Supervisor: Professor E. S. Hemedua

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my son,

Kgolagano Kealeboga Monkwe,

My loving husband,

Rapula Joseph Mofitlhi Monkwe,

And

My loving parents,

Mr & Mrs Kgokong

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First, I would like to thank The Lord that saved me and made this project a success.

The researcher would also like to express her gratitude to the following people:

- Professor E. S. Idemudia, my supervisor, for your support, guidance, encouragement and mostly your understanding. For being with me in every step I took. I thank you.
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- My sister for taking care of my baby and my baby, Kgolagano, for not being with you at all times.
- I would like to thank the people who allowed themselves to be an extended hand of God in my life. They have supported me and contributed positively toward this project.
- I thank my pastor and his wife for the words of encouragement and I thank my family at large. I appreciate all the help and assistance from everyone and those that I could not make mention of. May The Lord Almighty bless all abundantly.

SUMMARY

Street Children in Mafikeng, North- West Province: A qualitative study of Social Experiences.

Keywords: Street Children, Social experiences, Mafikeng, North-West Province, South Africa.

The aim of the study is to develop an understanding of the social experiences of street children in Mafikeng area.

The literature reviewed so far indicates that most street children come from disadvantaged families (broken homes, single parentage etc) and, consequently, have experienced psychological trauma and, as such, are likely to be predisposed to psychological problems.

Considering the reported relationship between negative family situation, trauma and experience of violence which can result in stress overload among street youths, one can then hypothesize that street children are more likely to report deficits in family and personality characteristics and experience more mental health problems than non-street children.

PREFACE

Article format

For the purpose of this dissertation, which is part of the requirements for a professional master's degree, the article format as described by General Regulation A.7.5.1.b of the North West University was chosen.

Selected journal

The target journal for the submission of the current manuscript is the Journal of Social Sciences. For the purpose of examination, tables are included in the text.

Letter of consent

The letter of consent from the co-authors, granting permission for the manuscript, "Street Children in Mafikeng, North- West Province: A qualitative study of Social Experiences", to be submitted for the purpose of a dissertation, is attached.

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In the dissertation, page numbering starts from the first to the last page. For submission to the above mentioned journal, the manuscript is numbered according to the requirements of the Journal of Social Sciences. Thus, numbering starts from the title page of the manuscript.

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LETTER OF CONSENT

I, the undersigned, hereby give consent that Keitumetse Charlotte Kgokong, may submit the manuscript entitled, “Street Children in Mafikeng, North- West Province: A qualitative study of Social Experiences”, for the purpose of a dissertation in partial fulfilment for a master’s degree.

.....

Prof. E.S. Idemudia

Supervisor

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I. INTRODUCTION

II. METHODOLOGY

III. RESULTS

IV. DISCUSSION

V. CONCLUSION

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Report:

UNESCO 1974. Report of an Expert Panel on MAB Project 6: Impact of Human Activities on Mountain and Tundra Ecosystems. *MAB Report Series No. 14*, Paris: Unesco.

Thesis / Dissertation:

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8. TABLES

9. FIGURES/ILLUSTRATIONS

10 APPENDIX (IF ANY)

MANUSCRIPT

**STREET CHILDREN IN MAFIKENG, NORTH- WEST PROVINCE: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL EXPERIENCES.**

STREET CHILDREN IN MAFIKENG, NORTH- WEST PROVINCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL EXPERIENCES.

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STREET CHILDREN IN MAFIKENG, A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL
EXPERIENCES.

ABSTRACT

Background: The rapid increase in the number of homeless or street children in the cities of Africa and, particularly in the North West Province of South Africa, is a matter of grave concern. The general perception of these children in the North West Province of South Africa and probably the rest of the world, is that they pose serious problems in their homes as well as in the streets where they live. Besides, street children experience psychological and economic violence including physical violence in the public space, ranging from police brutality to sexual abuse. The extent of the study of street children is not well documented in South Africa and it does not seem to be a popular research subject hence there are knowledge gaps, particularly in North West Province. To bridge these gaps, this study investigated the social experiences of the street Children in Mafikeng, North –West Province.

Method: Using a qualitative research approach, data was collected in 2 focus group discussions and one week observation of purposefully selected 19 males and 1 female street children with age ranging from 10 -19 years in Mafikeng, North West Province of South Africa. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) data was audio taped and the observational data organized, and compared from one participant to the other, through coding and themes extracted using consensual qualitative research and a constant comparison of the qualitative method to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

Results: The results of this study revealed three major themes and three sub-themes. The major themes include: Reasons for abandoning home; Life in the streets and the desire to go back home. The subthemes include Risks and challenges encountered: Regrets including the desire for rehabilitation and schooling. Some traumatic experiences have been shared pointing to the need for change.

Conclusion: The whole world is aware of the phenomenon of street children and the North West Province of South Africa is not an exception. The question is, is the North West Province taking note of this problem and the statistics? If they are, what measures have been taken to try and minimise the dilemma as these children freely sleep and wake up in front of e shops under the full view of members of the community. This study has attempted to explore the Mafikeng street children's life experiences in the street and the revelation of their experience clearly indicates the cry for help, need for support and appropriate actions to be taken by community organisations, social and mental health services as well as the government. The traumatic experiences, health hazards and their outcomes need to be taken into consideration, assessed and attended to by the relevant people in order to avoid more unpleasant things happening to these children.

The following are the suggested recommendations for intervention:

More research should be done with adequate sampling including the community members, health workers, parents and relevant stakeholders in the province in order to arrive at adequate and convincing results for a better action.

Psychological interventions should be made in order to take these children out of the street and help them realise their potential and change their behaviour and lives, mostly because majority of them are ready for help and change.

The health department should conduct street children's campaign whereby they go into the streets and conduct free medical examination with recommendations for free help through the government hospitals.

Key words: Street Children, Social experiences, Mafikeng, North-West Province, South Africa.

Introduction and problem statement

The rapid increase in the number of homeless or street children in the cities of Africa and, particularly the North West Province of South Africa, is a matter of grave concern. The general perception about these children in the North West Province of South Africa and, probably in the rest of the world, is that they pose serious problems in their homes as well as in the streets where they live. Besides, street children experience psychological and economic violence including physical violence in public places, ranging from police brutality to sexual abuse.

Many children on the streets are gradually being made vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in their street life which increasingly weakens their development of self-esteem leading to a negative view of themselves. They are usually dressed in rags, living from hand to mouth and roaming the streets all day. These children are more visible around market places, motor parks, busy road junctions, cinema houses and other busy places in cities. At night, they sleep in uncompleted buildings, bus stops, under bridges, in abandoned vehicles, in public gardens and parks or simply in the open. To harden themselves for this tough life, the use of drugs becomes common in their place of abode as they smoke cigarettes and marijuana, sniff glue and use alcohol.

Whether declared, abandoned or not, these children are abandoned. Being abandoned in this study is interpreted as being in physical or moral danger. What is often interpreted as the 'irregular behaviour' of these children is really a strong blow of being alone in life. These children spend shorter or longer jail terms between periods in the streets. This is why some researchers, Diop & Faye (1997), for example, argue that delinquency and all other forms of violence which street youths suffer and inflict on their society are better seen as a response or

a counter-violence to the violence they undergo. Violence thus becomes the only instrument of maintaining oneself in the street.

Street children often engage in more than one type of service to make ends meet. Sometimes their work is seasonal or related to special days of the week or year. The work they perform to support their survival is not always what we would term lawful or morally appropriate. Studies (Adisa, 1994) claim that they engage principally in petty crimes such as shoplifting and pick pocketing. They seldom take part in serious crimes like robbery, car hijacking and murder. Glue-sniffing and other forms of drug abuse (not so much trafficking) and prostitution also tend to be part of the street subculture (Jansen, Richter, & Griesel, 1992). The existence of this myriad of criminal activities leads to the propensity of street youths to graduate from, what Diop and Faye (1997) describe as moving from a 'pre-delinquent state' to a state of criminality.

The frequent engagement of these street children in prostitution and homosexuality puts them at serious risks of contracting and spreading AIDS in addition to other health hazards (Kruger & Richter, 2003). It is for the actual and potential problems and risks they constitute to society at large that street children need to be given far greater attention than has been the case.

While Le Roux (1993), identified family violence, parental alcoholism, abuse, poverty and personal reasons for child streetism, Keen (1990) found broken homes, alcoholism, violence and desertion by family as some of the factors contributing to the existence of street children. While these reasons may be acceptable, it is possible that some children abandon their families, having become tired of insecurity and rejection and home violence. If they are not collected and placed in institutions, these youngsters usually become children of the street whose ties with the home have now been broken.

Problem statement

Street children are increasingly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in their homes before they come to the street and, as a result, they tend to develop an increasingly weakened self-esteem and an increasingly negative view of themselves leading to mental health problems when compared to non-street children. According to Ross (1991, p. 70), majority of street children in South Africa are black and are normally between the ages of 13 and 14 years and concluded that South African street children are a reminder of the racial legacy of apartheid. However, Van Niekerk (1990), argues that it is unrealistic to explain South African street children in terms of a political system; rather, the problem should be explained and addressed holistically. While Le Roux (1993), identified family violence, parental alcoholism, abuse, poverty and personal reasons for child streetism, Keen (1990), attributes it to broken homes, alcoholism, violence and desertion by family. None of these studies investigated psychological factors of street children. Unfortunately, psychological studies with street children are scarce.

The extent of the study of street children is not well documented in South Africa and the study of street children is not a popular research area because such children are often seen as thieves and people hold negative attitude towards them. Another point of note is that their mental state is hardly ever investigated.

Hence there are knowledge gaps in the studies of street children, particularly in the North West Province. To bridge these gaps, this study is set out to investigate the dynamics surrounding street children and their mental health in the Mafikeng area, North West Province of South Africa.

The study seeks to understand the relationship between parental factors, child personality and mental health of street children in the Mafikeng area and compare them with a control group from the general population matched for sex, age and other demographic variables.

Aim of the study

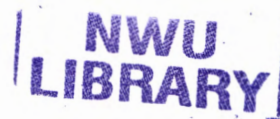
The aim of the study is to develop an understanding of the social experiences of street children in Mafikeng area.

Objectives of the study

The overall objectives of the study are:

- To determine the relationship between child personality and mental health, and
- To investigate the relationship between parental factors and the mental health of street children.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND



Child streetism is anchored in chronic childhood adversity and early-life stress as a result of significant social experiences (Idemudia, 2007). According to Benjet, Borges and Medina-Mora (2010), chronic childhood adversity has long been theorized to be an etiological factor in the development of psychopathology.

This study has both practical and theoretical significance. The practical significance is to assist the Mafikeng Local Municipality through the recommendations that are made. The theoretical significance is to help the Mafikeng communities, homes and the North West Province understand how the problem of street children can be avoided and preventive programmes developed in order to maintain stable families and communities in the North West Province.

The informed recommendations and conclusion will be structured and sent to stakeholders within the province, particularly in Mafikeng, to formulate policies that will subscribe to the values of human dignity, freedom, respect and free from the abusive environment of street children.

While background factors are important in explaining the general trends and in identifying systemic changes that are necessary for dealing with the problem of street children, there is less clarity on why children end up in the streets or, for that matter, why only some children in difficult circumstances end up in the street (Eghosa, 1997). In addition, there is need for a holistic consideration of all factors including regard for social background, economic and psychological factors as predisposing and facilitative factors. Some authors describe 'situational factors' as factors that include the eviction of children from home following family squabbles, outbreaks of violence, or forced street begging in the face of unbearable hunger, which eventually forces the youth into the street (Katz, 1988; Dauren & Di Giacomo, 1996).

There are adverse *situational conditions*, which relate to problems of the day-to-day survival under excruciating and desperate conditions (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992; Williams, 1996). Psychological factors can be gleaned from the profiles of street children using the literature as reference. Street children are not mentally defective though they tend to be in poor physical condition, suffering from varying degrees of cognitive difficulties and psychological instability, particularly depression and anxiety (Richter, 1989, 1996; Swart, 1988; Scharf, Powell & Thomas, 1986).

The positive value that the children attach to personal freedom and individuality has, however, been associated with the psychiatric classification of conduct disorder, which Giles (1988), refers to as DSM III of non-aggressive under socialized conduct disorder.

The notion of individual pathology as a factor for street living has been seriously challenged, if not nullified, by the conclusions from many studies that street living is one of the avenues for the expression of complex tensions between youth, parents and the society at large (Richter, 1990).

According to Osaghae (1997), *strain theory* is the first theory which attributes delinquent behaviour to accumulated frustrations arising from structural inequalities and impediments to the attainment of socially defined success. On the other hand, it seems as a response to living in a painful and abusive environment (Agnew, 1985). *Control theory* emphasizes the failure of family and school experiences to establish social bonds as one of the reasons for abandoning home (Hirschi, 1993). The *differential association theory* focuses on sustained exposure to deviant behaviour and peer groups; and the labelling theory looks at the effect of successive stages of deviant stigmatization.

What all these theories have in common is that delinquent behaviour is 'pre-determined' by background experiences which develop and accumulate over time. However, this study attempts to conceptualize street children from the perspective of their social experiences. Two perspectives of street living could be inferred from this. First, street living could be seen as a rebellion against the injustices of society evident in oppression, maltreatment and violence. The second perspective, which is directly related to the first, sees street youths as going through cumulative circle of social violence-from the home environment to the street environment.

There is a pervasive assumption that street children suffer psychological trauma as a result of both destructive family backgrounds and their subsequent potentially injurious experiences on the street. Research claims that about 25 percent of the homeless are estimated to be emotionally disturbed.

Also, some homeless children are substance abusers; research suggests one in four. Many of these are included in the 25 percent who suffer from mental illness. One percent may need long-term hospitalization; the others can become self-sufficient with help. They are also often regarded as dangerous.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) offers a corrective to those accounts of psychosocial development that do not properly engage with the overarching socio-political context in which development occurs. According to Hook (2002), Bronfenbrenner's is an original contribution to psychosocial developmental psychology for a number of reasons. First, he accords relatively equal importance to both the environment of development and the developing person; for him, development is effectively the evolving interaction between these two variables. For Bronfenbrenner, the developing child never exists in social isolation, or the child never exists outside an accurately unique socio-political, historical and ideological set of circumstances (Hook & Cockcroft, 2002).

Belsky (1980) proposes a second view, namely, the microsystem, which refers to characteristics of the family of origin. This addresses the day-to-day functions of the family, its level of dysfunction and the relationships among family members. In those families where the mother is abused, children are more likely to develop behavioural and emotional problems than in normal families because (a) they are constantly exposed to violent role models, (b) they are continuously exposed to marital problems that result from spousal abuse, (c) they have to cope with fear not only for their mother's safety but also their own safety, and (d) one or both of their parents may be abusing them as well (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Witnessing intimate partner violence is childhood trauma that may contribute to a dysfunctional ontogenetic system.

Children whose mothers are abused are likely to suffer more severe forms of corporal punishment and more verbal aggression from their parents than children whose parents do not engage in spousal abuse (Moore &Pepler, 1998).

The extent of the study of street children is not well documented in South Africa. In addition, the study of street children is not a popular research area because the children are often seen as thieves and people hold negative attitude towards them. Another point of note is that their mental state is hardly investigated hence there are knowledge gaps in the studies of street children, particularly in North West Province. To bridge these gaps, this study investigated the social experiences of the street children in Mafikeng, North West Province of South Africa. Three aspects were examined in this study; that is, reasons for leaving the home, experiences in the street, feelings and intentions about the street life.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was adopted as it permitted a thorough exploration of the social experiences of the street Children in Mafikeng. Focus group interviews and observation were used to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the street life community (Ritchie & Lewis, 2009). According to Creswell, (2007), focus group discussions are beneficial when the interaction between participants yields in-depth information and when participants give each other time to speak and listen respectfully to each other.

Participants were the street children from Mafikeng, 19 males and 1 female as it was difficult to find the female street children. The participants age ranged from 10 to 19 years. These participants were purposefully selected as living in the streets and not adults in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the reasons for leaving home, experiences of life in the streets as well as perceptions about this life.

The research design used in both data collection processes was the narrative approach (Leedy& Ormrod, 2001). The narratives allowed the researcher to access the street children's social experiences of their sense of belonging (Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2008); Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008).

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the North- West University, Mafikeng Campus. Informed consent was also obtained. The focus group discussion lasting 75 minutes was conducted in a private corner on the street. Three sets of data were generated, analysed and reported on in this article.

This was due to the fact that the first set of data obtained did not give clarity concerning experiences and reasons for leaving the home, the researchers agreed on a second set of focus group discussion for clarity of the phenomenon. A one week observation period was later scheduled at different settings and times for an in-depth understanding and clarity of the phenomenon leading to the three sets of data being collected. Observation is a way of gathering data by watching behaviour and noting observable feelings.

The street children were observed in order to extract their behaviour, interactions, conduct and life style and thus gain a more understanding of experiences in the streets which were not revealed through their verbal expressions (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The group sessions were audio taped. Field notes were taken from both focus group discussions and observations during the data collection and used by the researcher, to gain a deeper understanding of the street children's life experiences.

Setting

The study took place in Mafikeng, the capital city of the North West Province in South Africa, situated next to the Botswana boarder.

Measures

A focus group interview guide was developed to investigate three major areas of the street children's life, namely reasons for leaving the home, experiences in the street and feelings and intentions about the street life.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis of textual and observational data. Thematic analysis, defined as capturing the key ideas in data that relate to the research topic (Braun and Clarke 2006), was used in this study to yield knowledge and new insights and thereafter organise facts under themes.

Thematic analysis linked the street children' experiences and meanings by identifying salient themes arising from their behaviour, language and the patterns embedded in the data (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2005). The observational data were analysed with the help of the field notes to compare the findings with the textual data.

RESULTS

Two groups of 10 street children each were purposefully picked from the street; 1 female and 19 males making a focus group of 20 participants but only 19 were interviewed. The female participant was not able to go through the interview as she had an accident and was rushed to hospital while the interview was on before she could be interviewed. The age range was from 10 to 19. The mean of the duration of the stay on the street was 4.4 years. About 7 of the participants reported that they left school at grade 6 while other participants did not want to state whether they were schooling before or not. Forty- five percent of the participants reported being orphans and to have been staying with their guardians, 15% of them stayed with their parents and lacked nothing, 15% stayed with their mothers and step fathers, 1girl 5% had an accident before being interviewed while 25% were not willing to share their biological background. The study has revealed that the majority of the street children around Mafikeng are boys.



The survey was done through focus group interviews and 1 week observation, inquiring reasons for leaving the home, experiences in the street and the feelings and intentions about the street life. Three themes that were extracted from the focus group discussion and the observations were reasons for abandoning home, life in the streets and the desire to be out of the streets. The reasons for leaving home differed from one individual to the other, depending on the home background and this led to the development of four subthemes under this theme. The children reported some traumatic experiences including among others, abuse, misjudgements by society, fights, accidents and health risks. Four sub themes were revealed under the theme: "Life in the streets" and four under the theme "the desire to be out of the streets".

The three major themes and subthemes are presented in Table 1 below.

Reasons for abandoning home	Poverty Neglect and Orphan hood Abuse Disobedience and conforming to others
Life in the streets	Challenges encountered Traumatic experiences Risks and dangers Survival
The desire to be out of the streets	Regrets and desires to go back home Going back to school Going to rehabilitation centres or given shelter Finding jobs

Reasons for abandoning home

The reasons for abandoning home were stated differently although majority of the participants indicated, among others, four major ones being, Poverty, Neglect and Orphan-hood, Abuse and Disobedience and conforming to others.

1. Poverty. Lack of food and clothing and school necessities was experienced as a common problem in these children’s homes as some parents were not working and there was not enough food for everyone. *“I am from a home with no money. My mother is not working, so I was tired of the suffering of not eating for some days or not getting what I want especially for school. That’s why I made a choice to come a stay in the streets.” [FG-male 1]*

“It is not nice at home; there is no money and food so I decided to come here and search for them. [FG-male 2]

"I am from family of seven and poverty has been prevailing at home...I was looking for food because at home we would sleep without eating...There are too many people at home that is why I left home, there is no food, we live in hunger."[FG-male 3&4]

2. Neglect and Orphan -hood. Some children went without food due to the neglect by their working parents who spent all their money on alcohol while there was no food or clothing at home for their children. *"My mom drinks a lot, so sometimes we would sleep without food because she had spent all the money in alcohol."* [FG-male 5]

Lack of guardian care after the death of a parent/parents is one of the major reasons why these children left their homes. Some were left alone or ignored by these guardians to the extent that they engaged in stealing in order to find something to eat. *"I noticed that my relative did not want to take any responsibilities on me after my parents died. I was struggling with small things like money for school, food and clothes. But no one offered to help."* [FG-male 6]

"I am from a big family; I was under my grandparents since my mother died. So one day I stole money from them and ate it. Then returning home was a challenge so I decided to stay with the boys here. No one has come looking for me, so I guess they are happy that I am not living with them anymore."(Sadness in the voice)[FG-male 7]

"We are ten at home I came here in trying live, because my parents died."[FG-male 8]

3. Abuse. Some participants reported incidents of parental abuse from both biological and step parents and this occurred regularly, leading them to run away from home. *"Life at home was not pleasant; my parents weren't taking care of me. My father abused me, saying I am stupid and lazy. At times he would beat me for no reason. That's why I came to the streets."* [FG-male 9]

It is because of my step father who does not treat me well. He comes home drunk then beats me up." [FG-male 9]

4. Disobedience and conforming to others. One of the factors leading to some of these participants leaving home was shown to be disobedience. These street children stated that they did not want parents to control them, that is, some of them did not want the parents to stop them from doing what they wanted to do or going where they wanted to go. Some even reflected leaving home in order to join friends or their siblings who were already in the streets. *"At home they were bothering me. They don't want me to go anywhere."*

"Okay me, I was tired of staying with mama (mother) and step-father. My step-father always shouted me for playing, so I decided to leave home and come here (street) so I can do my own thing without anyone stopping me."

"I came in the streets because I was following this one (brother). At home it was okay, but I wanted freedom just like my brother."

"Friends influenced me, he convinced me that we will have freedom, to drink and smoke since we did not like to go to school. School was very hard for me, I failed at it."

"My parents are working, I don't lack anything at home, no reason, I just left no one kicked me out, I did that by myself. I like to spend my time with friends."



Life in the streets

Unpleasant experiences and feelings were expressed by the street children about street life. The observation also proved that each day brought challenges to street children and four sub themes were identified from these including; Challenges encountered, Traumatic experiences, Risks and dangers as well as survival.

In one of the early morning observations, it was discovered that one of the main places where these children slept in the streets of Mafikeng was at the Stateway Centre (a shopping complex), in front of Pep stores. The researcher was about 200 meters away from the scene but later moved closer, 11 boys of different ages were just waking up slowly one after the other from under boxes and old frames and having used plastics as blankets. Most of them were scratching their bodies uncontrollably and looked very dirty, with dirty plastic bags which they carried all over around them. As early as that time, the first one woke up, picked up a box of juice from next to him that seemed to have been containing glue and started sniffing; another one woke up about 4 minutes later searched for something and later lit some cigarette, started smoking and later left the place. He later came back holding something which they all seemed to want a share of. They seemed to have peace amongst themselves although their faces were filled with hopeless impression that seemed to say, "which direction do I face, where do I start?" People were just passing by as if everything was normal. The observation lasted for about 65 minutes when slowly each one of these boys disappeared with an unhappy face into the street that was becoming busier and busier each minute.

1. Challenges encountered. According to the participants, street life has many challenges and has no peace, and leads to a difficult and unpleasant life. Some of the children even regretted and wished they could withdraw from that kind of life. They lived a life of the survival of the fittest as there was a lot of fighting among them and the young ones were bullied around by the older ones or those that had been in the street for a long time. *"We are always fighting, there is no peace here."*

"I do not like it (street life), at time some old children fight us for what belongs to us, for example money, foods, and blankets if it's cold."

"It is not nice here, we are victimized by our older colleagues, they sometimes beat us...I do not like it, they bully us into giving them our foods and money."

"I don't like fighting, when they fight I go to the police station for help, but they sometimes listen to me and sometimes they don't."

"There is no togetherness; some think because they have been here longer they have the right to control all of us."

"If we don't make money during the day we are forced to eat from the dustbin."

The participants faced some victimisation from the community as some people regarded them as criminals, leading to ill-treatment from other members of the community and they did not like it. *"I dislike it, people do not treat us well, and some think we are thieves and some speak to us in a violent manner yet they do not understand what we are faced with."*

"It is not nice out here; people of the community treat us differently like we are criminals. They look at us somehow."

"I help people carry their parcels from different destination, after that they are supposed to give me ten bucks but some cheats me and give half others do not give me at all."

2. Traumatic experiences. As stated by the participants, life in the streets traumatises those that live there in many ways. Among the traumatising experiences they face out there are; fearful fights using dangerous weapons, rape and accidents. They become sick but cannot get any help because of fear. *"We fight a lot, we even use bottles to protect ourselves."*

"We are raped, always fighting one another. I was once stabbed with a knife."

“They (the older ones) rape us at night. When we are sick because of these rapes we struggle to get assistance since we are afraid of going to the care centres.”

3. Risks and dangers. Most of the participants talked about issues that reflected risks in their lives as some of them did not follow medical instructions after being injured which is a health risk. Through the observation, it was also been revealed that these street children face some dangers out there especially accidents due to their drug abuse. The participants also reported some weather problems they encounter which also put their lives in danger as they often slept in open spaces in front of shops. *“I broke my arm while we were playing soccer. I fell in same logs as I was fetching the ball on top of them. Now I need to go back and remove an iron rod placed inside me. But I do not have R20.00 to do so.” [Did not look into eyes as if not telling the truth]*

“I do get sick sometimes. We go to the clinics, they sometimes help us but at times they don't because of we don't have file or clinic cards as well as Identity cards.”

On observation in relation to life risks and dangers, in one of the data collection incidences, one of the participants, a girl was severely under substance influence, knocked against a moving truck, fell face down and the bottles of beer she was carrying broke onto her face and injured her badly to an extend she was immediately carried to the hospital.

“We sleep in front pep store in the open.”

“We light fire to warm ourselves during winter as we sleep in the open and when it's raining we hide under shelters. (There is sadness in his voice)”

4. Survival. Although there are some ways of survival like protecting one another, mostly in the case of siblings, some means of survival in the lives of these participants also revealed health risks and dangers as they used glue and marijuana in order to strengthen their intentions of running away from the reality of their street life, survive the pressures of life and be able to sleep in these dangerous environments.

"I survive by drinking and smoking glue with the money I get from carrying the street sellers."

"I left smoking glue but I smoke marijuana so that I can go through the night since it's very dangerous in the streets."



The worries of these children's street life led them to more glue sniffing habits which have been identified as a serious health risk. *"I wanted freedom and I got it but not knowing where my next meal will come from, is not okay. Plus the weather is unpredictable it's a big challenge that we face... I smoke glue to help me with the conditions."*

Despite the fact that these children experience the side effects of glue, their worries make them sniff more glue. In conversation with a community member vending around the place during one observation, this came out, *"it is shocking that these children do not want to drop their glue sniffing habit despite its side effects. One of them died sometime back, I think last year and it was reported to be the side effects of glue. When interviewed why they do not want to stop glue sniffing, they said they even want to do it more in order to speed up their death, die and join their friend wherever he is as he is now free from the pains of this world."*

Eating from dustbins is also a risky habit for their survival. *"I survive through eating in the dustbin if I have no money. But when I get money first thing that I buy is glue to sustain me in the harsh conditions of the streets."*

Survival, in spite of the street abuse and fights, also depends on relationships because as they support one another but at times the police need to intervene. *"Me and my brother help one another with food, money and especially glue...We cannot suffer while we have each other. We do things together. I am like a protector to my younger brother, I wouldn't want to see anything happening to my brother. They (other street children) know that I fight for him."* *I don't like fighting and when they fight I go to the police station for help, but they sometimes listen to me and sometimes they do not listen but the police help. [Starting to hold back]*

The major means of survival of almost all these participants is helping people in order to make money to eat while some ask for food and some dance in the streets for people to get some donations. *"Pushing trolleys and dancing in street help them get something to eat although sometimes they will not receive what they worked for."*

"I carry for people to make money when I get that money, I buy food and clothes."

"I carry for people although some thieves would try to get money from me."

"There is food, we get them from people when we ask them and we buy with the money... we also get more money from pushing trolleys"

"I survive through dancing in the street so the people passing by can give me same money."

"I survive by dancing in the street so people passing by would give me same money."

The desire to be out of the streets

The majority of the participants expressed the desire to seeing themselves out of the street and starting afresh with life by going back to school and, reconciling with family members while some desire to go for rehabilitation and find jobs.

1. Regrets and desire to go back home. Some of the participants indicated their regrets and acknowledged the fact that they had not been obedient to their parents and wanted to go back home. They desired to find some means of reconciling with their families. *"I want to go back to school and also go back home and start being a good, obedient child at home. It is not nice in the streets because at times we fear for our lives."*

*"I want to be helped to return back home, since I am afraid of how they will receive me after stealing from them. I also would like to be helped with stopping smoking glue and drinking. I want to go back to school. And the government must assist us in terms of social grants, because we are tired of struggling at home and in schools."**"I want change at home. To have food and money at home so that I go back."*

2. Going back to school. The participants revealed the desire to go back to school for a better future. *"I want to go back to school."**"...I want to stop smoking glue because I want to go back to school."**"I want to be taken to safe house and rehabilitated back to school. Since education is the key to my future."*

3. Going to rehabilitation centres or given shelter. Most participants expressed the need for them to be taken to rehabilitation centres or homes for the homeless in order to be taken care of and helped to reorganize their lives as they would like to reform from their old ways. *"I do not want to go back home, I would rather go to a shelter for homeless children. I am not sure if my step-father has changed."**"I want to be taken to a shelter for homeless kids, but I would perfare somewhere not around. I would like to start on a clean slate. I want to stop smoking glue."**"Yes I want to be out of here but I do not know how. If the government can assist me I would really want to go to a centre, where I will find food."*

"I want the government to assist me by giving us grants so we won't face the world on an empty stomach."

"The government should at least provide us with a shelter, where we know that we will be safe and where we can have a normal life like any other children of South Africa. We want same opportunities like other children."

4. Finding jobs. The older participants wanted to get their IDs, find jobs and be out of the street. *"I will only go home if there is food and I also want an ID (identity Document) so that I can be able to apply for a job."* *"I plan to look for work, I don't have it."*

DISCUSSION

With poverty, abuse and neglect, some children in and around Mafikeng end up on the street. As the literature states (Le Roux, 1993; Keen, 1990), violence at home, family break downs, alcoholism and desertion by family have led to the dissatisfaction of the children and hence they left home. These painful experiences have led to discomfort and feelings of rejection that made some children to do mischievous things like stealing and later regretting and running away from home. Lack of parental care and support may lead to stress, violence and leave some psychological impact.

The street children in this study left their homes with high expectations of being free from their parents, free from hunger and poverty but it turned out to be a life full of risks, challenges and regrets. The common condition in the children's lives prior to abandoning home, which may be regarded as the reason for leaving home was poverty. This poverty implies going for the whole day without food or sleeping on an empty stomach due to several factors like non-working parents, neglect from parents, parental alcohol abuse and orphanhood. Some of the reasons for running away from home have been identified as abuse from step parents who they (the children) thought they would be free from including the abuse since they would be living alone in the streets. As one of the disappointing issues, some children left their homes only to join their friends or their siblings already on the streets and their parents did not even make any effort of following them or knowing their whereabouts. This has been termed in this research as parental neglect. The street children reported that they were now faced with the responsibility of working for their next meal which they were not used to.

The Mafikeng street children have reported that they live and sleep in the open areas of the streets, roam around during the day in search of money to buy food and glue for survival, an act which is regarded as homelessness. Apart from being homeless, many of them use glue as a distressor and have become addicted to glue sniffing which makes them high, enabling them to cope with hunger, embarrassment, feelings of rejection by the community, frustrations and the cold winter season. According to some studies, glue sniffing is the most harmful behaviour with high health risks to the street children.

"The adhesive glue contains toluene, a sweet-smelling and intoxicating hydrocarbon, which is neurotoxic...The solvent dissolves the membrane of the brain cells and causes hallucinations, as well as dampening hunger pangs, and wards off cold, which is very dangerous for the children."(Sherman, Plitt & Hassan, 2005).

"(Glue) damages parts of the brain involved, including cognition, movement, vision and hearing...It affects different parts of the brain, producing a variety of sensory and psychological disorders."(Rai, Chimire, Shetha & Tuladhar, 2002).

"Long-term use of glue can cause muscle fatigue, weight loss, electrolyte imbalance, exhaustion, and later, permanent damage to liver, kidneys, blood and bone marrow and the nervous system," (Sharma, 2011).

Because of the effects stated above, the affection of the different parts of the brain produces a variety of sensory and psychological disorders hence fights, violence, accidents, and stabbing others with knives as observed in the Mafikeng street children. Through the observation, the children look weak, not stable but often restless.

When asked, they reported that they sometimes had problems with their stomach, vision and chest and did not feel well generally in their bodies. Through the reports that the children gave, it was clear that they knew about the risks and side effects of glue because they had seen their friends become sick, admitted in the hospital or die due to what they believed were the side effects of glue. One realises that glue sniffing is not only used to make them feel high and temporarily forget their problems, it is also used as a way of suicide by the street children of Mafikeng. For instance, one of the community members, commenting on this glue sniffing problem said, *"when asked why they continue to sniff glue whereas they have witnessed one of their colleagues dying because of glue they said maybe glue will speed up their death so that they join their friend who is now free from the worries and pains of this world."* This indicates that these children want to die and therefore stay in these unpleasant and risky places and deliberately retain these unhealthy behaviours.



Even though glue sniffing seems to constitute the highest risks in these children's lives, rape and weather conditions are also major health risks experienced. Rape is reported mostly by young street boys, (as there were no girls in this research) as their most traumatic experience as they became sick after the event but never went to clinics in fear of rejection there. In most cases, these children end up having not only sexually transmitted infections but HIV and AIDS as well, mostly because they were not attended to with immediate effect after these rapes and they could not seek proper medical care due to lack of money and the fear to approach health practitioners (Wangui, 2011).

Weather is also a threat to them since during heavy rains they do not know where to go, they stay the whole night in the rains and get some infections due to the rains and the cold weather.

One realises that, despite the fact that these children experience some pains, trauma of some kind, neglect and discomfort in their homes causing them to leave their homes, they are not happy in the streets.

According to them, what they experience in the streets is what they never expected and that becomes the most horrifying experience of their life and hence they are crying for help of any kind.

While some studies have indicated that street children do not want to go to rehabilitation centres since they would have to give up their addicted behaviours (Wangui, 2011), this study has found the opposite to be the case, and concurring with Rai, Chimire, Shetha and Tuladhar (2002), who reported a cry for help from the street children. Faced with helplessness, no place to sleep and more responsibility of protecting themselves most of the street children in this study realised that they made a mistake by leaving their homes. To those who wanted to go back, the fear of facing the anger at home seemed to be the barrier making them to cry for help and somebody to intervene to make them reconcile with their families. Majority of these children desired to stop sniffing glue, be helped to change and go back to their homes, back to school, to rehabilitation centres, or homeless children's places in order to start clean with their lives. The identity document also posed a problem to the elderly ones especially those willing to quit the street life and look for jobs. With regrets running in their minds, the children are crying out for some assistance as they are tired of their uncomfortable, miserable, unpleasant, abusive and risky street life.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the whole world is aware of the phenomenon of street children and the Northwest Province of South Africa is not an exception. The question is; is the North West Province taking note of this problem and the statistics? If they are, what measures have been taken to try and minimise the dilemma as these children freely sleep and wake up in front of these shops and every member of the community is aware of this. This study has attempted to explore the Mafikeng street children's life experiences in the street and the revelation of their experience clearly indicates the cry for help, need for support and actions taken from the community organisations, social and mental health services as well as the government. The traumatic experiences, health hazards and the outcomes need to be taken into consideration, assessed by the relevant authorities and attended to in order to avoid more unpleasant things happening. The following are the recommendations suggested for intervention:

More research should be done with adequate sampling including the community members, health workers, parents and relatives and the relevant stakeholders around the province in order to bring adequate and convincing results for a better action.

Psychological intervention should be made in order to take these children out of the street and help them notice their potential and change their behaviour and lives, mostly because majority of them are ready for help and change.

The health department should hold some street children's campaign whereby they go out in the streets and conduct free medical examination and give recommendations for free help in government hospitals.

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APPENDIX A



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2010-11-19

ETHICS APPROVAL OF PROJECT

This is to certify that the next project was approved by the NWU Ethics Committee:

Project title : The relationship between child personality, parental factors and mental-health of street children in Mafikeng area Project leader: Prof. ES Idemudia Ethics number: NWU-00112-10-A2 Expiry date: 2015/11/17
--

The Ethics Committee would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Committee for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

The formal Ethics approval certificate will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Me. Marietjie Halgryn'.

Me. Marietjie Halgryn
NWU Ethics Secretariate

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY (MAFIKENG CAMPUS)

ETHICS COMMITTEE

PROJECT TITLE: Street Children in Mafikeng, North-West Province: A qualitative study of Social Experiences.

Researcher: Ms Keitumetse Kgokong

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the following project:

Street Children in Mafikeng, North-West Province: A qualitative study of Social Experiences.

I realise that:

1. The study deals with living on the streets, family issues, my character and wellbeing
2. The Ethics Committee has approved that individuals may be approached to participate in the study.
3. The project protocol; i.e. the extent, aims and methods of the research, has been explained to me.
4. The protocol sets out possible discomfort for persons participating in the research and an explanation of the anticipated advantages for myself or others that are reasonably expected from the research
5. I will be informed of any new information that may become available during the research that may influence my willingness to continue my participation.
6. Access to the records that pertain to my participation in the study will be restricted to persons directly involved in the research.
7. Any questions that I may have regarding the research, or related matters, will be answered by the researcher.

- 8. If I have any questions about, or problems regarding the study, or experience any undesirable effects, I may contact the researcher.
- 9. Participation in this research is voluntary and I can withdraw my participation at any stage.
- 10. If any psychological problem is identified at any stage during the research, or when I am vetted for participation, such condition will be discussed with me in confidence by a qualified person.
- 11. I indemnify the North West University and all persons involved with the above project from any liability that may arise from my participation in the above project or that may be related to it, for whatever reasons, including negligence on the part of the mentioned persons.

.....
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHED PERSON

.....
SIGNATURE OF PERSON THAT INFORMED
THE RESEARCHED PERSON



Signed at _____ this ____ day of _____ 2010

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION

APPENDIX C

Demographic questionnaire

Please answer all questions.

- 1. Age
- 2. Place of origin
- 3. Usual place of residence.....
- 4. Religion
- 5. Place of residence during childhood
- 6. Place of residence during adolescence
- 7. Significant others during childhood i.e (mother, father, sister, brother, relatives, uncle, aunty, cousins, motherless babies home etc)

APPENDIX D

Focus group discussion

Interview guide for focus groups

- Facilitate discussions on how they became street children.
- Facilitate discussions on parental factors (upbringing, exposure to violence)
- Ask questions and entertain discussions on feelings of anxiety and insomnia experienced.
- Get participants to talk about interpersonal relationships and their participation in social activities.

Questions for FGD

1. Personal disclosure (Telling about oneself including history of child).
2. Journey to the streets (How did you end up on the streets?).
3. Life on the street (Experiences lived on the street, Dangers and challenges (+ or -).
4. Coping behaviour on the street (How do you survive on the street?)
5. Way forward (what can be done to leaving the streets, individual, institutions and government?).

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