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Rehabilitating street children: The great paradox

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Street children are habitually depicted in a purely negative manner, often described as indigent, penurious, and impecunious individuals who roam the streets in search of a livelihood. Their world is demoralizing, disheartening, disenchanting and their future appears formidable and arduous as they are frequently rejected, scorned and despised by society. However, it's important to recognize that they are normal human beings who, due to challenging circumstances, find themselves homeless. Identifying a singular reason for their homelessness is complex. This paper does not cast aspersions but seeks to ascertain whether some of these children can be rehabilitated through inclusive education. Inclusion entails all children studying in the same classrooms and being provided with learning opportunities to enhance their abilities. Although inclusion is a lifelong and challenging process, it is instructional and edifying, and it may potentially rehabilitate street children. How feasible is this for street children? Can inclusive education truly rehabilitate them? Even if it does, the stigmatization of street children often leaves a lasting scar, presenting a significant paradox. This non-empirical research reveals that rehabilitating street children is extremely complex and seemingly impossible. Nevertheless, some children may desire a different lifestyle, offering hope and optimism for rehabilitation efforts.

Key words: Rehabilitate, street children, inclusion, education, learning, diversity, equity, equality.

INTRODUCTION

The author firmly believes that these children can be reintegrated into society. However, the discrimination against them is so pervasive that it is almost impossible to eradicate. Due to the intricate and complex nature of these questions, there exists a great paradox. It should be noted that published research indicates a dearth of information on this issue. Nevertheless, with the support of professional literature, this paper emphasizes the importance of inclusive education and highlights the prejudice that street children endure. This non-empirical research provides a comprehensive review of various research papers, journal articles, and books. A critical research method also compares various papers directly

related to this topic. The majority of educators firmly believe that fostering inclusive education is obligatory. Positive learning environments often enhance the teaching and learning process. Thus, it is accurate to mention that everyone - educators, professionals, and policymakers - pays specific attention to and considers the importance of promoting inclusive education, especially to accommodate the homeless. Although this process is challenging and demanding, it is highly recommended that all citizens strive to promote and encourage inclusive education and minimize prejudice against the homeless. The following research questions guided this study: What exactly is inclusion? Is there value and merit in inclusive education?

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Can street children be rehabilitated through education? Can the stigma they suffer be removed? How long will society continue to discriminate against them? This paper is structured under the following seven headings: definition of street children, street life, education, inclusive education, the classroom, stigmatization, and methodology. It also offers some recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of street children

It is extremely convoluted to formulate a single uniform definition of street children because there are several definitions purported by various organizations and countries, leading to a lack of universal agreement on the term, which varies across different organizations. It is extremely convoluted to formulate a single uniform definition of street children because there are several definitions purported by various organizations and countries, leading to a lack of universal agreement on the term, which varies across different organizations.

Ghosh (2022) posited that many street children are denied basic human rights, including proper access to social and health services, the need for education, and protection against exploitation. Buske (2011) held the firm opinion that the number of street children continues to rise at a frightening scale, proliferating exponentially over the last decade. Buske (2011) further indicated that in virtually every country and major cities, it is not uncommon to find street children, emphasizing the urgency to address this phenomenon as the number continues to escalate. Purnomo and Suryono (2023) believed that although street children are homeless, they are sometimes euphemistically referred to as children who are excluded, marginal, and alienated from affectionate treatment due to their early exposure to harsh street life. Purnomo and Suryono (2023) further indicated that street children live in inadequate and unacceptable conditions, often being branded as a nuisance. Ghosh (2022) also highlighted that these children are homeless and deprived of the love, care, comfort, and protection of family.

Lyn (2021) opined that street children are wholly impoverished and completely destitute, leading horrid and unyielding lives without a fixed abode or job, forced into homelessness for survival, rendering their existence utterly hopeless and desolate, while being discriminated against by society. Due to their penurious state, they are habitually susceptible to various forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Lyn (2021) also believed that street children consider the streets as their homes. Miller (2023) claimed that street children are customarily portrayed in a highly unfavourable manner and are marginalized, often depicted as dressed in shabby and filthy clothes, barefooted, and engaged in survival activities such as selling books, newspapers, or sweets (Quainoo, 2020;

Salihu, 2019). She further added that some may engage in scavenging garbage heaps, working in restaurants and pubs as garbage collectors, washing vehicles, shining shoes, or participating in illicit practices. The literature explicitly indicated that since the streets serve as their abode, these children inevitably receive national and international public attention, which tends to be pessimistic and contributes to their marginalization. According to Lyn (2021) and Ghosh (2022), this negative attention does not benefit the homeless.

Public outrage and resentment towards street children often lead to support for their removal by police officers, with many members of the public not objecting when extreme force is used, resulting in fatalities (Lyn, 2021).

Although it is still unclear why children are homeless, Aluko (2021) and Parveen (2019) firmly believe that violence, abuse, torture, abandonment, neglect, and poverty are some of the major factors for the presence of street children.

UNODC (2023) also believed that poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, child abuse, and neglect are some contributing factors that cause children to be homeless. Parveen (2019) and Salihu (2019) noted that children are found on the roadside and in public places such as markets, subways, and bus stations, engaging in selling trivial items or begging for money and food. Parveen (2019) further added that they scavenge and rummage through rubbish and dustbins, often bearing untidy appearances with tattered, dirty, and torn clothing, while being barefooted and expressing defeated expressions on their faces, with some even half naked (Abate et al., 2022; Adebayo and Olaogun, 2019; Joshi, 2021; Malindi and Molahlehi, 2020). It is important to mention that although they are found almost everywhere in most major cities, at traffic signals, crowded marketplaces, near restaurants, and even at places of worship, they remain invisible, constantly ignored and disregarded by everyone (Parveen 2019). Azzam et al. (2021) posited that these inappropriate images undeniably illustrate the harsh and brutal reality of street children. Due to poverty, homelessness, or abandonment, these children are forced to live on the streets and engage in illicit activities as a means of survival, often pushed into exploitative and risky predicaments, susceptible to abuse, neglect, and criminal behavior. The daily lives of these children are habitually marked by the struggle to earn a meager income, living on the fringes of society.

Azzam et al. (2021) explained that while it is admirable that these children continue to survive in dispiriting situations, it is important to address the root causes of homelessness so they can be provided with better opportunities, education, and support to live a better life.

Challenges faced by street children

The problems faced by street children are multifaceted and encompass various dimensions. One of the primary issues

is the total absence of love, care, protection, and the comforts of family life. Street children are highly susceptible to exploitation, whether it is physical, mental, sexual, or economic (Dankyi and Huang, 2022; Hasan et al., 2022, Mekonen et al., 2020; Msangi, 2017). They are exposed to health hazards, chronic diseases, and are vulnerable to malnutrition, hunger, and unsanitary conditions (Deb et al., 2020; Jariego, 2021). Economic exploitation is particularly prevalent, as employers often pay inadequate wages or exploit their labour. Mention must be made that girls are at a higher risk of sexual exploitation since they are constantly harassed by their male counterparts and police officers. Due to a lack of trust in law enforcement, many cases of abuse are not reported, and the perpetrators are unpunished. It is understandable why these children are intimidated and coerced into illicit and illegal activities such as prostitution, begging, and drug peddling (Amoah and Nyamekye, 2022; Ewunetie et al. 2022; Odoyo et al., 2019). This situation is further compounded by the consistent harassment and exploitation from police officials and municipal authorities. It can be concluded that street children are prone to adopting anti-social behaviors and felonious habits.

The children, as discussed in the literature (Kaiser and Sinanan, 2020; Mia and Islam, 2021; Ramaswamy and Seshadri, 2020), lack basic education and proper parental guidance, leading them to frequently cultivate bad habits such as smoking tobacco, consuming alcohol, and even taking drugs. Additionally, some engage in felonious activities like theft, drug peddling, and pickpocketing. They are persistently confronted with psychological, social, educational, and emotional challenges, while being completely unnoticed and unforgotten by the public, often regarded as a nuisance.

This on-going neglect by the public and those in authority consistently exacerbates and embitters the issue of homelessness. Concrete, holistic, and meaningful efforts must be made to properly confront homelessness, affording these children ample care, protection, education, and opportunities for a better future.

The Consortium for Street Children (2019) acknowledged the complexity of this phenomenon. While some police officers genuinely attempt to reintegrate street children with their families and protect them from abusive adults, many street children still live in fear of the same forces that aim to assist and protect them. Conversely, the Consortium for Street Children (2019) admitted that some police officers and even soldiers frequently threaten, rob, beat, and harass these children, compounding discrimination and instilling greater fear in the children. Consortium for Street Children (2019) further mentioned that in some scenarios, police officers recruit these children to steal and loot in exchange for a share of the proceeds or a small sum of money. Therefore, it is logical that these children, under duress, cooperate with the officers and facilitate their malicious habits. Because street children are habitually viewed in a completely negative

manner, they are often blamed for crimes. Consortium for Street Children (2019) claimed that these children are typically suspected of crimes and detained for interrogation and investigation. During this process, police officers often resort to beating these street children to coerce confessions, showing little interest in the truth but rather aiming for a confession from the children.

This chronic abuse continues to affect every aspect of these children's lives. Some officers and military personnel routinely rape them (Consortium for Street Children 2019). Hence, many children feel embarrassed and ashamed and are sometimes unable to recount the episodes of abuse. Thus, the perpetrators go unpunished and continue the same illicit activities with even more power and authority (The Youth Endowment Fund 2020). Kertati and Cristiani (2022) claimed that children who are homeless are frequently a source of community concern since they are believed to impede movement on the streets and harm the environment. Most street children are still young, and their parents release them onto the streets without supervision, leaving them in a vulnerable and hazardous situation. Additionally, the local administration is concerned about the status of these street children, who are homeless without regard for their safety or well-being, including their nutrition, health, or education. Vameghi et al. (2023) and UNICEF (2020) suggested that street children are among the most marginalized globally, experiencing severe violations of their rights and facing multiple deprivations. Ally and Paul (2022) resolutely affirmed that street children are highly vulnerable and frequently at risk, especially of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Kaplan and Çuhadar (2020) proposed that children become homeless and engage in labor due to various factors, including family dynamics, socioeconomic conditions, and peer pressure, with variations observed between industrialized and developing countries. Human Rights Watch (2016) highlighted the serious issue of police abuse, with many officers resorting to excessive force to remove children from the streets, while numerous security firms are employed specifically for this purpose. Karami et al. (2017) identified several factors contributing to the presence of street children, encompassing economic issues such as poverty, injustice, and unemployment, as well as cultural, social, and family factors like migration, war, and lack of parental awareness. Individual, biological, and psychological components also play a role, including personality traits, mental capacity, and societal marginalization (Karami et al., 2017; Hosseini, 2005).

Karami et al. (2017) proposed two approaches to addressing the issue of street children: preventive approaches, which aim to prevent children from becoming homeless, and corrective and reconstructive approaches, which focus on improving the conditions of existing street children and reintegrating them into their families and communities (Vameghi, 2005). Setyowati et al. (2023) noted the lack of effective regulations to address the problem of street children, emphasizing the importance of

accepting and understanding their potential to improve their social situation. While many street children lack proper upbringing from their families, research by Sakina (2011) indicated that the assistance provided through shelters is often insufficient. It is crucial to ensure that the basic rights of street children are fulfilled to protect them from violence (Sakina, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The relevant information was obtained through current studies, methodical review, and meta-analysis, supplemented by secondary sources from the internet spanning from September 2023 to January 2024. Sources included databases such as EBSCO, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, MEDLINE, SCOPUS, and Web of Science. Additionally, a comprehensive hand screening of relevant journals was conducted, including the International Journal of Inclusive Education, European Journal of Special Needs Education, British Journal of Special Education, Exceptional Children, British Journal of Educational Psychology, International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, International Journal of Special Education, Teaching and Teacher Education, and Journal of Research on Special Needs Education. To maintain focus and achieve the objectives of this non-empirical research, specific terms such as rehabilitation, stigmatization, labelling, prejudice, street children, and inclusive education were utilized in the search. Thus, this non-empirical research employed careful investigation and analysis techniques, including text criticism, critical examination of biographical studies, and narrative analysis.

RESULTS

Rehabilitation and education

Cahyani et al. (2021) assertively emphasized the importance of education for proper survival, stating that it enables individuals to optimize their abilities and achieve their goals. They further highlighted the significance of inclusive education in meeting the needs of all students, including the homeless, emphasizing that it should recognize that all children can learn. Hasan et al. (2022) firmly affirmed that education is fundamental and should be accessible to all, including street children. The Consortium for Street Children (2021) implied that inclusive education is essential and can be rehabilitative, advocating for opportunities for street children similar to those afforded to others. They assert that this can be achieved by listening to the voices of street children and eradicating the discrimination they face daily.

Although the perspectives offered by various authors hold merit, many street children struggle to access these valuable opportunities. Edinyang et al. (2020) strongly advocated for the involvement of parents and significant others in the educational lives of street children. Anthony and James (2019) asserted the importance of policymakers and education stakeholders implementing measures to effectively educate street children. Edmonds et al. (2022), based on extensive work in Jinja, Uganda, firmly suggested that education should be child-centered and recognize the potential of all students, including street children. They decisively advocated for involvement in street work, encompassing counseling, care, and skills development to facilitate the reintegration of street children with their families and enable their participation in the formal education system. They emphasized that street work should prioritize the interests of the students, fostering problem-solving skills, self-regulation, resilience, and strong social skills. Additionally, it should foster a sense of community support for the education and overall well-being of street children. However, the task of educating street children is complex and challenging due to the numerous hindrances and obstacles they face on the streets, which hinder the teaching and learning process. Moreover, pervasive prejudice against these children exacerbates this paradox.

Setyowati and Imron (2016) proposed a potential model for empowering and rehabilitating street girls in Surabaya through the Srikandi street School. Research focusing on educational empowerment for female street children is an intriguing area within Sociology studies. Studies conducted at the Independent Children's Shelter Home in Yogyakarta reveal that the education provided aims to remove children from the streets, granting them access to education. Septiarti (2005) strongly advocated for alternative approaches to education programs for street children, highlighting the importance of community empowerment. The implementation of home-based education seeks to cultivate a civilized, empowered, and dignified community among the impoverished, who have limited access to formal educational services. The comprehensive project in handling street children aims to provide character education and liberation through education. Harackiewicz et al. (2016) emphasized that education should stimulate cognition, promote critical thinking, and maximize potential, fostering student interest in learning. Abdurahimovna and Zaynalobidinovna (2023) affirmed the crucial role of education in life. Sadikovna and Azimjon o'g'li (2023) suggested that inclusive education necessitates the provision of additional facilities for children with limited access to education in mainstream institutions, especially those with disabilities. While these approaches hold promise and could benefit homeless children, they fail to adequately address the persistent prejudice that street children endure, exacerbating the overarching paradox.

Mukhtoraliyevna and Kizi (2023) suggested that the teaching and learning process could incorporate games, emphasizing the usefulness of didactic games. They explained that didactic games, unlike creative games conducted in kindergarten, are guided by the teacher through narration and individual student participation, strengthening learning. Didactic games primarily serve the purpose of teaching and should be conducted in a manner that is interesting, enjoyable, and understandable for students. Children engage wholeheartedly in the exercises to win the game, which fosters their interest in didactic

tasks and enhances their understanding of lesson objectives and exercises. Inclusive education, as stated by the United Nations (2017), often incorporates values, ideas, and practices aimed at providing a more effective and meaningful education for many students. The United Nations (2017) firmly believed that inclusion, which values and appreciates the unique contributions of all children, is one of the best ways to ensure equal educational opportunities for all. Inclusive education encompasses various groups, including those with special needs and disabilities, females, at-risk pupils, and members of ethnic minorities, fostering collaboration and growth for the benefit of all. Dalton (2017) emphasized the importance of intercultural sensitivity, competence, and awareness in building effective inclusion. Inclusive education ensures that all students, including those with disabilities such as hearing impairments, physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities, as well as gifted and talented students, are integrated into the curriculum.

In addition, Mag et al. (2017) strongly advised that inclusion must also encompass children of diverse races, cultures, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, an inclusive environment should be both welcoming and protect children from danger. Moreover, it should strive to educate all students. Teachers must be willing to accept and embrace students and ensure that they receive quality education. Hence, the school curriculum should be modified to embrace all students. Mag et al. (2017) suggested that adequate opportunities must be provided so that all students are at liberty to increase their intelligence. Inclusive education integrates the following: acceptance, accessibility, and assessment reform. It also means that students must enjoy a deep sense of belonging where respect for all is of paramount importance. To accomplish these components of inclusion, educational institutions are obligated to accept and embrace changes to meet the needs of all students. This means that educators ought to have an in-depth knowledge of students and be willing to adapt to the teaching and learning process if required to do so. Nurdyansyah et al. (2022) indicated that numerous barriers prohibit educators from successfully using modern technology in the classroom. Some educators are not competent in using technology, while others lack proper teaching strategies to an acceptable degree. They further believed that some digital materials, such as those designed for assistive technologies, may be neither compatible nor accessible. Bartz (2020) and Fichten et al. (2009) stated that there are times when content is not organized when presented, and this can hamper the teaching and learning process to a great extent. This, in turn, can arrest academic progress for students who rely on assistive technology or have focus disabilities and learning attention disorders.

There is also a great need to eliminate barriers to learning because some school personnel are still unwilling to accommodate students with special needs. Many educators are also unaware of students with disabilities and may not have the most suitable attitude to address their needs. Some educators are not properly trained to address issues with disabilities. Because many classes are overcrowded, educators cannot provide the quality education and attention that students deserve. It is not uncommon to see that the entire teaching and learning process is gravely restricted, and the curriculum fails to be student-centered. Further, a great number of educational institutions meet with inadequate infrastructure, thereby depriving students of the relevant tools needed to cater to their learning needs. The lack of resources for inclusion poses a major problem, along with parental and community involvement. Likewise, poor collaboration and lack of support among peers, parents, teachers, schools, stakeholders, and even the Ministry of Education are repeatedly at the forefront. Makwana (2022) stated that labelling refers to the classification of children based on their disability, which does not foster inclusion. The issue of labelling students must be addressed immediately, as it is a matter of grave concern, and children with special needs dislike being labelled purely because they feel rejected.

The classrooms

Sandilos et al. (2017) observed that positive classrooms should cultivate self-worth and positive self-esteem. Creating such a multifaceted environment is complex, yet Nair et al. (2018) strongly affirmed that it reflects a high quality of life, encompassing various dimensions including social, political, intellectual, religious, and educational aspects. Şükran (2020) emphasized the significance of universal values in fostering positive classrooms, asserting that a value system based on love, respect, and tolerance is essential for building a peaceful school environment. Both educators and students have expectations and needs, with educators desiring to feel valued and students benefiting from classrooms that emphasize positivity.

Prodigy (2022) believed that one of the primary goals is to establish and sustain classrooms that foster success, especially among students. Ariyani et al. (2021) further posited that educators ought to always motivate, encourage, and monitor others to do their best. In this way, they continue to design classrooms where peace and tranquillity are evident.

Rahmawati et al. (2020) also added that teaching and learning ought to be conducted in a peaceful classroom, but it is not simple to establish positive classrooms. It is a difficult, complex, and convoluted process. To have a positive learning environment in a classroom demands much more than merely adorning the classrooms with posters and other visual material. It really signifies truly appreciating, understanding, and supporting the diverse needs of students and colleagues in multiple ways. This can be accomplished by establishing rules in the classroom that set the tone for a healthy learning

environment where students know what is expected of them. This structure makes students feel safe and comfortable and promotes positive well-being. When students feel safe in the classrooms, they are unafraid of confronting challenges. Further, they do not see them as negative but use them for further growth and development. In this way, both students and educators are more engaged and excited to interact with one another under positive circumstances.

Students are more likely to thrive in positive learning environments where they feel a sense of belonging. It is important to recognize that there is no singular or perfect learning classroom, thus efforts should be made to create inclusive classrooms by thoughtfully selecting diverse and representative course material that supports cognitive development.

Fuentes et al. (2021) suggested that an inclusive syllabus promotes intercultural interactions and the sharing of diverse experiences and perspectives, essential for ensuring that all students, regardless of gender, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or abilities, feel welcomed and valued within the school community (Germano and Nicholls, 2020).

DISCUSSION: THE PARADOX: STIGMATIZATION

It is widely acknowledged that numerous scholars have produced significant literature critically analyzing street children and offering various recommendations and programs aimed at removing them from the streets and reintegrating them into society. However, despite efforts to incorporate them into society, a significant challenge remains: stigmatization. This segment of the paper highlights how stigmatization, including labeling and discrimination, detrimentally affects the well-being of street children. Street children are often stigmatized, labeled, and discriminated against, which severely hinders the rehabilitation process. These children face numerous challenges due to stigmatization and prejudice as they strive to survive in a society that frequently rejects and deems them worthless. The impact of stigmatization is profound and potentially life-threatening. Street children are often excluded, criminalized, and forcibly removed from the streets due to the prejudices they encounter. These prejudices persist throughout their lives, as noted by Olsson (2013), who suggested that stigma is a consistent aspect of their experiences, whether they are on the streets or in rehabilitation programs. This ongoing discrimination only serves to further exacerbate their vulnerability.

Khan and Loewenson (2005) suggested that the term stigma originated in ancient Greece, where slaves and criminals were branded as outcasts. They further implied that stigma can manifest as either internal or external. Parker and Aggleton (2003) argued that stigma is deeply ingrained in the social and cultural fabric of society, diminishing and discrediting individuals. Moncrieffe (2006) noted that labels also have the power to stigmatize, dehumanize, and discriminate against others. Against this backdrop, street children exist, making it difficult to implement and sustain programs aimed at assisting them due to the entrenched root cause of stigmatization (Panter-Bricks, 2002).

It is important to acknowledge that street children possess dreams, goals, aspirations, and ambitions. Despite the potential for hope, this study suggests that rehabilitating these children is often perceived as nearly impossible. This is primarily due to the enduring negative perceptions surrounding them, which significantly impact their lives and make it challenging to view them differently. Even without stigma and negative labels, their homelessness complicates the rehabilitation process. Living on the streets exposes these children to various dangers such as drugs, alcohol, sexual exploitation, gang violence, and the struggle to obtain food through scavenging, begging, or engaging in petty crimes.

These circumstances deny them a normal life compared to children with parental guidance. Consequently, the stigma and prejudice they face heighten their vulnerability and resistance to rehabilitation efforts. Survival becomes their primary concern on the streets, making them reluctant to accept alternative forms of life.

Conclusion

It must be noted that it is possible to rehabilitate street children and there is hope. However, this process is convoluted and difficult to attain because these children are marginalized, ostracized, and stigmatized for life. They are constantly discriminated against, and therein lies the great paradox. In this regard, the public ought to be fully cognizant of the fact that all children are a source of hope and could be a major element for the development of a better society, nation, and indeed a better world. This non-empirical research explored the complexity to accurately justify the need for these children to be rehabilitated. At the same time, it mentioned the complexity to achieve this goal, which may not be attainable for some of them. This process is not easy. It is demanding, challenging, and time-consuming. Therefore, government institutions, stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and all those interested in the well-being of children should always engage in meaningful and regular dialogue. In this way, they can clearly ascertain and appreciate the urgent need to rehabilitate these children.

Limitations

While this non-empirical study contributed to understanding how street children could be rehabilitated and emphasized the involved paradox, it has limitations. The methods relied on personal observations, integrative literature, reflection on current events, the authority and

experience of various authors, but lacked grounding in practical observation and first-hand experimentation. Due to the absence of empirical data, the arguments presented are more susceptible to criticism. Moreover, this research may have overlooked relevant studies as it was impossible to capture all available information from online databases. Fieldwork and the inclusion of the actual voices, experiences, thoughts, and opinions of those involved in the rehabilitation process, including street children, were also absent. Therefore, future studies could incorporate both non-empirical and empirical methods, embracing both the scientific field and the research outcomes being analysed.

Recommendations

From all that has been stated the following recommendations are offered:

1) Listen to the voices and experiences of street children.
2) Appreciate and value their lives and decrease all types of discrimination.
3) Establish more centers to rehabilitate street children.
4) Host conferences, workshops, and seminars to sensitize the public about rehabilitation.
5) Improve relation with governmental organizations, stakeholders.
6) Conduct more qualitative and quantitate research among street children. Through the media releases the public could be assisted to minimize prejudice.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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