Family based Factors Leading to Street Children Phenomenon in Kenya

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Family based Factors Leading to Street Children Phenomenon in Kenya

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Abstract: *In the last four decades, Kenyans have witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of street children in the country's urban centers. This has led to development of several interventional measures to curb the menace, although with little success. Academic evidence from various studies done on street children in Kenya has consistently implied a dialectic connection between the family system and street children phenomenon in Kenya. This paper is a culmination of various studies carried out by the authors and other researchers and seeks to specifically interrogate factors in the family system in Kenya, which contributes to children leaving homes to live on the streets. The paper is a critique to the existing strategies that emphasize dealing with street children through repatriation, rehabilitation, placement in charitable children institutions, foster care and juvenile confinement. The authors argue that not much has been done at the policy level on how to improve the deteriorating family conditions in the society, yet it is the main push factor for influx of street children. According to this paper, stability in family system is significant in enhancing socio-economic sustainability and reducing social deficiencies in interventional programmes dealing with street children in Kenya. The paper recommends a national moral and value system that considers the significance and stability of the basic institutions of the society.*

Keywords: Family-based factors, Street children, Kenya.

1. Introduction

The 21st century presents a hostile face to many millions of children in many African countries. There is an increase in number of children being forced to the streets as a result of poverty, rape, abandonment, homelessness, landlessness or orphaned by AIDS. Human rights violations against children between 1990s to date have become common and disturbing occurrence in many African countries. Indeed, denial of basic human and legal rights including right to life, liberty and security as a person to children are now a defining feature of the African socio-economic landscape.

Street children in Kenyan urban centers are one of the greatest challenges to urbanization process. This is not a phenomenon peculiar to Kenya and other developing countries. According to Waghid (2004), street children phenomenon is an alarming and escalating worldwide problem, representing one of the most pressing issues in child welfare;

"…no other global child welfare problem is as the loss of human potential experienced by millions of children who are being reared outside of the institutions of family and education in the often perilous street environment"(pg. 68).

Street children are present in developed nations like the 'rent-boys' of London's railway termini and the homeless children of America's large cities (Shorter and Onyancha, 1999). In Calcutta, India, there are close to 300,000 street children, while in Sao Paulo, Brazil, there are about half a million street children, and it is estimated that four-fifth of the Sao Paulo's prison population are former street children (Shorter and Onyancha, 1999: 5). Estimates of street children in Colombian streets were 300,000 in 1985 (UNICEF, 1985) then 25,000 in 1987 (Goode, 1987). The differences in figures reflect the change brought about by the exclusion of working children. In 1995, there were about 3,000 street children in Guatemala, most of who were orphaned by civil war, abused and rejected by dysfunctional and poverty stricken families and further traumatized by the indifference of the societies in which they live (Alianza, 1995:1).

Due to the fact that there are no accurate statistics on the actual number of street children in Kenya, there have been varying estimates on the actual number of street children in the country. In 1975, there were 115 street children in Kenya. This number increased to 17,000 in 1990, and subsequently to over 150,000 in 1997. In Nairobi alone, the number increased from 3,600 in 1989 to 40,000 in 1995 and to 60,000 in 1997. By 1999, the number in Mombasa had reached 5,000; in Kisumu, 4,000; in Malindi and Kilifi 2,500 each; and in Kitale and Nakuru, 2,000 each (Shorter and Onyancha, 1999). Recent studies (Sorre, 2009) estimate that there are over 600,000 street children in Kenya today. This figure is likely to have increased sharply in 2007/2008 as a consequence of the post election violence that left thousands of Kenyans in the greater Rift Valley Province, Western Kenya, Nairobi and other hotspot areas homeless; high economic inflation; and widespread human rights abuses both in rural and urban areas. From the above statistics, one gathers that street children are found in all major towns in Kenya.

We contend that not enough is being done to address the problem and that indeed street children remain an ignored tragedy that is set to have devastating impact on the development of Kenya. This notwithstanding, the family,

which is supposed to provide the bedrock foundation for children's welfare and protection is today becoming a major cause of the problem of street children. Eitzen et al (2009:449) notes that in the last few decades many have come to the conclusion that the family is in serious trouble, that we have lost out family values, and that the breakdown of the family is at the root of other social problems. Consequently, children are leaving their homes to escape to the streets for safety, protection, help, livelihood and overall survival. It is within this backdrop that we seek to explore the family system as the underlying cause of influx of street children in the Kenyan urban centers.

2. Family-Based Factors Leading To Influx of Street Children Phenomenon in Kenya

Substance Use and Abuse by Parents/Guardians

Substance abuse can simply be defined as a pattern of harmful use of any substance for mood-altering purposes. Medline's medical encyclopedia defines drug abuse as "the use of illicit drugs or the abuse of prescription or over-the-counter drugs for purposes other than those for which they are indicated or in a manner or in quantities other than directed"(Medline, 1998). A drug is any chemical substance which when taken into the body can affect one or more of the body's functions. For instance, when one feels pain and is given aspirin, the pain reduces or disappears. The aspirin modifies how the body works so that pain is tolerated or not felt at all. Similarly, when one smokes bhang, he experiences changes in the mind for example he may see or hear things that are not there. The term drug therefore, includes those substances useful to the body and also those substances that harm the body. They may be legal or they may be illegal. The abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances that harm or threaten the physical, mental or social and economic well being of the user, his or her family and society at large is a global phenomenon.

In Kenya, drug and substance abuse is a major social problem and a silent disaster that claims many lives every year. There is a strong linkage between drugs/substance abuse and violence, criminality and currently, the HIV/AIDS scourge (NACADA, 2010). Practical observation and research have shown that the problem affect all segments of the Kenyan population. For instance, in a study on the impact of drugs, alcohol and other substances abuse on food security and nutrition in the agricultural sector in Kenya, NALEP (2011:1), as cited in NACADA (2011:19), found that:

…youth between ages 15 and 24 years are the highest drug, alcohol and substance users in urban areas while in rural settings, those between 25 and 64 years are the major users. In the Agricultural sector, alcohol (41%) is the most consumed drug followed by cigarettes (28.7%), local brews (17.9%) and bhang (6.5%) in both rural and urban areas. In addition, 59.8% of the respondents are still consuming drugs and other substances. Alcohol prevalence among students is highest in Western 43.3%, followed by Nairobi 40.9%, Nyanza 26.8%, Central 26.3%, Rift Valley 21.9%, Coast 21.3%, Eastern 17.2%

and North Eastern 1.6%. Among non-students, consumption is highest in Western at 90.1%, followed by Nairobi at 89.9%, then Rift Valley 86.1%, Central 84.1%, Nyanza 81.5%, Eastern 73.4%, Coast 73.1% and North Eastern at 15.6%. Among livestock keepers, 97.7% reported having ever used some drug and/or substance some time in their lives. Among those who had ever used some drug and/or substance some time in their lives, 65.5% are still using. In the fishery sub-sector 61.8% of the respondents engage in drug and substance use.

The above findings illustrate substance use and abuse as a practical social problem in Kenya found in all regions, settings and demographic segments of the country's population.

Psycho-social studies indicate that up to 25% of children with an alcoholic parent will develop alcohol abuse or dependence (Basangwa et al., 2006). The prevalence of alcoholism among individuals with alcoholic parents or siblings is two and half times that of the general population. The major familial risk factors for alcoholism include growing up with parents who are dependent on alcohol, use alcohol to cope with stress, and have coexisting psychological disorder(s). Others are family violence and having several close blood relatives who are alcohol dependent. This is evident by studies on street children (Sorre, 2009; Undugu Society, 2011), which indicate that a significant number of the street children were attracted to the streets because of neglect or maltreatment by their parents who were addicted to drugs and/or alcohol consumption. For instance, a report by Undugu Society (2011) shows that children move to the streets in response to a variety of social problems, which render the home or family environment hostile and non-conducive to the needs of the children. The reasons may be drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, little or no motivation to go to school, compounded by poverty at home among others. The report found that most of the street children were from parents that were alcoholic and had neglected their children. The street was thus, a source of alternative livelihood for such children.

Children with parents/guardians that use and abuse substances carry such behavior with them to the streets. For instance, Sorre (2009) for instance, shows street children justifying the use of drugs as an adaptive mechanism to psycho-social stress associated with street life. Similarly, Undugu Society (2011) asserts that addiction to glue sniffing may be one of the main reasons for the failure of effective and sustainable rehabilitation of street children in Kenya's urban areas. The latter study found that a significant number of the children that abuse drugs on the streets came from drug abusing family background. These findings imply that lack of positive role models in the society may influence the adoption of such behaviors like drug abuse and further complicate eradication of street children in the society.

Further, NACADA (2011) presents drug abuse among street children as an extension of what is experienced in the larger society. For example, while studying alcoholism in Central Kenya, NACADA observed that:

A significant proportion of the respondents rated the consumption of alcohol among people aged less than 18 years as "high". Further, results point at the concentration of the drinking among the youth, gender notwithstanding. "Very high" usage was reported for ages 25 – 34 years (males, 79%; and females, 15%); and 19 – 24 years (males, 77%; and females, 14%). Alcohol consumption among males aged 35 – 54 years was rated as "very high". However, alcohol usage declined with reference to ages 55 years or above (NACADA, 2011: 21).

In overall, it is evident from the above studies that parents who abuse substance provide a fertile ground for potential street children in their families. There is thus, evidence that substance abuse leads to child abuse and neglect that lead to influx of children into the streets. These notwithstanding, children from such background, while on the street continue with use and abuse of substances that further complicate their rehabilitation process.

3. Landless/squatters and Homeless families with children

Homelessness is a devastating experience for families. It disrupts virtually every aspect of family life, damaging the physical and emotional health of family members, interfering with children's education and development, and frequently resulting in the separation of family members. The problem of homelessness is not solely restricted to urban areas; but rather both rural and suburban communities are increasingly plagued by the problem. One of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population is families with children.

In Kenya, the problem of displacement is closely linked to land tenure issues and forced displacements that occurred in the country's colonial past. When, in the early 20th century, the British colonialists chose to settle in the most fertile land of the Rift Valley, they evicted the indigenous nomadic pastoralists and recruited agricultural laborers from neighboring provinces to work on their farms. After independence, a majority of the 'white highlands' owners chose to go back to Europe, leaving their farms to the government who in turn sold them through the famous one million acre settlement scheme. The land was mainly bought by the non-indigenous laborers and this in effect locked out the original owners who had been evicted by the colonialists (Malombe, 1997).

Studies have shown that the issue of land in Kenya is central in its history of conflict and is an example of structural violence. This is in part because of long and complex histories of land dealings among tribes. Often the members of the tribe in power were unethically given or allowed to use land, frequently at the expense of other tribes. This is also in part due to the complex legal structure surrounding land (Mara, 2009).

Studies by Sorre (2009) in Kisumu Municipality; Ayuku (2005) in Eldoret town; and (Gichanga, 2006) in Nakuru Municipality; found that the influx of street children in the said towns was closely attributed to incidences of "ethinic" clashes that occurred in these towns and their environs during election years: 1992, 1997, 2003 and 2007. For instance, while studying patterns of migration among street children in Kisumu Municipality, Sorre (2009) found that over 61% of the 324 street children interviewed had come to the streets of Kisumu Municipality from other neighboring towns. These towns included Nakuru, Obunga, Busia, Kakamega, Kuresoi and Molo, all of which were politically hotspots during post-election violence. The study further observed that most of these children from other towns said that they were living in camps for internally displaced persons.

According to a Human Rights Watch Report (1997) and the Catholic Church (2008), after the introduction of multiparty politics in 1991 and the subsequent calls to non-indigenous agriculturalists to leave the Rift Valley and return to their homeland, there was violent conflicts dubbed 'land' and 'ethnic' clashes, massive destruction of property, immense fear and insecurity in that region and rapid displacement of persons. In particular, Human Rights Watch approximated that by 1993, over 300,000 persons had fled their homes. The election year of 1997 was another major period of violent displacement in Kenya with similar calls being made to the non-indigenous people to leave for their homelands. An outbreak of violence in Coast Province caused the displacement of over 120,000 persons and left numerous others dead. In their report, the Catholic Church observed that Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisii, Turbo, Kericho and Bungoma were some of the other towns that experienced massive displacement of population out of the 2007/08 post election violence. Other statistics by Mara (2009) showed that during the 2007 post-election violence, the historic land issues between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities continued to be a major cause of conflict and landlessness and over 600,000 people were evacuated from their homes and many lost their lives.

It is clear that the problem of homelessness is accelerating as the society undergo social, political, environmental and economic transformations that leave most of the citizens either forcefully displaced or unable to cope with the rapid changes. Consequently, a large number of displaced persons through political violence, social and ethnic clashes, and displacement by evacuation to create space for investment, security, conservation of forests resources and other reasons, are not uncommon scenes in Kenya. The affected families get disoriented, some are separated, many are deprived, and consequently, children become vulnerable and join street life.

4. Changing Family Structure and the African Traditions in the Kenyan Communities

In their study on street children in Kenya, Philistia, et al (1991), observed that the underlying denominator for the influx of street children has been the interference with the family structure through industrialization and modernization that have adversely weakened the family institution and focused more on individual parenting. It is noted that the family structure in pre-colonial Africa existed as a solid unit of the social structure. It was not only responsible for procreation, but was the pinnacle for

the perpetuation, economic development and survival of the culture (Erlbaum, 2005; Boakye-Boaten, 2006). The family as a self enabling institution has been the most instrumental institution of socialization. As part of the process of rapid demographic and socio-economic change mainly due to urbanization and modernization, patterns of family formation and family life are continuing to undergo considerable change, altering the composition and structure of families in our societies.

The traditional family structure under pressure from rapid social change is undergoing erosion, and is generally splitting up to such an extent that it is failing to fulfill its primary role of socialization. More prominent in urban areas is the dominance of the nuclear family system that seems to lack the sense of cohesion for the wider society. It is a matter of the individuals' life: one's house, possessions, and not the traditional usage of our farm, our home, sharing all happiness, woes, successes of the extended family loyalty and the collective obligation. Here, the emphasis is on private property ownership and the rights of the individual.

Luo and Luhya cultures hold that the father takes the children compared to what happens in other communities like the Gikuyu where the children go with their mother. In circumstances of single parenthood and/or children born out of wedlock and they also happen to be boys, when the mother gets a potential man to get married to, the boy child compared to the girl is not easily accepted by the new husband. This is because taking such a child means taking long-term responsibility of not just caring, but also providing land for him. Therefore, being Further, in explaining how he came to join street life in Kisumu municipality, one of the boys interviewed in the same study said that, "mama yangu alipata mwanamme mwingine na huyo mwanamme akanifukuza lakini alibaki na dada yangu", (Street Child 11, Vihiga) meaning that "my mother got another man [husband/step-father] and the man chased me away and remained with my sister." Similarly, another boy narrated, "baba wa kambo alifukuza mimi na ndugu yangu kutoka nyumbani Bondo, akisema kwamba hana shamba ya kutupatia. Ndio mimi na Deno [his brother] tukaanza kusaka kwa streets Bondo" (Street Child, 14, Bondo). This translates to mean "my step-father chased me and my brother Deno arguing that he had no land to give us. That is how we joined streets in Bondo town."

The above findings contrast ideas by Nukunya (1969) who posits that the family structure was primarily responsible for the protection of its members. Within the political set up of the wider community, the various families were represented by the family head. Nukunya (1969) further claims that the cohesiveness of the family structure was the authoritative and leadership role played by the family head. The family structure was organized along lineage lines, with the boundaries transcending beyond one's allegiance to his or her biological parents. This is partly why he argued that "…the economic life of an individual was enclosed within the framework of the lineage system."

The processes of modernization, westernization and urbanization have severely affected the traditional social bonds, social networks and collective conscience. Therefore, families are "left" to vent for themselves and where survival is not forthcoming, the parents and children opt for alternative means, which contravene the societal and cultural expectations. For instance, begging in the streets, stealing, gambling and prostitution, among others. This is common in urban settings especially among the low income households characterized by chronic indicators of poverty and deprivation. It is also common in rural settings especially in households that are either polygamous or with a single parent, but with strong cultural beliefs about gender of the children.

In his study on migration patterns among street children in Kisumu Municipality, Sorre (2009) observed that there were more male than female street children on the streets of Kisumu Municipality. This was partly explained by cultural beliefs and breakdown of the extended family system. For example, one of the key informants in that study observed that:

patriarchal societies with boys as the heirs, men in these communities will not want to marry a woman with a boy child [ren]. However, they are quick to take girls because they will not demand land to inherit and secondly, the father will claim bride wealth. Therefore, under the condition of a child out of wedlock, there is a strong cultural view of girls as investments while boys are seen as a cost in these communities.
(45 year Old, NGO, employee August 10, 2007, Source: Sorre, 2009: 40)

According to Ayieko (2003), since the pre-colonial time, most Kenyans live within communities of extended families and kin in rural areas. The villagers are endowed with basic resources, production information, customs and traditions essential for sustaining life and raising families in a rural community. However, the structure of the African family system has undergone transition that has affected how the kin and family institution operate.

Among other factors poverty has been suggested to be the biggest motivating factor for street children in most developing nations and particularly Kenya. A study by McLanahan (1994) indicates that family structure may be more important than poverty in determining the behavioral and psychological problems of the child. Kilbride and Kilbride (1990) argue that family support system invariably formed a barrier against child abuse and neglect. The support system inherent in the African traditional family system apparently reduced the rate of child destitution.

According to Sorre (2009), children were considered a treasure in the Africa societies. Children were the first indication that one was wealthy and socially rewarding. Children were considered prestigious to the family as they symbolized blessing from God. Children were also a source of cohesion and stability in the family. For instance, for the sake of the children, many families were brought together and parents considered divorce undesirable and a disservice to the growth of the child

(Boakye-Boaten, 2006). Suda (1997) asserts that the ideal in nearly all traditional African societies was to have a stable family and as many children as possible. She observed it was not conceivable to talk of street children in the African traditional society because:

In traditional Africa, children meant wealth and were seen as a source of power and prestige in addition to being regarded as a blessing from God and the ancestors. Children were also seen as the strongest rope that could tie couples and families together and it was mainly for their sake that unhappy marital relationships were endured…the support networks had the potential to reduce destitute children in the family or community. Such children did not have to be left to cope on their own or to turn to the streets to beg, or to be taken to institutions (Suda, 1997: 43).

One of the reasons we are interested in writing about street children is to find out what exactly happened in this [Kenyan] society where children are highly valued, yet we see armies of children taking over major towns in Kenya as scavengers to whom the street is the only source of livelihood? According to Mufune (2000), changes in the family structure have occurred largely due to factors of urbanization and modernization. For instance, the declining role of the extended families, especially in urban areas through modernization process in Africa de-emphasized the important role of the extended family system. In traditional African societies, the individual will operate within the confines of the collective will. However, with the coming of modernization, new forms of social values and control have evolved, giving the individual will more prominence than the collective will. Thus, the modern person seems to pursue egoistic rather than altruistic values, norms and obligations, in contrast to the traditional expectations. Another compounding factor is the capitalist economy that the Kenyan society has adopted, which further reinforces individualism and one's success at the cost of others. Members of the Kenyan society who cannot adjust to these rapid changes find themselves in a dangerous state of what Durkheim (1951) refers to as anomie: a situation of normlessness where the tradition is not yet over and the modern life is also not yet internalized. As a result, one becomes confused with no moral guardian. Since individuals operate within a family structure, the confusion and the new changes affect the family structure, education system and forms of authority. Thus, the street children phenomenon and families on the streets, suicides, crime, among other deviance behavior, reflect the dissatisfaction and the social stresses that are associated with inadequate adaptive mechanism by members of the society (Le Roux & Smith, 1998).

Traditionally in an African society, a child was normally a member of a community and could not be separated from it. As the family structure changed from extended to nuclear and eventually to single parent family, this meant that even the entitlement that a child deserves from being a community matter to individual parent. Nukunya (1969) and Shorter (1974) observe that in traditional East African societies, the child was educated and socialized by the community for membership into the community. A child in Africa used to be the responsibility of each individual member of society and therefore, children had no need to fend for themselves. They were loved and cared for by society. Today's children are the responsibility of individual parents and are ignored by the rest of the community. As a result, the role of the family as the primary mode of socialization is greatly diminished, while the designated surrogate institutions are inadequate in dealing with the issues of socialization solely. Eitzen et al (2009) observed that:

The explanations behind decline in family influence and control over its members include, breakdown of the extended family, stresses on the nuclear family, the failing of intimate love, the changing roles of women and sexual permissiveness, among others (Eitzen, et al., 2009: 449).

The diminished role of the family system is the perpetual impotence of the kinship system to provide support for family members in distress, thus the streets become one of the alternative sources for survival.

In the African tradition, one's membership to a particular lineage automatically entitled him/her to some of the land or other properties owned by the lineage group. This common interest in land according to Nukunya (1969) resulted in a special relationship or bonding among members of a particular lineage. This bonding system or the unified structure of the family made members responsible for one another. That is why Sorre (2009) observed many boys of the single parents joining street life because when their mothers decide to marry, the new husband/father doesn't want to take them because the boys will demand land as heirs in these patriarchal societies.

The above findings introduce other variables that compound and manifest changes in family system. First, there is a new trend of child headed families, secondly, the increase in cases of single parenthood and thirdly, child abuse and neglect that we wish to discuss separately.

5. Single Parent families

Findings by Sorre (2009) indicate that out of the 324 street children that were interviewed, 273 (84%) were from a single parent's background. As the Kilbrides note, divorce is a growing phenomenon in East Africa, especially in Nairobi (1990, p. 222) and those who end up suffering are the children who eventually find alternative on the streets for their livelihood.

An earlier study conducted by Aptekar and Ciano-Federoff (1999) in Kenya concluded that:

…street children generally come from homes headed by single mothers…Most of the children in our study had not experienced the emotional plight that comes from parents dissolving a marriage in a Western-style divorce. Instead these children were accustomed to living in a family that included a series of men staying for a short period of time, some of them more compassionate than others. Although no reasons were assigned for these trends, it is plausible to suggest that changes in family structure may be due to

economic pressures and fast changing indigenous traditions due to modernization.

In a survey study done by Philista, et al, (1991) on street children in Kenya, Interviews with street children and their parents revealed that:

…the majority of street children are males aged 6-15 years who for the most part are illiterate, of varied ethnic and religious background and migrant to the urban centers and most came from single-parent, large families and chose street life because of socio-economic factors. Available information also tends to indicate that these children are either from poor or broken homes or are orphans (Wainaina, 1977; Wainaina, 1981)…a large number of these children are from single-headed households.

Studies by Action for Children in Conflict Organization in Kenya, (Thika Street Children Census Report, 2009) on children's families indicated that 43% of those interviewed claimed to have parents who are still together, 11% said their parents were separated, 35% were single orphans, and 11% were double orphans, though 57% claimed to not live with both parents.

Further studies by Mburugu and Adams (2001) on families in Kenya posits that divorce and separation are not as prevalent in patrilineal societies as they are in matrilineal, since in the latter the woman does not lose much in divorce (Kayongo-Male & Onyango, 1984, pp. 28–29). In Kenya the percentage divorced, according to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS), is slightly over 4 for those ever married. Our study of the Gikuyu community shows the percentage of those ever married who are either separated or divorced to be just over 7 (KDHS, 1994, p. 61; Mburugu & Adams, 2001, p. 28).

Single parenthood is not just a Kenyan problem. In Morocco, a study by the Moroccan Children's Trust (2010), indicated that in many poor households, one or more parents are absent or deceased, generally fathers. The majority of households have women as the main and often only earner for the family. Family breakdown seems to be a strong factor in children spending more time on the street or in leaving home entirely. One of the Morrocan Children's Trust social workers related a common case;

"The change in the child's behavior and his living on the street began after his parents' divorce and whilst his mother was in prison for three months, where she was serving a sentence for prostitution."

In some families the biological parents are not present at all, or suffer from learning difficulties that incapacitate them as a primary career. Carers and breadwinners are often, therefore, an adoptive parent, an uncle or aunt or a grandparent.

6. Child headed households

In African tradition, children were children. Children were strictly under the care of either their biological, foster or communal parents. They were provided for, cared for, protected, and were restricted in terms of the extent to which they would take up certain responsibilities. Today,

children have brief childhood. Proponents of urban studies have indicated that children from low income households start at as early as five years to take care of their siblings under their parents' instructions. This notwithstanding, there is another larger group of children who have been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS, family conflicts, accidents and other causes of death to both parents (Sorre,2009).

According to Ayieko (2003), most parents even if they are aware of their terminal illness, do not attempt to make any alternative living arrangements for their children before their death. Children are left in the household with limited, or no, resources. As the epidemic spreads, these child-headed households are becoming more and more frequent in rural areas. Children in such conditions are deprived of their childhood and the opportunity to go to school. Economic hardships lead them to look for means of subsistence that increase their vulnerability to HIV infection, substance abuse, child labor, sex work and delinquency, and running away from their home to the streets to look for livelihood.

Ayieko (2003: 44) further posits that:

A significant number of children do not have caregivers in their households. Of the 5.2% (57) of households without living-in guardians, 17 had no caregivers at all. Such children live and manage their own household activities without supervision of an adult. The rest had at least one answerable adult in a nearby home. However, some of these adult relatives only claimed responsibility for orphans where they anticipated rewards. Due to a lack of counseling services for the caregivers and orphans, a number of guardians were experiencing care giving fatigue. These were the consequences of being stressed by children from other families, strained relations between them and the orphans, and high demands on their time, particularly for nursing ailing children. Given the growth of individualism and the nuclear family amongst villagers many caregivers do not welcome the obligations that come with an extended family support system.

From the foregoing discussion street children phenomenon is not just a product of societal and institutional child abuse as observed by Muganda (2007), but also as a manifestation of the level of vulnerability of children in society. Our view is that when the family institution is stable, the society also becomes stable. Implying that the increasing street children population in Kenya indicates an increase in number of problematic families in the society.

7. Child abuse and neglect

Globally, around 40 million children are subjected to child abuse each year (WHO, 2000). In the ground-breaking World Report on Violence and Health, published in 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO 2002) described violence as "an extremely diffuse and complex phenomenon" that includes physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as deprivation and neglect. Violence is mostly found in the family, in schools, in institutions such as orphanages and other places of residential care, on the streets, in the workplace and in

prisons. It can arise as a result of cultural beliefs, norms and traditional practices or within the context of conflict situations.

A small proportion of violence against children leads to death, but most does not even leave visible marks. Yet it is one of the most serious problems affecting children today. Much violence is hidden. Children may not feel able to report acts of violence for fear of retribution from their abuser. Both child and abuser may see nothing unusual or wrong in the child being subjected to violence. They may not consider an act of violence actually to be violence at all, perhaps viewing it as justifiable and necessary punishment. The child victims may feel ashamed or guilty, believing that they deserved to be subjected to violence. Therefore, children are unwilling to speak about it because of fear, threat by abusers, ignorance and unresponsive social environment, among other reasons.

Further (WHO 2002; Sorre, 2009; ECCO, 2010), asserts that many children experience abuse at some point or the other during childhood. The nature and types of child abuse vary from one society to another, and according to the age and sex of the child. In most cases it is inflicted by people who are well known to them including their parents, relatives, religious leaders, and fellow children. Child abuse largely occurs within the victim's home, school, church/mosques, play grounds, and it happens repeatedly.

Evidence from Sorre (2009) shows that 88% of the 324 street children interviewed were living with their caretakers. However, 84% were from family background that was problematic – families under single parenthood, step parenthood, grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters. These group represents a cohort of vulnerable families characterized by inadequate supply of food, clothing, shelter, weak parental control over their children in socialization process and hence, lack of role models; cultural and gender prejudices; and the general economic impoverishment. Therefore, these were children that were socially, economically and psychologically abused either consciously or unconscious of their abuse conditions. In fact, 86% of the 324 street children interviewed in the study indicated that they joined street life out of their own conviction as an alternative to the difficult life they were leading in their own homes. Showing that child abuse is a major push factor for children into the streets in Kenya. This is evident by various chronological studies, which have indicated that modernization and western culture leads to a breakdown of families and street children come from aberrant families who abandon, abuse, or neglect their children. (Wainaina, 1981; Dallape, 1987; Kariuki, 1989; Kilbride and Kilbride, 1990; Onyango, Orwa, Ayako, Ojwang, and Kariuki, 1991, Sorre, 2009).

8. Which Way out?

We therefore recommend that, there is need for the adjustment of attitudes and social values to those essential to achieving child protection with pressure on protection of all rights of children. We emphasize on a strong family up bringing where the children feel secure; on the other hand, children have better judgment when it comes to choosing their friends and stay in a better position to handle peer pressure.

From the findings it is clear that if intervention programmes instigated to help street children concentrate on street children rather than their families, they are going to achieve less since they will on deal with the symptoms (street children) of the problem rather than dealing with the root cause (family factors) of the whole problem as Sorre, (2009) puts it. There is therefore, the need to instigate family therapy and socio-economic programmes targeting single-parent families and caregivers to encourage good parenting practices that would stem children from joining the streets.

We also recommend home visiting intervention programmes that monitor child development and provide advice, support and referral to families with street children rather than just reintegrating or repatriation or reunification of these children with their families. This can be one of the best and most practical methods of bringing about a significant reduction in child abuse and neglect in the family set up that has been blamed to be among other factors that make children run away from their homes. This will also put pressure on the family institution to take responsibility and uphold values of the family and children. The same services can work best when it is extended to all families with young children to sensitize them on the effects of child abuse and neglect in the family.

To compound it all, a national value system that is also institutionalized should be embraced with a strong emphasize on values that support children from all segments of the society; making families more responsible and reduce family break ups; reduce cases of child abuse and neglect, and uphold a human face in the Kenyan society. This will help prevent as many children as possible from landing on the streets that have proved to be hostile to their survival and development, while giving the country a negative picture of a society that doesn't care about its children and future generation.

9. Conclusion

In a nutshell, street children phenomenon is a major challenge to the Kenyan society, raising questions on the extent to which the society upholds the fundamental rights of the children; planning by the policy makers in regard to future generations; and the types and nature of interventions attempted. It is the conclusion of the paper that the family is the main source of street children in Kenya and therefore, should be given priority in intervention programmes if we have to curb the menace. Because of the rapid socio-cultural and economic changes in the society, we recommend that the leadership of the country comes up with national values systems that would provide guidance for families that find themselves in crisis that would predispose children to street life.

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