

Children Living on the Street

English Sources Booklet

RS3



Source 1: Children Living on the Street

From the British Council Website

There are an estimated 100 million children living in the streets in the world today.

UNICEF has defined three types of street children.

- Street living children - children who have run away from their families and live alone on the streets.
- Street working children - children who spend most of their time on the streets, fending for themselves, but returning home on a regular basis.
- Children from street families - children who live on the streets with their families.

'Street children may live in abandoned buildings, cardboard boxes, parks or on the street itself. A great deal has been written defining street children, but the primary difficulty is that there are no precise categories, but rather a continuum, ranging from children who spend some time in the streets and may sleep in a house, to those who live entirely in the streets and have no adult supervision or care.'

Children who are vulnerable to street life include those who've been abandoned by their families or sent into cities because of a family's intense poverty, often with hopes that a child will be able to earn money for the family and send it home. Children who run away from home frequently end up on the street since they rarely return home due to dysfunctional families, or physical, mental, and/or sexual abuse. In several areas of the world, disabled children are commonly abandoned. In addition, refugee children from armed conflict areas and AIDS orphans, repeatedly find nowhere to go but the streets.

Children living on the streets are incredibly vulnerable. They are often exploited, abused and criminalised and live in exceptionally tough conditions. International indifference to the problem has led to continual neglect and abuse of these children. Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) asserts that 'States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development'. Homelessness denies each one of these rights.

The hidden and isolated nature of street children makes it difficult to gather accurate statistics; UNICEF estimates that the number of young people on the street is constantly growing. There are up to 40 million street children in Latin America, and at least 18 million in India. It is often assumed that street children are only to be seen in 'developing' countries but almost all countries, rich or poor, have young people living on the street. For example, it was estimated that there were two million young people living on the streets in the USA in 2003. In Europe too, there are young people on the street. A report in 2005 tells of 100,000 young people in the UK who have run away from home and one in six of them sleeps rough. Homelessness and street life have extremely detrimental effects on children. Their unstable lifestyles, lack of medical care, and inadequate living conditions increase young people's

susceptibility to chronic illnesses such as respiratory or ear infections, gastrointestinal disorders, and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Children fending for themselves must find ways to eat; some scavenge or find exploitative physical work.

Drug use by children on the streets is common as they look for means to numb the pain and deal with the hardships associated with street life. Studies have found that up to 90 per cent of street children use psychoactive substances, including medicines, alcohol, cigarettes, heroin, cannabis, and readily available industrial products, such as shoe glue.

"Children who are forced to survive on the streets deserve something much better. They are not criminals - and, instead of being treated with care and understanding, they receive harsh treatment from the police and society. All children have the right to a secure home, protection against violence and access to healthcare and education. Even more importantly, their voices should be heard and their hopes and dreams taken more seriously." Andrew Webb, CEO, ABC Trust, Brazil.

Source 2: Stone Cold Extract

Written by Robert Swindells (Page 55 - page 59, Puffin Teenage Fiction 1993)

If you think sleeping rough's just a matter of finding a dry spot where the fuzz won't move you on and getting your head down, you're wrong. Not your fault of course – if you've never tried it you have no way of knowing what it's like, so what I thought I'd do was sort of talk you through a typical night.

So you pick your spot. Wherever it is (unless you're in a squat or a derelict house or something) it's going to have a floor of stone, tile, concrete or brick. In other words it's going to be hard and cold. It might be a bit cramped, too – shop doorways often are. And remember, if it's winter you're going to be half frozen before you even start. Anyway you've got your place, and if you are lucky enough to have a sleeping-bag you unroll it and get in.

Settled for the night, well maybe, maybe not. Remember my first night? The sky was? Course you do. He kicked me out of my bedroom and pinched my watch. Well that sort of thing can happen any night, and there are worse things. You could be peed on by a drunk or a dog. Happens all the time – one man's bedroom is another man's lavatory. You might be spotted by a gang of lager louts on the lookout for someone to maim. That happens all the time too, and if they get carried away you can end up dead. There are other guys who like young boys, who think because you are a dosser you'll do anything for dosh, and there's the psycho who'll knife you for your pack.

So, you lie listening. You bet you do. Footsteps. Voices. Breathing, even. Doesn't help you sleep.

Then there's your bruises. What bruises? Try lying on the stone floor for half an hour. Just half an hour. You can choose any position you fancy, and you can change position as often as you like. You won't find it a comfy, I can tell you. You won't sleep unless you're dead drunk or zonked on downers. And if you are, and do, you're going to wake up with bruises on hips, shoulders, elbows, ankles and knees – especially if you are a bit thin from not eating properly. And if you do that six hours a night for six nights you'll feel that you fell out of a train. Try sleeping on concrete then.

And don't forget the cold. If you've ever tried dropping off to sleep with cold feet, even in bed, you'll know it's impossible. You've got to warm up those feet, or a lie awake. And in January, in the doorway, in wet trainers, it can be quite a struggle. And if you manage it, chances are you'll need to get up for a pee, and then it starts all over again.

And those are only some of the hassles. I haven't mentioned stomach cramps from hunger, headaches from the flu, toothache, fleas and lice. I haven't talked about homesickness, depression or despair. I haven't gone into how it feels to want to girlfriend when your circumstances make it virtually impossible for you to get one – how it feels to know you're a social outcast in fact, a non-person to whom every ordinary everyday activity is closed.

So. You lie on your bruises, listening. Trying to warm your feet. You curl up on your side and your hip hurts, so you stretch out on your back so your feet stay cold and the concrete hurts your heels. You force yourself to lie still for a bit, thinking that'll help you drop off, but it doesn't. Your pack feels like a rock under your head and your nose is cold. You wonder what

time it is. Can you stop listening now, or could someone still come? Distant chimes. You strain your ears, counting. One o'clock? It can't be only one o'clock, surely? I've been here hours. Did I miss a chime?

What's that? Sounds like breathing. Heavy breathing, as in maniac. Lie still. Quiet. Maybe he won't see you. Listen. Is he still there? Silence now. Creeping up, perhaps. No. Relax. Jeez, my feet are cold.

A thought out of nowhere – my old room at home. My little bed. What I wouldn't give for – no, mustn't. Mustn't think about that. No sleep that way. Somebody could be asleep in that room right now. Warm and dry. Safe. Lucky sod.

Food. God, don't start on about food! (Remember that time in Whitby – fish and chip caff? Long, sizzling haddock, keeper of chips like a mountain. So many, you had to leave some). Wish I had them now.

Mum. Wonder what Mum's doing? Wonder if she wonders where I am? How would she feel if she knew? I miss you Mum. Do you miss me? Does anybody?

Chimes again. Quarter past. Quarter past one? I don't believe it.

And so it goes on, hour after hour. Now and then you doze a bit, but only a bit. You're so cold, so frightened and it hurts so much that you end up praying for morning even though your dog tired – even though tomorrow is certain to be every bit as grim as yesterday.

And the worst part is knowing you haven't deserved any of it.

Source 3: Our Stories

Joseph, Sierra Leone

Joseph's parents were murdered during the civil war when he was only 7 years old. His aunt took him into her care but she passed away the next year. He was left in the care of his uncle, an amputee from the war who was unable to support him. Joseph left to go to the streets because he had no food, no education and knew life wouldn't get any better if he stayed. During his time on the streets he experienced all kinds of abuse. Considered an inconvenience he was kicked, spat at and beaten. He spent his nights sleeping in the lorry park and dreaming of becoming a doctor one day so he could help other people.

(Case Study provided by Street Child Of Sierra Leone and the Consortium for Street Children)

Gabriela, Brazil

Beginning her life as a young girl born into a world of drug-related crime and deprivation, Gabriela had little choice but to turn to the street to make a living begging at traffic lights. Her parents were consumed by drug addiction. Soon Gabriela decided to flee from the violence she was living with at home and found herself alone and homeless in the huge city of Sao Paulo. Gabriela was vulnerable and unable to protect herself from the many dangers that life on the streets poses to a young child. She became caught up in a triangle of violence, drugs and sexual abuse. Falling pregnant at just 12 years old, Gabriela turned to a care centre for help and was looked after through the birth of her child at hospital. At 13, Gabriela now lives in the Menina Mae shelter with her son, Miro, whom she adores. She hopes he will have a better future than her.

(Fictional case study created by children living on the streets provided by Action for Brazil's Children and the Consortium for Street Children)

Maryam, Morocco

Maryam is 11 years old and should be approaching the end of her primary education. In fact, she doesn't go to school and hasn't done so for several years. Maryam describes her father as "a problem". He never does anything for her and her siblings and he sometimes hits her. She lives, along with her 4 siblings, her mother and her mother's colleague, in a small apartment with only two rooms. Her mother works a 12-hour day but, as the sole source of income, still struggles to provide a basic standard of living for her family. The four younger children (between 2 and 8 years) are all looked after by Maryam. She cares for them, prepares their meals and does the household chores. Maryam doesn't know how things will ever change and is thinking about leaving home to live on the street.

(Case study provided by Moroccan Children's Trust and the Consortium for Street Children)

Neya, Congo

Neya is 16 years old. He lived for 3 years on the streets. His mother died of malaria and his father disappeared soon after her death. He was being looked after by his mother's brother in Kasumbelesa. However, his Aunt accused him of being a witch. After a number of degrading episodes when the family attempted to cast demons out of him he left home and gravitated towards the city. He started working and sleeping in the market where he could earn a small amount by emptying sacks of flour off lorries. About a year ago he started attending a charity run day centre. With the support of the charity he is now studying in a local school. He's been learning to paint by a local artist and has exhibited some of his pictures in the Lubumbashi art Gallery.

(Case study provided Congo's Children Trust and the Consortium for Street Children)

Source 4: 'Aloys' extract from Dogodogo

Written by Aloys, a Tanzania Street Child

'Why do you drink alcohol, Baba?'

'It is not your job to tell me!'

'But why do you do it, Baba? You are not the same to us when you drink.'

'It is not your job to tell me!'

'When you drink you forget we are your children. When you drink you beat Mama! You beat Anton and Mariam! You beat me! Why, Baba?'

'Be quiet! Go away! I don't want you! IT IS NOT YOUR JOB TO TELL ME!'

My first memory of my home village is hiding from my father when he was drunk. I was 6 years old. I could hear him shouting at my mother and beating her. I knew that, if he found me, I would be next. That is why I had to run away. There was nothing for me there: no school, no music, no laughter. The public TV in town showed me other people who had those things and they looked happy. Why was I different?

I am going to get a new life, I decided. I left home. I was 9 years old and nobody tried to stop me. I went straight to the bus station in town and said to the bus driver 'Can you help me? I need to get to Dar es Salaam. My mother is there'.

On the bus journey I was happy. I felt proud of myself! This was an adventure just like the TV and I was on my way to the good life. But in Dar es Salaam I started to be scared. I had nowhere to go and there were gangs of older boys everywhere who did not like little new comers like me. I could not really sleep at night in case someone came to harm me.

I decided to take a job selling eggs at the market to get money. But the women who owned the egg business was not fair to me. I found myself working for little or no money and life was very hard. I was always dirty and tired from working all day and always, always hungry.

One evening as I walking to the park where I used to sleep at night with some of my friends, a policeman stopped me.

'STOP! Come here boy!' shouted the policeman.

He grabbed me by the arm and told me to show him everything in my pockets.

'Where did you get this?' He asked, taking my 500 shilling note.

'I work selling eggs at the bus station.'

'You are lying! You stole it didn't you? You are a little dirty thief. I will keep this money because you stole it.'

'No, please, I need it to buy food.'

'Come with me to the police station. You will spend the night cleaning the floors and then you will get out of my sight.'

I lived on the streets of Dar es Salaam for four years and I don't know how many times I was arrested or beaten by the police. If they were drunk they would come and find us and chase and beat us for fun.

There was one terrible time when I was caught selling eggs on the harbour. I knew it was not allowed but a ship had just arrived from Uganda and I wanted to reach the hungry passengers before the other hawkers so I could get a good meal that night. I had 45 eggs left when the policeman grabbed me. For my punishment, he made me eat half of every single egg – with the shells still on – while he watched. Then he kicked me in the stomach with his hard boot.

Of course I could not sell the leftovers. My boss went crazy and I missed a whole months pay.

Did I regret leaving home? Yes, but only when I was hungry or when it rained a lot or if I was in trouble with the police. Did I miss my family? Not my father. If I went back he would punish me for running away. I missed my siblings though and felt bad I had left them with my father.

Even though my life was not like the one I saw on the TV, I was OK. I still believed in a better future.

Source 5: I Am Not Street

Written by children at S.A.L.V.E. International who have lived on the street in Uganda.

I am not street
I am not something you walk on
I am not something to be thrown in the rubbish skip
I am not a bad smell or torn clothes
I am not a thief

I am not a stomach empty of food to eat
I am not worthless
I am not something for people to box or kick
I am not the drugs I sniff to help me forget
I am not invisible

I am here
Don't pretend not to see me
I am a child
I like to play and laugh and learn
I deserve food to eat

I deserve an education and a warm bed at night
I deserve to be safe
I deserve to dream and sleep at night without fear
I am NOT street
A street is a place and I am a child
Who will one day be an adult
I am the future
I want the opportunity to make that future great