

## Challenges Facing Street Children and Copying Strategies in Dodoma and Dar es Salaam Cities, Tanzania



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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the coping strategies that were employed to curb the situation of the question of child streetism. Specifically, the paper analyzes the challenges faced and coping strategies by street children. I used two major cities i.e., Dodoma City which is the Capital City, and Dar es Salaam City which is the major commercial city of Tanzania. Methodically, the study employed both qualitative methods. Instruments for data collection included participants' interviews, key informant interviews, and document review. The findings of the study revealed that child streetism in both cities was largely promoted by both push and pull factors. Major push factors included poverty, limited family support, family violence, low education, and single parenting. In terms of coping strategies, the study found that street children in the two cities survive by using the little money they get through begging and doing other petty activities. To address this issue, the study recommends mechanisms such as providing community education on how to handle children, increasing attention on the matter from the government and other stakeholders as well as involving religious leaders.

**KEYWORDS:** Copying Strategies, Challenges of Child Streetism, Family Support

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Global Overview of Child Streetism Issues. Statistically, in 2019, most of the world's population live in poverty: in PPP dollars, 85% of people live on less than \$30 per day, two-thirds live on less than \$10 per day, and 10% live on less than \$1.90 per day (extreme poverty). According to the World Bank Group in 2020, more than 40% of the poor live in conflict-affected countries (World Bank, 2016).

#### 1.2 Health Issues in the Context of Child Streetism

One-third of deaths around the world some 18 million people a year or 50,000 per day, are due to poverty-related causes. People who are living in developing countries mostly women and children are mostly affected by this severe poverty. Those living in poverty suffer disproportionately from hunger or even starvation and diseases as well as lower life expectancy. According to the World Health Organization, hunger and malnutrition are the single gravest threats to the world's public health. Malnutrition contributes a lot to child mortality that is present in half of all cases, (Human Development Report" (PDF), 2015). Studies show that poverty impedes cognitive functions although some of these findings could not be replicated in follow-up studies, Pogge Thomas, (2010). One of the hypothesized mechanisms is that financial worries lead to the burden on one's mental resources, hence it becomes no longer available for solving complicated problems.

#### 1.3 Child Streetism and Access to Food

With regard to access to food, the rise in the costs of living makes poor people to be unable to afford food. They spend a greater portion of their budgets on food than wealthy people and as a result, poor households and those near the poverty-affected areas are particularly vulnerable to increased food prices. For example, in late 2007 increases in the price of grains led to food riots in some countries. The World Bank warned that 100 million people were at risk of sinking deeper into poverty. In Africa, if the current trends of soil degradation continue, the continent will be able to feed just 25% of its population by 2025, this is according to the United Nations University's Ghana-based Institute for Natural Resources in Africa, (Watts, Jonathan, 2007).

#### 1.4 Education Sector and Child Streetism

Research found that there is a high risk of educational underachievement for children who are from low-income housing circumstances. This begins in primary schools and instruction in the US educational system. Most of the other countries tend to

## Challenges Facing Street Children and Copying Strategies in Dodoma and Dar es Salaam Cities, Tanzania

favor those students who come from more advantaged backgrounds, as a result, those from poverty backgrounds are at a higher risk for retention in their grades, and special placements during school hours, which leads to not completing their high school education, (Huston, A. C. (1991).

### 1.5 Shelters for Street Children

Mokomane and Makaoae, (2015) have done a qualitative study about shelters for street children in South Africa. They describe that shelters offer many developmental processes, such as therapeutic ones. The shelters also have recreational programs at an early intervention level. In the study it is described that street children live and sleep on the streets in urban areas and make it their home; whereas street children have their homes and only come to the streets to beg money during the day and return home during the evening. They also have their home but are rarely visited in that place; they make street as their main residence, (Chireshe, Jadezweni, Cekiso, et al, 2014).

Mokomane and Makaoaes, (2015) main findings showed that all shelters offer some form of therapeutic, developmental, and recreational programs that were trying to reach the street children at a preventive level. The first step when they come to shelters is to estimate the individual's basic needs of food and clothing, then they look at the psycho-social nature, where a person is offered an accustomed consultation.

## 2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Vulnerability is a characteristic of human existence that carries with it the imminent or ever-present possibility of harm, injury, and misfortune. In this fact, the Vulnerability Theory explains how a vulnerable environment can lead to a certain social consequence for an individual. The theory also enlightens the public's response to poverty and homelessness. Homelessness may tend to create an identity of the vulnerable population of poor.

In terms of its relevance to the study, the researcher noted that the theory offers an opportunity to overcome the limits of antidiscrimination law, equality analysis, and identity-based politics. It recognizes the limits of existing interpretations of antidiscrimination where formal nondiscrimination constrains state responsiveness to substantive inequality by reinforcing a series of dichotomies including state action and omission, negative and positive rights, and public and private spheres.

Vulnerability theory recognizes that the human experience of constant vulnerability varies as a result of stages in the life course, social institutions, and law, which often trace intersecting forms of oppression on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, disability, and class. Yet the theory focuses on social rather than individual identities and characteristics of socially constructed relationships that are inherently unequal, such as those between employer/employee, creditor/debtor, adult/minor, parent/child, stockholder/stakeholder, and so on. Equality and antidiscrimination are inadequate as frameworks for understanding how to promote justice within these roles and relationships. Vulnerability thus provides a heuristic device for exposing the structural privilege and disadvantage enveloped in these relationships and suggests ways to readjust them in order to advance social justice and lessen inequality.

Despite the noted relevance, the theory has limitations in its application to the study. For instance, the approaches emanating from the theory to understand vulnerability have focused on an unequal power dynamic between politically and monetarily marginalized groups and investigators or sponsors.

It is not simply a substitute term for dependency on care. Nor is it or its theoretical and conceptual potential exhausted in concepts such as weakness, fragility, precariousness, or being "at-risk" these are terms usually found in dichotomous pairing [weakness/strength; precarious/stable, and so on]. There is no position of invulnerability there is only resilience we know this intuitively and experientially. Vulnerability is NOT just another way of talking about discrimination or signaling disadvantage. Vulnerability is not merely one among many possible "identities" traditionally adopted or assigned in arguing for equality and civil and political rights.

In addition, recognition of vulnerability does NOT reflect or assert the absence or impossibility of agency rather, it recognizes that agency in the form of resilience is socially produced over the life course and is limited and constrained by the resources and relationships available to any specific individual. Vulnerability theory asserts that agency or autonomy like the concept of resilience and unlike vulnerability should always be understood as particular, partial, and contextual.

## 3.0 CHALLENGES FACED BY STREET CHILDREN IN DAR ES SALAAM AND DODOMA CITIES

### 3.1 Access to Food

Interviewed street children stated that they hardly had a meal in their families and felt like they would die if they decided to stay in their homes. Moreover, the lack of food taught children to become beggars and beg for food in the neighboring communities, which motivated them to become street children. One informant stated, "*I began to beg for food from our neighbors which gave me the experience to become a street child*" (A boy, 14 years old).

In the same way, Dutta, (2018) concluded that poverty is the main cause of child streetism which was also mentioned by other prior empirical studies (Sam, 2016; Byion, et al., 2021, Chowdhury, 2017, Bhukuth & Ballet, 2015). In support of the findings of this

## Challenges Facing Street Children and Coping Strategies in Dodoma and Dar es Salaam Cities, Tanzania

study, Strobbe, et al. (2010) for example, attest that in a family with a male household figure who is sick, his children are likely to be in the street. However, Strobbe et al. (ibid) argue that the educational level, age, and employment status of a parent/guardian have an insignificant influence on child streetism. This is true because it depends on the willingness of a parent or guardian to care for the needs of his/her children. Consequently, children are likely to do anything in order to survive which also includes going to the street (Kwaku, 2019).

### 3.2 Access to Shelter

Lack of shelter as one of the income poverty indicators contributed to child streetism. A child who was born to homeless parents was likely to become a street child. The findings showed that children born to homeless parents had no opportunity for education or proper family care, and in most cases, they were taught to beg as their career. For instance, the contacted informant argues that *"I managed a visit of one of the homeless families that had four children who were all of them in the street begging as a means for their survival"* (Male informant, Social Worker).

### 3.4 Access to Education

The inability to access education is one of the main income poverty indicators that influenced child streetism. It is theoretically agreed that children who are in schools are less likely to become street children because schools play the role of a functional social support network. However, the inadequate financial capacity of families to accommodate education expenses contributed to child streetism. This was due to the fact that most interviewed street children either did not go to school at all or dropped out of school in the early years of their studies due to inadequate family income. Furthermore, the findings also revealed that children who were in children's homes (i.e., childcare institutions) and sent to school did not go to the street.

This finding indicated that children who were integrated with their fellow children in the education system were less likely to become either children in the street or street children. This was vindicated by one of the informants who argued that *"I cannot go back to the street because I am now finishing my primary school education"* (A girl, 14 years of age, child under Children's homes). The findings of this study are supported by several prior empirical studies. For example, Edris and Silotal, (2019) argue that poverty is one of the push factors that contribute to child streetism. Diriba, (2015), with reference to poverty as a push factor, contends that children who are born by parents who engage in low-income generating activities are likely to become street children. Furthermore, Diriba, (2015) argues that poverty is the main cause of child streetism, which is in support with the findings of this study.

### 3.5 Coping Strategies Adopted by Street Children

The study findings have discovered that coping strategies adopted by street children in the context of income generation include engagement in begging, collecting bottles and scrap metal, and car washing. These are common legally accepted income-generating activities in which street children get involved. However, whenever they miss such acceptable labor, they resort to stealing and robbery under the influence of drug abuse, especially male children. In the case of female children, they get involved in begging for sex in exchange for money.

Regarding sickness, most street children use their little amount of money to buy medicines without proper consultations from medical practitioners. One of the informants argued, *"in most cases we buy medicines from the pharmacy using the little amount of money we have"* (Street child, male and 15 years of age). In other circumstances, they had to steal in order to assist their fellow street children to get medicines without even exactly knowing the diseases. In case the situation gets worse, they simply leave their fellow street children at the hospital while others were left in the street to get assistance from good Samaritans or children's homes/care centers.

Without help from children's homes or care centers, children had no coping mechanism that would allow them to enroll in the education system. With limited support from the community, street children depend on children's homes and care centers. Children's homes and care centers either facilitate family reunification and institute follow-up mechanisms to ensure safety for the child. In most cases, street children seeking assistance from a children's home or care center were admitted because they had no communication with their parents. However, the majority of admitted street children end up running away from the children's homes or care centers because they were not used to such environment. Case VII below provides more details: -

### 3.6 CASE VII: Children's Homes/Care Centre as a coping Strategy

*Kwa Bibi House (not a real name) is a children's home which deals with children living and working on the street. It provides temporary shelter to children and traces child's family for re-unification and continuously monitors the wellbeing of a child. It also provides children's rights and needs such as education, health and shelter. Additionally, vulnerable children do other activities such as general cleanliness, sports and games. Children who have been accepted at the home/center included the street children coming from poor families or live and work in the street due to family separation; abuse at the family or school level; death of parents and family negligence.*

*Despite the fact that the center is located in Dar es Salaam, most children were from Mbeya, Singida, Kigoma and Kahama who turned out to be street children in Dar es Salaam. It has also received street children from rich families, but they are not the majority; these are children who were pushed away from home by other factors other than poverty. The main challenge that the center has been facing is the relatively high turnover of street children at the center.*

### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 Key

The findings of this study on health seeking behavior of street children are supported by several prior empirical literatures. For instance, Amury and Komba, (2010) argue that street children adopt self-medication in case they fall sick. However, in addressing economic challenges, they engage into high-risk behaviors including unsafe sex. Flasorgbor and Flasorgbor, (2015) observed several coping strategies including hawking goods on busy streets, carrying heavy loads/luggage, begging and scavenging. Flasorgbor and Flasorgbor, (2015) and Amury and Komba, (2010), also argue that street children mostly opt for self-medication or using herbal medicines in case they fall sick, similar to what was observed in this study.

Consequently, Gunu (2021) has similar argument but added that street children form networks to address challenges they face in the streets and protect themselves. The researcher as child growing up on the streets of Nairobi and Mombasa, belonged to a social network that provided shelter and belonging. This is also supported by Lawuo, (2015) who contends that street children form and join into a group to protect themselves and sometimes engaging in illegal activities as a source of income. Likewise, Mohamed, Mohamed and Hassan, (2018) reveal that street children engage in begging, washing cars and shop windows, collecting plastic and cans from wastes, selling paper tissues and shoe-shinning.

While recognizing the researchers' interests on the coping strategies adopted by street children, this study revealed that street children have no any specific coping strategy that allowed them to enroll into the education system. In this case, children's homes and family re-integration/re-unification are important strategies towards enrolling street children into educational system.

The findings also reveal that, street children get involved in begging, collecting bottles and scrap metal, child labor, stealing and robbery under the influence of drug abuse and sex exchange for money. They also used local shops or pharmacies to buy medicine without consulting medical professionals. The mentioned coping strategies adopted by street children were learnt from their fellow street children and followed the instructions of their group leaders on how to cope with the situation.

#### 4.2 Key findings on challenges faced by street children in Dar es Salaam and Dodoma Cities

Exploring challenges faced by street children in Dar es Salaam and Dodoma Cities in Tanzania was another area of focus in this study. Based on the study findings, four major challenges were identified. These challenges include the following;

#### 4.3 Access to Food Challenge

Access to food was found to be one of the major challenges that street children face. It was observed from the study findings that most street children sometime go without food on a daily basis while others have a single meal per day. This exposes these children to several problems including malnutrition and engaging in stealing so as to survive.

#### 4.4 Access to Health Challenge

Findings of the study also showed that street children do not have access to health facilities and as a result they tend to suffer from health-related issues. These children have no money to buy medicine or even visit health centers to receive medication when they fall sick. This increases the risk of losing life among street children since they have been ignored by society.

#### 4.5 Access to Shelter Challenge

The absence of shelter for street children was among the challenges that were identified facing street children in Dar es salaam and Dodoma cities in Tanzania. The study found that these children sleep on the shop verandahs on the street while others sleep in open areas along the street. The lack of shelter for these children signifies another major challenge that these children face and further exposes them to various health related problems.

#### 4.6 Access to Education Challenge

The study found that most street children are young children within the age bracket of 5 years to 12 years. These children have not received sufficient education and they are not provided with any form of education while on the streets. In this case, they live an ignorant life which exposes them to various challenges.

Generally, the key findings on this objective show that street children in Dar es salaam and Dodoma cities in Tanzania face several challenges. Never the less, despite these challenges, this study found that children continue flopping the streets of Dar es Salaam and Dodoma. This implies that these students still see staying on the street as a better option than staying in their homes. On such account, it still comes down to the fact that efforts to deal with factors that attract these children onto the streets need to be addressed.

#### 4.7 Key findings on coping strategies employed by street children in Dar es Salaam and Dodoma Cities

Coping strategies in the context of this study implied mechanisms that street children employed to survive on the streets of Dar es Salaam and Dodoma Cities in Tanzania. This study explored this aspect and found three key strategies that street children were employing. These strategies are as presented below;

#### 4.8 Begging for Money from City Dwellers

The study found that majority of street children survive by begging for money from city dwellers. Upon receiving such money, they use this money to buy basic needs that include food while others use the money to buy alcoholic drinks among others.



## Challenges Facing Street Children and Coping Strategies in Dodoma and Dar es Salaam Cities, Tanzania

### 4.9 Begging for Food from Food Vendors (Restaurants)

As another survival strategy, the study found that street children on the streets of Dar es Salaam and Dodoma go begging for food from food vendors especially in restaurants. By doing this, they are able to at least get a meal that can keep them surviving.

#### 4.9.1 Engaging in Petty Theft Activities

The study also found that some street children engage in petty theft activities which involve pick pocketing. In this regard, they obtain valuable assets from people and trade them off to get money which they later use to meet their basic needs. This act lands most of the street children in trouble and some end up losing their lives through mob justice.

#### Theoretical Implications

The findings revealed that street children experienced social and economic hardship in their street life, which negatively affected their development as humans. They were prone to all sorts of abuses including psychological, sexual and physical abuse associated with the vulnerable environment they lived in. This is in line with the vulnerability theory which explains how vulnerable environment leads to a certain social consequence to an individual.

However, the key question is, why children were willing to join the street life despite the fact that the environment was mostly vulnerable to them? This question was explored by the Sociological Rational Choice theory whereby it was not necessary for children to make a rational choice but what was best for them. Comparatively, when the family environment is more vulnerable than the street environment, then a child may recognize that, it is best to face street life difficulties and hardships than the family hardships and difficulties. Therefore, the study indicates that in exploring the lived experiences of street children, both vulnerability and rational choice perspective must be used.

Likewise, the findings of this study revealed that lack of family support contributed to child streetism. The study revealed that family plays an important role in protecting children from joining street life. However, if the family environment is no longer safe and secure then a child may likely end up joining the street life. The findings are in line with the Ecological System Theory which recognizes a family as one of the systems that has a role to play in child development. However, the ecological system theory may not be enough to explain the influence of family support on child streetism due to other factors such as inadequate family support system and social institutions focusing on streetism and homelessness.

The findings also revealed that family violence, particularly GBV, contributed to child streetism. Child streetism is a result of physical, sexual and psychological abuse experienced in a family where women are victims resulting in family disintegration and separation. In this case, the Feminist perspective can best explain such relationship between family violence and child streetism. Thus, this study raises the need for exploring the influences of family support on child perspective using both ecological system and feminist perspectives.

Moreover, the study demonstrated several coping strategies adopted by street children, where in most cases, street children made their choice of coping strategies based on the extent of vulnerability and peer pressure, as well as what they learn from their environment. Based on vulnerability, street children are likely to do anything when they perceive themselves to be more vulnerable with limited available alternative options. This observation was also supported by Kwaku, (2019) who states that street children are willing to do anything just to survive.

Also, street children adopted coping strategies due to peer pressure from their colleagues and their own systems that they have created in the street. Peer pressure with inadequate social support services may lead a street child to engage in illegal activities under the influence of his/her colleagues or group leaders. Rationality was another factor found to have an influence on the choice of coping strategies. Rationality does not mean that an individual makes a rational decision, but it is to choose what it is perceived to be the best option for that individual. Finally, street children may adopt identified coping strategies because of what they have learnt through observation, imitation and reinforcement resulting from social and interpersonal interactions.

Hence, the study showed that adoption of coping strategies by street children is a multidimensional factor i.e., influenced by several personal and social factors. In this case, the social learning theory alone cannot adequately explain such phenomenon. In this case, it must be looked at from the vulnerability, ecological system, rational choice and social learning perspectives.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary

The study concludes that lack of family support to children contributes to child streetism. Lack of family support to a child to access basic needs and service regardless of the employment and income status of the household pushed children to join the street life. Likewise, substance abuse and use by the parents and guardians, family violence, single parenting with limited economic opportunities, presence of child headed household under poverty, child neglect and abuse also pushed children to join the street life. In this case, family disintegration and separation resulted from irresponsible behaviors and practices of parents and guardians promoted child streetism. Hence, family as a system which has a responsibility to ensure children's welfare is well protected and managed, may contribute to child streetism if it is disintegrated and no proper mechanisms to unity such family. Likewise, poor orphaned families are also likely to end up on the street due to the lack of parental guidance and counseling. Moreover, family

## Challenges Facing Street Children and Coping Strategies in Dodoma and Dar es Salaam Cities, Tanzania

relatives thirsty for family properties left children with no choice apart from joining the street life because they are left poor with no any other means of survival. Hence, irresponsible relatives as a social system contribute to child streetism.

### 5.2 Coping Strategies among Street Children

This study further analyzed the coping strategies for street children. In most cases, street children engage in begging, collecting bottles and iron steel and car wash. Specifically, female street children are also engaged into sex in exchange for money. Regarding sickness, they mostly use self-medication without having medical prescription. When the situation gets worse, they simply leave their fellow street children either at the hospital or on the street to get assistance from good Samaritans or children's homes/care centers. Additionally, they do not have any coping strategy to enroll themselves into the education system.

### 5.3 Recommendations

#### 5.3.1 Government and Institution Based Recommendations

Government of Tanzania through the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elders and Children should basically pay attention to the increasing number of street children in the country, by formulating intervention programs that can reduce the number of children who live in streets. This could be through supportive mechanism such as provision of clothing, schooling and medical care and also sustainable programs that will boost the economic status of families such as soft loans and training on entrepreneurship, small scale agricultural activities, and also fishing or animal keeping. All these activities should be intended to give economic strength to poor rural families so that they can be able to handle family responsibilities. When these are provided and children are sure of them, it will automatically help the number get reduced because children will be able to stay home with families.

#### 5.3.2 Non-Governmental Organisations in Tanzania

The NGOs in Tanzania should be encouraged to participate and support effort towards reducing street children by fighting against abuse, child labor and denial of human rights, such as, use of street children to selling drugs. The ability to deal with these problems which hinder the reduction of street children need close attention from the NGOs.

#### 5.3.3 Community in Tanzania

The community should be educated in order to consider all children are equal and their demands and needs are the same; thus, seeing them on streets is disaster not only to the children themselves, but to the whole community. Therefore, they should take every possible means to end this problem.

#### 5.3.4 Religious Leaders

Religious leaders have to play their role accordingly by filling spirit to their followers so that they abide to the teachings of their holy books, in order for them to become good parents who will be responsible for their children and families; thus, reducing the 58 possibilities of children leaving their homes and moving to urban areas seeking to meet their basic needs

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