



Experiences of Abuse Among Street Children: Nature, Magnitude and Practices

Khwairakpam Sharmila*¹ and Sukhminder Kaur²

¹Phd Scholar, Department of Human Development, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

²Extension Specialist, Department of Human Development, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

Date of Receipt- 05/05/2014
Date of Revision- 08/05/2014
Date of Acceptance- 10/05/2014

Address for Correspondence

khwairakpam sharmila, c/o dr. (Mrs.) sukhminder kaur, department of human development, Punjab agricultural university, ludhiana-141004 (Punjab), India.

Tel. +91-8968491940.

E-mail: khwairakpamsharmila@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Objective: The prime objective of the research is to determine the nature, magnitude and practices of abuse among street children by their parents. **Design:** Self-structured Interview Schedule. **Setting:** The sample was selected from various crowded places of Ludhiana city such as railway station, bus depots, traffic lights, market places, temples etc using a snowball sampling technique. One of the criteria for sample selection was that the street children should be home based. **Participants:** 160 street children (9-12 years) equally distributed over gender. **Main Outcome Measures:** Age and gender differences in the method of punishment inflicted upon street children by parents were determined. **Results:** Majority of the street children (92.50%) experienced abused by their parents. The most predominantly used punishment was scolding (83.44%) followed by spanking/slapping (47.96%), twisting ears or hands (37.50%), beating (30.74%), verbally abusing (20.94%) and yelling (20.26%). The most predominantly used mode of physical punishment by the parents was stick followed by other objects such as switch, shoes, broom and rod. Fathers were found to be stricter and exhibited more negative attitude towards the children compared to mothers. **Conclusion:** Street children experienced both physical as well as verbal abuse by their parents. Most of the children experienced beating/punishment frequently by their parents because of varied reasons such as disobeying parents, misbehaving with parents, making too many demands, using abusive language, not going for work, etc.

Keywords: Abuse, Magnitude, Nature, Practices, Street children.

INTRODUCTION

Street children are the most vulnerable group in any society and their problem is a global one and exists in both, the developed as well as developing countries though differing in size and magnitude. Street children are a growing phenomenon of modern times, especially in the urban areas in developing countries which are faced with the process of rapid and unplanned urbanization¹. So the issue of street children is considered to be an urban problem. Children can be found in railway stations, near temples, in markets, under bridges, near bus depots and stops and other crowded places. Hence the definition of street is not in the literal sense, but refers to those children without a stable home or shelter. There are three major categories of street children defined by UNICEF (1988) namely¹:

Children on the street

Home based children who are economically engaged in street life but they have families, either they live with them or have continuous contact with them.

Children of the street

Home based children who spend most of the days and nights on the street and are functionally without family support.

Abandoned children

Children who have cut off all ties with their biological families and are completely on their own. They include orphans, runaways and lost or destitute children¹.

However, the government of India uses the term "Working Child" as a "Street Child"².

There are a number of factors that lead children to living on the street. One root cause that has been identified is poverty.

However, poverty alone does not result in this problem. The majority of children living on the streets of India are repeatedly exposed to maltreatment ranging from child labor, child trafficking, sexual exploitation, and many other forms of violence and abuse³. According to UNICEF violence against children can be "physical and mental abuse and injury, neglect or negligent treatment, exploitation and sexual abuse. Violence may take place in homes, schools, orphanages, residential care facilities, on the streets, in the workplace, etc." Such violence can affect the normal development of a child impairing their mental, physical and social being. In extreme cases abuse of a child can result even to death. Child abuse has many forms: physical, emotional, sexual, neglect, and exploitation. Any of these that are potentially or actually harmful to a child's health, survival, dignity and development are abuse⁴.

Street children in India are frequently exposed to abuse and extortion⁸ because they have no social status and no adults to protect them, street children identify being physically threatened and intimidated by adults as the one factor that contributes most to the misery of living on the street^{8,9}. The primary cause for this treatment is the views that the police and general public hold toward them: most scorn them and react to them with hostility¹⁰. Street children are experiencing abuse at home by parents and other family members due to varied reasons such as disobeying parents, misbehaving with parents, making too many demands, using abusive language or not going for work. But no such empirical data on these factors is available in the Punjab state. Hence the present study was undertaken with the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine the nature, magnitude and practices of abuse among street children by their parents.
- To determine the age and gender differences in the nature, magnitude and practices of abuse experienced by street children.

METHODOLOGY

Location

The study was conducted in various crowded places of Ludhiana city, Punjab, India.

Sample

The sample comprising of 160 home based street children (9-12 years) equally distributed over gender was purposively selected using snowball sampling technique from various crowded places such as railway station, bus depots, bus stops, traffic lights, market places, temples, etc.

Tools

A self-structured Interview Schedule was used to study the nature, magnitude and practices of abuse experienced by street children. The tools was circulated among the experts and modified in the light of the comments given by them. It was then pretested on 20 non-sampled street children and the test retest reliability was calculated to be 0.91.

Statistical techniques/designs

Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Karl Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Mann-Whitney U test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data presented in Table 1 reveals the type and method of punishment experienced

by street children. Out of the total sample majority (92.5%) of the children reported to be abused. It is evident that scolding (77.02 %) was the most predominant method used by the fathers towards children followed by spanking/slapping (54.72%), beating (43.92%), verbally abusing (29.05%) and kicking (7.43%). Isolating, not being served food, threatening to harm with weapons, threatening abandonment and hair pulling were reported to be other methods used by the fathers. Similarly mothers were also more involved in scolding (89.86%) children followed by spanking/slapping (41.21%), twisting ears or hands (33.78%), yelling (29.05%) and beating (17.56%). Threatening abandonment, pushing and strangling, threatening to harm with weapons, isolating not serving food, frequently criticizing and verbally abusing were less used by mothers.

Age and gender differences among street children experiencing punishment are presented in Table 2. Fathers were found to be equally punitive towards younger (9-11 years) and older (11-12 years) age group. Fathers were found to be using similar type of practices such as scolding, yelling, isolating, not being served food, frequently criticizing, verbally abusing, threatening to harm with weapons, threatening abandonment, hair pulling, spanking/slapping, pushing and strangling. However, significant differences were found in the use of physical punishment such as twisting ears or hands ($Z = 2.24$; $P < 0.05$) and beating ($Z = 2.04$; $P < 0.05$). Younger children experienced more of twisting ears or hands by the father whereas older children experienced more of beating.

Similarly, mothers were also found to be equally punitive irrespective of younger (9-11 years) or older (11-12 years) age group. Mothers were also found to be using similar type/method of punishment such as scolding, yelling, isolating, not being served food, frequently criticizing, verbally abusing, threatening to harm with weapons, twisting

ears or hands, hair pulling, spanking/slapping and beating. However, the results were found to be statistically non-significant. It was only the younger children who reported to be threatened for abandonment and pushing and strangling by their mothers. A study by (Deb and Mitra 2002) also reported four major modes of abuse of street children by parents which are physical torture, willful negligence, exploitation of innocence and dependency of the child and enticement to accept a disgraceful life⁶.

With respect to gender difference, fathers were found to be yelling on boys more compared to girls with statistical difference ($Z=2.37$; $P < 0.05$). Similarly it was only boys who were restricted access to food as a punishment ($Z=2.53$; $P < 0.05$). They were also often criticized for their mistakes ($Z=2.00$; $P < 0.05$), verbally abused ($Z=2.81$; $P < 0.01$) and often inflicted with more physical punishment such as hair pulling ($Z=1.97$; $P < 0.05$) compared to girls. Rest of the practices such as scolding, isolating, threatening to harm with weapons, threatening abandonment, twisting ears or hands, spanking/slapping, pushing and strangling, kicking and beating were found to be statistically non-significant.

Mothers were equally punitive towards boys and girls. They were found to be using similar type of practices such as scolding, yelling, isolating, not being served food, frequently criticizing, verbally abusing, threatening to harm with weapons, twisting ears or hands, spanking/slapping and beating. However, significant differences was found in the use of physical punishment such as hair pulling ($Z=2.77$; $P<0.01$). Girls experienced more of hair pulling by the mothers as compared to boys. It was only boys who reported to be threatened for abandonment and pushing and strangling by their mothers but none of the street children reported of being kicked by them. Overall, fathers were stricter towards boys and exhibited more

negative reactions towards them compared to mothers. The result is in line with the study conducted by Mathur *et al* (2009) who examined the prevalence, type and intensity of abuse in street children in Jaipur city, India. Results revealed street children reporting experiences of abuse in all the five areas namely “general abuse,” “health abuse,” “verbal abuse,” “physical abuse,” and “psychological abuse” given under the study. Larger numbers of children (61.8%) scored in the “moderate” category of abuse while 36.6 per cent children indicated abuse in “severe” and “very severe” categories on the intensity of abuse. Highest mean scores were obtained on the “verbal” and “psychological” area of abuse. Gender differences were significant in health and overall abuse, indicating boys to be significantly more abused than girls. There were significant positive correlations of abuse with increasing “age” and “income” of street children; and the occurrence of “multi-type” maltreatment and neglect in street children was clearly present⁵. An overwhelming number of working children were abused physically, mentally and sexually⁶. There are however indications that supportive counseling and continuous efforts can bring some positive change in the outlook of street children, resulting in moderate improvement in interpersonal relationships and some interest in vocational training⁷.

Data pertaining to mode of beating used by parents towards street children revealed that most of the children were beaten by using stick (43.96%), followed by the used of switch (41.76%), broom (18.68%) and shoes (15.38%). However, few children also reported beating by used of rod (5.49%) (Table 3).

Further analysis of the data revealed that there were significant differences in the used of stick for beating the children, where younger children experienced beating with a stick more compared to older ones with statistically significant differences ($Z=3.37$;

P<0.01). However, there were no significant differences in the used of other modes such as switch, shoes, broom and rod among younger and older children. Similarly, no significant gender wise differences were found in the used of various modes of beating by the parents to the street children (Table 4).

A higher proportion (42.56 %) of street children reported being punished once in a week by their parents because of varied reasons such as disobeying parents, misbehaving with parents, making too many demands, using abusive language or not going for work followed by once in a month (31.75%) and fortnightly (12.83%). However, some of them were punished more frequently i.e. twice a week (8.10%) and daily (4.72 %) (Table5). So, maximum children experienced punishment by their parents frequently.

Further analysis of the data revealed no significant differences in the magnitude of abused experienced by street children from their parents (Table 6).

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that street children are exposed to abuse and violence by their parents in their day to day life. Verbal and psychological abuses were reported to be the most predominantly used method for punishment by the parents. Improving the quality of life of street children is a difficult and challenging task, as they live in a transitory lifestyle. But many scholars believe that fixing the problems of street children depend on addressing the causal factors of their situations. Additionally, as these causal factors are addressed, help for the immediate situation of street children must also be given.

REFERENCES

1. Maraichelvi A and Jayapoorani N (2007) Endurance of street children. *Social Welfare*. 46 (4): 24-28.
2. UNICEF (1988) a background paper on street children. Submitted at National Workshop on street children, 29-30 August, New Delhi.
3. <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/07/19/314515/study-india-street-kids-face-abuse/>.
4. <http://www.childlineindia.org.in/child-abuse-child-violence-india.html>.
5. Mathur M, Rathore P and Monika M (2009) Incidence, type and intensity of abuse in street children in India. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 33: 907-13.
6. Deb S and Mitra K (2002) Deviance among disadvantaged children in Kolkata and reasons thereof. *Indian Journal of Criminology and Criminalistics* 22 (1): 41-59.
7. Deb S, Datta K and Ghosh M (1997) Modification of a deviant street children's behaviour: An in-depth case study. *Indian Journal of Criminology* 25 (1): 15-22.
8. Bose A B (1992). "The Disadvantaged Urban Child in India". *Innocenti Occasional Papers, Urban Child Series*. Retrieved February 20, 2012.
9. Chatterjee, A. (1992). *India: The forgotten children of the cities*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF. Retrieved February 20, 2012.
10. Aptekar, L. (1994). "Street children in the developing world: a review of their condition." *Cross-Cultural Resources* 28: 195-244. Retrieved February 20, 2012.

Table 1. Method of punishment inflicted upon street children by their parents

Method of punishment	Father	%	Mother	%
Scolding	114	77.02	133	89.86
Yelling	17	11.48	43	29.05
Isolating	5	3.37	6	4.05
Not being served food	6	4.05	11	7.43
Frequently criticizing	10	6.76	11	7.43
Verbally abusing	43	29.05	19	12.83
Threatening to harm with weapons	7	4.72	5	3.38
Threatening abandonment	7	4.72	1	0.67
Twisting ears or hand	61	41.21	50	33.78
Hair pulling	7	4.72	25	16.89
Spanking /slapping	81	54.72	61	41.21
Pushing and Strangling	20	13.51	1	0.67
Kicking	11	7.43	0	0
Beating	65	43.92	26	17.56

Multiple responses, (n=148)

Table 2. Age and gender differences (Mean \pm SD) in the method of punishment inflicted upon street children by parents

Method of punishment	Age wise distribution of street children						Gender wise distribution of street children					
	Father		Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)	Mother		Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)	Father		Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)	Mother		Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)
	9-11 years (n=71)	11-12 years (n=77)		9-11 years (n=71)	11-12 years (n=77)		Boys (n=73)	Girls (n=75)		Boys (n=73)	Girls (n=75)	
Scolding	0.75 ± 0.44	0.79 ± 0.41	0.66	0.89 ± 0.32	0.91 ± 0.29	0.44	0.79 ± 0.41	0.75 ± 0.44	0.69	0.89 ± 0.31	0.91 ± 0.29	0.33
Yelling	0.28 ± 0.70	0.18 ± 0.58	0.95	0.54 ± 0.89	0.62 ± 0.93	0.59	0.36 ± 0.77	0.11 ± 0.45	2.37*	0.63 ± 0.94	0.53 ± 0.89	0.65
Isolating	0.08 ± 0.50	0.12 ± 0.58	0.36	0.21 ± 0.77	0.04 ± 0.34	1.76	0.16 ± 0.69	0.04 ± 0.35	1.39	0.12 ± 0.60	0.12 ± 0.59	0.03
Not being served food	0.23 ± 0.93	0.10 ± 0.64	0.93	0.28 ± 1.03	0.31 ± 1.08	0.17	0.33 ± 1.11	0	2.53*	0.33 ± 1.11	0.27 ± 1.00	0.36
Frequently criticizing	0.49 ± 1.50	0.33 ± 0.80	1.84	0.49 ± 1.50	0.36 ± 1.12	1.08	0.55 ± 1.57	0.13 ± 0.81	2.00*	0.27 ± 1.15	0.47 ± 1.46	0.89
Verbally abusing	1.84 ± 2.58	2.03 ± 2.86	1.31	0.76 ± 2.01	0.78 ± 2.03	0.06	2.38 ± 2.96	1.12 ± 2.35	2.81**	0.66 ± 1.89	0.88 ± 2.14	0.67
Threatening to harm with weapons	0.30 ± 1.42	0.36 ± 1.56	0.28	0.30 ± 1.42	0.18 ± 1.12	0.55	0.40 ± 1.78	0.19 ± 1.14	1.19	0.29 ± 1.40	0.19 ± 1.14	0.48
Threatening abandonment	0.33 ± 1.33	0.52 ± 1.98	1.05	0.11 ± 0.95	0	1.04	0.44 ± 1.83	0.32 ± 1.58	0.42	0.11 ± 0.94	0	1.01
Twisting ears or hand	4.56 ± 4.53	2.92 ± 4.24	2.24*	3.17 ± 4.33	2.92 ± 4.24	0.35	3.82 ± 4.48	3.60 ± 4.44	0.03	3.21 ± 4.34	2.98 ± 4.23	0.46
Hair pulling	0.70 ± 2.58	0.56 ± 1.60	1.27	1.55 ± 3.64	1.72 ± 3.88	0.44	0.82 ± 2.77	0.13 ± 1.15	1.97*	0.82 ± 2.77	2.53 ± 4.38	2.77**
Spanking /slapping	6.05 ± 5.47	5.91 ± 5.53	0.71	4.65 ± 5.47	4.43 ± 5.43	0.25	6.48 ± 5.45	5.57 ± 5.54	1.00	4.97 ± 5.51	4.81 ± 5.36	0.97
Pushing and Strangling	1.03 ± 4.53	1.25 ± 3.69	1.15	0.17 ± 1.42	0	1.04	1.81 ± 4.32	1.44 ± 3.93	0.54	0.16 ± 1.40	0	1.01

Kicking	0.85 ±2.63	1.05 ±3.99	1.42	0	0	0	1.07 ±3.60	0.87 ±3.26	0.36	0	0	0
Beating	4.93 ±6.73	6.73 ±7.04	2.04*	2.17 ±5.10	2.23 ±5.58	0.64	7.10 ±7.05	6.93 ±6.82	1.63	2.30 ±5.22	2.51 ±5.49	0.36

** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; Multiple response, (n=148)

Table 3. Street children as per the mode of beating used by parents

Mode of beating	F	%
Stick	40	43.96
Switch	38	41.76
Shoes	14	15.38
Broom	17	18.68
Rod	5	5.49

Multiple responses, (n=91)

Table 4. Age and gender differences (Mean \pm SD) among street children in the mode of beating used by parents

Mode of beating	Age		Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)	Gender		Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)
	9-11 years (n=41)	11-12 years (n=50)		Male (n=48)	Female (n=43)	
Stick	1.27 \pm 0.98	0.56 \pm 0.91	3.37**	0.71 \pm 0.97	1.07 \pm 1.01	1.72
Switch	1.32 \pm 1.51	1.20 \pm 1.48	0.37	1.25 \pm 1.49	1.26 \pm 1.50	0.02
Shoes	0.68 \pm 1.52	0.56 \pm 1.40	0.40	0.83 \pm 1.64	0.37 \pm 1.18	1.51
Broom	0.98 \pm 2.01	0.90 \pm 1.94	0.18	1.25 \pm 2.19	0.58 \pm 1.62	1.63
Rod	0.15 \pm 0.94	0.48 \pm 1.64	1.15	0.50 \pm 1.68	0.14 \pm 0.91	1.25

** p < 0.01; Multiple responses, (n=91)

Table 5. Per cent distribution of street children in the magnitude of punishment experienced from parents

Extent of punishment	F	%
Daily	7	4.72
Twice a week	12	8.10
Once a week	63	42.56
Fortnightly	19	12.83
Once a month	47	31.75

(n=148)

Table 6. Age and gender differentials (Mean \pm SD) in the magnitude of punishment experienced by street children from parents

Extent of punishment	Age wise distribution of street children		Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)	Gender wise distribution of street children		Z-values (using Mann Whitney test)
	9-11 years (n=71)	11-12 years (n=77)		Male (n=73)	Female (n=75)	
	Mean \pm SD	Mean \pm SD		Mean \pm SD	Mean \pm SD	
Daily	0.26 \pm 1.12	0.18 \pm 0.94	0.49 ^{NS}	0.19 \pm 0.96	0.25 \pm 1.10	0.39 ^{NS}
Twice a week	0.16 \pm 0.78	0.43 \pm 1.25	1.66 ^{NS}	0.35 \pm 1.14	0.25 \pm 0.97	0.60 ^{NS}
Once a week	1.29 \pm 1.49	1.08 \pm 1.45	0.87 ^{NS}	1.20 \pm 1.48	1.16 \pm 1.47	0.16 ^{NS}
Fortnightly	0.23 \pm 0.65	0.24 \pm 0.66	0.70 ^{NS}	0.25 \pm 0.67	0.23 \pm 0.64	0.24 ^{NS}
Once a month	0.29 \pm 0.45	0.30 \pm 0.46	0.21 ^{NS}	0.26 \pm 0.44	0.33 \pm 0.47	0.87 ^{NS}

NS = Non Significant, (n=148)