

**STREET AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN IN INDIA:  
A CASE STUDY ON VISAKHAPATNAM CITY**

Dr. GOPI MADABOYINA  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Political Science and Public Administration,  
Adikavi Nannaya University,  
MSN Campus, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

Cell: +91 9908001356

\*\*\*\*\*

**ABSTRACT:**

The meaning of street Children those who are living and working on the street are some of the most excluded and unprotected in the world. While some of the child are homeless with their families, or return home at night after working on the street, many others are without parental care or a home and have no viable alternatives. This may be the result of family disintegration, conflict, poverty, abuse or neglect. Life on the street exposes children to a myriad of risks and robs them of the safety and comfort that a family environment can offer.

Street children as defined by United Nations (UN) are children working or living on the street, whose families are on the street or children who've run away from their families and are living on the streets. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child broadly mentions the right to protection from exploitation and abuse, right to an adequate standard of living and nutrition to ensure proper development, and protection from bonded labour, right to education, right to adoption as well as right to name and nationality; these rights were also adopted by the Constitution of India. Despite these laws and efforts, children are pushed into child labour, trafficking, and exploitation. According to the UNICEF India report 2020, interrupted learning impacted 286 million children, with increase in the school dropout rates due to the closure of schools during the pandemic. The lockdown and its extension significantly impacted nearly 40 million children belonging to the poor and underprivileged families such as children of migrants, children working on farms and fields in rural areas, and street children.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Introduction:**

The phenomenon of street and neglected children though we are referring today is not confined to a specific society. The street and neglected children are symptom of a deep and disturbing trend in society. Where youngsters are abused, neglected, abandoned and maltreated in many ways thus they venture on the streets. The problem of street and neglected children is a global one and exists in all the countries including developed, developing and under developed countries with a difference in its size and magnitude. But as the countries are becoming more and more urbanized, the number of street and neglected children is swelling. In majority of the cases neglected children have become street children. So there is interconnection between street and neglected children.

It is most appropriate to mention that UNICEF (1986) has suggested that the term “street children should refer to ‘children who work on the streets of urban areas, without reference to the time they spend there or too reason for being there’. Most of the street and neglected children spend their large amount of time in the street frequently because of low returns on their labour. In them most of them work like petty hawkers, shoes shine boys, and scavengers of raw material or even thieves and street prostitutes, by the nature of their work and life, they are normally on their own and largely un-protected by adults.

**Street and neglected children:**

The present study defined the street children as ‘those who are abandoned or come out from families temporarily or permanently, mostly in urban areas and make the street as their living for a variety of reasons which include a way of life, giving belief from family dissatisfactions, a way to strengthen associations, the way to enjoy without compulsions etc’.

**Street children and the categories:**

United Kingdom committee for UNICEF provides the basis for categorization of street children into three types. They are: The children on the street, Children of the street, abandoned children.

**The children on the street:**

By far the largest of the three categories and consists primarily of working children who still have family connections of a more or less regular nature. Their focus in life is still the home. A very few attend school, most returns home at the end of each

working day and most will have sense of belonging to the local community in which their home is situated, They are children on the street.

### **Children of the street:**

The second group is smaller but more complex, children in this group see the street as their home and it is there that they seek shelter, food and a sense of family among companions. Family exists but the remote and their former home is visited infrequently. They are children of the street.

### **Abandoned children:**

This third group may appear to form part of the second group and daily activities are practically indistinguishable. However, by virtue of living served all ties with a biological family they are entirely on their own, not just for material but also for psychological survival. They are also children of the street.

Shroff (1988) has classified the street children into categories;

1. There are children on the street that leaves with their families, though they work on the streets, they often attend school and have the presence of their family to support them.
2. There are children who live on streets with the street as their homes. It is there that they seek shelter, food and a sense of belonging among their companions. A majority of them have no ties with their families, even if they also have sometimes, their report and contracts or visits to or from the family are rare. They are entirely on their own for their economic and psychological survival. Usually these children are runaways from homes. They can be further classified in two groups:
  - a) Children who runaways from unpleasant or traumatic home environment. They have family problems that they are unable to resolve. They have experienced conflicts, which go beyond their tolerance level.
  - b) Children who runaway from home taste the exciting experience of a glamorized city life.

Radha Krishna Murthy (1996) further categorized the street children into two ie., 1) children with continues contact with their families. 2) Children with occasional contacts with families. In the light of the above classifications the present study classified into five types; they are include, Runaway but no

contact with the family, runaway but occasional contact with family, runaway but regular contact with the family, not runaway but regular contact with the family and orphan (abandoned).

### **Neglected children:**

Child neglect is defined as ‘the failure of a person responsible for a child’s care and up bringing to safeguard the child’s emotional and physical health and general well being’ and ‘the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs resulting in serious impairment of health and/or development’. Child neglect is the failure to provide basic physical health care, supervision, nutrition, emotional nurturing education or safe housing. Society generally believes there are necessary behaviours a care giver must provide a child in order for the child to develop.

Neglect is notoriously difficult to define as there are no clear, cross-cultural standards for desirable for minimally adequate child rearing practices. While neglect generally refers to the absence of parental care and the chronic failure to meet children’s basic needs, defining these needs has not been straightforward. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or caregiver failing to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter. Family size can contribute to child neglect. If the family cannot provide for all the children, children can suffer neglect. Family history can play a role in parent’s neglectful behaviour. If parents were neglected as children meaning they learned neglectful from their own parents, they often internalise and believe those behaviours to be the ‘norm’ which results in neglecting their own children. Neglectful behaviour is most often women. The higher proportion of female reported for neglect may reflect the social attitude that mothers are responsible for meeting the needs of their children.

There are various types of child neglect. Physical neglect refers to the failure to provide a child with basic necessities of life such as food and clothing. Educational/developmental neglect is the failure to provide a child with experiences for necessary growth and development, such as not sending a child to school or giving him or her an education, whereas emotional neglect is failing to provide emotional support such as emotional security and encouragement. Medical neglect is when care givers do not meet children’s basic health care needs.

**Magnitude of the problem of street and neglected children:**

The condition in modern societies, irrespective of their economic achievements contributing for the growth of the phenomenon of the street and neglected children, the process of family disintegration, breakdown in marital harmony, massive emigration, decay of human values, parental mental and health problems, substance use, domestic violence, unemployment and poverty are factors which increase the likelihood of street and neglected children. The estimates on the street and neglected children with reference to the statistical figure either in terms of absolute numbers or in proportions are found difficult. In 2008, the U.S state and local child protective services received 3.3 million reports of children being abused or neglected. 71 percent of the children were classified as victims of child neglect.

The researcher has conducted empirical study in the city of Visakhapatnam by taking a sample one hundred and fifty street and neglected children.

**Profile of the area under study:**

Visakhapatnam district is one of the North eastern coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh and it lies between  $17^{\circ} - 15^{\circ}$  and  $18^{\circ} - 32^{\circ}$  northern latitude and  $83^{\circ} - 30^{\circ}$  in eastern longitude. It is bounded on the North Partly by the Orissa state and partly by Vizianagaram district, on the south by East Godavari district, on the West by Orissa state and east by Bay of Bengal. According to 2011 census report the actual population of the Visakhapatnam is 14,35,099. It is the second largest city in the state of Andhra Pradesh and the third largest city on the east coast of India after Kolkata and Chennai.

There are fifty centres in Visakhapatnam city where street and neglected children are found. Among fifty centres researcher has randomly selected fifteen centres for the present study, they are: fishing harbour, R.K beach, poorna market, rellivedhi, Jagadamba junction, Railway station, RTC complex, Kotha road, Kurupam market, Old post office, Kailasagiri, Simhachalam, Malkapuram, Gajuwaka and Industrial estate.

**Data analysis:**

In the first instance, researcher asked about the general information of the respondents. An overwhelming majority i.e., 89.9 percent of the street and neglected children belongs to the category of male, where as 10.1 percent are female. Regarding the age majority i.e., 70 percent of the respondents are 12 years old and above, where as 30 percent are below 12 years age group. When comes to the religion an overwhelming

majority ie., 90.5 percent of the street and neglected children are Hindus, followed by 3.3 percent Christians, 3 percent Muslims and 0.2 percent are from other religious background. The other question asked by the researchers was about the caste more than half ie., 55.3 percent of the respondents said that they belongs to backward class, followed by 21.1 percent forward caste and 2.3 percent are from scheduled tribes category. The next question asked to the street and neglected children was about their educational qualifications. 41.7 percent of the respondents said that they have studied up to primary education, where as 19.9 percent of the respondents have upper primary education followed by 12 percent higher secondary education. Further the researcher asked the nativity of the respondents. More than half ie., 69.2 percent of the street and neglected children said that their native place is Visakhapatnam city, whereas 29.4 percent of the respondents said that they are from surrounding rural areas of Visakhapatnam urban, while 1.4 percent are from tribal areas.

The next question asked to the respondents was about the duration of the time from which they have left their houses. 44.3 percent of the street and neglected children said that they are on street for less than one month duration, whereas 21.1 percent of the respondents are on the street from few months, followed by 15.6 percent from one year, 9.3 percent for few years and 10.7 percent for many years. Researcher asked the street and neglected children the reasons to come to the street nearly half (50 percent) of the respondents said that due to friends influence they have come to the street, contrary to this 35.4 percent of the respondents expressed the view that they have come to the street, because of deprivation of basic needs, remaining 14.6 percent did not mention any specific reasons. Immediately the next question asked to the respondents about the type of work which they are doing, majority ie., 53.7 percent of the respondents said that they are doing the rag picking, where as 9.5 percent of the respondents said that they are working in garages, followed by 8.8 percent railway bogie cleaners, 7.9 percent beggars, 7.7 percent tea parlour boys, 6.3 percent market coolies, 5.3 percent servant maids 0.6 percent shoes shiners and 0.2 percent prostitution etc.

The other question posed to the street and neglected children was about their monthly income, more than half ie., 52.1 percent of the respondents said that they are earning Rs.600/- per month, where as 31.5 percent of the respondents said that they are

earning Rs.800/- per month and the remaining 16.4 percent of the children are earning Rs.1000/- per month.

Researcher enquired about the social life of the street and neglected children, more than half i.e., 51 percent of the respondents said that they are spending their time with friends, followed by 20.2 percent watching movies, 18.1 percent involved in gambling and 10.8 percent with alcohol and drugs. Further the next question asked to them was where they are consuming their food, 48.1 percent of the respondents said that they are consuming their food in way side parlours, followed by 27.9 percent at pavements and platforms, 20 percent of the children at homes and 4 percent at non-governmental organizations.

Researcher has tried to know about the knowledge of street and neglected children regarding non-governmental organizations, majority i.e., 78.3 percent of the respondents said that they did not have any knowledge about non-governmental organizations, whereas 21.7 percent of the children have awareness about non-governmental organizations.

#### **Findings of the study:**

Majority of the street and neglected children belongs to the category of male. They are in 12 years and above age group, majority of them are Hindus and belongs to the reserved category (back ward class and scheduled caste). Regarding to education majority of them have primary and upper primary educational qualifications. Further it is noticed that majority of the street and neglected children are non-migrants and belongs to the Visakhapatnam. It is observed that majority of the street and neglected children are on the street for less than one month duration and they have come to street because of friends influence. It is interesting to note that majority of them are rag pickers, and they are earning Rs.600/- per month. Regarding their social life, majority of them are spending their time with friends and they are consuming their food at way side parlours. It is surprising to know that an overwhelming majority of street children did not have knowledge about non-governmental organizations. Majority of the street and neglected children mentioned the reasons to become street and neglected children are lack of love, care and affection and proper guidance, in these situations they were neglected and ill-treated.

The causes of child neglect are parental mental health problems, substance use, domestic violence, un-employment and poverty. It is observed that there is also close relationship between poverty and neglected children.

To improve their conditions it is essential to provide necessary support and assistance for reinstatement with their families, where it is possible. Day and night shelters should be created at different important places for these children. There is need to empower the street and neglected children with acceptance and confidence protect their rights as children. Help the children to develop as respective and productive citizens. They should be provided with all the facilities for their creativity. Counselling services should be conducted regarding physical, educational, emotional and psychological problems. Police should be oriented with professional knowledge and skills in dealing with street and neglected children. In addition to that there should be proper police patrols and beats are organised and the police treat the children with a humanistic concern to place the street and neglected children in proper places. It is important to help and support the street and neglected children by organising self-help projects run by the children for collective action.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion we can say that it is not mere enough to give birth to the children but it is essential on the part of the parents to show proper care, love and affection towards them. Because today's children are the citizens of tomorrow, if they are not moulded properly they will become a threat to the society. Parents and teachers should be role models to the children. It is also essential on the part of the parents and teachers to observe the movements of the children from time to time. Because there is an old saying that 'tell me about your friend and I will tell what type of person you are', friends and environmental influence will be there upon the children. So when the children are going in a wrong track, it is the responsibility of the parents and teachers to correct their behaviour.



**References:**

1. Nangia P & Pinto “Situational analysis of children in especially difficult circumstances with focus on street and working children in the Union territory of Delhi” New Delhi, Report submitted to UNICEF, 1982
2. Philips WSK (1994) ‘street children in India’ Jaipur, Rawat publications
3. Daniel.B (2005) ‘Introduction to issues for health and social care in neglect’ (11-25) London and Philadelphia – Jessica kingsley publishers.
4. Thompson, RA (1995) ‘preventing child maltreatment through social support’ thousand oaks, CA; London; New Delhi, sage publications
5. [http://en Wikipedia.org / wiki/census.India.gov.in](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/census.India.gov.in)
6. Gullotta, Thomas p(1979) ‘leaving how family relationship of the runaway child’. The journal of contemporary social work vol.60, No.2, pp 111 to 114.
7. Masani, R.P (1984), ‘story of the society for the protection of children in western India’ the Indian Journal of social work, vol 11 No.4, March, pp 423-437.
8. <http://wiki pedia.org/wiki/child-neglect>
9. <http://www.street children.org.uk>