Children of the street: The cause and consequence of their social exclusion in Gondar city, North West Ethiopia

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Abstract: The marginalization of children who are working, living, and surviving on the street is a worldwide problem. This study emphasized examining the root causes and consequences of social exclusion on street children in Gondar city, North West of Ethiopia. The study employed a qualitative research approach to get a profound understanding of the phenomena. Hence, samples were selected using the non-probability purposive sampling technique. The data was collected from in-depth interviews with eighteen street children, two focus group discussions with the children, and four Key informant interviews with experts in the area of street children from the Gondar office of women and children, office of labor and social affairs as well as Yenge Tesfa organization indicated that street children are excluded member of the society because of lack of parents/guardians, poverty, peoples’ negative attitude. Also, the finding shows that their lives were affected due to the deprivation of positive social relationships, lack of basic needs, acute health, and psychological problems respectively. Accordingly, their social exclusion inhibits them from enjoying the rights and opportunities that exist in society as children in particular and members of society in general. Therefore, unless interventions are made by the concerned bodies, it results in general crises on the well-being of these unfortunate children.

Subjects: Childhood - Anthropology; Sociology & Social Policy; Social Class

Keywords: Street children; social exclusion; cause; consequence; Gondar

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Children are assets and hope of a nation. They have a right to survival, protection, development, and participation in social activities. However, those children who are working, living, and surviving on the street are denied their rights. Accordingly, study on the social exclusion of children of the street with a particular emphasis on the causes and consequences of their exclusion would considerably support people, government organizations and other concerned stakeholders particularly on the area of humanity work to understand and take the necessary steps that will contribute for the improvement in their wellbeing. The finding of this research will also benefit policy designers to formulate and implement well considered strategy that can assure basic needs for the children.
1. Introduction

The social exclusion of street children is a worldwide phenomenon as children working, living, and surviving on the street are marginalized members of society (Crous & Bradshaw, 2017; Volpi, 2002). Globally, UNICEF estimated 100 million children growing up on the urban streets. However, the magnitude of the problem varies around the world (Adeyemi, 2012; Alaye, 2021). It is more serious in developing nations where a lack of adequate social infrastructure and socio-economic programs threatens the developmental needs of these unfortunate children (Hassen & Mañus, 2018). A complex web of factors gravely heightens the risk of streetism on children (Shah et al., 2005). Poverty, HIV/AIDS, broken homes, single-parent families, and crisis from natural disasters to ethno-religious war appears to be a major factor causing the phenomena (Markim, 2007).

Ethiopia is one of these nations with a growing number of street children facing several deprivations (Yacob, 2018). In this country, there are an estimated number of 150,000–200,000 street children nationwide, with another 1,000,000 vulnerable or at-risk youth ending up on the streets (UNODC, 2006). Furthermore, Gondar’s office of Social Affairs (2019) stated that there are over 4200 Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) of which over 800 are living on the street in the city (Yenge Tesfa, 2013). Though, Blanchfield (2010) indicated theUNCRC (1989) claim as t every child has the right to fully develop his/her social, emotional, cognitive, and physical potential regardless of any family circumstances (Smolinski, 2014). Ethiopian Government ratified this agreement in 1991, that defines children’s rights and services to which they are entitled as survival, protection, development, and participation in social activities (Kifle, 2005).

However, literature analysis in the area specified street children are marginalized and least assisted in society (Adeyemi, 2012; Cabaguing et al., 2022; WHO, 2000). They do not have appropriate relationships with major social institutions during their childhood, such as family, education, health, and other institutions Vedadet al., 2013). Additionally, street children are underprivileged in social relations, access to resources, and human rights (Bhukuth & Ballet, 2015; Fikre, 2016; Jérôme, 2015). These combinations of deprivations are significant indicators of their social exclusion (Daly et al., 2006; Jehoel, 2007; Kebede, 2015).

Thus, social exclusion produces deep and long-term damage to the living conditions, social and economic participation, emotional life as well as the health status of street children (Abate et al. 2022; Yacob, 2018). According to (Birhanu, 2019) a study conducted in Ambo Town, West Showa Zone, Ethiopia indicated that street children are facing numerous social problems ranging from sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, engagement in drug use, prostitution, discrimination to different health challenges because of their living condition and inaccessibility to medical services. Similarly, there are reports of various basic deprivations of street children like food, shelter, clothes, and other necessities in Gondar city.

Figure 1 indicates the underprivileged living circumstance of children of the street from the society, social institutions and accessing resources leads them for social exclusion. As well, this marginalized living condition direct them for further segregation in various affairs of the society.

Accordingly, this study is conducted to address the following research questions in the study area; what are the main causes for the social exclusion of street children? What are the consequences of social exclusion on street children?

2. Methods and material

The researchers employed the phenomenological design of a qualitative research method by way of describing phenomena that exist as an integral part of the world in which we live (Astatil, 2013). This approach broadens and/or deepens our understanding of how things came to be the way they
are in our social world. Accordingly, qualitative data collection methods which are pertinent in phenomenological design to answer the research questions regarding the lived experience of street children are employed, notably, in-depth interviews, FGD, and KII (Northey et al., 2018). These strategies give the opportunity for the researchers to combine the strengths of diverse methods and triangulate in order to offset the weakness of one data collection method by the strength of the other (Uwe, 2009).

Samples were selected using the non-probability purposive sampling technique because there is no sample frame from which to choose these street children for the study. Even they are extremely mobile from one corner of the street to the other as they perceive danger from the law enforcement officials and older street residents. It was difficult to employ a probability sampling to participants whose location is temporary and who are constantly on the move. The researchers therefore found it logical to use non-probability sampling. Hence, although mobile, those who have rich information and highly knowledgeable about street children and street life were selected for participation (Elmusharaf, 2016; UNODC, 2006). Also, the researchers relied on their own tacit knowledge, good judgment, and cognizance of the topic under study while choosing participants for the study. The sample size of the study was decided when redundancy/saturation of information was reached after interviewing eighteen street children who work and live on the street for over one year and above. As well, two FGDs were conducted; each group consisted of eight members. Furthermore, four experts from the Gondar city administration office of women and children, office of labor and social affairs, and Yenge Tesfa organization provided vital information about the social exclusion of street children.

Thus, the data gathered from the participants followed various ethical issues particularly the researchers protect the dignity of informants, kept confidential, anonymity hoard the data at secured places, deterring sniffs and scoopers from reaching the data. The data were thematically analyzed and interpreted using various steps: (Lacey & Luff, 2009), such as transcription, familiarization, coding, organizing, and thematizing (Berg, 2007). Prior to analyzing data, the researchers became familiar with the collected data from in-depth interviews, FGD, and KII. Afterward, the data were translated to the study language and coded in order to classify similar categories (Warren & Karner, 2015). These similar categories were condensed and categorized into key themes based on the objectives of the study that shed light on research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2007). As well, to assure the quality of the data collection and analysis, the researchers passed through different procedures particularly carefully select the participants of the study based on the outlined criteria, established rapport with the interviewees, invite professionals to comment on the prepared interview guideline etc. Finally, the
results of the study were validated with a discussion in line with other related findings. Then, conclusions and recommendations were drawn based on the findings of the study.

3. Results
This study explored various causes and consequences of social exclusion of street children, where a number of factors to the social exclusion of street children interact. The result mainly indicated that lack of parents/guardians, poverty, people’s negative attitude on street children and poor sanitation as triggers for their social exclusion. Also, the study finding showed that social exclusion affected the lives of street children by preventing them from having positive social relationships and unavailability of basic needs, exposing them to health/psychological problems.

4. Causes for the social exclusion of street children: Lack of parents/guardians
Exclusion from the normal activities of society makes them lonely, devoid of affection, love, security, protection and social support. The lack of these relevant social capitals separated them from the mainstream society due to families/guardians who serve as interlocks. In this regard, a 13-year-old street child expressed that lack of parents/guardians made him excluded from the society as follows:

I am 13 years old. I came from Amba Giyorgis, I lost my parents 4 years ago. Starting from then I started living on the street, suffering from a lot of things mainly lack of affection and protection. Before my parents died, they used to care for me and people were also nice to me. No one mistreated me and spoke with me in a bad manner. However, after I lost my parents, people abused and insulted me. In these entire situations, no one stood to protect me from the abuses and I am leading such a miserable life because of the death of my parents.

Additionally, a key informant reported,

There is no other institution that plays the role of the family. The separation of street children from their families makes them suffer from lack of appropriate skills and protection which help children to be included as members of the society.

The above excerpts exhibited that lack of parent/guardian harshly exposed street children to social exclusion. Family is the pillar of social institutions to socialize children, using different roles such as; nurture, love, protection, providing emotional and material supports. As the surrounding of Gondar is fully a traditional society, the children could have largely taken care of by the extended families. However, street children’s lack of parents/guardians makes them to be segregated member of the society. As they are devoid of the necessary human needs, their chance of becoming healthy and successful adult will deteriorate due to their vulnerability to exploitation, abuse and violence in the street.

5. Poverty/lack of resource
Poverty is the pivotal reason for causing social exclusion of street children. The study result indicated that poverty/lack of resource has highly contributed to their segregation—the segregation that landed them in starvation, inferiority and denial of opportunities. In this case, 12 years old street child mentioned how poverty/lack of resource makes him excluded member of the society:

All the time I am on the street begging money from people. I never went to school. However, I look at children at my age when they go to school and return back from school with sorrow. I cannot afford the expenses to go to school like them. If I were not poor, I will go to school like other children.

Another 16 years old street child described,

People always like, follow and stand for rich people. I am poor guy on the street so no one likes my value as a human.
Furthermore, participants in FGD reported,

Due to lack of resources, we are not receiving the service that exist for free in the society for example, school and hospital. There are schools without fee, but we cannot attend education because no one provides us basic needs. Further, whenever we feel ill, hospitals request letter from kebeles.

Therefore, the above excerpts demonstrated that poverty makes street children deprived of the opportunities and rights that are open to the other member of the society. Though the services appear for free, the existing bureaucracy system creates problems. Thus, the arrangement in the social structure makes street children isolated from getting benefits that are available in the society without charge. As well, it deprives them basic needs such as food, shelter and clothes, damaging a good-life chance of childhood.

6. People's negative attitude
Most street children are not fully accepted by public as people develop a negative attitude towards street children. In this regard, a 15-year-old street child explained how people 's negative attitude excluded him from the society in the following way,

People think that I am on the street because I am interested in living on the street. Moreover, people believe that I am addicted to substances, thief and rude. Thus, they prevent their children to not play with me because they tell their children that I am rude. They also suspect me of everything bad and they are not interested in helping me.

Also, participants of FGD described it as,

People usually misunderstand us; they think that we do not have any future as we make the “feature of a nation unattractive”. However, like other children we have great dreams to accomplish in the future. As well, we want to make the image of our nation beautiful, although the attitude of people discourages us from achieving our dreams.

Further, key informant asserted the situation as:

Mostly, people consider children are on the street because they are beyond the control of their parents/guardians; people do not understand the basic problems of street children. Consequently, the society keeps excluding street children from the rights and opportunities which are open to the member of society in general and children in particular.

Therefore, the above stories showed that people misunderstand the phenomena that forces street children to further exclusion. Any exclusion complicates children's lives on the street. Furthermore, since children want to imitate the behavior, they observe/hear from their surrounding area, these children are sometimes exposed to engage in theft, substance abuse and other acts.

7. Poor sanitation
The finding of the study revealed that due to their poor sanitation street children are exposed to forced segregation. They lack water, soap, and a safe place to sleep and thus they are easily exposed to health problems and most people denied having social contact with them. In this regard, a 16-year-old street child portrayed how poor sanitation causes him to be socially excluded as:

Most of the time, I do not have a nice odor, particularly if the night is rainy. Thus, if unintentionally I touch people, they even clean the body part that I touched and they show me bad face sometimes they want to beat me but I quickly run away.

Similarly, FGD participants expressed it as:
The existing life situation makes us forget about our personal hygiene. We do not wash our body and clothes frequently. Also, we do not wash our hands while eating food and we consequently feel ill most of the time.

The above excerpts from in-depth interview and FGD pointed out how poor sanitation leads to social exclusion of street children. It is understood that poor sanitation among street children affected their social wellbeing as well as their health. Their wellbeing is affected as they are denied of smooth social interaction with people as people mostly do not like to have contact with a person of unpleasant odor. Their health is thwarted, exposing them to various diseases due to lack of personal hygiene.

8. The consequence of social exclusion on street children: Deprivation from social relationship
Street children are socially excluded mostly because they do not have good relationships with people. The study finding indicates that most people stigmatize street children and do not want to have a positive affiliation with them. Even if there is a connection between people and street children, there is status gap which puts street children at the lower level of the ladder. In this regard, a 16-year-old street child clarified the situation as follows:

Most people do not want to have links with street children. Even they do not want to talk to us, play with us and greet us well. People want to have contact with us when they want to use our labor for free, giving us leftover food or a small amount of money.

Furthermore, FGD participants indicated the circumstance of street children as:

We feel bad on the street because people do not show us love. They treat us violently. Whenever people saw us around the hotels/ other places, they tell us to go away rather than asking our desires.

Likewise, key informant elucidated the phenomena as:

People do not want to come closer to street children. They believe that street children are suspected of improper act in the society. Thus, people fear that they may get robbed or face other harm if they have an attachment to street children.

The above excerpts exhibited that due to various reasons people refused to have an attachment to street children. This makes children feel isolated, lonely, poor and helpless. Furthermore, they lose the value of their existence. Therefore, their lack of social interaction makes their life full of challenge. For instance, lack of social network predisposes them to develop an antagonistic culture which attributes to instability in the society. Street children further exposed to carry social stigma and negative social attitude and thus unable to get assistance in order to survive. Therefore, this obvious alienation can cause feeling of helplessness where the only foreseeable solution may be suicide.

9. Lack of basic need (food, cloth and shelter)
Interview result revealed that street children are denied of basic need thus suffer a lot from starvation and lack of clothing. In this view, a 13-year-old street child stated about living on the street as,

Whenever the night comes, I get jealous of people who have a house. It is because finding a safe place to spend the night is the main challenge I usually face.

Additionally, participants of FGD discussed,

Most of us do not have extra cloth more than the one we wear. Thus, one should have to be lucky to get another cloth. Though, that child gets more clothes, it is meaningless because it can be snatched by older boys on the street.
Key informant also explicated the situation as:

Street children are deprived of basic needs. They are viewed as public nuisance and risk to the security of the general public. People refrain from providing basic needs for these children. Sometimes they are exposed to hunger and thirst, other times are exposed to various diseases, feel hopeless and remain underweight.

The above stories exemplified that street children are deprived of basic needs which are the basic right of every child. According to the convention on the rights of a child 1989) article 27 (3) every child has the right to basic needs. Thus, state parties shall take appropriate measures to assist children in regard to nutrition, clothes and housing. All street children are devoid of rights and found suffering from hunger. As a result, they are vulnerable to multiple problems such as, abuse, neglect, health and emotional problems.

10. Health problem
The study results also showed that the life of street children is affected due to their frequent experience of health problem. It is observable that any person without sufficient food, poor sanitation and inappropriate place to stay will be victim of different disease. Hence, finding interviews with a key informant and street children encountered acute health problems. In this regard a 14 years old street child described it as:

I usually feel pain in my stomach and have headaches. I also have cough at night I do not even know what happens to me whenever I am so ill.

Besides, key informant described it as:

Street children are mainly exposed to health problems due to their way of life. Their vulnerability to health problem is mainly associated with nutritional problems and lack of a safe place to stay as well as sanitation problem. Thus, they experience various health problems such as skin diseases, cough, stomachache, malnutrition and diarrhea.

The above two excerpts from key informants and street children are evidence of the exposure of street children to disease. Therefore, it has two indications for the children as well as the nation. Primarily, it is damaging the life of street children because they frequently experience illness so it decreases their life expectancy. The other one is for the nation; it is known that children are the future of a nation. Thus, if these children are vulnerable to different disease, the nation is also losing its future human resources. It means the future of the national development will be at risk as children are the hope of future nation in particular and the world in general.

11. Psychological problem
Street children go through the psychological dilemma due to the situation they pass through their day-to-day life. In this regard, a 12-year-old street child described it as:

These days when a stranger comes to me, I get worried. It happens to me after I hear what happen to my friends. The story my friend told me is that: some people gave him food, cloth and money so that they planned to take him to somewhere else without him knowing it. Those people planned to take him with other street children just to take their kidneys illegally. But thanks to God, they are saved by the police.

Another street child expressed it as:

I am 12 years old. Children of my age are going to school and learn. But I am not going to school because I do not have anyone who can help me to school. When I think about my future, I do not know what will happen to me because I am going to be illiterate and the world has no place for uneducated person.
FGD discussants also indicated as:

On the street, we feel inferior to other people and children. The way people treat and look at us makes us feel undesirable and valueless further, we are pessimistic about our future.

Moreover, key informant enlightened as:

Street children are leading a stress full life because of the adverse street life condition, family disintegration, economic factors and abuse. Additionally, they are not acquiring the skill from the basic social institutions such as family and schools. Street children are more anxious in their current living conditions and have become pessimistic about their future.

The above four quotes from different sources exhibited that street children are facing prolonged stress and feeling of inferiority in their lives. Thus, such anxiety in life forces them to traumatic events that make these children weak, fearful, angry and worrisome. As a result, they became a pessimist and their ability was impaired and thus could not interact with people.

12. Illegal activity
The participants of the study in the in-depth interview revealed that they often engage in illegal activities mainly theft due to their poverty. In this case, a 16-year-old street child depicted how social exclusion forces him to engage in illegal activities as:

Most people have a negative attitude and are not volunteering to help me. So, when I get the chance, I steal money/ anything from people so that I buy food to fulfill my other desires.

Key informant as well reported,

Whatever good thing is done by street children no one willingly recognizes their good sides. Instead, people blame and insult them as a thief, gambler and rude. Hence, children are pushed to involve in unlawful behavior because they believe that people do not see their good jobs and thus these children want to behave the way people label them— gambler, thief and rude.

Therefore, the above stories denoted that street children engaged in prohibited activities due to social pressure and starvation. Firstly, when people label street children unnecessarily, they are indirectly forcing them to act according to the label … The other one is starvation; these children are excluded member of the society from basic needs so the feeling of hunger forced them to commit unlawful acts to solve their problem of hunger. However, this act distracts their personality, landing them in jail.

13. Discussion
The main objective of the current research was to examine the causes and consequences of social exclusion on street children. At this point the current findings are presented in relation to relevant findings of previous researches in the area. The present study found that the root causes for the social exclusion of street children are: lack of parents/guardians, poverty, negative perspective of people, deviation of street children from accepted norms and poor sanitation of street children. These findings are consistent with and contradictory to the study results of various scholars.

A study conducted by (Mccoll & Groark, 2015) claimed that family is an institution which provides a child with love, a sense of belonging, and a lifelong connection to people. Thereby, if children are separated from their parents/guardians they become a marginalized member of the society (Aya (2010). Thus, the findings of these scholars were steady with the current study finding. As well, (Cabaguing et al., 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2017; Ekpiken-ekanem & Ayuk, 2014; Harju, 2013) asserted that poverty is the main reason behind forcing the children to live and work on the street. However, unlike the current study finding, the scholars revealed that street children spent their leisure by playing games, roaming around by watching video/ cinema.
According to (Asante, 2016; Ghimire, 2014; Martinsson & Amanda, 2017; Redmond et al., 2022) the attitude of the general public towards street children is hostile, showing dislike towards children and thereby isolating them from their surroundings (Cullen, 2021). The current study revealed that people do not have a positive attitude towards street children as they consider street children as rude, thief and suspect for many offensive activities in the society without having real evidence. Hence, this makes the lives of the children highly intricate and difficult to solve.

However, the finding of the study conducted by Hakim and Rahman (2016) was inconsistent with the current study. Their finding showed that most of the street children keep their personal hygiene; they developed the habit to wash their hands before taking meals. These authors claimed that street children are not plainly deprived of their own wellbeing. Nonetheless, the current study identified that street children are not keeping their cleanliness well, impacting their well-being as it prevents them from having social affiliation that serves them as a social capital against exclusion.

Regarding the consequences of social exclusion on street children, the present study signaled that social exclusion prohibited them from having social interactions and basic needs by exposing them to health, psychological problems and illegal activities. This finding is congruent with many scholars’ findings such as (Dutta, 2018; Hai, 2014; Tuladhar, 2013) who claimed that street children could not have vital social relationships due to the lack of parents/guardians, poverty and other reasons. Furthermore, (Dutta, 2018) reported that street children are unable to access schools and healthcare facilities. Not only do they usually feel hungry, but they also do not have more than one set of cloth which gets torn, dirty, and undersized. Nevertheless, street children remained optimistic about their future, hoping to become professionals in different fields. However, the present study partially revealed that most street children were found pessimists about their future.

In relation to the health and psychological problem of street children (Amury & Kombo, 2010; Markim, 2007; UNICEF, 2021) claimed that street children are exposed to different diseases, so they frequently experience illness and injuries. This finding was steady to the current study finding that discovered the psychological impact of social exclusion on street children, but further from the reason of the above scholars the current study demonstrated how the anxious life of the street and illegal activity of people affected street children psychologically.

Regarding illegal activities, a study conducted by (Atkinson, 2017) showed that street children engage in criminal activities in order to overcome the impact of social exclusion. They are hired to carry weapons, sell drugs, collect extortion money, commit political violence and conduct contract killings. This finding is relevant to the current study finding in a way street children are engaged in illegal activities. Nevertheless, the present study result differs to the extent that street children in the City of Gondar simply engaged in criminal activities such as theft.

14. Conclusion and recommendation
The finding of the current study showed that street children are severely excluded members of society. They are ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy that prevents them from enjoying several rights and opportunities that exist in society as children. As a result, it is difficult for them to access basic needs notably; food, clothes, shelter and education. They try to survive from hunger, lack of clothes and shelter by taking several mechanisms mainly through involving in child labor, begging and illegal activities that can keep their health at risk of physical and psychological problems. Above all, the worst situation is the children are left without attending formal education. Though they have access for free formal education it is difficult for them to continue class without having anyone to fulfill their basic needs and material cost. Hence, they became pessimist in their lives. Additionally, the roles played by government and NGOs to secure their future is not sufficient as they could not provide them basic needs, permanent residences, protect them from gangs or treat them as citizens. Above all, the central/local governments and could not fulfil its custodian responsibilities—leaving them as uncared for part of the society.
Accordingly, this study showed different causal factors for segregation, such as lack of parent/guardians, poverty, negative attitude of people toward street children, and poor sanitation of street children. Thus, these reasons for their social marginalization are found beyond their control. It needs basic intervention from the government, NGOs, and other stakeholders in the area. However, the inadequacy of such measure in the study area makes the children pessimists in their life and they suffer from problems such as lack of good social relationships, basic needs, and thereby face acute health and psychological problems. Additionally, lack of basic needs and their inability to survive forces them to involve in illegal activities that eventually damage their childhood, life chances exposing them to further exclusion. Based on the findings on the social exclusion of street children in the study area, the following recommendations are forwarded:

- The main cause for the social exclusion of street children is their separation from parents/guardians. The children get to street life due to abandoned, neglected, and abused by family members. In this stance through intervening in the problem family reunion could be the solution.
- Street children are excluded by the misapprehension of the people. Therefore, the media should play important role in changing the negative attitude of people that can help in addressing the basic problems of street children as well as their deprivation from social relationship.
- Community-based organizations working on promoting the culture of respect as well as providing basic needs and protection for these vulnerable children must be established and work to advance the wellbeing and the social inclusion of street children.
- Rehabilitation center must be established to provide services for those street children with a psychological problem, substance abuse, and illegal activities, in order to restore their self-confidence.
- There should be a national policy and strategy with a focus on addressing the social exclusion of street children by providing their basic needs adequately.
- The existing bureaucracy in different organizations has to be revised because it denies street children the opportunities and rights which are open to the other member of the society. For instance, health centers provide their service for the poor as far as the individual has evidence from kebele that confirm the person’s residential locations, but this system excludes street children from such benefits as they do not have letters from kebele.

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