

Full Length Research Paper

The importance of listening to minority groups especially street children

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The voices of minority groups have been ignored for too long! Who are they? Why and how should we listen to them? It is imperative to listen carefully and thoughtfully to the voices of everyone; especially those who belong to minority groups. This article summarized and analysed recent published literature on street children and thus it is not a new fieldwork. However published research unquestionably indicated that there exists a paucity of information which gives an ear to minority, primarily street children. It is crucial that everyone, moreover professionals and policy makers, pay particular attention to and consider the voices of these children; above all when they formulate policies that pertain to their growth and development. Listening is necessary to try to understand the lives and varying perspectives of these children. Although it is difficult and demanding, it is strongly suggested that professionals, policy makers and indeed all citizens, heed the voices of these children to bring about meaningful and productive change because listening helps to properly identify the needs, the feelings, the goals, the ideals, and the vision of minority groups. Listening also facilitates people to glean a better and clearer understanding of the mindsets of street children on different issues, notably the social, moral, ethical and educational areas and how these affect them. Most of all, listening can render assistance in the formulation of recommendations and the consequent implementation of diverse programmes. Listening will better inform governmental and non-governmental agencies that often establish programmes without the input of the very people they are intended for. Through the process of listening and discernment, social architects would find themselves in a better position to design programmes that would meet the needs of children and in so doing, enhance their standard of living in some of the following areas: social, intellectual, religious and educational.

Key words: minority groups, street children, listening, advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing emergence of minority groups and street children over the past decades. Although very little is still known about them, they are often negatively depicted and are subsequently treated

with apathy, indifference, and disdain. With the support of literature, this paper revealed some of the characteristics of street children. It presented possible definitions and showed the complexity in attempting to listen to them. It

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is the firm view that if people are more informed about the lifestyle of minority groups and street children, they may become more sensitive to their needs.

Listening to minority groups is intricate and labyrinthine. To listen carefully and attentively to minority groups, one must be willing to devote ample time and attention simply because it means paying very close attention to their utterances and voices. Listening is fundamental since it forms an integral component in trying to comprehend the lives of how minority groups, specifically street children, live. When minority groups and street children notice that people take a keen interest in their lives, they are sometimes eager to communicate their thoughts, emotions, feelings and aspirations.

Listening is a dynamic process. It is developmental and continuous. It requires a unique effort and skill because it is convoluted and complex. However, when carried out competently, it can create, renew and maintain concrete relationships and eliminate barriers. A review of the professional literature indicated that there is paucity of information on this topic. This non-empirical research entailed a constant review of several research papers, journal articles and books. A critical research method compared recent papers that related to this significant topic. This paper presented the value of listening to the voices of street children and did not conjure sensationalism.

Definition of minority groups

Wikipedia contributors (2022) opined that depending on the context, minority groups connote different usage. Nonetheless, they stated that minority groups can be understood according to demographic sizes based on characteristics or practices, such as: ethnicity, race religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Wikipedia contributors (2022) further added that these groups frequently face discrimination in the social, political, intellectual, religious and educational sphere of life. The editors of Britannica (2019) defined minority groups as a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists in a subordinate manner in each society. While the dominant group dictates who should be considered minority groups, it is still unclear what criterion is used to make such a prediction. However, the editors of Britannica (2019) further included that minority groups are generally separated and segregated socially, politically, and intellectually from the wider society. Depending on the given society, some minority groups may have a voice. Minority groups which are exclusively comprised of children continue to suffer on all levels of society. Chatham and Mixer (2021) admitted that although over the decades qualitative research incorporated children as participants, more needs to be done because ethnic minority children are yet to be represented. To better comprehend the views of children,

Chatham and Mixer (2021) examined the history of research with children. They concluded that trust is an essential component for gaining access to minority children. They also stated that the voices of children are vital. These voices can advance others to better comprehend the picture of the experiences of children. The voices of minority groups can inform policy makers about these children's ills. Zhou and Bankston (2020) hypothesized that minority children often lack the basic foundations for life. Many of them have little education and are stereotyped by society. Hamilton et al. (2020) claimed that because many minority children do not engage in physical activity, they are prone to all types of diseases. This type of behaviour is often carried into adulthood. Hamilton et al. (2020) further expressed that if this issue goes unattended, it can result in serious negative repercussions. It can cause chronic diseases relating to the liver, renal cells, breasts, endometrial, and colon and can even contribute to premature death. Similarly, White et al. (2021) opined that the lack of adequate nutrition can also precipitate diseases among children. White et al. (2021) believed that children from minority groups often experience poverty which puts them at a great disadvantage. They experience lower socioeconomic status, live in crowded houses and are prone to illness. This scenario is even more complex when some of these minority children are deemed as street children.

Definition of street children

It is not simple to accurately define street children. This process is complex, convoluted, and contentious. United Nations (2017) affirmed that street children are not a homogenous group. Their diversity may include age, gender, ethnicity, and nationality. This implies different experiences, risks and needs. Yin Cheryl Ng et al. (2022) explained that some of the children live on the streets and maintain little or no contact whatsoever with parents or significant others. Some work on the streets while others return to their homes at intervals. It is unsurprising that throughout the world nearly every country views them in different fashions. A review of the literature described them as an enigma and inconspicuous.

Consortium for Street Children (2021) hypothesized that they are unnoticeable in the world and are not treated with dignity and respect by many religious organizations, government officials and policymakers. Setyowati et al. (2021) claimed that they are considered rubbish by some because they roam the streets and rattle the neighbourhood with their rambunctious and boisterous behaviour. According to Setyowati et al. (2021), these children are marginalized and ostracized. Hence, they are constantly faced with all types of exclusion, discrimination, and exploitation at the social, political, intellectual and religious sphere of life. Reza and

Henly (2018) posited that life on the streets is wretched and miserable and these children are continually battered with filth, disease, violence, and poverty. Asante (2019) believed that there are limited options on the streets and these children struggle and battle for survival. Similarly, Bajari and Kuswarno (2020) narrated that because street children are connected to and identified with uproar, upheaval, and abominable crime, they are considered social outcasts. On the streets they are susceptible and vulnerable to the environment. Irawati et al. (2021) surmised that street children count on minimal support from family and significant others. They work on the streets and undesirable places like under bridges, parking lots and vacant land. Bwambale et al. (2021) merely defined them as individuals who literally inhabit the streets. Sah (2019) mentioned that they are constantly at high risk because they are unprotected and defenceless, are exploited and abused. They are also deprived and stripped of their rights and dignity and are disregarded and rejected by society. Sah (2019) also claimed that these children require proper guidance and direction all because their only goal and aspiration is to survive on the streets. With little education and vision, their future is wretched and miserable.

Ismael (2019) proffered countless reasons for the presence of children on the streets. Some of them included the loss of parents or significant others and the disintegration of family. Other reasons were extreme poverty, illicit drug abuse in the homes and excessive domestic violence. He further went to indicate that some adults literally send their children out to beg on the streets. Societal et al. (2021) also agreed that inordinate poverty and lack of parental guidance encourage children to live on the streets. Consortium for Street Children (2019) noted that although many people use the terms "street children" and "homeless children" interchangeably, they are by no means synonymous. There are certain differences as not all street children are homeless. Consortium for Street Children (2019) commented that some street children seek refuge and accommodation at drop-in centres and half-way houses; thus, children who are portrayed as street children are not necessarily homeless. They toil, recreate, and spend time on the street but do return to their family.

A review of the literature described street children in a completely undesirable and distasteful manner. The research findings by Prasad (2021) postulated that more than a third of the street children asserted that they chose to live on the streets due to the fact that they were deprived of the affection of their family. As a result, they were disillusioned and distrustful of new acquaintances. Even the efforts to rehabilitate them by non-governmental institutions were seemingly impossible. As a result of this great mistrust that they have towards others, Prasad (2021) further mentioned that these children may circumvent issues before they reveal the whole truth. This type of behaviour often compounds their ability to achieve

their goals and desires.

Dutta (2018) asserted that life on the streets is a constant challenge for survival. According to Dutta (2018) it is paradoxical because, even though they may live in the major city, they are unable to enjoy the comforts of urban life.

Pratap and Singh (2021) believed that street children consistently crop up in several parts of the developing world. They further suggested that in as much as they are not properly protected and supervised by adults, they often end up on the streets. Pratap and Singh (2021) also claimed that street children wander the streets searching for food, water, clothing, and shelter. Their battle for survival is unceasing. In addition to neglect and exploitation, they are also prone to gang violence and various types of abuse. They are easy prey for the drug dealers and sex-traffickers and many of them are forced into prostitution (Parveen, 2019).

Listening to street children

Julien (2021) hypothesized that listening to street children is an art, skill, discipline and a way of life. He further explained that listening does not mean just giving advice and good counsel. It does not mean criticizing feelings.

Listening does not try to solve problems and troubles. Opined that it is a skill that some people must acquire and hone. When carried out accurately, listening can create and maintain positive relationships. Koščak et al. (2021) postulated that it is necessary to listen to children although communication with them still needs to be explored and researched in greater detail. Liu et al. (2022) believed that it is imperative to communicate and collaborate properly and effectively with street children. This channel of communication and collaboration ought to be transparent and engage the children as much as possible. Fyhn and Berntsen (2022) emphasized the value of active listening to children. They mentioned that some people may even need to learn how to listen and be non-judgmental. Julien (2021) put forward that listening can expose adults to certain language usage such as: similes, metaphors, and idioms and propel them into understanding the insight for certain jargon known and used by children in the majority. He further deduced that albeit listening is challenging and difficult as it is rewarding. Listening to the tone of children and observing their manner of behaviour in response to certain questions are of paramount significance. Yin Cheryl Ng et al. (2022) strongly advocated that people ought to create safe spaces for street children to speak of their own free will and without inhibition. They also figured that adults must learn how to listen thoughtfully and carefully. Julien (2021) believed that listening involves caring, reflecting and not casting aspersions. It also involves empowering children with a voice. He further added that listening is a necessary tool in trying to fully grasp the views and

perspectives of street children. Consequently, more prominence ought to be applied to this discipline. Too often listening is undervalued, underestimated, and oversimplified. In this contemporary society, many adults are preoccupied with their jobs and personal pursuits. They sometimes have to work for long hours, and this could hamper and obstruct their capacity and enthusiasm for listening. Fyhn and Berntsen (2022) admitted that both respect and listening are convoluted issues. Nonetheless, they were convinced that when adults listen with a respectful ear, a child-centered atmosphere is created. To effectively engage in this process, Skovsmose (2020) staunchly suggested that adults should weigh the interests, expectations, hopes, aspirations, and motives of children. In this way, the listening process becomes dynamic and interesting. It energizes and motivates children and moves them into speaking voluntarily and from the heart. Mithani et al. (2021) emphasized that it is essential that minority children are provided with a convenient and comfortable environment to share their stories.

Brookes (2018) recommended one of the ways to listen effectively to children is to encourage them in conversation. She suggested that there is value when children are coaxed to express their needs, wants and ways they can achieve them. This simple but important approach gives children a sense of purpose and belonging and consequently they are unafraid of engaging in the dialogue. Brookes (2018) further described that when children actively participate in conversation, they freely express themselves and personal growth and development are both evident. Walker and Misca (2019) firmly advocated that the voices of children must form part of the decision-making process. When this is accomplished in a proper manner, the end result is definitely that of a significant difference. It empowers children and provides them with a sense of autonomy and social competence. They finally embrace the distinct relationships between actions, decisions, and their consequences. They develop a deeper sense of responsibility and duty and in this way take ownership of their lives. It is convoluted but not impossible and so, it is only fitting that street children be afforded the opportunity to share their stories (Kaneva and Corcoran 2021). Therefore, listening to street children involves building trust and creating an environment of harmony (Ferguson, 2017). Church (2019) believed/recognized that the various communities can lobby with the government to uphold the rights of children.

DeVito (2006) mentioned that there are five stages in listening: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. Delpit (1993) knew that listening is an aptitude which involves empathy and trying to appreciate the message others are conveying. Listening to the youth is intricate, sensitive and involves paying very close attention to their utterances. Listening, according to Julien (2021), is inherent in trying to envision

the lives of street children since these same children are more likely to communicate their thoughts and feelings to anyone willing and with the enduring patience to lend an ear. Julien (2021) also hypothesized that it is imperative to listen meticulously to the tone of street children and observe their mannerisms. Very often these emotions and behaviours are useful in coming up with a way to clarify the perspectives of children. Adler and Rodman (2010) and Gerrig and Zimbard (2008) thought that it is important to listen with a positive attitude since children sometimes have the innate way of cultivating analytical and constructive observations. In this way they can inadvertently react responsibly to the task of identifying factors that may somehow impede their immersion into the wider social community. Delpit (1993) emphasized that although listening to children is a necessary component in perceiving their views, it demands a very special skill and art. Delpit (1993) further added that listening calls for the active use of all the senses. Listening with heart and mind means being totally involved and committed to the relationship. It means being alert and tactful for the simple reason that adults often distinguish things not only through the eyes and ears, but also through their beliefs. According to Delpit (1993) listening to children could signify that adults may have to suspend and place their beliefs to one side. DeVito (2006) also supposed that listening with an open mind and heart benefits adults into better trusting and assessing the message. Listening with heart and mind means so much more than being attentive and discreet and putting beliefs on the back burner. It goes beyond mastering the jargon of children. It means being sincere and genuine. It indicates embodying children's lives and seeing the world from their perspective. Fine and Glassner (1979) also remarked that listening to children means more than possessing the qualities of sympathy and empathy. Bovee (2008) submitted that through listening adults can seek clarification, reflect on their personal feelings and even probe; but they must always try to succeed in their endeavour to separate opinions from facts. DeVito (2006) mentioned that listening with empathy enhances a relationship. He therefore proposed that adults try to empathise with children and in this way, they will inspire young ones to vent their emotions.

As mentioned above, listening can expose adults to certain language usage: similes, metaphors, and idioms – and guide them into understanding certain jargon that children use. Even when adults think they are fully equipped and can appreciate the jargon of children, Fine and Glassner (1979) cautioned that barriers could arise on the grounds that children's usage of slang is quite difficult for an adult to appreciate and even when digested correctly often comes out weird and unnatural to children when emitted by an adult. They further believed that even listening professionally must be timely only because an artificial and insincere attempt could prove to be devastating. Bovee (2008) and Adler and Rodman

(2010) offered some suggestions that could make listening that much easier. Take proper notes, make frequent eye contact, react with appropriate facial expressions, transmit nonverbal cues and above all else stay focused on the conversation. If possible, try to paraphrase mentally the salient issues and keep questions or points of disagreement until the appropriate moment. Most of all, value the listening relationship as an opportunity to learn.

Julien (2021) holds the firm view that listening is a necessary tool in trying to understand the views of street children. More prominence should be paid to this discipline, and it should not be underestimated, undervalued, and oversimplified. Julien (2021) also observed that children speaking with a tremor in their voice denote nervousness or anxiety. In this way, adults ought to be cognizant and appreciate the tremendous difficulty and great pain that some children experience when attempting to explain something that is very sensitive in nature to them. Listening can facilitate the acknowledgement of children and lead adults to the realization that children are frequently eager to share their testimony. They will only do so if adults are genuinely interested in them. Therefore, the need to clearly comprehend the voices of street children must never be underestimated. Of course, there will be times they may not be able to describe precisely what has happened owing to a lack of the necessary vocabulary. Some street children may even feel ashamed and embarrassed to speak about delicate issues. Nonetheless, adults must make it a point to believe the stories of street children until and unless investigation proves otherwise.

Advocacy

In simple terms advocacy means speaking and acting on behalf of oneself. It also means deciding what is best and pursuing that particular goal. Advocacy is not just about being afforded an effective voice along with interpersonal skills.

However, there are many people who do not accept minority groups and consider self-advocacy as important. On the other hand, advocates among minority groups find themselves in a constant battle for independence and recognition.

Several minority groups hold the view that street children should voice their cases on their own behalf. They are the ones who can best explain what they are experiencing. After all, it is their life, and they ought to make decisions that they themselves deem appropriate and describe their own unique journey thus far through life given the circumstances.

Advocacy may also mean challenging the current way of thinking. This may mean reorganizing political trends of thought. Giving children a voice means revolutionizing

the structures and the images that society has of street children.

It means emancipating children from the conventional and authoritative attitude that certain members of mainstream society may hold towards these children.

Julien (2022) resolutely supports and affirms self-advocacy and believes that street children are quite capable of making their own representation. Many street children are of the opinion that mainstream society is oppressive and intimidating and they do not trust them. Thus, street children must be afforded a voice. Having a voice is the only way they would achieve freedom. Being denied this voice makes the possibility of internalizing their disenchantment more real.

They tend to become more withdrawn from society, resentful and aggressive. Some of them harbour this disenchantment and the resulting pain, fear, confusion, negative self-esteem and the low expectations further compound their daily active lives.

United Nations (2017) in their document on the Convention to the Rights of the Child clearly outlined a policy and legal guidance for governments to protect street children. This document cited that these children have the right to associate and interact freely in public spaces without harassment by the law enforcers. Thomas De Benitez (2017) supported the idea presented by the United Nations (2017) and further mentioned that it could be used as an advocacy tool for street children. SCU (2020) cautioned that advocacy programmes, one of them being the introduction of sports, among street children involve the support of all. According to SCU (2020) when street children are engaged in sports, they create an awareness of themselves and the public tunes in more to their way of life and become more tolerant and passive towards them. Sports can minimize the gap that exists between street children and the public which can possibly create an environment of tolerance and peace between society and street children, (Meir and Fletcher, 2019, 2020; Richardson and Fletcher, 2020). Advocacy gives these children the opportunity to highlight how they live on the streets, (Kaneva and Corcoran, 2021). It also provides opportunities for children to cordially interact with each other, develop new skills, and receive informal education (Njoroge, 2017). Moreover, this exposure gives street children a tremendous sense of pride and satisfaction thereby giving their fragile ego a boost and empowering them. It also boosts their ego and empowers them, (Black et al., 2020, 2021; Dowse and Fletcher, 2018; Malcolm and Fletcher, 2017). When street children participate in sports it accentuates their talent, and this awareness can occasionally be made public through the media and other social platforms, (Corcoran et al., 2020). Dowse et al. (2018) suggested that there is a paucity of literature about sports, and its impact on street children. They further believed that this dearth of information clearly suggests that the voices of street children are not given due consideration.

For advocacy to be effective there must be drastic changes in society. To empower street children and give them a voice is more than merely permitting them to express themselves and provide their own comments and suggestions. It is a complete reorientation that forces society to value and appreciate their proposals and contributions to the wider society. It is important to note that advocacy for street children is not easy to attain. In several instances, street children are ignorant of the existence of those who make policies regarding their presence on the streets. Therefore, policy makers must be alerted. They must listen to the voices of street children. They must be aware of their concerns. If their voices go unheard, then their lives as a whole could be disregarded completely, and interests will not be effectively engaged. Advocacy among street children should foster an awareness of how they live. To simply express an interest in street children is insufficient. People cannot identify with them when they are not willing to confront issues and systems that contribute to their presence on the streets. Commitment without confrontation tends to fade quickly into fruitless sentimental commiseration. Commitment involves a diligent effort. This has its own measure of difficulty. It involves political action and critical analysis challenging the misinformed, ignorant prejudicial statements and ideas that are often prevalent within society about these children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research methodology

This non-empirical research gathered relevant data through critical studies, systematic review and meta-analysis. Secondary sources were taken from central library books, journals, and the internet. A careful and thorough investigation of appropriate and relevant research techniques such as text criticism, critical examination of biographical studies, narrative analysis, creative writing as a research method, and internet-based research assisted this methodology. Pertinent and apt reading material were also gathered and thoughtfully analysed and evaluated academically and the importance of the findings informed this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A review of the professional literature indicates that few people pay great emphasis on listening. This becomes even more convoluted when people try to listen to minority groups and street children. Thus, this research is crucial because it offers scholars and researchers pertinent information and knowledge on how to actively listen to minority groups. The analysis of existing literature contributes to current knowledge and serves as catalysis to motivate, energize and inspire others to engage in the process of listening to minority groups. Because it enriches and enhances the research and academic scenario it can lead those who are interested in minority

groups in the right direction. Moreover, it can encourage and stimulate policy makers, non-governmental organization and all those who are interested in minority groups to be unafraid to render assistance.

Conclusion

It is the genuine desire that this paper will stimulate the minds and hearts of the public so that we can all realize that minority groups and indeed all children are the source of hope and could be the major factor for the development of a better society, nation, and indeed a better world.

This non-empirical research explored the complexity in arriving at a precise definition of minority groups and street children. It examined the significance of listening with great consideration to the voices of street children and advocacy.

It must be remembered that listening is more than just hearing and being attentive. It is more than being empathetic and demonstrating sympathy. It is more than expressing a desire to be committed. It means getting seriously and wholeheartedly involved in the lives of socially displaced children. Again, this is not easy. It is demanding, challenging and time consuming. Moreover, the paper highlighted that advocacy in an important component of listening. Too often programmes are designed for street children without even consulting them. Therefore, government institutions, non-governmental organizations and all those interested in assisting the well-being of street children should have a meaningful dialogue with them. Listening to their voices, concerns and perspectives is of paramount significance in order to chart a meaningful way forward. One must remember that street children, because they are able to survive the rigors of the streets, could be deemed the experts on street life. However, street children must make their voices heard.

They must also fight for their rights which is called advocacy. It is the genuine desire that this paper will stimulate the minds and hearts of the public so that we can all realize that minority groups and indeed all children are the source of hope and could be the major factor for the development of better society, nation, and indeed a better world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflicts of interests.

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