



Challenges of Social Marketing: Combating the Problem of Street Children in Mumbai, India

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ABSTRACT

The problem of street children has been a global phenomenon affecting both affluent and poor societies. The extreme poverty and desperation for survival in the third world countries take the problem to unimaginable depths of despair. Convincing families and children in such crises situations to accept a helping hand, prima facie, appears to be a simple task of persuasion. However, many external factors transform this simple appearing task into a “mission impossible.” This paper analyzes the problem of street children as a marketing challenge and presents the details of the first phase of a two-phase research project designed to develop effective ways to deal with the problem.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of street children has always been a global phenomenon affecting both affluent and poor societies alike. Emergence of individualism as a dominant force over collectivism, resultant crumbling of the traditional family structure, and weakening of the close family ties have only further exacerbated the problem in modern societies. The global financial crisis has made the problem so much worse. And, adding to that the extreme poverty and desperation for survival in the third world countries take it into unimaginable depths of despair.

Children's coming on the street is a serious problem for both the children and their families. Convincing families and children in such crises situations to accept a helping hand that would rescue them from the horrors of street life, prima facie, appears to be a simple and easy task of persuasion, something marketing—the science and art of persuasion—should be easily able to handle. However, the issues of economic desperation, lack of hope and trust, and the attraction of immediate gratification of mundane biogenic needs over the uncertain promise long-term wellbeing interact in a complex and entangled manner and transform this simple appearing task of social marketing into a “mission impossible.”



This paper analyzes the problem of street children as a marketing challenge. It presents the details of the first phase of a two-phase research project designed to identify critical dimensions of this phenomenon and use the information to develop effective approaches to deal with the problem. The first phase involved conducting in-depth interviews of several street children and the social workers helping them in the large metropolitan city of Mumbai, India, and identifying critical dimensions, issues, and variables involved in the phenomenon of street children and their lives that would form the basis of a structured investigation in the second phase.

CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MARKETING

At its core, marketing is a science and art of persuasion. However, when dealing with social problems this conceptually simple task becomes extremely challenging because of the involvement of multiple parties in indirect transactions, and the missing link between the “give” and “take” aspects of the exchange process. It now requires persuading the beneficiaries to receive and value the help they get free of cost.

In the case of the social problem of street children, any solution would involve convincing the people involved—the parents and children in the families in crises—to change their behaviors, make sacrifices and control their urges for immediate gratifications in the short run, for a promise of long-term wellbeing of everyone in the family. However, the forces of nature, society, and life acting on the people involved can turn this simple appearing task into something as challenging as a “mission impossible” as discovered in this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no unanimity among researchers as to what is the exact meaning of the term ‘street children.’ ‘Children without families’, ‘high risk children’, ‘abandoned and destitute children’, ‘children in need of care and protection’ and ‘children in especially difficult circumstances’ are some of the terms commonly used while referring to street children with overlapping meanings. Researchers offer many different definitions and



descriptions of what street children are. (Sondhi-Garg 2004, 3; Connolly 1996; Ritchie 1999; Casa Alianza 1995; Blanc 1994; Cockburn 1990; D'Souza 2008; Pandey 1991)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defines street children thusly: "Any girl or boy for whom the street in the wider sense of the word (including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland etc.) has become home/ habitual abode and/or source of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults." (Black 1993; Nieuwenhuizen 2004)

The *UNICEF* definition makes a distinction between *children on the street* and *children of the street*.

"*Children on the street* are those whose families support base has become increasingly weakened, who must share in the responsibility for family survival by working on the city streets and market places. For these children, the home ceases to be their centre for play, culture and daily life. Nevertheless when the street becomes their daytime activity, most of these children will return home most nights. These children continue to view life from the point of view of their families."

"*Children of the street* are a much smaller number of children who daily struggle for survival without family support, alone. While often called 'abandoned', they too might also have abandoned their families, tired of insecurity and rejection and aged up with violence. Their ties with home have been broken and de facto they are without families."

According to the UNICEF, 75% of the street children maintain regular contact and another 20% of the street children maintain an intermittent contact with their families and constitute the "children on the street." Only 5% of street children have no family at all; they include orphans, runaways, and refugees, and constitute the "children of the street." The process of transitioning from one category to the next is very gradual (Aptekar 2004).

FACTORS CAUSING EJECTION OF FAMILIES/CHILDREN ONTO THE STREET

Factors causing the ejection of families and children on street come from many directions.



- Economic Factors: Global economic imbalance, rapid industrialization and urban poverty, resultant geographic migration of population to the cities, Impoverishment of migrant families
- Political Factors: Lack of political will, political interest in perpetuating poor homeless population in cities
- Social Factors: The curse of caste and class, failure of the educational system, break up of joint families, break up of nuclear families, conflict and aggression in family, lack of warmth and nurturance
- Psychological Factors: Child's personality, emotional dysfunction and running away

PROBLEMS FACED BY CHILDREN ON THE STREET

- Psychological Problems: Attitudinal and self-actualization problems, anxiety, anger and lack of affection, low self-esteem, depression,
- Economic Problems: Homelessness, struggle for survival
- Social Problems: Social inequalities, negative to hostile public attitude, police harassment
- Health Risks: Lack of food, shelter, and clothing, unhygienic working, living and eating conditions, drug abuse, HIV and AIDS
- Moral Problems: Stealing, robbery, violence, bribery
- Coping with Problems: Anger, Disassociation and drug abuse, Crying and praying, Stealing and spending

INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL & NONGOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN INDIA

The UNICEF had been working on the problem of street children in the past. However in 1979, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MEPS) commission of the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB) organized an international seminar on street children in Mumbai. As a follow up, the ICCB launched an inter-NGO international pilot program for street children from 1982 to 1985 (Pandey 1991, 34-35). As the result of these pioneering efforts, the street children phenomenon came to be recognised as a major policy issue by the government.

India is constitutionally committed to an all-sided development of children. However, it is only recently that the government has started taking the problem seriously by setting up institutions such as remand homes under the provisions of juvenile justice act 2000 (Sondhi-Garg 2004, 90).



In India, the NGO's have proven to be more practical in their approach and therefore more effective than many government programs for street children. The NGO's generally provide four categories of interventions for the street children namely, correctional (containment, institutionalization), rehabilitative (Cure), Outreach (Street education), and Preventive (Sondhi-Garg 2004, 116-118).

Many of the services provided by the NGOs address the immediate needs of street children such as education, family repatriation, medical care, psychological counseling and recreation among others. Their purpose is to ensure stability, care, predictability and protection (D'Souza 2008, 68). Some provide street children with shelter or drop-in centre facilities in addition to health care and recreational facilities. A few organizations provide basic education and skill training which enable street children to find a gainful vocation at a later stage.

In addition, there are many charitable trusts in the city initiated by different religious and cultural groups which donate clothes, blankets and food to people on the street. Religious places of worship such as temples, mosques and churches also donate food and other items to those street children.

THE STREET CHILDREN OF MUMBAI, INDIA [WDR 2012]

India with a population of 1.171 billion, second only to China's 1.338 billion, would be the poorest large or largest poor country in the world. Compared to India, the per capita GNI of China is 3 times, of Mexico 7 times, and of the U.S. 35 times as large. 76% of India's population earned less than \$2 per day as compared to China's 36% and Mexico's 9%. 44% of India's children under age 5 suffer from malnutrition and their mortality rate of 230 per 1000 compares with China's 38 and Mexico's 85. Only 31% of the population in India had access to improved sanitation as compared 55% in China and 85% in Mexico. Putting it in another way, average Indians would think of China as the land of the fortunate, and would consider Mexico heavenly.



According to the World Development Report 2012, India had a population of 1,171 million in 2010. 31% of the population i.e. 363 million were below age 14. It was estimated that about 16 to 20% of these children work and live in urban areas, many without a home (Census of India 2010; McFadyen 2004, 16).

If an average Indian is so poor by the world standards, one can only imagine how dire and hopeless the condition of street children would be who find themselves without home, education, and any employable skills all alone on the streets of India. The problem of street children has in fact assumed serious proportions in all major urban centers of the country. In large cities, street children can be seen everywhere-at the railway stations, near temples and durgahs, in markets, under the bridges and flyovers, at the traffic lights, around bus stations and state transport depots, in short, in all unoccupied and unprotected public and private places (Rane 2004). Child advocacy groups portray these children as despondent, hapless and sad; psychologists look upon them as deviants who can and need to be rescued and civilized; the bourgeois look upon them as perpetrators of social evils like drug abuse, prostitution and violence. In reality, these children are victims of exploitation and harassment by their employers, sexual predators, child abusers, drug dealers, pimps and gang leaders, and even the police. No place is safe for them (McFadyen 2004, 16).

On this background, the present research was undertaken to study the problem of homeless children in all its facets with a view to develop a comprehensive plan of action for use at government and nongovernment institutional and individual levels.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Conceptual Model of the Street Children Phenomenon

The purpose of modeling the problem of the street children is to identify all variables, factors, considerations and influences involved and to study their causal relationships.

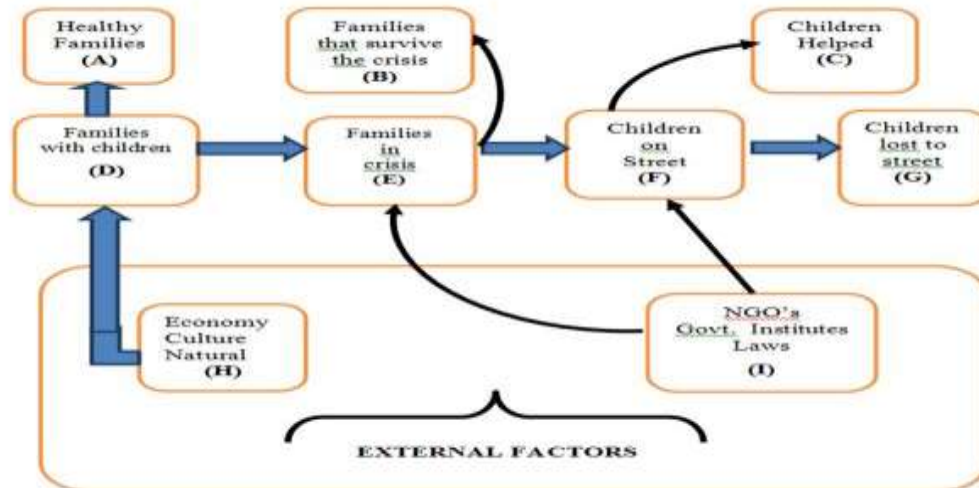


Figure: 1: Modeling the Problem of the Street Children

As seen in figure 1, external factors such as the economy, the culture and natural calamities affect all families, including those with children. A majority of them survive the onslaught of such forces. However, a significant number of them fail and become families in crisis. When no help comes along, their children are either forced out or leave on their own and come on street. At times the whole family becomes destitute and starts living on the street along with their children.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to help develop such strategies to deal with the problem of street children at multiple levels, it was decided that the research study must be formulated to achieve the following information objectives:

1. The experience of NGO's in their efforts in the past to deal with the problem of Street children and the results of those efforts in containing and resolving the problem
2. To understand the conditions and factors that cause/ create "families in crises" that fail to care for their children adequately, and create circumstances that force their children to come on the street
3. To understand the lives of children living on the street, the enticements and problems they face which break their spirit and force them to resign to a life of a victim of exploitation by others, or to the life of a criminal exploiting others



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was designed as a two-phase, mixed-methods research study.

Phase 1: Exploration

The first phase would involve qualitative study involving in-depth interviews of several select subjects who can provide valuable information about the phenomenon of street children.

The subjects would include:

- a. Administrators and volunteers working in Government organizations and NGO dealing with the problems of street children as experts, and key informants
- b. Ex-street children presently living in institutions and working on building skills to make a future for themselves
- c. Children presently living on the street including who want to take help from an institution and those who refuse to take such help

Phase 2

Based on the qualitative information gathered in the first phase, a structured instrument would be developed to conduct a large sample survey of street children to determine the quantitative dimensions of the problem that would help develop specific action plans.

As stated before, this paper presents the first phase of the project. All information presented hereafter refers to the Exploration phase of the research project.

Choice of Location for Studying Street Children of India: Navi Mumbai

Since the NGOs and the Street Children were the primary sources of information for this research, Mumbai was chosen as the ideal location of this research because the city is a microcosm of India as the largest and a rapidly growing city in the country where people from all parts have migrate to make a living. Another factor in favor of Mumbai as the location was that Mumbai is also a magnet especially for street children because



it offers them the anonymity they desire and many opportunities to work and earn a living.

Given the large number of street children in Mumbai, the metropolis also is a base for a large number of NGOs operating to help ameliorate the problems of Street children.

SAMPLING

It was decided to limit the study to only male street children as the population of interest for this research because this is the only segment of street children that is visible and relatively easily accessible. Such access would be impossible to obtain to girls living in private homes or locked up in illegal brothels.

In view of the relatively small number of NGOs and the need to have total and wholehearted cooperation of the NGO officials, a non-probability convenience sample of willing participants was used for the NGO study.

A street child constituted the sampling unit for the other half of the exploratory research. The sample of 16 street children was used for conducting the in-depth interviews. The following procedure was used to select the sample:

In view of the difficulty in locating and contacting the street children, only nonprobability convenience sampling method was the feasible option for interviewing the street children. Initial interview subjects were chosen from among the ex-street children that were presently living in institutions and taking their help to build their future. Taking the help of social workers who had been working with these children, total 6 in-depth interviews were conducted with such children.

These subjects were then used to gain access to and trust of other children presently living on street for inclusion in the study. Taking the help of the ex-street children, and their social workers, major towns and important hideouts of the street children were visited to select additional 16 street children for the depth interviews.



FINDINGS OF THE DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Important Phases of Children’s Lives and Facets of each Phase

1. The contents of the depth interviews with the street children were analyzed to conclude that there were 3 possible dominant parts of the children’s lives. These were as follows:

Table: Important Phase of Children’s Lives

Important Phase of Children’s Lives	Code
Origins and family of birth	F
Other homes and institutions lived in as substitute homes	H
Life on street	S

Further, each Phase of the children’s lives had several important facets on which information was available. These facets are:

Table: Important Facets of each Phase of life

Important facets of each part of life	Code
Experiences, good and bad	E
Temptations experienced	T
Issues of Survival - Physical	SP
Issues of Survival – Emotional	SM
Reasons for losing that part of life, for moving on	R
Moral problems faced	M

Therefore, these codes were then combined and used to classify the information obtained about the lives of the interviews thusly.

Table: Combination Codes Used to Tag Each Piece/Unit of Information in the Depth Interviews

Important facets of each phase of life	Combined Code
Experiences good and bad in the family/ institutions/street	FE/HE/SE
Temptations experienced in the family/institutions/street	FT/HT/ST
Physical Survival in the family/institutions/street	FSP/HSP/SSP
Emotional Survival in the family/institutions/street	FSM/HSM/SSM
Reasons for losing family/institutions/street	FR/HR/SR
Moral Problems in the family/institutions/street	FM/HM/SM

Other information gathered from respondents involved the following:

2. Transitional help givers and the help received (Code = T)

The help givers involved institutions or individuals who helped the street children to go from home to street, street to an institution, or from one institution to another one



3. Accomplishments (Code = A)

Most interviewees were eager to list their life's accomplishments that they had successfully made despite all odds. They also were eager to describe their plans and aspirations for the future. These were classified into the following categories.

Dimensions of Accomplishment	Code
Educational	Ed
Skills acquired	KL
Residence Status, moving into an apartment, home etc.	Res
Plans and Aspirations	PA

4. Role of God and Religion (Code = GR)

Finally, many interviewees specifically mentioned the roles played their faith in God and their following of a religion. This information was classified under the following code. The transitional help or the role players 'T' (see Table no. 2) are persons or institutions that helped the street adolescent to go from street or one shelter to another.

The above codes were developed with detailed content examination of all depth interviews. Each unique code thus represented an important variable on which information was available from the respondents.

In order to make sure that the variable set identified was robust and had not missed any important variables, the codes were actually used to analyze the qualitative information obtained from each interview by actually tagging each piece/unit of information with appropriate code. This process made sure that the codification was able to analyze and organize all information available from the interviews and no important variables had been missed. The final codes thus represented the full set of variables identified in this phase of the study.

The next job was to identify all possible values each variable could take. Once again, the content analysis of the interviews was done to list all possible responses each variable could generate. Once tabulated in this manner, what emerged was a full skeleton of a structured questionnaire.



When transformed into an actual instrument, such structured questionnaire can then be administered to a large sample of street children to gather information for quantitative analysis of various segments of street children, and various facets of the problem of street children in the second phase of the research.

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