

Effects of Street Children on Supermarket's Shoppers Behavior in Urban Areas in Kenya

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Abstract: The presence of street children is a phenomenon experienced in many towns and cities in Kenya. The main objective of the study is to find effect of street children on supermarket shopper's behavior in urban centers in Kenya. This study relied on social capital theory by Coleman that posits that in the absence of social capital in the family, provision of basic needs becomes a problem leading children to leave their homes to seek alternative avenues of comfort. Random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to select a study sample, which was subjected to interviews. The data was keyed into the computer and both qualitative and quantitative statistical techniques used for analysis. The output of the analysis was presented in tables. The findings reveal that supermarkets in Kenya have problems on existence of street children majority of who are located in CBDs. Some of them steal from shoppers and therefore affecting the behaviors of the shoppers. Consequently, the supermarkets and other business premises are affected since they lose customers. However, the study also found that street children were also exploited by some people who come to shop at supermarkets through prostitution and drug trafficking. The study recommends for enhancement of government efforts towards the alleviation of problem faced by street children, building community responsibility on alleviation of street children, and starting programmes for educating street-children on economic exploitation.

Keywords: street children, supermarkets, economic exploitation

INTRODUCTION

Street children are homeless persons of age 0-17 years who move about the streets in search for food and other basic needs [1]. They have limited interactions with their family members while others do not interact at all. These children consist of both boys and girls who are of different ages and sometimes they intermarry among themselves and form street families. For some children, the street is where they look to find their home, their parents, their playground, their education, their healthcare and their love [2]. For others, this is where they work from as early as sunrise to as late as midnight. In Vietnam, street children are known as "*buidoi*," or children of the dust. In Jakarta, they are called "a *nakJalanan*," and in Kenya the Swahili word given to them is, "*chokora*," meaning to pick or search through garbage [3]. Regardless of the nation, street children and their growing numbers is a threat to the order and function of civilized societies.

The 2000 Human Development Report estimates that there are roughly 100 million street children across the globe [4]. In Port-Prince, the number of street children is estimated at 3000-5000, in India, around 18 million children work on the streets [4]. Although the 100 million figures is still cited for

street children, the Consortium for Street Children points out that the exact number of street children is impossible to quantify although the figure runs into tens of millions across the world and the numbers are constantly increasing [4].

Kenya itself has seen a striking increase in the number of street children. In 1969, there were only a few hundred recorded street children. Over thirty years later, Nairobi found itself home to between 10,000 and 30,000 street children [2]. Awori [1] estimates the number of street children in Kenya to be more than 300,000 children. In 2002, the East African Standard similarly reported an estimated 250 thousand children living on the streets in urban areas. These children were often involved in theft, drug trafficking, assault, trespassing, property damage and engage in survival tactics that endanger their well-being and that of the society. Their interaction with common citizens has influenced their behavior significantly.

There is a higher incidence of street children particularly in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru and other growing towns. There are also reports of widespread prostitution among the girls who hawk or beg by the day and work as prostitutes by night [5].

Those who are too young to participate in the trade are often forced to beg, some even resorting to crime in order to survive [1]. There are also individuals, the majority of whom are girls, who resort to the use of what is known as “survival sex” as a means of earning a living.

The UNICEF estimates of 2012 has that there are currently about 1500 street children in Nakuru town, and the number keeps rising as time goes by. These children often look for help in areas where economic activities are undertaken since they believe people in these areas may have pity on them and give them some money or offer some help [4]. Due to the hardships of life on the street, street children are equipped with numerous coping strategies, which allow them to navigate through survival and development such as pick pocketing shoppers or even grabbing goods and other belonging such as handbags from them. Shoppers of high profile and foreigners are also scared off by the

nature of begging from street children [3]. This has become a major challenge to both shoppers, business premises such as supermarkets in Kenya as, the majority of shoppers tend to avoid shopping in towns, and those who constantly shop in towns are in constant fear and always alert. The current study therefore, explored the impact that street children have on Kenyan supermarket shoppers in urban centers.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the causal research design method, which is both qualitative and quantitative. The target group was the street children, shoppers and supermarket workers within Kenyan supermarkets. Those interviewed were from Nakuru town. In the study 20 respondents was purposively selected and participated including 10 shoppers, 4 supermarket workers, and 6 street children. Table 1 below shows the breakdown of the respondents.

Table 1: Sample population

Target Population of (respondents)	Frequency	Males	Females
Shoppers	10	4	6
Supermarket workers	4	1	3
Street children	6	5	1
Total	20	10	10

This research used non-probability sampling since respondents are chosen arbitrarily, there is no way to estimate the probability of any one element being included in the sample. The study used interviews in data collection. These interviews yielded highest response rates in survey research. They also allowed the researcher to clarify ambiguous answers and when appropriate, seek follow-up information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics of respondents are essential in this study as they contribute to an understanding impact that the presence of street children has on the behavior of supermarkets and shoppers. The respondents interviewed in were both females (9) and (11) males. This study established that the males dominate the female in the street life. However, according to Baizerman [6] the politics of

numbers can hide or distort the moral issues in the street children phenomenon. However, male gender dominate the streets due to the fact that females are generally protected by the society and are used more on domestic chores around the house and do not therefore have the time to be on the street. Furthermore, developing countries tend to refer to poverty and the weakening of the traditional family structure as the main reasons for the street children phenomenon [7].

The study also established that eight (8) respondents were in the age bracket of (8 to 16) years which was equivalent to 40%. Ten (10) respondents (50%) were between the age group of 17 years to 25 years and they were in number while those in age group 26 to 34 years and 35 year and above were represented by one respondent each and this was equivalent to 5%, as shown in the Table 2.

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
8-16	8	40
17-25	10	50
26-34	1	5
35 and above	1	5

Level of education

It emerged that all 6 (30%) street children had not gone to school, 2 (10%) other respondents were of

the primary level with 7 (35%) attaining Secondary and 5(25%) tertiary level. This finding concur with Grundling [8] that most of the street children are

actually on the street rather than off the street and hence do not go to school. Poverty is an underlying factor as it causes many school dropouts due to lack of school fees. However, it can be argued that with the introduction of free primary education in Kenya, lack of school fees should not be a causal factor but the government does not provide the necessities like uniforms, lunch to students and even in some schools books are not catered for. This factor compounds the problem and hence the drop out rates tends to escalate. These findings were contrary to the findings by Akuffo [7] who observed that 94.3% of working street children interviewed was attending school, with 71.4% of them attending primary school and 22.9% attending secondary school. The reasons for this contradiction was revealed by key informants who said they had observed an increase of children moving on to the streets due to increased poverty caused by economic hardships, HIV and AIDS and inadequate coverage of educational programmes by NGOs. In developing countries, poverty is a major barrier where limited resources affected the provision of education to children [4].

Problems caused by street children

Majority of the respondents who were supermarket workers and shopper indeed agreed that street children were a problem to them and other business premises. These were 10 out 12 shoppers and supermarkets workers while the rest two did not agree. However, according to street children, majority of them did not look at themselves as a problem to business premises like supermarkets and to shoppers since they are in process of looking for a way of earning a living of which they themselves perceives to be doing in right way. This asserted that street children are found in a variety of moneymaking activities such as guarding parked cars, carrying luggage for people and vending. These children's expressions have confirmed social capital theory which was propounded by Coleman that in the absence of social capital in the family, provision of basic needs becomes a problem leading children to leave their homes to seek alternative avenues of comfort. In this case, children were involved in activities that are exploitative. Vending was common among street children. This was also observed by Akuffo [7] who argued that some members of the public used street children to vend for their business: "Occasionally, I observed this girl selling boiled eggs, popcorn and cigarettes to other street children and passers-bys" and one of the girls was vending her mother's stuff to sustain the family [7].

Location of street children

Most of the supermarkets workers and shoppers interviewed said that the reason why street children were located near supermarkets were to beg from shoppers. They further said that street children earn some income by engaging themselves in small labor activities such as carrying luggage and vending

while others steal by pick pocketing or forcefully grabbing goods from shoppers. Street children rely on the public for their day-to-day existence. In Kenya, children begging, stealing, directing motorists for parking spaces and even carrying luggage characterize the street children phenomenon. These findings are consistent with Brink [4] who observed that, older street children own 'areas for packing where they employ smaller boys to operate. According to the boys they interviewed, there was no fixed amount for parking a car. Car owners give anything they feel to the car minders and sometimes they offer nothing. Parking bay owners' pay the boys in kind or in cash on weekly basis. However, based on answers from street children, some of them responded that they usually hang around supermarkets and other business premises because most of them are involved in collection of recyclable material such plastic water bottle, which they later sell to recycling industries thus getting some money. Some of them who dress themselves at least a little better also help to carry goods luggage of the shopper or hawk small commodities such sweets thus earning themselves some few coins for survival. Furthermore, some even said they feel happy and enjoy seeing tourist and high class customers shopping in supermarkets and other business premises which have better environments compared to where they resides such as slums and dumpsites.

Effects of street children on shoppers

According to the response from the shoppers, they felt so scared by the presence of street children around supermarket and thus avoid shopping in such supermarkets and instead prefer to shop in other supermarkets at the outskirts of the towns or buy things which are less valuable which may not be costly incase they are grabbed by these street children. Brink [4] also found similar findings pointing that car theft is common in Harare due to the presence of street children. Supermarkets workers interviewed said that their business has been negatively affected because they lose many customers and hence are forced to reduce the prices of goods to attract customers, which leads to reduction in profits. This was exacerbated by the fact that they had to employ more security guards to be outside supermarkets to ensure the safety of their customers.

It was clear from the literature that street children engage in begging, stealing, directing motorist for parking spaces and even carrying luggage [7]. In other cases, street children bring about insecurity in business premises whereby the shoppers feel insecure to shop in such areas, thus shift to other areas. On the other hand, based on their response, the street children viewed themselves as having positive effects since being located near supermarkets and other business premises in towns attract sympathizers of high profile people and white tourist willing to assist them through

buying food for them from supermarkets and other business premises or even giving them some cash. They further said that they help supermarkets and other business premises by reducing cost incurred in waste management by collecting some of recyclable waste such as plastic bottle, which would have been done by contracting out these services to responsible companies.

Improving situation of street children

When street children were asked what they expected for their future that will improve their situation 5 (25%) indicated that they did not like street life but they have no alternative. The rest of the respondent 1 (5%) said street life was a temporal life and they were looking forward to prosperous future. They believed that something could be done to help them out. Some of them expressed the need to go to school while others preferred capital to start small businesses. A few said that they needed a permanent job but did not have identity cards. According to Onyango [9] all key informants from NGOs pointed out that, street children were failing to process their identity cards because they did not want to give their fingerprints to the police. Some street children have skills but life on the street seems to discourage them from using the skills.

Based on shoppers from supermarkets, majority of them suggested that street children especially the young ones should be taken to children's home for proper care and provision of education. While the mature street children should be provided with job opportunities by the business premises in collaboration with responsible authorities. They further said that parents especially women who tend to throw away babies should be criminally held responsible for the action as this increases the number of street children. In addition, parents should be responsible for providing basic needs especially those who are capable.

CONCLUSION

Street children involved in this study were working for their own survival and some were working to support their families. Economic hardship was the main cause for children to live and or work on the street. Children living and working on the street were facing a number of challenges, which turned them to crime. Street children revealed that they agreed to be involved in crimes because they were offered good money and they really needed the money. The study found out that street children were located near supermarkets and other business premise, mostly, because of the jobs they got involved in of which they are economically exploited in many ways. Types of economic exploitation were in three categories: economic activities, sexual activities and criminal activities. People from the business community used these children as cheap labor; they worked on the street and outside the street in farms and in households.

Adults from the community took advantage of children's needs and sexually exploited them. Adults also involved these children in criminal activities such as stealing, conning, prostitution, trafficking and abuse of drugs.

Despite challenges street children encounter, they continue to patronize the street as their only place for survival. The problem of economic exploitation on street children has brought up on them psychological effects after being traumatized through physical and mental abuses by adults who engaged them in economic activities. Underpayment was one of the common problems street children faced as mentioned by many respondents though not included in questionnaires and research interview. People from the public took advantage of street children as source of free and cheap labor. Due to the hardship they face, some of the children have dropped out of school as they failed to pay school fees and opted to work full time on the street.

The study found that the unemployment of many parents, peer pressure, unwillingness to submit to parental control, parental neglect leading to children running away are some of the many factors leading to children being in the streets. The government should intervene to save the street children from the miserable lives of living in town streets. Most of the children have talents and ability to learn if given chance. The researcher faced some resistance from the street children while gathering information from them but in the end, she managed to collect concrete information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing Government efforts towards the alleviation of problem faced by street children

The Government of Kenya has enacted laws and put in place polices for the protection of child rights. Street children being children also fall within these laws such as Children's Act 2002, prohibit child participation in economic activities, prostitution and other hazardous employment activities. This study therefore recommend that the Government enhances its efforts to protect the right of the street children by supporting children homes, NGOs and other government departments like the Social services which assists children working and living on the street. Government should encourage public awareness campaigns for curbing street children economic exploitation. Government efforts should be made to prosecute perpetrators of economic exploitation of street children, who employ children and engage them in child sexual exploitation to gain income also strengthen the Police force patrol on the streets during the night to curb sexual abuse and sodomy. Government should facilitate economic empowerment to the rural populace, which will assist in curbing the

flow of street children into the cities to look for a better life.

Enhancing NGOs efforts towards the protection of street children

NGOs dealing with street children in Kenyan towns were constrained with financial and human resources to address the problem of street children effectively. This study therefore recommends that, members of the communities particularly business premises such as supermarkets where majority of these street children are located, Government and donor agencies support NGOs by providing funds, materials and capacity building. It is also recommended that NGOs enhance their strategies to get financial and human resources. NGOs training programmes afforded to street children need to be reviewed to address the changing needs of the street children. In addition, such trainings should include an element of apprenticeship where trainees will be provided with working tools on loan or on hire basis to enable them engage in economic activities after completion their course. In addition, NGOs should review of their project cycle process that is, the relationship between the needs of the children and implementation of projects. Bottom-up approach to programming should be encouraged. This approach should take into account the children's vision, decision-making and priorities.

Building Community Responsibility on Alleviation of Street Children

The Government and NGOs should plan and implement public awareness campaigns on the importance of the public's contribution to assist in alleviating economic and sexual exploitation of street children. The public campaigns may include, voluntary service programmes of volunteers from colleges, schools, private and public companies to train street children life skills and vocation skills, and other academic fields to deter them from vices such stealing from shoppers and supermarkets for survival. The corporate sectors should also be urged to contribute to the alleviation of the street children economic exploitation. This is possible through the promotion of corporate social responsibilities. In the case of economic exploitation, public education is necessary because exploiters are members from the public. The business community should discourage employment of children as vendors or other jobs offered to children guard at parking area of business premises. In addition, the community should employ communal monitoring mechanism on the abuse of vulnerable children from families of orphans or abusive parents or guardians. In turn, this will discourage influx of children from homes to the streets seeking employment or better life. Ultimately, the community itself will reduce exploitation of the street children since this problem originates from the community.

Programmes for Educating Street Children on Economic Exploitation

Street children have rights to be protected like any other child. Since they stay alone on the street with no proper guidance from the adults, they need to be educated about their rights. Relevant government departments and NGOs should invest on street children's education on Health care, child labor, sexual reproductive health and HIV and AIDS matters. Street children should be informed about the importance of attending trainings that are offered by the government and other stakeholders in child protection.

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