

Socio-Demographic Backgrounds of the Street Children in Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract

Street children are a social problem because children are the future of nation and hope of happiness of every family. However, due to various social and economic factors cause to be street children. The study was conducted with the aim to identify the socio-demographic background of the street children living in the street of Kathmandu valley. The study had collected data from 234 street children living in street and shelter. Structured questionnaire survey was done to collect the data. The study found that majority of street children were form the Janajati group followed by Chhetri and Dalit. There was problem of street children in all types of caste and ethnicity. Basically, extended family, poverty and family conflict were the major causative factors to be street children. Children from the labour class family was found more vulnerable because in this study, more than 80% children reported that the main occupation of their parents was labour work; daily wages. There was need to assess the socio-economic status and main causative factors of street children in future.

Keywords

children, demographic, Kathmandu valley, social, street

Introduction

When we refer to street children, we mean children who spend all day on the street. Some of them remain there at night, some have homes, and others drift in and out of the houses of families, relatives, employees, and friends. With the constant movement from country to town, the number of street children is increasing. Today, it includes not only adolescent boys, but adolescent girls, young children and, at times, whole families (Scanlon, Scanlon, & Lamarao, 1993, p. 16). The term street children have many definitions in different settings. Perhaps demonstrating the fact that street children are not a homogeneous group and that the particular circumstance dictates who should be included in the definition. Generally speaking, four categories of street children have been described and these are: children of the street; children on the street; children who are part of a street family; and those in institutionalized care (WHO, 1995).

Kathmandu is the capital city of Nepal. Around 1.5 million people live in the valley. Overcrowded population city have variety in caste, class and ethnicity. Kathmandu is a very ethnically and culturally diverse city. The Newar are the largest ethnic group at 30% of the population, followed by the Matwali at 25% which includes Tamang, Gurung, Sunuwar, Magars,

and others, the Khas Brahmins at 20%, and the Chhetri at 18.5% of the population. The Tamangs were originally from the surrounding hills of the region. Many hill ethnic groups from Terai (the marshy forests and grasslands on the outer foothills of the Himalaya) have also migrated to the region (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Nepal's urban centers have been facing several socio-economic and infrastructural problems due to lack of policy measures and institutional harmonization. In absence of a strong policy for the regulation and management of rapidly growing, uncontrolled and haphazard urban development has created numerous problems, including deficiencies in basic urban services, encroachment of public lands, slums and sprawling settlement. Urban population growth rate in Nepal is 3.38% where rural and total population growth rates are measured at 1.03 and 1.4 in 2011. Natural expansion of urban area due to increased population growth and newly established planned cities put high pressure in the limited resources available in cities (Devkota, 2012, p. 6).

According to Ghimire, globally the problem of street children has been increasing dramatically. There are as many reasons for being on the street as there are street children. The social conditions and economic necessities, under a changing urban environment are forcing more and more children daily into the street life. It can be associated due to the growth of urban centers and its glamour indirectly affecting the raw mind of children those facing and aggravated by various difficulties, deepening their extent of poverty leading to low level of living. Though, after belonging to the street are involved in money making to maintain their family or themselves, the activities they do include "marginal economy" such as shoe shining, car washing, begging, pick pocketing, garbage collecting, etc. which is against the child right (Ghimire, 2014, p. iii). In the Nepalese context also, the problem of street children can be observed in the city areas. Mostly children from the broken family and economically poor family children come to the street and involved in the different types of work to live their life. The study aims to identify the socio-demographic background of street children available in the Kathmandu valley.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in the Kathmandu valley; data were collected from 234 street children. The study was based on the descriptive research design. The study had adopted the cross-sectional design. The street children were selected purposively from the street and shelter. Only those children were selected who could say about his or her own family information and other causative factors which made them to come in street. The researcher had not given any pressure or incentive to those children to participate in the study. It was fully volunteer participation and ensure the confidentiality. The study was based on the quantitative data because the data were collected from the structured questionnaire survey. The collected data were analyzed statistically from the statistical software.

Findings and Conclusion

Demographic characteristics of children

Nepal is a landlocked country surrounded by India and China. Geographically, it can be divided into three distinct belts – the mountains in the north, the hills in the middle and the narrow plain of the Terai to the south. Nepal is a land of diversity with marked multi-ethnic characteristics. Approximately 55% of the population comprises of indigenous Nepali speakers. Nepal has a

social system characterized by the centrality of the family with factors such as caste and religion having significant impact on the lives of the people. Administratively, Nepal is divided into 5 development regions, 14 Zones, 75 districts, 58 municipalities, 3912 Village Development Committees (VDC) and nearly 36,000 wards. The rapid rate of urbanization during the past two decades has created unprecedented pressure on Kathmandu and a number of cities in the Terai. Apart from the obvious health issues, the main problems are inadequate infrastructure and services, increase in slum and squatter settlements, a decline in the quality of the environment and social conflicts due to overcrowding (Ministry of Health and Population , 2007).

The following study has been conducted with street children of Kathmandu who were belonging with various social demography of Nepal. Thus, on the basis of caste, street children population demographic situation in Kathmandu valley, the following table elaborated that the maximum numbers of street children were belongs from Janajati caste along with 49.1%.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of children

		Frequency	Percent
Caste	Chhetri	52	22.2
	Brahamin	21	9.0
	Janjati	115	49.1
	Dalit	35	15.0
	Madhesi	9	3.8
	Muslim	1	.4
	Others	1	.4
	Total	234	100.0
Sex	Male	190	81.2
	Female	44	18.8
	Total	234	100.0
Age	5-10 Years	34	14.5
	11-15 Years	142	60.7
	16-20 Years	55	23.5
	21-25 Years	3	1.3
	Total	234	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The street children from Muslims and other caste group with very less number along with .4% of existence in the Kathmandu city. Similarly, Chhetri caste group street children were 22.2%, Brahamin caste group street children from 9.0%, Dalit and Muslims caste group street children from 15.0% and 3.8%. Thus, this shows the higher number of Janajati caste group street children escaping or leaving their home due to the various reasons. Female security is very serious and problematic issues of every country. If female street children have higher number that could create huge problem like health, violence, exploitation, etc. However, here, in the given data it has been visualized that the less number of female street children along with 18.8% have secured the less number of harassment and health related other issues in comparison with male street children along with 81.2% in Kathmandu valley.

Age matters a lot in making the right and wrong decision in every body's life. Along with growing process of children they also build up their either negative or positive courage. Some have capacity to turn and remove the negative courage from their lives and some have capacity to make their negative courage more powerful. Even from the given table it has been proven that 11-15 years age group street children had more influence of leaving or escaping from home and enjoying street life along with 60.7%. The age group from 16-20 had second position in having the number of population in street children mass in Kathmandu valley along with 23.5%. Generally it has been kept adult in 15-20 years age group because they use less capacity to choose good way of path want to live according to their wish. The age group from 5-11 years had 14.5% on the other hand only 1.3% street children were still living in the street.

Family structure of street children

Family is one of the most important social institutions. Most of the world's population lives in family units; it is an important primary group in the society. Family is the most pervasive and universal social institution. It plays a vital role in the socialization of individuals. Family is regarded as the first society of human beings. Study points in his blog the notion of sociologists, family is the most important institution of a society because survival of human race is related with it. It is the family that brings up an individual by taking care and by training him. An individual passes most of his time in a family, affecting his personality most of all. Family is the center of a society and is a source of culture. However, family structure is under culture and is in harmony with its demands (Study Point, 2014).

The study found that every street child has family. Majority reported that there were father, mother, brother and sister in their family.

Table 2: Family structure of street children

Family member in house	Frequency	Percent
Father only	41	17.5
Mother only	28	12.0
Both father & Mother alive	121	51.7
Father & Mother died	44	18.8
Total	234	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Family size of street children

The study found that the number of family members of street children were minimum 1 to maximum 12 member in one family. The average family size was 4.8884.

Table 3: Family size of street children

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
No. of family members	215	1.00	12.00	4.8884	2.02475

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Occupation of Parents

Occupation, business, profession, trade refer to the activity to which one regularly devotes oneself, especially one's regular work, or means of getting a living. According to Mayer "Poor children are more likely to impose costs on society by consuming more health dollars, more education resources, and more government economic aid. Because their chances of success are lower, they are also more likely to grow up to be poor themselves, thus perpetuating poverty into the next generation" (Mayer, 1997). There is no doubt that on average the life chances of poor children are worse than the life chances of more affluent children. The study given the results of street children parents occupation and their reason to leave the home and street children had reported the varieties of occupation of their parents: labour, driver, mason, carpenter, aboard job, small scale business, agriculture. But more than 80% reported that their parents were doing the labour work which was not adequate to manage the daily needs of family.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The demographic information shows that there was highest (49.1%) number of street children were from Janajati (ethnic) group followed by Chhetri and Dalit group. Majority (51.7%) reported that their father and mother both are alive though they came in street because of the conflict between the parents. Most of the children reported that due to the drunk habit of father, their mother had left home which made the children to be a helpless. Main occupation of majority of street was labour work. It was found that the limited income of parents was not adequate to manage the daily expenditure and need of family which was one causative factor to create the conflict between parents. The children of extended family were found more vulnerable to be a street child. The study found the need of further study to identify the socio-economic status of family of street children and other causative factors which made them vulnerable to be street children.

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