



Quality of Social Support System and Drug Use among Street Children in Starehe Sub-County, Nairobi County Kenya

O'gallo Brian Ochieng¹

¹brian.ogallo@yahoo.com

¹Africa Nazarene University

ABSTRACT

The issue of drug use among street children is a global concern that demands serious attention due to its profound social and health implications, negatively impacting the intellectual, social, and physical development of the individuals involved. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between the quality of the social support system and drug use among street children in Starehe Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya, utilizing a correlational research design. Data were gathered from 100 street children through cluster and simple random sampling methods, selected from a target population of 30,000 in Starehe Sub-County. Additionally, information was collected from purposively sampled officials, including four from the Starehe Children's Office, eight from NGOs/FBOs operating in the sub-county, one sub-county administrator, and four ward administrators. Quantitative data collected via questionnaires underwent analysis using descriptive statistics such as means, percentages, and frequencies. The findings indicated that a lack of social connectedness in the streets contributed to substance use among street children. Strengthening existing social support systems was identified as a means for providing street children with the necessary support to steer them away from drug use. The study recommends the promotion of social support systems in Starehe Sub-County and emphasizes the importance of providing homes for street children to reduce exposure to stressful conditions that may lead to mental health problems.

Key Words: Drug Abuse, Quality of Social Support System, Street Children, Starehe Sub-County, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

The global issue of drug use among street children, as highlighted by Bah (2018), necessitates serious attention. The term "street children" refers to a group of young individuals engaged in unofficial activities, making the street their primary residence for survival. This population is more susceptible to psychoactive drug use due to constant exposure to street life. Initial drug use typically involves legal and easily accessible substances like alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants. UNICEF (2018) acknowledges the significant social and health implications of drug misuse among street children, adversely affecting their intellectual, social, and physical development. Victims of substance abuse often grapple with cognitive issues, violence, poverty, and depression, as noted by Ghodousi et al. (2017) and Magai, Malik, and Koot (2018).

Globally, Tyler and Schmitz (2018), Sharma and Joshi (2020), and Aly et al., (2020) reveal high prevalence rates of substance abuse among street children, posing challenges for growth and development. In Africa, street children face daily physical and psychological abuse, leading to depression and coping mechanisms like drug abuse (John et al., 2019; Reza & Henly, 2018). While some argue that institutional and emotional support can mitigate substance use (Cudjoe & Alhassan, 2016), others emphasize the lack of counseling services as a hindrance (Kudenga, 2016).

Chepngetich (2018) acknowledges that the absence of social support systems compels street children to form enclaves for survival. Sitienei & Pillay (2019) highlight that a majority of street children resort to substance abuse, particularly glue sniffing, to alleviate hunger, pain, and violence experienced on the streets. Despite existing research on various aspects of street children's challenges, none comprehensively explores the combined influences of variables, particularly psychosocial health and its relationship with substance use. Thus, this study aims to investigate the correlation between psychosocial health and drug use among street children in Starehe Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya.



1.1 Statement of the Problem

Life in the streets is not easy (Sitienei & Pillay, 2019). It has immense negative effects on the psychosocial health of street children. Although governments spend a lot of financial resources to enhance the psychosocial health of their people (Cudjoe & Alhassan, 2016), street children are often excluded. Consequently, most of them lack tangible sources of support especially counseling services and have no close family relations to provide them with any meaningful social support (Friberg & Martinsson, 2017). Coupled with the harsh realities of street life, some of them result in substance use (Chege & Ucembe, 2020).

Regrettably, it remains a tall order to understand the nexus between psycho-social health and drug use among street children in Kenya. Most documented studies do not attempt to draw a link between the factors under investigation in this study such as period spent on the streets, access to counseling services, and social support for substance use among street children. This makes it untenable to proffer empirically informed ways of enhancing the psychosocial health of these children. This underlines the importance of studies such as this current one.

1.2 Objective

To examine the relationship between the quality of social support systems and drug use among street children in Starehe Sub-County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reza and Henly (2018) conducted a study on 'Health crises, social support, and caregiving practices among street children in Bangladesh'. This study focuses on informal caregiving and social support in a bid to understand street children's caregiving practices. A sample of 75 children was selected and data were collected using interviews. The findings show that there is a high prevalence of accidents, illnesses, and dangers in street life and that street children rely mostly on social networks for support (Reza & Henly, 2018). These social networks help in looking for treatment options such as accompanying the injured or sick to health centers, buying medicine, and nursing the sick. The findings also show that support is more intense in close friends but no members of the network lack support whenever they need it. There is also a struggle in balancing their own life and work while at the same time taking care of the sick and injured. This leads to the weakening of social ties.

In India, lack of social support predisposed children to substance use. It contributed to increases in peer pressure and by extension propensity to abuse substances. Singh, Thapar, Kaur, Kumar, and Saini (2017) conducted a study titled "Study on Prevalence and Its Contributing Factors of Psychoactive Substance Abuse among Homeless Children. This study focuses on India and data from UNICEF estimates that a population of 18 million children in India lives on the streets and that 40-70% of these children abuse drugs and substances (Singh, Thapar, Kaur, Kumar, & Saini, 2017). The study area was District Ludhiana, Punjab where snowball sampling was used to come up with a sample of 60 homeless children aged 6-18 years. Data collection was done through questionnaires and WHO Assist V

3.0. After data analysis, the findings show that 55 of the children, that is 91.7% of the children abused psychoactive substances and that the factors that led them to this were peer pressure and search for enjoyment, age, illiteracy, and being male. This could be checked by increased social support as envisaged by this current study.

Social cohesion in families plays a key role in preventing substance use. A study by Varda and Talmi (2018) on 'Social Connectedness in Family Social Support Networks: Strengthening Systems of Care for Children with Special Health Care Needs' aimed at summarizing families' descriptions of their social support networks (PSSNs) and describing the development of a social network analysis tool, the Person-Centered Network App (PCNA) which is a tool for measuring and monitoring the social connectedness of families of children with special health care and developmental needs (Varda & Talmi, 2018). Data collection was through social network surveys administered to 29 families which identified 38 types of support partners and 230 partnerships. The findings can be used in the formulation of policy by providers and caseworkers on ways to improve social connectedness and how this affects healthcare access and utilization. An understanding of the functionality of PSSNs in families with children who have complex health care needs is an opportunity to improve care systems such as nursing homes and also enhance health and developmental outcomes.

Strong social ties have also been identified to protect children from exposure to child labor which predisposes them to drug use on various continents. Alem and Laha (2016) conducted a study titled "Livelihood of Street Children and the Role of Social Intervention: Insights from Literature Using Meta-Analysis" which focuses on reviewing



existing literature systematically using meta-analysis and applying predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. 31 studies from 3 diverse continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America were reviewed. Findings from these empirical studies show that there is a predominance of boys in the 68014 samples of street children used in the data collection (Alem & Laha, 2016). The main work done by these children is casual labor while factors that led to this are family coercion, lack of education access, and poverty within the family. Statistical evidence based on odds ratio shows that location does not influence the behavior of street children in the study continents. Variance analysis shows that there is a variation within a continent for all the variables of living conditions, gender, education, and livelihood strategies. This study suggests that there is a need for social interventions to mitigate the problems experienced by ensuring the availability of livelihood options.

There was a study on the pertinence of social ties in mitigating substance use in Indonesia. For example, Bestari, Qomaruddin, and Hargono (2018) conducted a study on the 'Roles of Social Support and Social Control for Coping Resources to Prevent Drug Abuse among Children'. The background of this study is the prevalence of drug abuse among adolescents of 15 years and below in the rehabilitation centers in Surabaya, Indonesia, which is mostly influenced by the social environments. Qualitative methods were used in the data collection of this study, specifically the observational method. The study was conducted from March to May 2018 in Putat Jaya, Surabaya city in a sample of 22 children aged 10-17 years using in-depth interviews while the selected parents used the purposive technique (Bestari, Qomaruddin, & Hargono, 2018). A focused group discussion was also conducted with 6 members of the Putat Jaya anti-drugs coalition. The collected data was analyzed using the content analysis method. The findings show that social control and social support act as functions of the social network and are important for an individual's coping or risk of drug abuse. These social networks are in the form of families and communities and are a source of support and control for children in the prevention of drug abuse. This study suggests that communities and families should develop a strong mechanism to curb drug abuse among children.

The importance of social support in checking substance use was also observed in the United States of America by Cavaiola, Fulmer, and Stout (2015) in a study titled, 'the Impact of Social Support and Attachment Style on Quality of Life and Readiness to Change in a Sample of Individuals Receiving Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Dependence.' The background of this study is that social support is an important component of addiction treatment as it plays a role in the recovery process (Cavaiola, Fulmer, & Stout, 2015). The study's purpose is to examine the nature of social support, which is the types of social support that are considered helpful, and if attachment style is a determinant of this helpfulness, in a group of opioid-dependent individuals undergoing a methadone medication-assisted treatment program. Data collection was done in a sample of 159 patients using a demographic questionnaire, the Significant Others Scale, the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support Assessment, the Readiness to Change Scale, and an Attachment Style Questionnaire. Findings show that social support is a significant contributor to a perceived improvement in the areas of health, family and social relationships, and drug abstinence, but the attachment style has zero impact on improvement.

Cudjoe and Alhassan (2016) identified social support and its role in cushioning children against substance use in 'The Social Support of Street Children: The Experiences and Views of Female Head Porters in Kumasi, Ghana.' The study explored how the social support of Ghana's female head porters helps them navigate through street life. Data collection was done through semi-structured in-depth interviews in a sample of 25 female head porters in the Kumasi area for four weeks and data analysis was done using thematic analysis. The results from this analysis indicate the factors of institutional, financial, emotional, and casual as the support received by the porters (Cudjoe & Alhassan, 2016). The findings show that these porters have a belief that institutions are more willing to offer support than family and friends. It recommends that the government and other stakeholders such as NGOs should collaborate to ensure the meeting of the needs of these children.

Despite the importance of delving into the combined influences of the variables under investigation, none of the studies looks at psychosocial health and its nexus with substance use among street children. Efforts to address the issue of drug abuse among street children are important. In this regard, this current study sets out to examine the relationship between psychosocial health and drug use among street children.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the correlational research design. In this design, the researcher collected data by interviewing or administering questionnaires to a sample of individuals. The target population was the 30,000 street



children in Nairobi. The cluster sampling technique was used to get the samples. In this sampling technique, the sample size is 100 street children, four children officers, officials of NGO/FBO, 4 ward administrators, and 1 sub- county administrator. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires for street children as well as interview guides for children officers, government officials, and sub-county/ward administrators. The quantitative data collected using questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive (mean, percentage and frequencies) as well as inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and regression analysis). The findings obtained were presented using charts and tables. Qualitative data collected using interviews were analyzed thematically.

I. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between the quality of the social support system and drug use among street children. The street children agreed to a high extent (WM=4) with selected statements that were presented to them. In this regard, they agreed that lack of support from family in the street contributed to increases in substance use and that lack of support from peers in the street contributed to increases in substance use as shown by similar studies in Kenya (Chege & Ucembe, 2020). This makes it evident that lack of social support from families contributed to increases in substance use among children.

Table 1
Quality of Social Support System and Drug Use

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Total	WM
a) Lack of support from family on the street contributes to increases in substance use	1	7	19	38	29	94	4
b) Lack of support from peers on the street contributes to increases in substance use	1	9	19	37	28	94	4
c) Access to spiritual support in the streets checks substance use	1	14	13	40	26	94	4
d) The level of community support in the streets influences the level of substance use	4	13	21	32	24	94	4
e) I have strong social networks with my colleagues and this limited the use of substances among my colleagues	3	14	22	40	15	94	4
f) Lack of support or follow-up by the government social protection programs has pushed many street children to increase the use of substances	5	7	16	40	26	94	4
g) Some organizations visit and encourage us to be positive in life and this has reduced my use of substances	21	2	9	28	34	94	4

n=94

They also agreed to a high extent that access to spiritual support in the streets checked substance use (VicHealth, 2015). This creates a gap that organizations with spiritual dimensions in their programs ought to fill in dealing with street children. The level of community support in the streets also influenced the level of substance use (WM=4) as posited by Bestari and others who posit that communities and families should develop a strong mechanism to curb drug abuse among children (Bestari, Qomaruddin, & Hargono, 2018). It is thus pertinent for community- based interventions to be undertaken to deter substance use among street children. This can be done through sensitization programs to underline the importance of offering social support to street children.

They also had strong social networks with my colleagues and this limited the use of substances among my colleagues (WM=4). This agrees with a study by Alem and Laha that shows that strong social ties protect children from exposure to conditions that predispose them to drug use (Alem & Laha, 2016). Lack of support or follow-up by the government social protection programs had also pushed many street children to increase their use of substances (WM=4). Lastly, the respondents agreed to a high extent that some organizations visited and encouraged us to be positive in life and this had reduced their use of substances (WM=4). These findings agree with a related study by Cudjoe and Alhassan that shows that governments and organizations militate against drug use by street children (Cudjoe & Alhassan, 2016).

The respondents were presented with the question, “in which other ways does the quality of social support systems affect drug use among street children?” The findings show that social support systems contribute to a



reduction of drug abuse and emotional distress as identified by a related study in Nakuru, Kenya (Chepngetich, 2018). It has also helped to reduce stigma attitudes associated with being street children as identified by a related study (Bah, 2018). Support from family, friends, and the government such as offering food, finances, and other basic needs resulted in a reduction in drug abuse among street children as shown by related studies (Rezaa & Henly, 2018).

Social support systems helped the children to develop recovery networks of sober friends and supportive people who would help them to reform into better and more useful people in society as identified by Caviola and others (Caviola, Fulmer, & Stout, 2015). There were also instances in which college students visited the area to advise on mental health and how to avoid drugs in the streets. It also helped street children lead positive life (VicHealth, 2015). Social support systems also helped in the reduction of criminal activities associated with drug abuse. It also helped in the reduction of mental health problems that led to drug use (Bah, 2018). Supportive by the society lowered tendencies of street children indulging in drugs. Social support also helped in recovery processes, reduced relapse, and improved the quality of life of street children which corroborates the work by Caviola and others (Caviola, Fulmer, & Stout, 2015). The street children also pointed out that a lack of friends and peers often led to drug use (Sharma & Joshi, 2020).

Lastly, the findings show that indeed there was a close nexus between social support systems and drug use (Chepngetich, 2018). It was also affirmed that whenever there was family support, street children became less prone to drugs. However, social systems in Starehe Sub-County were lacking and could account for the high rates of drug abuse among street children. Social support systems also reduced stress which could push street children to drug use (Bah, 2018). The findings also show that the quality of social support informed on issues such as relapse and social integration (Caviola, Fulmer, & Stout, 2015). Regrettably, there were cases in which social support did not have any meaningful effects on street children.

II. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The findings provide crucial insights: emotional distress, along with physical and sexual abuse, renders street children vulnerable to drug use as a coping mechanism for the harsh conditions and survival challenges on the streets. Additionally, the failure to meet basic needs and the frustrations associated with street life contribute to an increased prevalence of drug abuse among street children. Mental disorders and emotional distress further elevate the likelihood of street children engaging in drug abuse. The absence of mental, social, spiritual, and emotional well-being compels street children to seek solace in drug use.

Concerning the correlation between psychosocial health and drug use, street children emphasized that the stressful nature of street life significantly contributes to substance abuse. Moreover, instances of sexual abuse during homelessness were identified as a contributing factor to substance use among street children. Physical abuse during homelessness also emerged as a factor pushing some street children toward substance use. The lack of social connectedness on the streets was highlighted as another significant factor contributing to substance use among street children.

5.2 Recommendations

It is pertinent to provide shelter to the street children and integrate them into social support programs. Raising awareness and sensitizing the street children on the negative implications of drugs is also important. There is also a need to provide gainful employment to the street children once they attained working age [18 years]. Offering affordable treatment and rehabilitation services would also make them feel part of society and reduce their tendency to abuse drugs. It is also recommendable to recruit street children to National Youth Service (NYS), enhancing school enrollment and taking them to rehabilitation centers.

Family empowerment programs such as family guidance sessions and couple sessions should be undertaken to strengthen family reintegration efforts and empower parents with the requisite knowledge to rehabilitate their children. There is also a need to create awareness in the community on the need to support street children as well as efforts aimed at keeping them from drug use. Religious organizations should also come up with regular programs aimed at offering street children spiritual and social support to keep them from drug use. They could also use their resources to strengthen campaigns aimed at keeping these children from substance use. In addition, religious organizations should also be encouraged to set up children's homes aimed at rehabilitating street children.



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