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REVIEW ARTICLE

STREET CHILDREN-A VULNERABLE SECTION OF SOCIETY

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Street Children-A Vulnerable Section of Society

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INTRODUCTION

In this 21st century we have been encountering various kinds of problems. The issue of **Street children** is one of them: a vulnerable section of society. These children are commonly seen when we stop near traffic signals and when they approach people with different needs, some for begging and some for selling their prepared items.

The term street children have different definitions in different settings. Perhaps demonstrating the fact that street children are not a homogenous group and the particular circumstances dictates who should be included in the definition. Usually it is been known that children of the street, children on the street, children who are part of the street family are all a category of street children. But according to the definition given by, The United Nation, "Street Children is any boy or girl for whom the street in the widest scene of the word has become his or her habitual abode and /or source of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults".

It is estimated that more than 400,000 street children exists in India. Many children run away from their home and chose the streets mainly because the prevailing circumstances provoke them to do so. Sometimes it is due to the broken family, death of the bread earner, alcoholism, or just for the sake of earning their own livelihood. At times it has been observed that when children witness their own parents begging on streets they adapt the same attitude as for them streets become the only place where they could earn. Poverty is also considered one of the prime cause of street children crises.

THREATS TO STREET CHILDREN

These children struggle very hard for their survival on the streets in a very highly competitive environment. Their childhood is seized; they are abused and exploited greatly for the benefit of others. The street Children are involved in different types of work. Few of the children sell cloth pieces, water bottles, flowers, toys etc. and a huge chunk is involved in begging too. Begging is the easy way for these children to earn as

even a child who is only three or four years old could be involved without much learning.

Everybody is aware of the scene that street children are the most vulnerable and they are frequently faced to exploitation, abuse and extortion. Many street children identify violence as a major problem in their lives. Mostly these children have no social status neither they have any guardian to protect them. As researches have proved the fact that most of the street children come from broken families thus there is hardly any check on them.

The street children are at a greater risk of various kinds of drug abuse and they also become the victims of child trafficking. Due to their tender age these children can be easily manipulated for any kind of work. Even many street children do not work for themselves rather they are being forcibly put on streets by highly organized begging gangs. As the income of street children fluctuate greatly, the kingpins of these gangs make them suffer for their poor performance; few of them are even beaten ruthlessly. Most of the street children who have run away from home have done so because they were beaten, tortured, or sexually assaulted. Tragically their homelessness has never helped them rather it leads to further abuse through exploitative child labour and prostitution. Even the people behave very rudely with these children. Such kind of abuse leaves them traumatized and emotionally broken and scarred. These children even feel that they are not a part of the society or they have been abandoned by the society due to some stigma. Children often feel guilty and blame their parents for their exploitative and ill treatment.

HEALTH HAZZARDS:

It might be hard to tell how many children are living on the streets of India, but one thing is clear that their number is very large and it is certainly increasing by every passing day. Street children in India face additional vulnerability because of their lack of access to nutritious food, sanitation and medical care. Half of all children in India are malnourished but in case of the street children the proportion is much higher. These children are not only underweight, but their

growth has often been stunted. Street children live and work in amidst trash, animals and open sewers. Not only are they exposed and susceptible to disease, they are also unlikely to be vaccinated or receive medical treatment. Child labourers suffer from exhaustion, injury, exposure to dangerous chemicals, plus muscle and bone affliction.

The street children are mainly dependent upon leftovers from small restaurants or hotels, food stalls or garbage bins. Thus majority of these children remain under fed which leads to various health issues.

The street children live in a very unhygienic environment and the availability of food is also very uncertain to them. These children lead an unhealthy and often dangerous life that leaves them deprived of their basic needs. The street children easily get into smoking beedies (cigarettes), chewing of Tabaco, drinking of alcohol and other kind of drugs. All of these habits deteriorate their health further.

World Health Organization studies show that street children suffer from various kinds of health problems ranging from cholera to Tuberculosis, and Anaemia and that are exposed to a variety of toxic substances, both in their food and in the surrounding environment.

CONCLUSION:

Children are the future of every nation but if we see the scenario nowadays our future seems getting faded. In India children are involved in various kinds of labour activities and the number of street children is also increasing by every passing day. Trafficking is on hike, prostitution is taking place and many other crimes against children have made the situation worst. Every category of child labour is associated with a number of problems ranging from beggary to sexual abuse. Too much work has been already done to liquidate this menace but the problem is still deep rooted. The need of the hour is to invest more time and strategies to uproot this menace for the overall development of our nation.

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