

# **FAMILY RELATIONSHIP AND STREET CHILDREN: SOME POINTS TO PONDER'**

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## **I. Introduction**

### *A. The Research Problem and Its Significance*

Research on the Filipino family during the past two decades has indicated the strong value that Filipino families place on children (Ramirez, 1976; Senden, 1976; Decaesstecker, 1978; Bulatao, 1975; 1978; 1979; Ellevera-Lamberte, 1978; Hollnsteiner, 1979; Sevilla, 1982; Andres, 1985). Children are regarded, for instance, as gifts from God, blessings, a source of joy as well as happiness, and an economic as well as practical assets of the family. Given this observation, it appears important to ponder how and why on the contrary quite a good number of children could now be seen not only staying most of the time in the streets but eventually are living in the streets. Many of these children already consider the streets as not only a place to secure money and/or means needed for a day-to-day survival but also as their homes and an area where they can enjoy the company of their friends and peers; this, amidst varying forms of hazards that they may face resulting from living or if not staying most of the time in the streets.

CHILDHOPE Asia (1992) estimated that there are about 1.2 million street children in the country, and that 60,000 to 70,000 of these children may be found in Metro Manila. What is the life situation of these children? What causes them to live and/or stay in the streets? The present paper explores the connection between family relationship and the spawning of street children in some areas of Metro Manila, specifically, the cities of Pasay, Quezon, Manila and Mandaluyong. It attempts to draw insights and lessons from a recently completed research which delved as one of its aspects of study, the family situation surrounding the street children. The paper

examines the relationship between marital dissolution and the changes in family structure brought about by remarriage of any of the widowed parent on one hand and the phenomenon on street children on the other. This paper also discusses the possible variations in the behaviors of what is classified as "children on the streets" and "children of the streets."

It is important to examine the role that family relationship plays in the phenomenon on street children, particularly in this year where we celebrate worldwide the "The International Year of the Family" in that it gives us insights on the social realities surrounding the street children notwithstanding the necessity of continuous research about the Filipino family as an institution especially at this point in time when such institution is faced by varying forms of present-day challenges and changes in our society. We need to conduct enough studies that enhance our scientific understanding of street children and THE Filipino urban poor family situation to make sure that the assumptions from where we are operating on when working with street children and their own families are not images of the past nor the "ideal" which are generally shaped by our cultural and religious traditions.

#### *B. Methodological Considerations and Limitations*

The data of this paper were drawn from a baseline study which I conducted for the Program on Street Education - An Alternative Response to Street Children, implemented by the Inter-City Collaboration for Street Education (ICCSE) with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency, Canada through the National Council for Social Development, Philippines. The research generally aimed at providing benchmark information about the life situations of street children in Metro Manila, specifically in the cities of Manila, Pasay, Quezon and Mandaluyong. Specifically, the said research intended: 1) to provide information on the background characteristics of selected street children in Metro Manila; 2) to describe the family situations surrounding the street children; 3) to identify deviant behaviors engaged in by the street children; 4) to ascertain factors contributory to the existing conditions and life situation of the street children; 5) to identify needs and services needed by the street children; and 6) to provide information on the kind of services received by the street children from various individuals and organizations working with them.

This baseline study was conducted with the participation of the street educators who are then involved until now in the implementation of the Street Education Program. The objectives of the study, the aspects to be studied, and the parameters that were used were determined by the educators themselves, with me serving as the facilitator of the conceptualization, operationalization processes and the planning of the research design. Again, the determination of the sample size and the selection of the sample units were made by the educators who were then recognized as knowledgeable of the subjects in

that they have established close contacts with them. In all of the stages of the research planning and implementation, the needs and the goals of the Street Education Program and the street educators took primary importance.

The said study covered a total of 700 out of the targeted 1,500 street children program beneficiaries. Non-probability--specifically convenient and purposive sampling techniques--were used in the selection of the sample. This was resorted to because of the lack of data and of the exact number of street children living or staying in the areas covered by the servicing agencies. The criteria used in selecting the sample street children were: 1) they must be willing to be interviewed, 2) they must have already been living or staying in the streets three months or more prior to the conduct of the baseline study, 3) they must be within the reach or contact of the street educator and 4) they must be capable of comprehending and understanding the questions asked in the process of the interview. The face-to-face structured interviews. These interviews which were conducted by the street educators themselves were facilitated through the use of an interview schedule written in Filipino. An intensive three-day training was conducted for the purpose of developing interviewing skills among street educators. Moreover, the street educators themselves constructed the interview schedule under my guidance. A separate one-day training was given for the purpose of learning the important rules in constructing A questionnaire.

Descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean, as well as standard deviations, were used as tools for the analysis of the data. In addition, crosstabulations were also done in order to discern the differences in the pattern of the responses of the street children.

## II. The Context of the Street Children

This section describes the context in which the street children's lives and situations could be understood. The discussion is preceded by a brief description of the typology of street children. The presentation of the background characteristics of the sample street children and their families follows the description, after which their family situations are described.

CHILDHOPE Asia (1992) has identified three categories of street children, namely: 1) children on the streets, 2) children of the streets, and 3) completely abandoned children. Children on the streets are estimated to constitute about 70 percent of the total number of street children in the Philippines. These are street children who spend a considerable amount of time in the streets without the close supervision of a parent or responsible adult, partly or fully to earn a living. They still go to school and return to their homes at the end of the day.

Children of the street are estimated to comprise about 25 percent of street children in the Philippines. This group is composed of children who live and work in the streets. They see the streets as their home and as a source of living. Generally, these children have lost all contact with their families. Family ties may still exist, but this is not viewed as valuable and favorable on their part. Consequently, they rarely visit their parents and families. They have adopted the streets as their home.

Completely abandoned children comprise about 5 percent of street children in the Philippines. They are said to be the "hard core" street children. Forced by many circumstances to live in the streets, these children have been conditioned even at an early age to live by themselves, making it difficult to elicit their cooperation and conformity to an organized activity. Although many of them are efficient and resourceful survivors in the streets, they also lack a sense of personal, self-care. Oftentimes, they resist a structured way of life and thus usually escape from the institutional care of shelters and/or centers.

Together with the completely abandoned children, children of the streets, according to the CHILDSHOPE study, have lost the normal organized arrangement of daily living which other children learn from normal socialization processes such as observing an appropriate time for eating meals, sleeping, grooming and taking care of oneself, studying, and even playing. Also, many of them slide into deviant behaviors and are predisposed to self-destructive behaviors such as drug addiction and sexual promiscuity.

Going now to the research outcome, findings indicate that the sample street children could be seen loitering around the main streets of Metro Manila (37.14 percent), in markets (22.28 percent), in shopping centers (16.73 percent), in parks (10.85 percent) and at bus stations (4.57 percent). The "tambayan" areas of the street children do not differ much whether or not they live at the shelters, in the streets or at home. It seems that where the street children may be found is determined by their workplace and work activities. Reinforcing the results of CHILDSHOPE Asia, 1992, it was found out that vending for instance is done mostly in the markets, commercial areas, bus terminals, entertainment districts, downtown streets, parks and tourist spots, and while cleaning and watching over cars in commercial areas, parks, bus terminals, and markets.

The living arrangements of these children vary, with 9.86 percent staying in the streets but living in the shelter/center, 37.14 percent actually living in the streets, and 53 percent living with families but spending most of their time in the streets. Adopting the categorization made by CHILDSHOPE Asia, we may infer that "children on the streets" comprise the majority of the sample street children, and a considerable number of them may be classified as "children of the streets." While the children on the streets may still have contacts with their families, they spend a significant amount of time in the streets without the supervision of a parent or any responsible adult — a situation similarly observed with the children of the streets.

It is important to note that the pattern of distribution of street children according to living arrangements in the baseline research differs from the previous studies conducted by CHILDSHOPE Asia and by the DSWD/NCSD/UNICEF. The CHILDSHOPE Asia Report indicated that there were 70 percent children on the streets (compared to 53 percent in this study) and 25 percent children of the streets (compared to 37.14 percent in this sample). The 1988 study of DSWD/NCSD/UNICEF revealed that 75 percent children lived at home but stayed in the streets. The differences likely demonstrate a possibility that children living in the streets is becoming more of a reality in our midst, and that the number of those categorized as children of the streets is relatively increasing. It may also suggest that family disintegration among the poor today is not just a threat as indicated by previous studies but becoming more of a reality. A considerable number of the street children had been in the streets for two or more years (39.57 percent), almost one-fourth of them for less than 6 months (24.99 percent) and about one-fifth for one year and above but less than two years. Those living in their own homes and in the streets have been hanging around the streets for a longer period, compared to those residing in the centers who had been in the streets for less than 6 months.

As in the previous studies, results of the baseline research have indicated that most of the sample street children belong to urban poor families (DSWD/NCSD/UNICEF, 1988; Black, 1991; CHILDSHOPE Asia, 1992; Lamberte, (1992). About 66.1 percent were born in Metro Manila and only a considerable number (33.9 percent) were born in the provinces. It is interesting to note that of this number, only 5.2 percent were born in Visayas or Mindanao; the rest were born in Luzon. Most of the parents of the sample children live in Metro Manila (79.5 percent); about 14.8 percent in Luzon and 5.6 percent in Visayas and Mindanao. The present data seems to reveal that unlike in the past studies where street children were found to be mostly migrants who accompanied their families and relatives in coming to Manila, most of the sample children are found to be Manila-born children whose parents might have been migrants in previous years but are now residing in Metro Manila. Only a small percentage were found to be migrants whose parents may be residing in Manila and in the nearby provinces. The present findings seem to affirm my suspicion that most urban poor families in Metro Manila are no longer new migrants but rather a generation of adults born in Manila, and whose parents might have been migrants from the provinces many years ago. It also shows that new migrants coming to Manila no longer originate from the Visayas and Mindanao, but rather from the Luzon provinces (Lamberte, 1992; 1993).

Notably, the street children included in the baseline belong to large families with a number of children ranging from 1 to 18. More than half of the sample street children have from 4 to 7 brothers and sisters (51.9 percent). Most of the sample street children

are either first born (32.6 percent), second (25.1 percent) or third (21.3 percent). Data seems to show that street children are likely to be the older siblings in the family.

Information was also obtained on the employment status of the children's parents or stepfathers or stepmothers. About 8.29 percent of the sample children reported that their father or stepfather is unemployed, and 28.1 percent reported that their mother or stepmother is unemployed. These unemployment figures are much smaller than those previously reported by past studies. More of the children's fathers or stepfathers are self-employed (59.71 percent) than employed by others (21.01 percent), while more of the mothers or stepmothers are employed by others (40.48 percent) than self-employed (31.28 percent). However, it is not entirely farfetched to posit that, while unemployment among the street children's parents and step-parents seems to be not as common today, underemployment information, however, has not been included in the employment figures generated in this study. Thus, it is possible that a much more optimistic picture is suggested by the study's employment data.

As noted in the DSWD/UNICEF/NCSD 1988 situationer in 10 cities, parents' options to work are limited due to their lack of formal schooling and skills. Typical parents of street children based on this situationer had a combined weekly income of 317.82 for a family of 6 members. Thus, given the large families and low income of these parents, the presence of working children can be seen as necessary for the survival of the family; it is thus a form of a coping strategy employed by the family.

Most of the street children earn their own income and only 42 percent claimed to have not been working in order to earn money. This observation was similarly noted by Black (1991), who found that many of the street children start to earn at an early age, in helping to support the family. The source of living for the working street children varies from vending or selling (32.36 percent), to begging (20.07 percent), to car watching or car washing (15.04 percent), scavenging (9.27 percent), engaging in illegal activities such as pickpocketing, stealing, and gambling (1.52 percent) and to other forms of activity such as working for an employer and doing menial jobs (21.74 percent) for other persons. Children living with their families frequently mentioned vending/selling as their work activity, followed by begging, while those living in the streets and shelter frequently reported begging followed by vending/selling. In addition, the pattern of the results seems to reveal two notable observations concerning work activities of the children according to living arrangements. One is that children living with their parents tend to be more enterprising than those in living in a shelter or in the street. The second observation is that quite a number of those living on the streets are engaged in begging and in undertaking illegal activities, compared to those living at home and in the shelter or center.

The earnings of the sample children range from 1.00/day to 150.99 or more/day. Most of the children (63.5 percent) earn 1.00 to 50 a day; 26.07 percent reported earnings per day of 50.99 to 100; 7.22 percent between 100.99 and 150 and 3.21 percent between 150.99 and above.

Most of the children (69.21 percent) spent much of their earnings on food, an expenditure pattern reflecting the national situation wherein most Filipino families allocate their income to food. Notably, among the children living with their families, the second-ranked among the items on which their money is spent most is "personal belongings." For the children housed in shelters or centers as well as the children living on the streets, the second-ranked item is "prohibited drugs." Because of the temporariness of the living arrangements of these children of the streets, it is only logical that they do not spend as much money on personal belongings as the children on the streets. Other items on which street children's earnings are reportedly spent are movies and gambling. While this finding seems to be consistent with the 1988 situationer of the DSWD/NCSD/UNICEF which noted that less children spend their earnings on drugs and gambling than those who used their money for basic personal and family needs, 54.42 percent of the respondents of this study admitted to engaging in gambling activities.

Interestingly, a considerable number of the children reported having savings, an observation that is completely inconsistent with past studies, as earnings are usually reported to be insufficient for meeting personal and family needs. Majority (67.95 percent), however, claimed to have not saved at all, particularly those living on the streets and in shelters/centers.

To sum overall, findings reveal that the majority of street children come from large, urban poor families. Most of these are not recent migrants like those in previous studies, but rather Manila-born. It is important to note also that majority of the few who are new migrants actually came from the nearby Luzon provinces, and not from the Visayas or Mindanao.

The children included in the baseline have parents who are generally engaged in gainful work. The employment figures of the fathers/stepfathers and those of the mothers/stepmothers were observed to be higher than in other studies, but this needs to be clarified because the extent of underemployment was not investigated and many of those surveyed--particularly among the mothers--were reported to be self-employed. In such cases, the earnings are likely to be less, and insufficient for meeting the needs of the family. The fact that poor living conditions were cited by children as a problem that led them to opt for a life in the streets makes this situation plausible. Economic deprivation has forced them to earn even at an early age and to be enterprising, finding creative ways to live and to survive in the streets. As shown in the data, children enter into varying activities, legal or illegal, just to be able to earn money.

### III. Family Relationship and Decision to Stay and/or Live in the Streets

There seems to be three major factors that force children to stay most of the time and/or live in the streets. These are poverty, family-relationship related factors, and peer-gang membership. Data on the reasons for staying or living in streets indicates that for children living in their own homes, poverty/poor living conditions (20.57 percent) and gang membership (15.29 percent) were frequently cited as reasons, while for those living in the streets, the most frequently given reasons were family related problems (9.57 percent) and poverty/poor living conditions (7.43 percent). For the children staying in the center/shelter, poverty was not the usual reported reason, but it was rather the gang membership. About 26 percent of the sample street children are members of gangs and/or fraternities. The most frequently cited reasons for joining are desire for friendship (47.75 percent), protection (22.47 percent) and peer pressure (17.98 percent). About 43.60 percent of the children reported that indeed, gang membership addresses their needs for friendship and protection, although the majority (56.40 percent) also claimed that their reasons for being a member of a gang or fraternity were not met at all.

It is interesting to note that peer or gang membership was not at all cited as one of the reasons for staying on the streets in either the 1988 DSWD/NCSD/UNICEF study or CHILDHOPE Asia research. That this reason was given by the baseline study's sample of street children implies that more and more, the peer group is becoming a pivotal factor to consider in understanding the life situation of the children, particularly the children on the streets category.

Most importantly, and this is the focus of this paper, family-related problems were also indicated as a major reason for the children to stay or live in the streets. Notably, disagreements with family members, being driven away by family, and being abused by people in their houses were specifically cited by a considerable number of the sample children. According to Maggie Black (1991), it is common to find that a child spending unusually long hours away from home is escaping from violent or sexually-abusive behavior from a step-parent or any member of the family. This study then reinforces the 1988 study showing abuse within the family as reason for not going home on a regular basis.

How and why do street children are faced with these familial problems forcing them to stay or live in the streets may be understood more by examining closely their family situation and structure.

In a related vein, the baseline revealed some relevant findings. First, almost half (45.61 percent) of the sample street children are raised by single or solo parents. Single



parents homes are basically headed by a woman who is either widowed, which is about 30.65 percent or separated, 69.35 percent. Second, although more than half (52.99 percent) of the respondents' parents were reported to live together in the same house, data at the same time shows that of this percentage, which is about 373 sample children, 59.25 percent have stepfathers and/or stepmothers. This type of a family structure is predominantly observed among the children of the streets, that is, children staying most of the time in the streets and children residing at the shelters or centers. In addition, data reveals that there are more children who are still living in their own homes who have complete parents living together compared to those living in the streets and/or shelters.

The present observations are consistent with the 1988 DSWD/NCSDFP/UNICEF interagency report, pointing out that in 9 out of the 10 cities covered by their study (Cebu City was the exception), more than half of these cities' street children were reported to be living with one or both parents, and in the 1991 UNICEF study, natural parents are separated in a maximum of 65 percent of streetchild homes. CHILDHOPE Asia notes, however, that a significant number of children who lived with their families rarely experienced love and affection in their homes. The said study also identified certain home problems commonly faced by street children such as lack of food, substandard quarters or depressing conditions, being forced to earn a living, parental or family quarrels, parents' lack of trust in their children, and absence of fathers or lack of knowledge of parents' whereabouts (UNICEF, 1991).

That marital dissolution likely occurs among a segment of the very poor families is evidently depicted by certain local researches (Wiley, 1982; Sta. Romana Cruz, 1982; Decaesstecker, 1978;). It is important to note that while some studies had been conducted about the attitudes of Filipinos towards divorce, not much adequate evidence, however, were gathered by past studies about the extent of separation and marital dissolution in the Philippines and the effects of this separation among the children (Go, 1993; Medina, 1991; Sevilla, 1982). The scarcity of adequate statistics and studies along this area may be explained by the fact that divorce is not allowed in the country until now. In many cases this situation is treated privately and with utmost privacy due to the associated social stigma and the perceived disapproval of not only the family members but also the significant and generalized others of the spouse confronted with the problem. The burden of providing an explanation about why the situation occurred to the relatives and friends, for them to understand rests on the couple themselves. Although, researchers are in a consensus in saying that the phenomenon of marital separation and remarriages is not only a threat at this point of time but a growing reality in our midst which the society needs to contend with. Some authorities refuse to accept the fact that such reality is increasingly happening in our society. I could not determine how long this situation will remain but one thing sure is that this phenomenon

is increasing and this reality needs to be recognized. We need to do so to be able to come up with certain mechanisms and support systems in order to ameliorate or if not eliminate the negative effects of marital separation among children or even come up with action programs to prevent the increase of unnecessary marital separation. Similar to the outcome of this research, literature in the West is replete with findings pointing to the detrimental effects of separation and divorce to children, either short or long term.

Remarriage of one of the widowed parents also seems to contribute to the decision of the street children to live or stay in the streets most of the time. Disagreements and the infliction of pain or abuse on some of step-parents are notable in homes of street children with step-fathers or step-mothers (36.89 percent). This observation may perhaps be attributed to the adjustment problems of the children with the new parent, especially given the fact that quite a number of the sample children are adolescents. An important point however has to be raised in relation to this situation given the fact that divorce and/or remarriage is not legally sanctioned in our society. In remarriages, children are seen to be the hapless and powerless party among the members as they are left on their own to make adjustments for the coming of the new parent. Not much institutional protection and legitimate support systems are available in cases where children would have difficulty in relating and interacting with the new parent and when he becomes a victim of abuse committed by the stepfather and/or stepmother. In the absence of all these mechanisms to protect the child from an adult who is by no means related to him by blood, life in the streets becomes an alternative or an attractive option.

Reasons given by the sample street children provide insights into the kind of dynamics existing in families with complete parents when compared with that of the broken homes. Sample children coming from homes with parents living together have cited other than poor living conditions being driven away, abuse/maltreatment and disagreements as major reasons for living and/or staying most of the time in the streets. Children with separated parents on the other hand cited equally poor living conditions, disagreements, peer influence and need to secure work to help the parent. As gleaned from these observations, family relationship seems to be problematic among those living with complete parents. This is likely possible given the fact that quite a number of them have stepfathers and/or stepmothers. On the part of those with single parents, the problems seem to lie between the fact that children were expected to help their parents in earning a living or in performing household tasks. And this gets in conflict with the fact that while earning a living in the streets, they also develop friendships with some becoming members of groups or gangs. The seeming dilemma on the part of the children rests on the choice between home responsibility and the company constantly provided by the peer in the streets. In this situation, it seems plausible to

expect disagreements and later being driven away from the house. Confounding this situation is the fact that in the process of controlling the behavior of the children, which is predominantly practiced among the poor families, some disciplinary sanctions may be given by the parent and this is possibly perceived as maltreatment or abuse on the part of the children. This is expected given the fact that in child-rearing practices particularly among the poor families, the line separating discipline and abuse is much more vague.

**Third**, that many of the street children belong to large families plausibly augments the problematic situation faced by the families of the street children. Aside from economic pressures, parents are also faced with the fact that more attention is needed in rearing the children because of relatively large number of children to managed. Whether neighbors and relatives could likely be counted upon to take care of the children while parents are working or just taking care of some of the smaller children may need to be reinvestigated at this time because of the surrounding economic pressures faced by each family. Even in the profile drawn of street children in the whole of Asia, maternal attention and time are inevitably subdivided in the typically large families, with newborn children often handled by older siblings. Round the clock childrearing support from female members (and adult male members as well) is thus less likely to be available, especially considering that parents are usually young, have little education, and are short of skills and qualifications not only for income-generating purposes but also in the management of domestic economy and parenting. As discussed earlier, in the Philippines, Black (1991) notes that slum mothers are rarely capable of devoting themselves to home-bound domesticity, and that the marketplace, the snack bar, and the public laundry are more likely than the porch or nursery to provide surroundings with which their toddler-children earliest identify.

**Fourth**, quite a number of the sample turn out to be in adolescent stage and a considerable number also are members of groups and/or gangs. The age range of the sample is 4-21 years and, as in the 1988 situationer of the DSWD/NCSD/UNICEF, the highest percentage of the children (49.9 percent) are in 11-14 age bracket. Quite a number of them (26.8 percent) are in the 15-17 age range. The average age of the sample children is 13.1 years old. Again, let me reiterate, the role played by peers and/or gang membership in the decision of the children to live and/or stay in the streets surfaced as a major finding in this study and which was not mentioned in previous researches. It is important at this point to deal with the implications of this type of observation, considering the fact that most street children observed in this study were between 14 and 17 years of age. In the adolescent stage of their psychological development, these children can be quite vulnerable, as they search for a sense of personal identity. As is evident in this study, peer group influence is very strong. Coincidentally, because role models are influential at this stage of their lives, such models are found in their peers and/or gang mates as well as leaders. It is not unusual

for adolescents at this point to try out varying roles simultaneously. However, given the kind of peers they associate with, the type of norms they learn in the process, and the lack or even absence of mature adult supervision from parents, the likelihood of these children imbibing a life and subculture different from the rest of the society is very high. It becomes less surprising therefore to discover that children at their age have already engaged in behaviors society considers to be deviant, such as gambling, unrestrained sexual activity, use of prohibited drugs, and committing illegal acts just to be able to earn and survive in the streets. Schooling is not even viewed by the children as an important part of life, though many of them aspire to be educated and land a job when they grow up. Deplorable as it is, much of the socialization process that takes place among these children occurs in the streets and among peers, because they are beyond the supervision of their families and the schools—the major agents of the socialization process. In the 1988 situationer collaboratively conducted by DSWD, NCSO and UNICEF, it was revealed that gang and/or group membership among street children exert some influence in the life and behaviors of the children. According to this study, the membership provides not only companionship but also serves as a medium through which children learn the ways of street life—ways which may include dubious activities as part of work activities or, if not, provide relaxation, away from the pressures of work and problems of living in the streets. It was also noted that street groups/gangs have the capability to develop and transmit norms and a subculture which may or may not be congruent to the culture and norms of society.

#### IV. Discernable Consequences of Living or Staying Most of the Time in the Streets

Some striking consequences could be gleaned from the fact that children live and/or stay most of the time in the streets. One, is that schooling and education are negatively affected. Results indicate that the majority (52.73 percent) of the sample street children were not studying at all during the time of the interview, and only 47.27 percent were in school. This finding affirms the results gathered by the 1988 situationer and the CHILDSHOPE study, which noted that educational attainment of many of the street children is relatively low. More of the children included in this study were busy earning a living than were preoccupied with schooling. Moreover, data also reveals that there are only a few who work and study at the same time; many devote much of their time to earning a living. Also, only a few of them can be considered as full-time students devoting most of their time to their studies. Most of those in school are in the elementary level. It is significant to note that despite the fact that basic education is provided to all by the public sector for free, the present data indicate that a considerable number, about 31.06 percent of the street children who are reported not in school, did not have any schooling at all. About 35.57 percent of children who have not had any schooling are recorded among those children living in the streets, about 31.01 percent among

those living with their families and about 11.36 percent those living in shelters. Children living in shelters composed the highest percentage of those who have reached the secondary level, while children living in the streets composed the highest at the intermediate level. The pressure to stop schooling at an early age seems to be much stronger among the children still living with their families. This is shown by the observation that many of children on the street who are drop-outs have only reached the primary level. Again, this situation could perhaps be attributed to the fact that many of those living with their families have solo parents.

Two, the consequence of living and staying most of the time in the streets could be seen more in the health situation of the children. Most (61.91 percent) of the children are generally able to eat thrice a day, with 18.61 percent eating twice, and 5.18 percent eating only once a day. About 14.3 percent said they are able to eat more than three meals a day. Most (73.33 percent) said they feel full after their meals, while 23.05 percent are satisfied and still want more food. Only a small percentage (3.62 percent) still feel hungry after eating. The results of the baseline however do not provide much information on the quality of the meals eaten by the children. But in describing the situation of street children in 1988 (DSWD-NCSDFP-UNICEF, 1988), some of the respondents complained of hunger and starvation "most of the time."

For 32.13 percent of the respondents, illness had occurred within the last 6 months. About 79.64 percent of them claimed that they know of health centers and clinics, with 52.81 percent actually having sought medical care within the past 6 months. For the considerable number of street children who did not know of health centers and clinics, it is quite plausible that they seek medical help from traditional healers. As noted in the UNICEF study done by Black (1991), a high proportion of slum children are delivered at home by the "manghihilot", and many slum dwellers use traditional remedies because they cannot afford modern drugs. Notably, incidence of illness is equally observed among children on the streets and children of the streets. It is also commonly observed among those with complete parents and those with broken homes.

Studying health hazards faced by street children, CHILDHOPE Asia observed that street children are generally malnourished and anemic, with many of them physically stunted. They are exposed to polluted street environments, causing common ailments such as fever, colds, coughs, and headaches. Street scavengers are prone to skin diseases and cuts, and baggage boys to chest pain and musculo-skeletal pain; street peddlers of newspapers, cigarettes, flowers, or rags run the risk of exposure to gas fumes, injuries, and trauma from vehicular accidents. As noted by the DSWD-NCSDFP-UNICEF study teams in 10 Philippine cities (1988), susceptibility to disease is an "occupational hazard" among street children. Common ailments documented by Black in 1991 were pneumonia, diarrhea, and tuberculosis.

Beyond the physical health hazards faced daily by street children are the emotional hazards the children are constantly exposed to. What cannot be accurately gauged is the extent of physical and emotional harm such acts inflict on the young (DSWD-NCSDFP-UNICEF, 1988). Some of the perceived and actual risks street children face were described earlier by CHILDSHOPE Asia. For one, there are the threats to the children's physical safety. These children are prone to street fights and are subject to bullying by bigger youth, harassment from extortionists and policemen, and abuse and torture from misguided authorities. They may also be unjustly treated when arrested, resulting in fear and hostility.

Adult exploitation is another risk facing the street child, as pointed out by CHILDSHOPE Asia. Exploitative adults include the street children's parents, who force them to work and beat them up when they bring home inadequate earnings; adult vendors, who harass child vendors; and syndicates, which systematically exploit children by making them beg for money, steal, or traffic drugs. And then, there is the risk of sexual exploitation and prostitution, contracting STDs or AIDs. Easy prey are street girls and boys who are offered food, money and shelter in exchange for sexual favors. Unfortunately, survival needs and consumeristic wants have made the attraction of money too strong for some of the street children. Some parents themselves encourage their children to go out and sell sex to foreigners. Street girls also have to deal with ruffians among the police and underworld elements.

Drug addiction is yet another risk faced by the street child. Mostly, the street child is exposed to substance abuse (glue or paint thinner), and some prostitutes end up as drug users. Threats to emotional well-being are also included among the perceived and actual risks street children face, as enumerated by CHILDSHOPE Asia. Among these threats are being deprived of basic education, lack of hope for a better future, constant humiliation by more affluent passers-by (resulting in lower self esteem), and feelings of neglect, which push them to drugs and eventually into criminality.

Specific measures are taken by the children in their attempts to deal with daily exposure to these physical and emotional health hazards (DSWD-NCSDFP-UNICEF, 1988). Such measures include working with groups and friends, going home early, heeding the authorities, keeping away from dangerous places, staying out of the "territory" of others, making friends with all their fellow street children, and avoiding being hit by vehicles. Scavengers avoid cuts and wounds by wearing slippers, and using sticks to sort garbage.

With regard to illness management, street children either resort to self-prescribed medication (using home-made remedies, staying at home and resting or suffering in silence, and asking for help from other families or family members), consulting a doctor, or availing of health services (DSWD-NCSDFP-UNICEF, 1988). While

CHILDDHOPE Asia observed that street children generally have no access to hospitals and other health facilities when sick, medical care was sought by 316 of this study's street children respondents most frequently at the health center and the hospital (39.88 percent and 37.03 percent, respectively), while others sought medical care at private clinics (7.91 percent), and at the center or shelter clinics (1.9 percent). About 7.9 percent of the respondents said they could not remember where they had sought medical care.

Three, children in the process of living or staying most of the time in the streets develop some behaviors and undertake some activities which many in the majority stream of society could be considered as deviant behaviors. Gambling, use of prohibited drugs, and unrestrained adolescent sexual activity are the main problem practices of some of the street children covered by the study. Gambling was the most prevalent deviant behavior among these three, with 54.42 percent of the children engaging in such activities. About 39.97 percent of the street children respondents admitted to using prohibited drugs, and 23.75 percent to engaging in sexual activities. Gambling is predominant among those living in the streets, especially those coming from broken homes.

Of the 39.97 percent who admitted to the using of prohibited drugs, 66.07 percent were users of solvent or rugby (glue), 14.29 percent of cough syrup, 5.36 percent of marijuana, 2.14 percent of shabu, and 12.14 percent of other drugs. Daily use was admitted to by 35.41 percent of the drug users, while 38.32 percent admitted to using prohibited drugs about three times a week; 12.76 percent said they seldom used drugs, and 13.5 percent claimed that they had taken prohibited drugs only once.

It is interesting to note that many of those who reported to have not gone into the use of prohibited drugs are children still living with their families. In addition, more users are reported in children with separated parents.

Of the 23.75 percent who admitted to engaging in sex, 33.33 percent said they had done this only once, while 41.34 percent and 25.33 percent admitted to engaging in occasional and frequent sexual activity, respectively. The persons with whom these children usually had sex were the street children's boyfriend/girlfriend (reported by 45.34 percent of the 150 street children who admitted to engaging in sexual activity), fellow children (15.33 percent), homosexuals/lesbians (10.67 percent), street adults (10.67 percent), foreigners/tourists (8.67 percent), and others such as arresting officers and/or stepfathers (9.32 percent). Remarkably, about 44.86 percent of those who have not engaged in sex are those living with complete parents and about 30.51 percent for those with broken homes. These data however need further investigation for it seems plausible that the figures may be higher.

Data on street children's experience with police arrest shows that a majority, that is, 52.21 percent of the children had been arrested previously, 70.27 percent of them in connection with "bagansiya" or police raids. Other reasons for being arrested include the children's being "suspects" (8.46 percent), use of prohibited drugs (4.66 percent), snatching (3.21 percent), and others like gambling, begging, and driving without a license (13.4 percent). To some of the street children, police arrest is already seen as a normal part of street life; a taken-for-granted everyday reality yet feared by many. The street children's experiences with police arrest are not very different from those reported six years ago. The 1988 data on street children's police arrest experiences include the following information: children who had previous arrests constituted 45 percent in Cebu and Olongapo, but a minority in Naga and Iloilo as well as in Davao and Baguio; number of arrests ranged from 1-25 times; common offenses were vagrancy, theft, gambling, fighting, being suspected of robbery, and curfew violations, with a few arrested for drug abuse or for sniffing rugby, for picking pockets and for vandalism; and length of detention varied from 30 minutes to 5 weeks or more.

When arrested, the children were usually brought to the police precinct (62.83 percent). Others were brought instead to the MYRC (19.48 percent), the barangay hall (11.5 percent), the Nayan sa Kabataan (2.37 percent), or other places like Boys' Town, a hotel, and the Lingap Center (3.82 percent). When arrested, most of the children (30.46 percent) were punished by "takal" (i.e., being beaten with a 2" x 2" piece of wood), being asked to clean the precinct (26.46 percent), being asked to give the police a massage (5.85 percent), and being asked to give money to the police (2.78 percent). For 10.14 percent of the respondents, no punishment had been given by the police.

### V. Assessment of Life, Needs and Aspirations

Majority (54.08 percent) of the street children are not satisfied with their life, personally assessing life on the streets as sad (22.74 percent), full of threats (13.05 percent), and "nakakaasar" (6.44 percent). But for 43.1 percent of the respondents, life in the streets was personally assessed to be satisfying. A greater percentage of those who felt dissatisfied with their life in the streets are those who come from broken homes. Notably, satisfaction is felt more among those still living with their families. Many children express negative feelings about being in the streets, and these feelings are more discernable among those who live in the shelters as well as on the streets and among those who came from broken homes.

Most sample street children admitted having fears and anxieties. Street children are revealed to be afraid of death (29.65 percent), accidents (20.5 percent), arrest by a policeman (16.57 percent), "mabugbog" or brutal treatment (9.6 percent), illness (4.07



percent), and "makikilan" (1.89 percent). Describing how the urban poor suffer from strains which ultimately result in a breaking point, Black (1991) notes that violence and cruelty have become integral to poverty-bound living. Brutality in the home, physically and verbally-abusive discipline, domestic stress and broken marriages, dislocation due to eviction of the family--these are just some of the stress factors apparent in the living condition of the street child in the 1990s.

Expectedly, one strongly felt need of these street children is money (38.08 percent); parental care, attention and understanding was also expressed as a felt need by 13.21 percent of the respondents. Other felt needs of these street children were food (11.35 percent), shelter (10.76 percent), employment (9.3 percent) and clothing (6.11 percent). Perceived needs, on the other hand, were education (65.1 percent), housing/shelter (47.1 percent), employment/work (45.3 percent), adequate food (41 percent), protection against abuse/maltreatment (39.9 percent), and medicine/medical care (36.1 percent). This study affirms the results of the 1988 study that indicated economic difficulties as predominant in the street children's responses to questions regarding their perceived problems. In the baseline however, equally reported as need is the need for family affection, attention and even mere belongingness. This could be seen by the fact that majority of those who already lived on the streets or in shelters and orphanages express a desire to go back to their families.

For some (27.13 percent) who do not want to go home, among the reasons cited were poor living conditions (25.59 percent), their friendships with their peers (25.97 percent), the disagreements at home (16.27 percent), their personal preference/wish to be away from their families (15.58 percent), maltreatment by family members (8.99 percent), and their having been driven away by their families (2.42 percent).

The street children aspire for education or schooling (38.43 percent), parents and a home life (20.94 percent), employment (17.93 percent), the ability to help their family (15.02 percent), and good health/no illness (5.93 percent). Only a few (1.74 percent) of the respondents had no aspirations in life. These aspirations do not differ much from those of the street children surveyed in the 1988 DSWD-NCSDFP-UNICEF situationer. At that time, the street children's personal plans given their difficult situation included the following: to finish schooling, to find stable jobs and earn enough money, to be reunited with their families, and to get rich someday. Education, then and now, was a primary aspiration among street children, especially since education is seen as a stepping stone to stable employment and income thus a vehicle for social mobility.

Realistically, though, the chances that the children will attain their aspirations are slim, given their depressed situation. For instance, the prospects of street children for further education are dimmed by several factors. As noted by the baseline study and the DSWD-NCSDFP-UNICEF situationer of 1988, these factors include: (1) a large

percentage are in the 11-14 age category, with most of the respondents not having reached the educational level appropriate to their age; (2) the generally low educational level of the respondents, suggesting that the children had not been in school on a continuous basis; and (3) a large number of school dropouts, again pointing to the strong possibility that the respondents must have dropped out at some point, with some resuming their studies and some not returning to school at all.

### V. Concluding Remarks

To sum, some important findings emerged in this study. The data seem to indicate that the number of the children of the streets is increasing. This seems plausible as one compares the findings of this study with that of previous studies. There are three important factors that seem to exert influence in the children's decision to live or stay in the streets without the close supervision of responsible adults or relatives. These factors are poverty, family life, and peer or gang influence. While poverty was generally cited as one factor that forces children to live or stay in the streets, when compounded with family life (which was cited as the most influential factor by children of the streets), pressure results and children are found in the streets more often. The nature and the type of parent-child relationship that exists between the street children and their respective parents seems to be interconnected with the burden of economic deprivation, separation of parents, and the remarriage of widowed parents. More importantly, separation of parents and relationships with stepfathers and/or stepmothers emerged as critical factors in the children's decision to stay and/or live in the streets. This observation is particularly true of children living in the streets and those living in the center/shelter.

The life situation of street children seems bleak as one considers what will become of them in the near future. This is true given the findings that many of the children engage in deviant behaviors such as gambling, use of prohibited drugs, gang membership, unrestrained sexual activity and others. Police arrests are in fact considered a normal occurrence in the reality of their everyday life. Although a higher portion of the children's earnings is spent on food, data also show that gambling and buying prohibited drugs rank highly on the children's priorities for spending money. This observation is particularly true for the children of the streets and children living in shelters and/or centers and children with separated parents. For the most part, children on the streets spend their money to buy personal belongings and in leisure activities. Street children may be creative survivors and enterprising, but one would still worry about the kind of life they will have in the future, given their existing conditions and surrounding situations.



Moreover, the health and the educational status of the street children are deplorable. Notwithstanding the fact that the present health status of the sample children is poor, the children are very much threatened by many factors. The most critical of these are the poverty conditions, the absence of training for proper personal care and required health habits, environmental and work-related health hazards encountered in scavenging, begging, and indulging in unrestrained sexual activities either with a fellow street child, "clients or customers," or exploitative individuals.

A similar situation could be observed with respect to the children's schooling. The findings indicate that the majority of the sample children were school drop-outs and many have reached only primary level. A considerable number of those not in school were revealed to have not gone to school at all. This is prevalent among the children living in the streets. Most importantly, it is a common practice among street children to devote their time and attention not only to school work but to earning a living as well. It would seem that it takes more effort and a strong determination on the part of the street children to complete their schooling, even at the primary or intermediate levels, considering that many of them work in the streets to earn money, have friends who are not in school, and are usually also members of gangs/groups. All of these factors seem to compete for the children's attention. Moreover, given their very mobile character, it requires more discipline and effort for these children to stay for extended periods of time in a structured classroom setting. Paradoxically, while many of the children are drop-outs, most of them mentioned that to complete schooling is their primary aspiration. They perceived schooling as a vehicle through which they can land a job, and have an opportunity to earn needed income. Given this kind of situation, one could ponder over whether the concept of children as the best investment for the country's future is mere rhetoric or a reality in itself.

The majority of the street children are not satisfied with their present condition. They view life in the streets as sad and frightening. Even those who were happy to live in the streets view their lives as uncertain and face constant threats; many express negative feelings. The sources of fear among the children are death, road accidents, police arrests, "mabugbog" or brutal treatment/injuries, and susceptibility to illness including AIDS.

Aside from being enterprising and creative survivors, however, the street children covered in this study are very optimistic about attaining their aspirations in life. Most of the sample street children aspire for education and schooling, and most importantly, being reunited with their families and have a stable home life, being able to help their families, and good health.

The needs that are strongly felt by the children are money, parental care, attention and understanding, food, shelter, employment, and clothing. The reported perceived

needs were education, housing/shelter, employment/work, food, protection against abuse/maltreatment and medical care. Given these findings, it is evident that the immediate concerns of the street children are still being able to look for money to support themselves, and seeking care from the family. The latter concern seems to be more immediate and primordial, since many of the street children—even those living in the streets or in a center—expressed the desire to be reunited with their families. Notably, the majority of the street children still do not want to stay or live permanently in the centers or in the streets. Only about one-fourth of the children expressed the desire not to return home, as a result of family problems.

In the light of the aforementioned observations and the discussion of the findings' implications, certain points need to be raised. First, the overall results seem to indicate that the phenomenon of street children is something that must be understood from a broader socio-economic context. Primarily, it is a phenomenon that is brought about when children are forced to survive amidst poverty and lack of attention from their families and society. Burdened by such conditions, the children seek to overcome their situation by staying in the streets.

Second, except for a few who were totally abandoned, street children through no fault of their own are forced to leave home and live in the streets. Three critical and interacting factors — namely, poverty, strained and unstable family relationships, and long-time companionship with peers (including those in groups/gangs/fraternities, who provide protection, security and camaraderie) — produce such circumstances.

Third, changes in family structure and relationships—such as marriages for one of the parents, and family disintegration brought about by separation of parents — seem to create problems of adjustment and anxiety for the children. Leaving home or being away from relatives/family, most of the time, then becomes an attractive option for these children — this despite the harsh conditions that street life presents them with.

Fourth, that the number of those considered to be children of the streets is increasing needs greater attention from those concerned with children's rights and well-being. As a future human resource of this country, the quality of this resource looks uncertain and bleak, given the existing conditions, the consequent behavioral problems noted among street children, and the low level of schooling and high rate of drop-outs among them—despite expressed aspirations to finish schooling. Working with street children appears to be a challenging endeavor. It also requires a considerable amount of effort and commitment on the part of those working with them.

To conclude, the overall findings of the baseline study reveal the possible effects of marital separation and changes in the family structure brought about by remarriage by one of the parents on the children, who are not only powerless but also known to be hapless victims of the marital conflicts going on within the family and consequently,

the dissolution of marriage. Looking closely at the data, one could glean how children get affected by the separation of the husbands and wives and most of all, how their lives suffer because not much preparation and mechanisms are available to counteract the expected outcomes of such separation. Since the children are left on their own to search for ways to live and survive, life in the streets appears to be an attractive option.

Lastly, certain research areas need to be explored in the light of the previous discussion. Given the relatively inadequate state of knowledge about the effect of changes in family structure and family relationships among children, specifically street children, it would seem useful to undertake a thorough and rigorous study into this area. A bigger sample may be necessary specifically to include the major cities of the country having a similar problem of increasing number of street children. It might prove useful to determine differences among the cities as regards major reasons why children decide to stay or live in the streets rather than with their homes and families. In addition, a comparison on the extent of contribution of marital dissolution and the kind of family relationship aside from poverty to the spawning of street children in cities or areas with high, moderate and low levels of economic development.

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