



Relationship between Access to Counselling Services and Drug Use among Street Children in Starehe Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Life in the streets is not easy. It has immense negative effects on the psychosocial health of street children resulting in substance use. This study set out to assess the relationship between access to counselling services and drug use among street children in Starehe Sub-County, Nairobi County Kenya. This study was on the Problem Behaviour Theory (PBT) and adopted the correlational research design. Data collection was from 100 street children. These were sampled using cluster and simple random sampling techniques from a target population of 30,000 in Starehe Sub-County of Nairobi County. In addition, data collection was from purposively sampled four officials from the Starehe Children Office, eight officials of NGO/FBO operating in the sub-county, 1 sub-county administrator, and 4 ward administrators from the Sub-County. The qualitative data collected using questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics like mean, percentage, and frequencies, as well as inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The findings presentation was using charts and tables. Analysis of the qualitative data collected using interviews was thematically and the findings use prose presentation. The findings show that access to counselling services had a significant influence on their drug use. Strengthening the existing social support systems meant that street children could get the support needed to steer them away from drug use. The study recommends that there is a need to strengthen behaviour counseling, support groups, and, sober social networks for street children. The government and non-governmental organizations should come up with programs for supporting access to counseling services and training some of the street children to prop up their abilities to offer peer-counseling services to their colleagues.

Keywords: Drug Use, Street Children, Counselling Services, Starehe Sub-County, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

Although substance misuse continues to pose a significant threat to public health and is a major societal concern, the topic of effective counseling still needs more attention because it affects so many youngsters (Savarkari & Das, 2019). According to Embleton et al. (2013), the issue of substance misuse requires urgent attention due to the alarming rate, and more so because the street children who are innocently at risk receive less care. Street children who abuse drugs are frequently terrified. They could be the victims of incest or physical abuse. Additionally, they might experience violence and difficult conditions on the streets, which could have an impact on their social lives. They observe the enjoyment shared by other families and realize how unique their own family is. Street life is stressful and erratic (Bah, 2018).

When street children encounter these difficulties far from their families, they frequently have no idea what to expect (Friberg, 2017). Nevertheless, despite all of these difficulties, many homeless kids sometimes are not aware of any assistance. Counseling is therefore crucial for kids who are struggling with this. According to Bah (2018), the high incidence of illegal substance use among street children is another signal that more research is necessary because it puts kids in danger. The use of counseling as a corrective and preventative method for youth has changed over time. Belcher (1998) argues that there are three key responsibilities for counselors working with drug-abusing children. These responsibilities include recognizing the warning indications of substance misuse, developing a therapeutic relationship, assisting the family system so that change is feasible, and serving as a liaison between society and the street children.

Kudenga (2016) argues that to ensure a holistic counseling experience, there is a need to involve other stakeholders such as the church and government. Access to counselling support services could also be availed to street children. Jones, Momand, Morales, Browne, Poliansky, and Ruiz (2020) are of the view that the focus should be to find the root cause of substance abuse to get a better understanding of this problem. Savarkari and Das (2019), on the other hand, concede that street children are a vulnerable group to poly-victimization exposure. This is in line with various studies and this victimization includes sexual violence, neglect, physical abuse, exposure to violence, bullying, and drug abuse. As a result, continued exposure to psychosocial stress may lead to these children suffering from mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety.

Magai, Malik, and Koot (2018) state that access to counseling services and their influence on psychological health in Kenya is a matter that needs attention. According to Wango (2020), the establishment of a task force on



mental health clearly shows interest in government policy. However, greater access to and effectiveness of psychological intervention must be the goal of any improvement in the standard of care for those with mental health issues and suffering.

In addition, Cheloti, Okoth, & Obae (2018) aver that it is crucial to build a relationship during substance abuse intervention, treatment, and follow-up to offer continuous support. A youth counselor must naturally take into account other responsibilities as part of their job, but if they are dedicated to counseling, they can continue to work with the troubled adolescent. Street children who are battling substance misuse may find comfort in this therapeutic connection. There Cheloti claims that guidance and counselling is the preferred method of discouraging drug and substance abuse among children.

1.3 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 many 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. Most of them may not afford 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).

The vast majority sniff glue and any other substances they can lay their hands on to mitigate the pangs of hunger, pain, and violence that they have to contend with in the streets (Sitienei & Pillay, 2019). Faced with high levels of poor psychosocial health due to the harsh life they face in the streets, substance use often remains the last bastion for most of these children. This study sets out to examine the relationship between access to counselling services and drug use among street children in Starehe Sub-County, Nairobi County Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2.1 Relationship between Access to Counselling Services and Drug Use

A study by Kudenga (2016) on 'Appropriateness of Counselling Given to Street Children by Non-Governmental Organizations in Harare, Zimbabwe' sought to investigate the appropriateness of counselling given to street children by NGOs in Harare. The study utilized the qualitative descriptive survey to look at the types of counselling for the children as they move towards independent adults (Kudenga, 2016). A sample is of these organizations using purposive sampling techniques and random sampling done to select 20 non-governmental officials who work with these children and 40 beneficiaries of these services. The findings from an analysis of the collected data show that a majority of the officials (87.5%) and 45 % of the children thought the counselling method was appropriate, 30% saw it as inappropriate while 25% were undecided. To ensure a holistic counseling experience, this study suggests the involvement of other stakeholders such as the church and government.

Access to counselling support services could also reduce substance use among street children in other parts of the world. A study by Jones, Momand, Morales, Browne, Poliansky, and Ruiz (2020) focused on summarizing the development and evaluation of an assessment instrument, 7-12 years old. The CHILD CARRE (the CHILD Intervention for Living Drug-Free Comprehensive Assessment of Risk, Resilience, and Experience) measure follows the semi-structured interview method and has 7 domains (Jones, Momand, Morales, Browne, Poliansky, & Ruiz, 2020). A sample size of 134 children from Argentina and the USA for data collection by the use of baseline and follow-up assessments and the findings show that a majority of the children were addicted to substance use and had a desire to get better from this problem. Common factors across these children are that they completed a certain level of education and can read and started engaging in economic activities at an early age. The influencers of drug and substance abuse were because of family influence as a high number of the children saw their family members engaging in this practice. Repercussions included conflicts with the law, legal problems, health problems, and discord among family members. These results provide important insights into the use of psychoactive substances in young children and therefore can measure this using multiple life domains.

In India, a study by Savarkari and Das (2019) on 'Mental Health Problems among Street Children' shows that street children are a vulnerable group to poly-victimization exposure. This is in line with various studies and this victimization includes sexual violence, neglect, physical abuse, exposure to violence, bullying, and drug abuse (Savarkari & Das, 2019). Continued exposure to psychosocial stress may lead to these children suffering from mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety. In this study, an analysis of available literature on a national and global scale to examine studies on the impact of street children living conditions in the psychological and social sphere is undertaken. The findings show that there is a correlation between mental health and holistic individual



development and this provides a conceptual framework that highlights the vulnerabilities and mental health of children living in the streets, the interventions, and public policy that can address this challenge and the implications for future research. This current study sets out to find out the level to which these findings apply to street children in Kenya. This is pertinent since the conditions in India could be different from those in Kenya.

Watters has a study on 'Editorial Perspective: Effective mental health and psychosocial interventions for children and adolescents in street situations'. This focuses on the risks of mental health and psychosocial impairments of children and adolescents in street situations (CASS) who are living in low and middle-income countries (LAMIC), who are often referred to as voiceless because of their vulnerability to abuse, drug addictions and psychological stress (Watters, 2017). This study suggests that for an intervention, such as counselling, to be holistic, it must put into consideration all factors leading to substance abuse. However, the former study did not focus on street children in Kenya or Starehe Sub-County for that matter. Studies such as this current one verify their applicability to the area.

Access to counseling services and their influence on psychological health in Kenya has also been the subject of numerous studies. Magai, Malik, and Koot (2018) studied 'Emotional and Behavioral Problems in Children and Adolescents in Central Kenya.' The background of this study is that there is little documentation on the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems (EBP) among children and adolescents despite it being a concern for mental health stakeholders and parents. The study aimed to bridge this gap by including Child Behavior Checklist reports from 1022 Kenyan parents on their children (ages 6–18 years) and Youth Self-Reports from 533 adolescents (ages 12–18) living in Kenya's Central Province (Magai, Malik, & Koot, 2018). The findings show that there is a high prevalence of EBP in Kenya, whereby younger children scored higher than older children. There is a high internalization problem according to parents' reports. Self-reports show that compared to boys, girls have a higher score in internalizing problems. This study provides a framework that mental health providers such as counsellors should apply to achieve their targets.

A study by Abdi, Saeieh, Roozbeh, and Yazdkhasti (2017) titled 'Health Policymaking for street children: challenges and strategies' focuses on discussing the issues and challenges of street children's health and the health policies that govern this population. Literature searches were in PubMed, IranMedex, WHO, Emro, Medline, Cochrane library, and Google scholar using the keywords of health, street children, challenges, policy, and health policymaking (Abdi, Saeieh, Roozbeh, & Yazdkhasti, 2017). This study concentrated on the data published between 2002 and 2015 and found 48 relevant studies. The findings show that health policy should consider factors such as street children and their health, strategies for health improvement, health policy approaches, the WHO's strategies, and social support programs. These findings are important for developing interventions such as guidance and counseling for reducing street children populations in Iran. However, the applicability of these findings to Kenya is hard to ascertain without studies such as this current one.

Cheloti, Okoth, and Obae (2018) conducted a study on 'Guidance and Counselling Strategy in Curbing Drug and Substance Abuse (DSA) in Schools; Effectiveness and Challenges to Head Teachers in Kenya.' The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of guidance and counselling as a method of curbing drug and substance abuse among students in secondary schools in Kenya. A literature review related to the study objective was reviewed (Cheloti, Okoth, & Obae, 2018). An example of this literature was a descriptive survey study using questionnaires and interviews conducted in Nairobi's secondary schools in a sample of 35 school heads, 35 department heads, and 420 students. The findings show that guidance and counselling was the preferred method of discouraging drug and substance abuse among students. Although it is an effective method, it faces challenges such as the teacher counsellors often double as subject teachers thus lacking time to offer these services, and the head teachers and teacher counsellors lack the skills to offer appropriate guidance and counselling. The former study focuses on secondary schools and may not expressly show the state of affairs among street children. This underlines the importance of this current study.

2.2.1 Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this study is the Problem Behavior Theory (PBT) formulated by Jessor (1977). The focus of the PBT is to explain the reasons why young people adopt unconventional behavior and sheds light on why street children throughout the world start abusing drugs and substance abuse (Ma & Shive, 2000). The guide of the PBT theory is the fundamental assumption that the interaction of three systems guides behaviors. These are; societal legal norms, an individual's value system, and the environmental-influenced relations that one sustains. In line with this study, social support and counselling can create an environment that can enhance the psychosocial health of street children. As such when street children have access to counselling services as well as social support, which forms the right environment, they can protect themselves from drug use.

Interventions of religious institutions and civil society organizations can significantly enhance the psychosocial health of street children at the street level. The government can aid in drug use alleviation among street



children through policy legislation aimed at enhancing access to social support services. The PBT theory forms a basis for the current study as it enables the researcher to explain the possible causes of poor psychosocial health among street children. It also shows the level to which interventions within the context of these children could alleviate substance use.

III. RESEARCH 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 sampling technique was the cluster-sampling technique. In this sampling technique, the sample was 100 street children, 4 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 presentation was using charts and tables. Qualitative data analysis was thematic.

IV. FINDINGS

The last objective of the study was to assess the relationship between access to counselling services and drug use among street children. To begin with, the respondents were to rate their level of agreement with selected statements on the relationship between counselling services and drug use among street children. The scale was 1-5 where one-to-a very low extent; 2- to a low extent; 3- to a moderate extent; 4-to a high extent and; 5-to a very high extent. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Relationship between Access to Counseling Services and Drug Use

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Total	WM
a) Group counselling in the street affects substance use among street children	3	16	14	41	20	94	4
b) Lack of individual counseling services among street children leads to increased use of substances	5	9	24	38	18	94	4
c) Continued exposure to psychosocial stress without counselling interventions contributes to mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety and may lead to increased cases of substance use	2	6	18	35	33	94	4
d) Counseling interventions by the government contribute to a reduction in mental health problems among street children	7	11	22	38	16	94	3
e) Counseling services by religious as well as non-governmental organizations contribute to a reduction in substance use	4	9	9	36	36	94	4

n=94

The respondents agreed to a high extent (WM=4) that group counselling on the street affects substance use among street children and that lack of individual counseling services among street children leads to increased use of substances. They also agreed to a high extent (WM=4) that continued exposure to psychosocial stress without counselling interventions contributes to mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety and may lead to increased cases of substance use. They went on to agree to a high extent (WM=4) that counseling services by religious as well as non-governmental organizations contribute to a reduction in substance use. Furthermore, they agreed to a moderate extent (WM=3) that counseling interventions by the government contributes to a reduction in mental health problems among street children.



The street children were to provide answers to the question, “in which other ways does access to counseling affect drug use among street children?” The findings show that counseling provided street children with mentors who helped them lead a positive life. It also gave street children guidance and provided them with alternative activities that they could engage in and generate income. It also helped them understand the effects of drugs that they used often. Furthermore, it contributed to better mental health among street children. Visits from university students were a source of hope to the daily lives of street children. Offering guidance and counseling to street children also prompted the government and stakeholders to proffer solutions to the increased use of drugs.

Counseling also helped drug addicts seek rehabilitation services to reduce drug abuse. It also counselling offers a platform where street children can air their grievances and through counseling, one was able to relieve stress and hence reduce the use of drugs. shun from drug abuse. It also provided them with information about drugs and made them willing to change. It also helped street children engage in drug-free social activities.

Counselling services also helped in revealing the sources of drugs, which also assist the government to combat the escalation of drug abuse in the country. Counseling also provided a platform for street children to brainstorm to avoid addiction. It also led to a reduction in substance use as well as physical, mental, and emotional abuse. Counseling helps the addicts engage in mutual support programs and amends those with adverse effects of drug use.

The interviews were on if there were any relationship between access to counseling services and drug use among street children in Starehe Sub-County. In this regard, the respondents said that there was a positive relationship between counseling services and drug use among street children. To this, Respondent J says, “*Counseling services help children who are using drugs to change their lives and have better ones.*” [Respondent J, May 3, 2021, Nairobi].

In the same accord, Respondent E says, “*Yes, counseling services had positive impacts on street children who use drugs as some may stop as a result of counseling...It also availed useful information.*” [Respondent E, May 7, 2021, Nairobi]. However, one of the respondents was of a contrary opinion and pointed out that guidance and counselling did not have any significant effects on street children. In this light, the respondent says “*No. Most of the street children in Starehe County engage the counselors but are still trapped in substance use.*” [Respondent C, May 7, 2021, Nairobi].

The interview participants were asked to point out ways in which the psychosocial health of street children in Starehe Sub-County, Nairobi County Kenya could be enhanced. Several responses were availed. It shows that there was a need to promote the social support systems in Starehe sub-county. There was also a need to provide them with homes to live in to reduce the causes of rape. Enhancing the quality of psychosocial support systems is equally important.

Lastly, the interview participants were to point out ways of curbing drug use among street children in Starehe Sub-County. The findings show that curbing drug use can be through educating the street children on the dangers of using drugs and by providing shelter to the street children and providing counseling them. [In this regard, Respondent F said: “drug use can be checked by introducing children homes in the region offering counseling services to the street children.” [Respondent F, May 8, 2021, Nairobi]. There was a suggestion on raising awareness and sensitizing the street children on the negative implications of drugs. It was also necessary to fight the drug dealers.

To this end, respondent I say, “*Law enforcement through prosecuting the individuals who supply drugs to the street children could curb drug use.*” [Respondent I, May 8, 2021, Nairobi]. There was also a need to provide gainful employment to the street children once they attained working age [18 years]. Offering affordable treatment and rehabilitation services. There was also a need for “*providing behaviour counseling, support groups, sober social networks, affordable medicals, and vocational training.*” [Respondent G, May 6, 2021, Nairobi]. Other important ways were recruiting street children to National Youth Service (NYS), enhancing school enrollment, and taking them to rehabilitation.

V. DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to assess the relationship between access to counselling services and drug use among street children. To begin with, questions to the respondents were to rate their level of agreement with selected statements on the relationship between counselling services and drug use among street children. The respondents agreed to a high extent (WM=4) with most of the respondents presented to them. In this light, they agreed to a high extent that group counselling on the street affects substance use among street children and that lack of individual counseling services among street children leads to increased use of substances as identified by a related study in Zimbabwe (Kudenga, 2016). The street children also agreed to a high extent that continued exposure to psychosocial stress without counselling interventions contributes to mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety and may lead to increased cases of substance use (Savarkari & Das, 2019). They also agreed to a high extent (WM=4) that



counseling services by religious as well as non-governmental organizations contribute to the reduction in substance use (Rezaa & Henly, 2018). Furthermore, they agreed to a moderate extent (WM=3) that counseling interventions by the government contributes to the reduction in mental health problems among street children. These findings show that counseling interventions contribute to the reduction in drug use among street children (VicHealth, 2015).

Counseling also provided street children with mentors who helped them lead a positive life. It also gave street children guidance and provided them with alternative activities that they could engage in and generate income. It also helped them understand the effects of drugs that they used often. Furthermore, it contributed to better mental health among street children. Visits from university students were a source of hope to the daily lives of street children. Offering guidance and counseling to street children also prompted the government and stakeholders to proffer solutions to the increased use of drugs (Abdi, Saeieh, Roozbeh, & Yazdkhasti, 2017).

Counseling also helped drug addicts seek rehabilitation services to reduce drug abuse. It also counselling offers a platform where street children can air their grievances and shun drug abuse. Through counseling, one was able to relieve stress and hence reduce the use of drugs (Rezaa & Henly, 2018). It also provided them with information about drugs and made them willing to change. It also helped street children engage in drug-free social activities.

Counselling services also helped in revealing the sources of drugs, which also assist the government to combat the escalation of drug abuse in the country. Counseling also provided a platform for street children to brainstorm to avoid addiction. It also led to a reduction in substance use as well as physical, mental, and emotional abuse (Magai, Malik, & Koot, 2018). Counseling was helpful as the addicts engage in mutual support programs and amending the drug users.

The interviews were also on if there were any relationship between access to counseling services and drug use among street children in Starehe Sub-County. In this regard, the respondents said that there was a positive relationship between counseling services and drug use among street children (Cheloti, Okoth, & Obae, 2018). However, one of the respondents was of a contrary opinion and pointed out that guidance and counselling did not have any significant effects on street children.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The findings show that group counselling on the street reduces substance use among street children and that lack of individual counseling services among street children leads to increased use of substances. Continued exposure to psychosocial stress without counselling interventions contributes to mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety and may lead to increased cases of substance use that counseling services by religious as well as non-governmental organizations contribute to reduction in substance use. In addition, counseling interventions by the government contributed to a reduction in mental health problems among street children. Counseling also helped drug addicts seek rehabilitation services to reduce drug abuse. It also offered a platform where street children can air their grievances and shun drug abuse.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by the outcomes of this study, the discussions, and the conclusions made, the study recommends that there is a need to strengthen behaviour counseling, support groups, and, sober social networks for street children. The government and non-governmental organizations should come up with programs for supporting access to counseling services and training some of the street children to prop up their abilities to offer peer-counseling services to their colleagues

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