

IMPACT OF PERCEIVED VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN THE LIVES OF STREET CHILDREN IN SRI LANKA

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All children do not hold happy and carefree experiences of childhood, especially, children who live in the streets of Sri Lanka.

Introduction

Within the broad category of street children there are three distinct groups:

1. Children on the streets - those engaged in some kind of economic activity ranging from begging to vending, due to economic fragility of the family, these children may eventually opt for a permanent life on the streets.

2. Children of the street - those children who actually live on the street (or outside of a normal family environment). Family ties may exist but are tenuous and are maintained only casually or occasionally.

3. Children from Street Families: children who live on the streets with their families (Ennew, 1994; Cosgrove, 1990)

Therefore, it would not be a surprise to hear the children who live in the street undergo physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as experience violent acts almost everyday. The studies convey that the most common form of abuse that the street children experience is those experienced in the hands of their parents (Cosgrove, 1990).

Objectives

Aim of the present study was to investigate the perceived psychological impact of violence and abuse in the lives of street children in Sri Lanka. The sample of the study comprised of 40 (20 girls & 20 boys) street children who have experienced at least one act of if abuse in their lives. The children in the study were divided into two age groups according to their age (5 to 9 years and 10 to 14 years).

Methodology

In order to identify the impact of violence and abuse experienced, a story about a street child called 'Ramu' was narrated to the children in the study. The story contained three sections (Section 1 - Ramu experiencing physical abuse, Section 2 - Ramu experiencing emotional abuse, Section 3 - Ramu experiencing sexual abuse). After narrating the story to the children they were asked to predict what might happen to Ramu due to the abuse experienced. In order to investigate the impact of perceived psychological abuse, five cards illustrating different forms of impacts were spread out in front of the children, and they were requested to choose one card which appealed to them the most. The cards bore the illustrations of depression and suicidal thoughts, inability to emote, never being able to trust adults again,

substance addiction and the child victim becoming an offender.

Results and Discussion

When examining the percentages there is no definite trend which could be observed, in terms of impact. However, maximum numbers of children have stated that the abuse leads to depressive and suicidal feelings. Children in the study had ranked, being able to trust an adults again as an impact which is least likely to happen. The results also revealed that according to the nature (physical, emotional and sexual) of the abuse the responses for perceived impact differed. For example, in the physical abuse condition 30% of the children have stated that the child victim in the story would start abusing the drugs whereas only 7.5% of the children have stated likewise in the emotional abuse condition. Another notable phenomena is that in the sexual abuse condition, 34% of the children have said that the child victim would become an abuser due to the abuse that he/she underwent as a child., compared only 10% of the emotional abuse condition and 17.5% of the children in the physical abuse condition. In all three conditions the children have stated depression as the most frequent impact of abuse. However, none of the children who participated in the study stated that Ramu will never be affected though he had experienced abuse.

Mean and standard deviation (derived from the statistical analysis of rating scales) of the amount of aggression revealed that in all three conditions the younger group of boys displayed more amount of aggression. The

ANOVA for the amount of aggression also confirmed these findings conveying that the main effect of aggression is significant (i.e. the amount of aggression in older children and younger children are different). The younger group of children possess more amount of aggression than the older children [$F(1, 36) = 4.74; P < 0.05$].

References

- Cosgrove, J. (1990) Towards a working definition of street children, *International Social Work*, Vol. 33, , pp. 185-192.
- Ennew, J. (1994). *Street and working children: A guide to planning*, Save the Children. U.K.

