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INVISIBLE CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY OF STREET CHILDREN EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The chaotic issue of street children is rampant across the globe especially in developing nations like Pakistan. The presence of around 150 million street children worldwide highlights the gravity of the situation, out of which 1.2 million are living in Pakistan. The extreme poverty, unequal distribution of wealth, high inflation and large families push children to the street. The need for survival compels these children to engage in hazardous labor, begging, trash collection, prostitution, and drug addiction. They receive no protection from state and faces dangerous risks on streets. However, the state is under the obligation to provide protection as well as free and quality education to all. At present, there is no as such particular policy develops regarding the education of these children. Hence, they remain deprived of their fundamental right to education. So, the study focuses on the current status regarding the education of street children; educational interventions carried out by the government of Pakistan and NGOs; and challenges experienced by NGOs regarding such interventions in the country. This research is based on case study methodology and a qualitative in its nature. The study concludes that deficient in implementing and translating existing policies into practice, inadequate laws, funds, and public institutions response combined with public detest makes these children deliberately invisible to state. In addition to that, the government is also hampering the work of NGOs providing free education to street children. The study recommends that the Pakistani government should develop tangible policy, laws, and funds for the education of these children. In addition, the government should facilitate NGOs working to fulfill the educational needs of street children. With the help of education, street children will be able to understand risks, challenges and prepare themselves to counter while living and working on the streets.

Keywords: Street Children, Pakistan, Education, Interventions, NGO

1. INTRODUCTION

Street Children is a global social phenomenon and a challenge to the future of the world. United Nations (UN) estimates that 100 to 150 million children are living and working on streets globally (SPARC 2012). Street children issue was initially noticed in the Latin American countries especially in Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia due to an alarming upsurge in the population of street children.

Every child has their own reasons, issues and rationalities to be as a street child. Some of them run away from their homes in excitement to enjoy and earn their freedom, and exhilaration from their families. But the major causes pushing children to the street are; severe poverty, political unrest, the turbulent socioeconomic situation of the families or countries, violence and abuse by families.

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Pakistan is the sixth most populated country in the world. It is facing serious challenges the shape of abject poverty, prevalent terrorism, and weak rule of law, bad governance, political unrest, human rights abuse, and child rights violation. The country is leading its war on terror; therefore the security concerns coupled with poor law and order situation that pushed away foreign investment from Pakistan (Dawn 2014). Consequently, the country is deeply mired in severe poverty where 30% of the population is living below the poverty line (Dawn 2016). Thus, these issues make the majority of street children population invisible to the state. Therefore, they are deprived of their basic needs and rights.

According to the estimation of a national Non-Government Organization (NGO) named Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) around 1.2 million street children are present in Pakistan (SPARC 2012). Most of these children are living in noisy, dirty, and unsafe streets of slum areas situated in the metropolitan cities of Pakistan. Most of these children are migrants from rural areas. The street children issue is a highly complex social phenomenon and these children are mostly invisible from all major institutional and state policies. These children do not have strong forums to claim their rights and have no awareness about their fundamental rights.

2. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Pakistani streets, parks, underpasses, bridges and slum areas are enormously visible with a population of street children. The Pakistani public and society considered these children as wasted and spoiled children of society and these children remain invisible from state policies.

Majority of street children population of Pakistan are living in urban areas of Pakistan. These Street children are a significant vulnerable group as per their age, lack of understanding, and have an unequal power relation with other social actors of society. These children have lack of protection, awareness and face high risks of abuse during every day on street. These children have also subjected to forced labor, slavery, and trafficking, bonded labor, and child soldiers (Refworld 1995).

Pakistan as a developing country has rapid industrialization, extreme poverty, high growth population and widespread socioeconomic inequalities that pushes the majority of children towards streets. Besides, Pakistan has no proper strategy on how to bring these children into the mainstream. It is important that Pakistan should not only focuses on developing new education policy, laws but all these existing policies and laws should be enforced into practice. The government should ensure the availability of funds to provide the education department so, the work beyond the development of policy towards implementation and provide quality of formal or informal education to street children.

Further, this issue requires also an innovative and appropriate solution in form of formal and informal education. It is well-established fact that education is an efficacious vehicle of knowledge and life transformation skills. Therefore, education can transform street children perspectives, and attitudes about their lives, and help them to undertake fair-minded decisions about their future. Therefore, concerted efforts are required from the government of Pakistan (GOP) that all street children should have the right to formal or informal education to enhance their understanding, development, realize their potential, knowledge, and information about many social issues.

At present NGOs are intervening active role in various socioeconomic and development issues. Similarly, NGOs in Pakistan are also contributing their active role in the provision of education to street children of Pakistan. Therefore, it is important that the GOP should collaborate and coordinate to particularly those NGO who are already involved in the provision of formal education to these children. Thus, through these practical interventions and action, GOP can provide the right to education and bring these children into the mainstream of society.



3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Below are the research objectives of this study as below

1. To analysis the National Education Policy of 2017 about the inclusiveness of street children in education Pakistan.
2. To assess the Quality of Non-Formal Education for Street Children in NGOs Drop-in Center of Karachi-Pakistan
3. To identify the Challenges experienced by NGOs while intervening for the Drop-in Centers of street children.

- Literature Review

- a. **Characteristics and definition of the Street Children**

The street children issue is a very complex social phenomenon. It rapidly increasing and it is connected with unplanned urbanization, rapid industrialization, socioeconomic inequalities and poverty in developing countries. Majority common public is unaware about the root causes of such issue and considered these children as young spoiled, vermin and underprivileged children who live in filthy places; collect trash, begging for their livelihood and working on the street.

These street children are given different names globally as per their characteristics, work and physical appearance. In Brazil, most of the street children are belong to the Afro-Brazilian and common public called them as “Beicola” (Big lips), “Barriga” (Belly) or “Verruga” (wart) and “Pivets” (Filho and Neder 2001). Besides in Colombia, the street children are known as “Gamines” (street urchin) and while in Peru street children known as “Pajaro-frutero” it means fruit bird (Behura and Mohanty 2005 p.3).

In China, the street children known as black babies as most of these children are born out of birth policy commonly known as one child policy China (Aptekar and Stoeck 2014). In Bangladesh street children known as “Path Shishu” (Street Child) or generally, people called them “Tokai” (gathering) (UNICEF 2012 p.5). In India, these children have no particular term but commonly known as rag pickers and in Philippine called them “Pogey boys” (Behura and Mohanty 2005 p.3). In Pakistan, these children do not have any specific local name but these children are known through their occupation. Generally, public called these children as ragpicker locally known as “Kachra Wala” (rubbish picker).

- b. **United Nation Definition of Street Children**

UNICEF defined that street children as that “Any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, and so on, has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, directed, and supervised by responsible adults” (UNICEF 2012). UNICEF also distinguishes between types of street children as below.

- I. **Children on the street**

Children who live with their families on the streets, work on streets but return to their families called children on the street. In this group, few children also attend school, work and return to their families and remained in contact with their families (Behura and Mohanty 2005 p.5).

- II. **Children of the street**

These Children are mostly known as homeless children. They use to sleep, eat, work and face all risks on the streets, footpaths and public parks. These children have no contact or very rare contact with their families (Behura and Mohanty 2005 p.5).



c. Right to Education and Street Children

Street Children life on the street has a frightful and painful experience. Most of these children face terrible experience while living on the streets. These children daily struggle for their livelihood, sleep on filthy places, involve in petty crimes, use drugs, sell sex, face exploitation and get killed by police or gangs due to street crimes (UNESCO 2004 p.19). Street Children faces their rights violation given under Convention of the Rights of Child (CRC) article from 01 to article 40 and customary child laws but no one realizes it (CRC 1990).

UNESCO stated that education is a practical tool to change perspectives of the lives, it enhances peace formation, eliminate poverty and form sustainable development in the world (UNESCO 2017). Education is a powerful life skill for deprived, marginalized children. Through this, these children can enhance their potential and battle against the poverty, abuse, violence and can equally participate in their development of communities (Haydar 2017 p. 11). It also helps to transform attitudes, behavior, values, and skills for effective development and participation in decision-making issues (Shephard 2015). Haydar stated that education is greatly valued assist and opened better opportunities, ideas and change perception of individuals about their lives (Haydar 2017 p.20).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) article 26/1 stated that everyone has the right to education and this shall be free as a minimum for primary and fundamental stages. Besides, UDHR article 26/2 also emphasized that purpose of education shall to develop the personality, attitudes, values, and morals (UDHR 1948). Moreover, the CRC article 29 stated that states parties should provide quality of education for development personality, talents, mental and physical to capabilities with the full potential of the child (CRC 1990). In Pakistani Constitution article 25A, designate that "State should provide the free and compulsory education to all children of the age five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law" (Constitution 1971).

4. METHODOLOGY

Overall this research qualitative in nature and use the Case study format. A case study is the qualitative format of research and is based on the bounded system, which mainly focused on one case or an issue and it main illustrated by the case. A case study is provided a full in-depth study of this system, based on a different and diverse data collection material (Creswell 2007 p. 244). This cases study methodology more focused to use a holistic approach and further it will use data collection spiral (Creswell 2007 p. 245). Moreover, data also collected through In-depth interviews from related actors

5. EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS FOR STREET CHILDREN OF PAKISTAN

In-universe every child have the right to education including the street children of Pakistan. Street children some characteristics closely resemble with illegal activities but yet these children have the right to education. Pakistan formed it first National Education Policy (NEP) from 1998 to 2010 and it remained limited and failed to achieve inclusiveness of disadvantaged group of these children in the formal or non-formal education system. This study found that GOP has is no proper policy and educational interventions for these disadvantaged children in Pakistan.

a. Overview of NGOs Educational Interventions for Street Children in Pakistan

Over the years NGOs are playing vibrant social change, poverty elimination, protection human rights and including in the provision of the formal and informal education in various countries including in Pakistan. To increase enrolment in primary schools, the GOP is providing sufficient funding to local NGOs and the results are highly optimistic. Moreover, it is highly reluctant to



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support those local NGOs, who are providing informal education to street children in Karachi. But, yet the role of local NGOs in the provision of education cannot be overlooked. Presently, there are few numbers of NGOs in Pakistan are providing free primary informal education to these children. This study selected two NGO schools for this research in Karachi.

A. Footpath School supported by Ocean Welfare Organization, Karachi Pakistan.

B. Street Children School operated by Hassan and Shireen, Karachi Pakistan.

The Footpath School was established under an overpass in Karachi Pakistan. This school has 130 enrolled street children from age 07 years to 14 years old. Another school is operated by Hassan and Shireen (NGO name) and it has 70 street children.

Both NGOs Drop-in centers are providing free education in collaboration with the philanthropist and self-help basis. The NGOs schools are providing free basic literacy and skills training to street children. The curriculum of these schools consists of awareness materials about various social issues in relation to these children like how to prevent HIV AIDS. These Drop-in centers are providing 20 to 30 Pakistani Rupees (16-19 cents American) per day and free lunch to all enrolled street children.

b. Challenges Faced by NGOs in Provision of Education to Street Children in Pakistan

The study finds that both NGOs schools have various core challenges in term of lack of funds, insufficiently trained staff, lack of theoretical knowledge about informal education to street children, and have no proper buildings and toilets facilities. In addition, NGOs school also facing problems in motivating parents and few children for getting an education; as most of these children are street working children and they are earning an additional income for their families.

c. Overview of Relationship of Government of Pakistan and NGOs

Moreover, the education department of the government of Pakistan also threatens to overtake these NGOs schools. NGOs schools officials shared that most of the government officials understand these schools on footpath and dirty places are disgracing state and nation image nationally and internationally. So, the government will provide them with proper buildings and teachers. But NGOs staff were frightened that after overtaken these schools, the government will shut down these schools and children may again be pushed on streets and their objectives and efforts will be wasted.

6. CONCLUSION

In Conclusion, this study discovered that GOP has no interventions and specific policy for these street children education in Pakistan. The GOP and NEP are utterly failing to provide formal or informal right to education to street children in Karachi Pakistan. This abysmal situation is violating the right to education of 1.2 million street children of Pakistan and driving them towards several serious risks, for instance, drug addiction, petty crimes, begging, prostitution and HIV AIDs.

However, in this mild situation, the local NGOs interventions are noticeable in the provision of informal education to the street children in Karachi. These school attendance records and observation reveal that the school's enrolments of children are persistent and have lack dropout. Moreover, this study also reveals that NGOs schools have extreme challenges in terms of funding, lacking proper school building and professional teachers, inadequate theoretical knowledge about informal education to street children.



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