

Street Children of Pakistan



Definition of Street Children

The most common definition of a street child is 'any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and/ or sources of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults.

Inter-NGO, Switzerland

Street Children in Pakistan

An estimated 1.2 to 1.5 million children are on the streets of Pakistan's major cities and urban centers, constituting the country's largest and most ostracized social group. These include 'runaway' children who live or work on the street, as well as the minority that return to their families at the end of the day with their meager earnings. Domestic violence, unemployment, natural disasters, and poverty are considered the major factors behind the increase in the number of street children. Other factors include unprecedented global industrialization, unplanned and rapid urbanization, family disintegration and lack of education. The problem has been further exacerbated in the wake of devastating floods that ravaged parts of Sindh, KPK and Balochistan. A study carried out by SPARC on street children revealed that 56.5% of the children interviewed in Multan, 82.2% in Karachi, 80.5% in Hyderabad and 83.3% in Sukkur were forced to move on to the streets after the 2010 and 2011 floods.

Risks Street Children Face:

Living and/ or working on the street, with no supervision, protection or guidance often makes street children vulnerable to a wide range of problems or hazards as detailed below.

1. **Violence:** Street children bear the brunt of various forms of abuses and instances of violence whilst living and/ or working on the street. Many children are regularly threatened and abused by their peers, handlers, the police and even by people on the streets. Sexual abuse is a common problem to most street children, especially females who are forced into prostitution. Moreover, the influx of children on the street is further aggravated by continued violence at home, schools and madrassahs.
2. **Health:** Continuous exposure to harsh and hazardous elements on the streets impairs the cognitive, emotional and intellectual development of a child. Street children suffer from illnesses ranging from the common cold to life threatening diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis. What bolsters the increasing tide of diseases among street children is the copious use of drugs and alcohol coupled with unhealthy and unprotected sexual practices. Mainstream health services lack proper facilities to accommodate street children and are grossly expensive therefore children are left with no option but to suffer through their illnesses.
3. **Drugs:** The prevalence of substance abuse is rampant across Pakistan especially amongst children on the streets. The use of various types of drugs is a medium through which street children escape their everyday sufferings and toil. Many are forced into habit by peers whilst others distribute drugs for criminals and drug peddlers and in turn get addicted. The most common drugs used by children on street are hashish, heroine and intoxicating industrial glue.

4. **Law enforcement agencies:** Children persistently come in conflict with the police when living and/ or working on the streets. Many are arbitrarily picked up from the streets and either beaten up or taken into custody only to be subjected to humiliating tasks such as washing police uniforms or cleaning toilets. Moreover, children have confided that they are sexually abused by police officials as well while in custody or in police vehicles.
5. **Crime:** Given the dismal state in which street children are forced to fend for themselves, it is only natural that they get involved in petty crimes, or serious ones if compelled. Pick pocketing and stealing food items from vendors is common among children on the streets. However, many join gangs for protection on the streets in return for carrying out various criminal activities such as theft, harassment and in some cases murder.

Legislation

Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act 2004

The Act was promulgated on June 21st, 2004 in order to consolidate the law for the rescue, protective custody, care and rehabilitation of destitute and neglected children. It defines a child as a natural person who has not attained the age of 18 years. Any child without a home or settled place of abode and without any ostensible means of subsistence comes within the definition of destitute and neglected child. Such a child will be admitted to a child protection institution for protection and rehabilitation.

Sindh Children Act 1955

In July 1955, the Sindh provincial assembly enacted the Sindh Children Act that rendered the pre-partition Bombay Children Act 1924 void. The new act entailed detailed legislation regarding juveniles and various other child protection issues. Under the Sindh Children Act, the

state must provide custody and protection to children whilst also punishing parents and guardians who willfully neglect and abuse children.

Sindh Child Protection Authority Act 2011

The Act was passed by the Sindh Provincial Assembly on May 16th, 2011 and entailed specific provisions for child protection in the province of Sindh under the authority formed. It shall have powers to coordinate, monitor, support and establish mechanisms for all child protection issues in the province vis-à-vis review laws and amendments pertaining to child rights.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act 2010

The Act became law on September 21st, 2010 with the purpose of providing for the care, protection, maintenance, welfare, training, education, rehabilitation and reintegration of children at risk in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The term 'child at risk' covers a wide range of circumstances of children including those living on or working on the streets and for its purposes, the Act envisages the establishment of a commission, fund, child protection institutions and units. The Act also criminalizes certain acts as punishable offenses including cruelty and violence against children, child sexual abuse, and corporal punishment, fraud against a child, dealing in the organs of children, employing a child for begging, child pornography, prostitution and trafficking within Pakistan.

Recommendations

- ▲ The presence of children on streets warrants special attention from the government, donor agencies and the civil society at large. In this regard, multi-pronged approaches that combine strong administrative initiatives with legislative measures can help in reducing the number of children on streets.

- ▲ Poverty alleviation initiatives aimed at helping the urban poor should be expedited. In this context, special attention should be paid to the parents of street children by providing them with economic opportunities and skills training. Such initiatives may discourage parents from forcing their children to work on streets by improving the overall economic condition of the family.
- ▲ Law enforcement agencies should receive special training on dealing with street children. Such trainings should have a behavioral dimension whereby the police officials should be discouraged from violence against street children.
- ▲ The existing laws dealing with children on the street should be strengthened with a strong implementation regime. Moreover, enactment of additional laws or amendments in existing laws should be initiated to improve the state of child protection in general.
- ▲ Advocacy campaigns and research initiatives dealing with street children should be encouraged at all levels. The state should play an active role in disseminating information on street children. This will help in raising awareness on one of the most marginalized groups in the society.



Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child

No. 151-b, Street 37, F-10/1
Islamabad, Pakistan

Telephone: +92-51-229 1553, 229 1559
Telefax: +92-51-229 1680
Email: info@sparc.pk

www.sparc.pk



Royal Norwegian Embassy