

Conflicts among Street Children and their Parents: Incidence and Consequences

Khwairakpam Sharmila¹, Sukhminder Kaur²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Babasaheb Bhimra, Ambedkar University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

²Senior Extension Specialist, Department of Human Development, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab, India.

Abstract— Street children by the nature of their work and lives are on their own largely unprotected by adults, and become vulnerable to many dangers and conflict at home and their workplace. This paper explores and analyses the various situations of conflicts and the reactions exhibited by street children after having conflict with their parents. The study was carried on 160 street children (9-12 years) equally distributed over gender. Data were collected by administering a Self-structured Interview Schedule to study the situations of conflict, consequences of conflicts, behavior and reactions exhibited by children after having conflict. Results revealed that children perceived parents as a fearful figure. A higher proportion of street children (56.87%) cited disobeying parents was the major cause of conflict with their parents and as a reaction a higher proportion of them (45.00%) started crying after having disturbing situations. More number of boys become indifferent, go to work as usual, reacted back verbally, becomes aggressive and think of running away whenever they had conflict with their parents while majority of the girls reported of seeking sympathy from friends/other family members, missing work on the particular day or crying for hours at end.

Keywords— Conflict, Incidence, Parents, Street children.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tens of millions of children live in the streets of cities scattered all over the world. While their presence may be noticed in developed as well as developing countries, however, the majority of street children live in the poor nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, especially India and Brazil (Pillai & Patnaik 2008). Most of the children who are on streets are due to poverty and unemployment of their parents. They may also be on streets because of breakdown of families and domestic violence or being abandoned or neglected by the family. The condition of street children involves those children who have sporadic relationship with their parents and the one who likes to live with other street children in the cities. Most of the street

children are neglected by their parents or relatives. They find themselves on the streets since their childhood due to family problems and constant abuse because of distasteful or disturbing home environment. These children learn to adjust their lives with the difficulties and problems. They train themselves to make their source of living easier and get indulged in various routine activities and occupation which teaches them to earn their living (Ugwuedbu 2003). Many a times they ended up having negative interaction with their parents due to various reasons such as bringing less money from work, not going to street for work, using abusive language, making too many demands, misbehaving with their parents, behaving violently with siblings or when the child disobeyed their parents and further these negative interactions ends up having conflict with their parents. But most of the parents don't understand or dare accept the negative effects of conflict on childrens' psychological and behavioral wellbeing. The impact of everyday conflict on their children's behaviour and mental health is driven by how the children understand the problems in the relationship as well as the nature of the conflict itself. Children exposed to family violence can develop behavioural difficulties like low self-esteem, increased levels of anxiety, repressed feelings of fear, anger, guilt and confusion, regression, aggression/temper tantrums, alcohol and drug abuse.

<http://www.ethpress.gov.et/herald/index.php/herald/society/2788-parental-conflict-invisible-bruises-on-children>.

Under these circumstances, children often find themselves active participants in the survival of themselves. Thus, becoming street as his or her habitual abode (Anandraj 2007). The presents study is in the direction to understand the various situations of conflict the children experienced with their parents and the type of reactions displayed by them. The main objectives of the study are

1. To identify the incidence of situations of conflict between street children and their parents.

- To determine the consequences of conflict among street children in the context of the age and gender differences in exhibiting the reactions after having conflict with their parents.

II. METHODOLOGY

Street children who live in various crowded places of Ludhiana city were selected for the study. The sample comprising of 160 street children (9-12 years) equally distributed over gender was purposively selected using snowball sampling technique. The main criteria followed for the selection of children was that these children should be home based and actively involved in street activities. A Self-structured Interview Schedule was administered to explore the behaviour of children which causes conflict between them and their parents, consequences of conflict in the context of age and gender differences on reactions exhibited by children to the situations of conflict. The interview schedule was pretested on a sample of 20 street children which was not included in the final sample. The test-retest reliability of the interview schedule was calculated to be 0.90 by using Karl Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Situations of conflict between street children and their parents

Street children are mostly deprived of family care and protection and the high rate of family disintegration makes children start working from very early age.

Data presented in Table 1 indicates the situations of conflict between street children and their parents. It is evident from the table that disobeying parents was cited by higher proportion of the children (56.87%) as the major cause of conflicts with their parents followed by violent behavior with siblings (40.00 %). However, more than thirty nine per cent children (39.37%) reported misbehaving and making too many demands respectively as the cause of conflict. Some children (27.50%) reported to be using abusive language and more than twenty four per cent (24.37%) reported for not attending work to street as the causes of conflict whereas 11.25 per cent children reported that bringing less money from work was the cause for conflict with parents.

Table.1: Situations of conflict between street children and their parents (n=160)

Causes of conflict	f	%
Bring less money from work	18	11.25
Don't go for work	39	24.37
Child using abusive language	44	27.50
Make too many demands	63	39.37
Misbehave with parents	63	39.37
Violent behaviour with siblings	64	40.00
Disobey parents	91	56.87

Multiple responses

Consequences of conflict

Further probing into data revealed that a higher proportion of the children (45.00%) starts crying after having conflict with parents, followed by 40.00 per cent children who were found to withdraw themselves from family. However, there were children (25.62%) who reported of shouting back at their parents, while 25.00 per cent started screaming followed by stop talking to the parents after having conflict (21.87%) with them. Many of them (17.50%) stopped carrying out household activities and around twelve per cent (12.50%) children reported of not returning home sometimes and run away from home whenever they had conflict with their parents whereas very few (7.50%) stopped going to work after having conflict with parents (Table 2). In line with the study Kufeldt and Nimmo (2002) discussed the findings of a study of runaway and homeless youth who were interviewed on the street. Two distinct groups emerged from the analysis, generating a tentative hypothesis that the true "runners" tend to leave their homes with the intention of not returning and thus their runs are extended; the second group, designated "in and outers," use the run as a temporary coping mechanism. Their runs tend to be impulsive and of short duration. The study found that runaways (in particular the runners) are at great risk of being drawn into illegal activities. Major factors affecting this risk are distance from home and length of time on the run. Sudan (2011) also stated that lack of parental care is among the major causes that push children onto the streets. Children are abused by parents, close relatives, guardians and at times the authorities.

Table.2: Consequences of conflict between street children and the parents

Consequence of conflict	f	%
Stop going to work	12	7.50
Not returning home sometimes and run away from home	20	12.50
Stop carrying out household activities	28	17.50
Stop talking to the parents	35	21.87
Start screaming	40	25.00
Start shouting	41	25.62
Withdraw from family	64	40.00
Child starts crying	72	45.00

(n=160)

Multiple responses

Age and gender differences in the consequences of conflict between street children and their parents

Street children are exposed to various types of problems and difficulties at home and their coping measures differ according to the age and gender of the children and the intensity of the stressful situation faced by them.

Data pertaining to consequences of conflict revealed that there was an association in between the reactions of the children exhibited after having conflict with their age and gender because it was more of older children (11-12 years) who do not return home and sometimes ran away from home (16.87%) and stop carrying out household activities

(20.48%) as compared to younger children (9-11 years) who usually start screaming (28.57%) or start crying (58.44%) after having conflict with their parents. Furthermore, it was also investigated that more number of boys who didn't return home and sometimes ran away from home (17.50%) and start shouting (32.50%) while major proportion of the girls reported to start screaming (30.00%) or cried (55.00%) after having conflict (Table 3). Gupta (1995) studied the coping and preference for social support in daily life stressful situation by children on the street and revealed that in coping with parental punishment, the children use emotion-focused coping which is representative of their escape-avoidance strategies, withdrawal tendencies and self-control. When confronted with problems related to peers and siblings, the children tend to use problem oriented coping styles which are indicative of the use of abusive language, aggression and vengeful behavior. In case of preference for social support children indicated their desire to be alone in situations related to their work place, peers and in dealing with parental punishment. Out of the parents, the children prefer maternal support in contrast to that of father especially when they are at the time of conflict. Children seek support of grandparents, relative and neighbors only at the time of parental conflict and also they like to be with their peers with sibling while doing the household chores. Lack of families/guardians and inadequate family support and attachment to alternative value systems in their culture are considered as risk factors (Senaratna & Wijewardana 2012).

Table.3: Per cent distribution of younger and older, male and female street children in exhibiting the behavior after having conflict with parents)

Behavior of the child	Age wise distribution of street children						χ^2	Gender wise distribution of street children						χ^2
	9-11 years (n=77)		11-12 years (n=83)		Total (n=160)			Male (n=80)		Female (n=80)		Total (n=160)		
	f	%	f	%	f	%		f	%	f	%	f	%	
Stop going to work	7	9.09	5	6.02	12	7.50	5	6.25	7	8.75	12	7.50	12.42***	11.96***
Not returning home sometimes and run away from home	6	7.79	14	16.87	20	12.50	14	17.50	6	7.50	20	12.50		
Stop carrying out household	11	14.29	17	20.48	28	45.00	14	17.50	14	17.50	28	45.00		

activities													
Stop talking to the parents	18	23.38	17	20.48	35	40.00	16	20.00	19	23.75	35	40.00	
Start screaming	26	33.77	14	16.87	40	25.00	16	20.00	24	30.00	40	25.00	
Start shouting	22	28.57	19	22.89	41	25.62	26	32.50	15	18.75	41	25.62	
Withdraw from family	30	38.96	34	40.96	64	21.87	31	38.75	33	41.25	64	21.87	
Child starts crying	45	58.44	27	32.53	72	17.50	28	35.00	44	55.00	72	17.50	

*** $p < 0.01$; Multiple responses

IV. CONCLUSION

Children need to be treated and protected well. To this effect, therefore, parents need to be alerted how to take care of children, how to treat and protect them from any of the undesirable happenings that may come across them and end up with awful acts since street children reported of facing various incidence of conflicting situations with their parents such as bringing less money from work, not going for street work, using abusive language, making too many demands, misbehave with parents, behaving violently with siblings or disobeying parents and higher proportion of the children reported of having conflicts with their parents because of disobeying them. As conflict influences the quality of their children's' lives in many ways, parents as a parent should have to cope with their emotions and learn how to handle and resolve conflict. Contrary to this, failure to deal with conflict appropriately and fight in the presence of children can result in wide-ranging and long-lasting negative outcome on children. Incontrovertibly domestic violence is likely to have destructive effects on both parents and children of all ages. However, its ill effects on children seem to be less recognized or undermined by the people.

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