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# **A Study to Identify the Hot Spots of Street Children in Lahore**

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## **Abstract**

The foremost objective of the research is to identify those localities which are considered the hot spots of street children in Lahore. The exploratory type of research uses the qualitative method of research and strengthened form data collection from the field. The observation is used as a tool for data collection. The result of research shows seven hot spots of street children at Lahore. The research indicate the dire need of initiating such programs with the cooperation of public- private organizations in these localities which directly address the root causes of street children phenomenon.

## **Introduction**

Children are roses of this world. They give fragrance, beauty and meaning to human life. They are innocent, trusting and full of hope. They are the real capital and future of a nation. They are very precious, delicate and need proper care and treatment. Their lives should mature gradually as they gain new experiences. It is a universal truth that economic prosperity and socio-cultural progress of a nation largely depends on the proper upbringing of its future generation. The educational, civilized and developed

societies always predict and plan their future keeping in mind the present status and situation of their children.

Childhood is considered the best stage in the cycle of human life. Nobody can forget the memories of his/ her childhood from the page of his/ her mind. Childhood is the most enjoyable and delightful period of human life but not for those who are caught up by the cruel clutches of the decree, not permitting them to heave up their mind and heart with many inner most wishes and inclination. But those who strive for really endeavor to mean it, particularly true for street children, preferring to shun their home to find out the horizon of their wishes and dreams. It is quite true that the world is encountering with a lot of challenges i-e Poverty, misery, and instability. These issues have erupted the most critical issue that is of, "Street Children".

It is the prime responsibility of every country to protect the rights of children with in its territory but these street children are deprived of their basic human rights. In some cases, they do not find the guidance of their parents to be best nurtured children of the society. Their circumstances compel them to be on the street.

As Waghid proves that the Street children phenomenon is an alarming and escalating worldwide problem representing one of the more pressing issues in field of child welfare. "No other global child welfare problem is as significant as the loss of human potential experienced by millions of children who are being reared outside of the institution of family and education in the often perilous street environment<sup>01</sup>".

Chetty also confirms this research statement that life in the street is difficult and that children are essentially alone. He adds that it might be happen that child fails to obtain some food, shelter, clothes, medical services and other relevant basic needs for child care and wellbeing<sup>02</sup>.

They fall prey to merciless and callous clutches of these unavoidable circumstances. In order to seek pleasure and comfort, they say adieu to their home. In doing so, they absolutely forget and neglect these pitiless and merciless clutches of the decree.

## Statement of the Problem

Lahore is the capital city of the Punjab. It is an important commercial and banking city. At the same time it is also well-known for its recreational activities and enticing attraction for children. Spots like Zoo, Minar-e- Pakistan, and different parks attract the children from outskirts and surrounding cities. The children attracted away from pushed out of their parental deception, to increase to the family income, find excellent labor resorts here. The children who desert their homes due to different reasons find refuge in Lahore. It is even indigestible to mention over here that no serious effort is being done to collect the statistics related to street children in Pakistan. That's why; no exact statistics about street children are available in Pakistan. It is just estimated that 1.2 million street children are spending their life in the streets of Pakistan<sup>03</sup>. While it is also estimated that 10,000 street children are present only in the streets of Lahore<sup>04</sup>.

Nobody also ever noticed the increasing number of street children at public places like bus station, railway station, parks and shrines etc. at Lahore. At once news published in the newspapers about the serial killing of the innocent children which highlighted the issue of street children in the society. No doubt, there was a storm in the tea cup after this incident but right now the majority has forgotten that such a pitiless incident has ever taken place. But the street children are bitter reality of the day and can easily be noticed at their well-known clusters. There are well-known social and geographical cluster which prove the presence of street children in the city of Lahore for reason like availability of free of cost food, shelter, work opportunities and entertainment. This motivated the researcher to do work on the topic, "A study to identify the hot spots of street children in Lahore".

## Objective of the Study

The fundamental objective of the study is to identify those localities of Lahore which are considered the hot spots of street

children for the reasons of their maximum presence on such localities.

### Cited Literature

Much ink has been spilt down about the definition and explanation of street children by the people present in various walks of life. The definition about street children came to the boundary of knowledge of the layman in 1990. Different schools of thought have coined their own preferred definitions. These definitions have been built upon and framed as per their own preferences and existing problems. Let us have a glimpse over these definitions.

The United Nations (1985) has its own definition of Street Children. According to UN, "Street Child is any girl or boy for whom the street in the widest sense of the word (including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland etc.) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults<sup>05</sup>".

Lewis defines a street child as someone younger than eighteen, who has decided to leave home to care for himself / herself on the street unassisted by an adult<sup>06</sup>.

Chetty states that street children are those who have abandoned or have been abandoned by their families, schools and immediate communities before they are eighteen years of age and drifted into nomadic street life<sup>07</sup>.

He also refers to the difficulties in defining street children because the term is applicable to a large number of children; all of them spends the significant part of their day in the street without necessarily sharing any other common characteristics<sup>08</sup>.

Schurink defines street children as any boy or girl between the age of 0 to 18 years to live on the street permanently or temporarily. These children spend most of their time unsupervised by an adult and therefore develop a tendency to depend upon each other<sup>09</sup>.

Barnett defines street children as children who spend a considerable amount of their time in street of urban centers to fend for themselves and their families and are inadequately protected, supervised and cared for by a responsible adult person<sup>10</sup>.

In the light of above mentioned definitions, there are three common elements are drawn which are listed below

- These children live or spend a significant amount of their time on the street.
- The street has become their source of livelihood.
- Overall, they are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults.

Although the term, "Street Children" is widely debated but at the center of each definition are children who are out of place.

### Causative Factors which Push and Pull the Children on the Street

It is not easy to encompass the reasons for being children on the street. Today, not even a single city exists without having the problem of street children in all over the world. It has become widely spread issue having threats and alarms. Neither developed nor developing countries could not free themselves from the pain of this increasing social evil.

Every street child has the justification for being on the street. He/ she strive to satisfy his/her inner by giving some justifications. In spite of these justifications, some children are captured and get attracted on score of excitement and freedom from outer world. While they leave their home, they are not cognizant of harsh and bitter realities of the callous attitude of the life. The majority of children enter into this sphere due to the desperation and pessimism. They have no rights for this sightless world and are compelled to stay there forever. Desmond says that

the street children phenomenon represents a complex issue resulting from a wide variety of integrating factors<sup>11</sup>.

Stolberg mentioned that the reason for children taking to the street or forced out of their home are multiple. This simply means that no single factor is responsible for homelessness of children<sup>12</sup>. In addition, Stolberg adds that broader global and societal factors filter down to affect communities, families and ultimately children. The immediate familial and community upheavals combine with inner motivation, culminating in the alienation of children from family and community supports so much so that running away is viewed as the best or only alternative<sup>13</sup>.

Agraval mentioned that in-depth study of the literature reveals a host of contributory factors, the most commonly cited being political factors, poverty, urbanization, un-employment, family disintegration and disruption, violence and conflicts, abuse in the sense of physical, sexual and emotional<sup>14</sup>.

Undoubtedly, these are so many reasons for why children dwell and lodge on the streets. Till now, to trace out a simple cause has become an impossible herculean tasks for the social workers. So we endeavor to keep an eye in the many reasons for the issue.

Lalor says that the picture is more complex then to be comprised in a simple reason<sup>15</sup>.

However, P. C. Shukla describe the following common reasons for why children on the Street<sup>16</sup>.

- To earn money for themselves and support their families

Street Children work on the street to earn money for themselves. Some children need to work to support their families. Some children may have been denied a chance to school or have dropped out of schools and have nothing to do. They can earn money by begging, carrying or bearing, car washing, drug trafficking, juggling, performing music, running errands, scavenging, sex work, shoe shining or vending.

- **To find shelter**

In overcrowded household children may decide to leave home to make room for younger siblings and elderly family members. Others are on the street because they do not have an alternative. They may have become separated from their families during civil unrest or their parents/caretakers may have died from illness such as AIDS or killed during armed conflicts. Other children may have nowhere else to go when they are released from institutions such as Jail or a detention center.

- **To escape from family problems including rejection.**

Many children feel that living on the street is better than coping with problems in their homes. These problems can include conflicts with parents, physical or sexual abuse or neglect. Some children are forced to leave home by their families because the family does not approve of a child's behavior or its consequences e.g. pregnancy, homosexuality or substance use.

- **To escape from work demand in the Home**

In many cultures, children are expected to participate in routine family tasks. At time, demand on children may be more than they can take. This leads to the child facing that he or she is a slave or of freedom from adult's demands.

- **To escape from a children's institutions.**

Street Children may feel that children homes are like prison. They cannot adjust to rules after experiencing the freedom of streets. At times, the personnel in these institutions may abuse children.

- **Family Causes**

- Poor, uneducated and large families.
- Lack of knowledge and skills needed for parentage.

- Lack of responsibility on the part of parents, family conflicts and parental behavioral problems e.g. giving priority to material gains, substance use and gambling etc.
  - Physical abuse of the child.
  - Rebellious behavior and attitude of the child.
- **Lack of Opportunities in Local Community**
- Inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities in the community e.g. lack of adequate employment opportunities, problems in working conditions and lack of recreational activities.
  - Congestion in slum areas and inadequately poor housing facilities.
  - Restrictive and inflexible education system.
  - Poor law enforcement and exploitation by law enforcers.
- **Social Influence**
- Political and economic condition e.g. poverty and underdevelopment of resources.

Poverty and misery is being enumerated and considered imperative reasons for the increase in the number and strength of street children. Sometimes, floods, droughts and earthquakes may raise poverty in any society. In addition to this, shortage or less of land, political upheavals, depression of economic growth and the end of industries and abundant unemployment can also increase poverty in a society. The above mentioned factors bring any society under the clutches of poverty and misery.

It becomes a hard nut to crack to root out this social evil from the society. Some research studies found that the most important



factor which pushes the children on the street is poverty<sup>17</sup>. While Matchinda, does not completely reject the theory of poverty. She has found a co-relation between level of family income and children leaving homes<sup>18</sup>.

Kombrakaran has different opinion about children arrival on the street. He has found that the major reason for going to the street is lack of supportive homes which involve traumatic experiences; children have to cope with at home<sup>19</sup>. Another reason which is quoted for street life is to be considered the peer influence<sup>20</sup>. It is also noted that before going to the streets, these children believed those who live on the street enjoyed life better than themselves did at home<sup>21</sup>.

### Growth of Street Children in Pakistan

The incidents like down of iron curtains, war in different parts of the world and socio-economic crises one after the other on the various part of the world has decreased the world's stability and peace. Due to the Afghan conflict, Pakistan housed more than four million refugees which shake the bases of Pakistan's economy. Owing to this, in Pakistan the quality of life is decreasing rapidly with almost monthly increase in the prices of essential items especially in fuel and diesel. This situation has a diverse impact on the industrial sectors as well as agricultural sectors. Meanwhile, the Pakistan is also facing the problems of extremism and terrorist activities and also is a front line state in war against terrorism due to which large number of population is internally displaced with a great loss of precious human lives. This war against terrorism also damages the basic services delivery infrastructure of Pakistan. In just a decade, the ratio of the number of people living under the poverty line has been horribly increased. Pakistan is facing the challenges regarding to child development, survival, protection and participation attributed with poverty, high population growth, traditional family system, illiteracy, unemployment, poor socio economic development and gender discrimination. An outcome of these increasingly hard

times is resulted in the appearance of children on the streets of Pakistan<sup>22</sup>.

### Situation of Street Children in Pakistan

According to Spark, "population boom, urbanization and poverty are cited as the most common causes for high number of street children in Pakistan. Non-implementation of laws relating to children is also to blame, widespread child labor and poor quality of education further aggravates the situation of poverty which in turns puts children on the streets to supplement the family's income, abusive home environment and corporal punishment in school adds to the number for children on the street. In some cases, simply bad company, the desire of unrestricted freedom and the pull of hustle and bustle of cities, prompt them to leave homes in rural areas and low income localities of our cities especially belonging to Southern Punjab and parts of NWFP ((KPK)<sup>23</sup>".

In spite of the national and international legislation regarding child rights, surprisingly no one in Pakistan ever noticed the rapidly increasing number of children at the public places like bus stands, railway station and parks etc. At once news about street children's serial killing published in the newspapers which took the attention of the society about the street children.

In Pakistan, "some limited surveys and interviews conducted by various NGOs show that an alarming 80 to 90 percent of the street children are victim of sodomy, sexual and physical abuse not just by elders but older children within their own gangs. A majority of them are drug addicts. The most popular and affordable of the drug is glue which these children inhale by putting it on a piece of cloth. One can see young boys sniffing this glue openly on the street and pavements that according to one user," tingles nose and makes one slightly drowsy". The use of other drugs including hashish and even heroine are also rampant among these street children<sup>24</sup>".

Though over the last many years, the issue of children is coming into line light but many more is there to do especially

with regard to Pakistan, where CRC is not more than a, "sacred documents" to which nobody can touch. Being the signatory of CRC, the state is accountable about the survival, development, protection and the participation of the children whether they are on the street or not. But all of this, Pakistan is determined and committed to improve the situation of child rights within its jurisdiction.

## Methodology

Methodological techniques have much importance for analyzing sociological problems empirically. Sound methodology is very important to establish chain for knowledge. The present research is exploratory type of research which uses the qualitative method of research and strengthened form data collection from the field. The observation is used a tool for data collection. Observation is a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listing to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place<sup>25</sup>. The geographical universe of the present study is Lahore city. For the purpose of data collection from the field, first of all, map of Lahore city is acquired. Initially on map 15 areas were marked on the basis of well-known clusters (Both geographical and socially) where such children are found for reason like availability of free of cost food, shelter, work and entertainment opportunities. For said purpose, a walk through survey was conducted in all selected areas and first-hand information was collected through direct observation technique. Then 15 discussion sessions with key informants (two key informants for each area selected on the basis of their relevance to street children) i.e. shopkeepers, vendors, rickshaw drivers, massager, hotel owner etc. were conducted through judgmental approach to collect information about selected areas. Through this process, six areas i.e. Data Darbar, Railway station, Minar-e-Pakistan, Laxmi Chock, Regal Chowk, Badami Bagh were selected as hot spots on the basis of maximum presence and activities of street children.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, following localities are concluded as hot spots of street children in Lahore on the basis of their maximum presence and socio-economic activities,

- Data Darbar
- Railway station
- Minar-e-Pakistan
- Laxmi Chock
- Regal Chowk
- Badami Bagh

The above mentioned clusters have some socio-economic characteristics which are as under;

### ■ Data Darbar

Data Darbar, the well-known shrine of Pakistan and Lahore, is visited by thousands people daily. It is situated on the north west of the Lahore city. On Thursday and some other peculiar religious days, this holy place is visited by countless people including street children who become the part of this visiting crowd. The newcomer street children find here opportunity of petty jobs with street vendors.

This place provides free food (Langar Khana), shelter and low paid job to the street children of all ages. Street children are also seen here as beggars and snatching the morsel of bread from pilgrims. The visiting pilgrims spend their money here primarily to provide food for the poor people residing in the park, streets and restaurants, Manji Bistra (Bed and bedding) hotels and thickly populated slums surrounding the Darbar. It is a congregation point of the street children and they can easily be observed for trying to get food from langar khana (free of cost food distributing centre) of the shrine. Massagers also have their set up beds on ground called "Adda" in front of the Darbar. Some street children

work for them and stay here. One can find street children with ease in cinema houses, hotels, footpaths and parks near the Darbar.

#### ■ Badami Bagh

The largest road transportation center of the Lahore city is known as Badami Bagh. Thousands of the runaway children enter the city through this gateway. There is also a biggest truck adda (truck station) for the provisions of goods facilities. Similarly, owing to an ample availability of work and custodial shelter many street children inhabit here. The street children were seen in large numbers at "Hazoori Bagh" stadium and in the shrine of slier Shah Wali which are relaxation points for the long route drivers and their supportive staff. There are a large number of vulgar truck drivers as well as sex clients and street children easily go in the hands of them. The "Hazoori Bagh" is also notorious for drugs addiction which attracts the street children due to the habit of drug addiction.

#### ■ Railway Station

Lahore Railway Station is one of the biggest and the busiest transportation centre of Pakistan. It is located in the heart of the city and providing services to millions of people. The colossal setting of this transport center provides multiple sleeping/ congregation hotspots for the old and new street children. There are dozens of Manji Bistra (Bed and Bedding) and small hotels are present around the railway station. The availability of cheap substandard food, collie's labor work and overcrowded station premises seemed to be the major source of attraction for the street children.

#### ■ Laxmi Chowk

Laxmi Chowk is the biggest center of recreation and entertainment as well as traditional food point. Mostly cinema houses of Lahore are situated in this locality. There is a hustle and

bustle of technical / non-technical trainings and job opportunities coupled with glamorous entertainment pull the street children to this hot spot. A large number of massagers, ustadhs (technicians), drug addicts and other sex clients residing in and around this hot spot who provide shelter, food and drugs to the street children. Lahore Hotel chowk is also situated near this locality where numerous children take refuge, because living quarters are available there. Shah Noor studio is also situated at Laxmi Chowk. There are children who leave home to become famous and Shah Noor studio area is the favorite place of such children. Though, they do not become hero but employment and entertainment opportunities at large scale make them to stay here.

#### ■ Regal Chowk

Regal Chowk is the busiest electronic and posh commercial activity center point on Shahra-e-Quaid-e-Azam. The cinema halls, huge parking areas, food spots and numerous market activities provide petty job opportunities, sleeping places and contact points to the street children. The street children can easily be seen wandering from "Hall Road" to Chaman Ice Cream spot at Regal Chowk. The Bagg-e- Jinnah and the city zoo arc also not very far from the Regal Chowk. These sites are well known hotspots for street children.

#### ■ Minar-e-Pakistan

It is a beautiful open park with Minar-e-Pakistan monument nearby Badshahi Masjid. It is situated in the vicinity of areas like the Red light District, Data Darbar, and Badami Bagh that are visited by thousands of youth, children and women daily. It is a favorite notorious place for sexual activities and considered the contact point for this purpose. It is also famous point for night sleeping. Most of street children live here in groups. Number of massagers and drug addicts also spend their time in the park. A number of the street children can be observed in the company of drug addicts.

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