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**PROBLEMS, CAUSES OF STREET CHILDREN AND ECONOMIC POSITION,  
OCCUPATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STREET CHILDREN'S PARENTS: A CASE  
STUDY OF COASTAL ANDHRA PRADESH IN AP, INDIA.**

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of street children is an offshoot of complex interplay of various socio-economic and cultural factors, religious, cultural, linguistic and geographical diversity. The large-scale presence of street children is a symptom of social disease. Street children have a greater burden than other poor children who are supervised by adults. There is a need to address the issue of street children as a global problem, as almost all over the world, it is possible to find various patterns of street children even though they differ in terms of push and pull factors, lifestyles and social problems. There are many social problems which need to be addressed with an approach, a theory and a model. Problem of street children is no exception. The economic position of the families of most of the respondents is poor. Out of 450 respondents, the economic position of the families of 45 per cent respondents is very poor, 38 per cent is poor and 17 per cent can be stated to be sound. Out of 411 respondents, a majority i.e. 48 per cent of the street children's father's occupation is coolie followed by 13 per cent government employees, and the majority, i.e. 54 per cent mother's occupation is coolie. In this study, it is found that majority of parent's occupation is coolie. 66 percent of the respondent's fathers are illiterate, and 72 per cent of the respondent's mothers are illiterate. 9 per cent fathers and 16 per cent mothers of these children are not alive. The main objective of the present article is to Problems, Causes of Street Children and Economic Position, Occupational Characteristics of Street Children's family: a case study of coastal Andhra Pradesh in AP, India.

**Introduction:** There is a need to address the issue of street children as a global problem, as almost all over the world, it is possible to find various patterns of street children even though they differ in terms of push and pull factors, lifestyles and social problems. The phenomenon of street children is an offshoot of complex interplay of various socio-economic and cultural factors, religious, cultural, linguistic and geographical diversity. The large-scale presence of street children is a symptom of social disease. It has acquired a gigantic dimension in the wake of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation especially in the developing countries such as India. It is attributed to exploitative socio and economic structure, lopsided development and inequitable resource ownership, large scale unemployment, rapid urbanisation, rural to urban migration, rapid population growth, extreme poverty, increasing disparities in wealth and income, cutbacks in government social and education budgets, high level child abuse by the parents and society, and the break down of traditional family and community structures etc. Consequently children are forced to live on the street, and earn livelihood for themselves and also in support of their families losing valuable time in life and forgoing all the opportunities for development in life. The risks of children living street life are great and their vulnerability to exploitation is enormous. According to the Human Development Report of the UNDP (2000), our country has the greatest number of street children. It is reported that New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta have around two lakh street children each

and Bangalore has about 45,000 street children. Another estimation (UNICEF – 2001) reveals the fact that in six major cities of India – Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Kanpur – there are about 4,14,700 street children and of these about 48 per cent spend their nights on the open street. Thus the phenomenon of street children with all its magnitude and dimensions is a challenging social problem of urban India. The country future depends upon the quality of present day children. Hence, there is every need to attend to this problem.

#### **Methodology of the Study**

##### **Objectives**

- To examine the Main Problems of Street Children
- To examine Occupational Characteristics of Street Children
- To examine Causes of Street Children as a Problem and Strategies to Contain the Problem.
- To examine the Economic Position of the street children's Family in the study area
- To examine Occupational Characteristics of Street Children's fathers and mothers in study area.

**Source:** this articles is based on the primary and secondary data

**Selection of the Sample Respondents:** Selection of the respondents has been done through a purposive sample at a few places of concentration of street children in the selected three cities. For the research study, a sample of 150 street children fulfilling the operational definition mentioned above has been selected from each city. The places of concentration selected are seven in each city. These include railway

station, bus stand, busy centres, market centres, temples, hotels, and parks. Out of the total sample of 450 street children from the three cities 57 are girl children.

**The Main Problems of Street Children are:**

- They do not enjoy parental love, affection, protection and guidance.
- They are deprived of the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing.
- They have no access to school education.
- They are misused by anti-social elements.
- The families do not give the feeling of security and love so essential for their normal growth and development.
- They are looked down upon by society as unwanted elements.
- They are given denied medical services when needed.

**The Problems of Street Children:** Street children have a greater burden than other poor children who are supervised by adults. Their problems could be grouped into three classes: social, physical, and psychological.

**Social Problems**

**Poverty and illiteracy:** They lack basic resources to sustain a healthy living. They usually have no financial means to buy food, which is crucial for their development. Street children cannot afford to go to school unless supported by non-formal services provided by NGOs, etc. Even where schools are free, many children cannot afford to buy uniforms, shoes and books. Since they live in places where they are not adequately protected from the environment, they rarely have access to facilities that they need for hygiene and sanitation, such as toilets and clean and safe water supply. They are, therefore, more vulnerable to health problems resulting from poor sanitation.

**Discrimination and Lack of Accessible Resources:** When civic authorities plan towns, cities, etc. street children's plight tends to be excluded from the planning process resulting in their not having facilities to get medical, educational, recreational and vocational resources. They face problems such as lack of vaccinations; poor health, illiteracy, and they cannot acquire skills needed for finding jobs.

**Violent Environment:** The Street is an unprotected environment and street children are exploited frequently. In some places, street children may even face the possibility of physical injuries or death from violence. Common sources of violence are: the police, gangs, drug peddlers, pimps, other street children, families and sexual partners.

**Stigmatization:** Society usually perceives street children as difficult children who are out there to

cause trouble. In general, the public thinks that street children are uncontrollable and violent, have substance use problems, have no morals, have lost all the ability to feel emotions such as love and that they turn into terrorists and revolutionaries. They tend to be unsympathetic to the street children's plight. This negative attitude may be a result of the society's inability to care for its people.

**Physical Problems:**

**Lack of Adequate Nutrition:** As street children do not get enough to eat, they are malnourished, anaemic and suffer from vitamin deficiencies.

**Injuries:** Injuries may be caused intentionally (including injuring self while intoxicated or when depressed) and unintentionally, e.g. due to use of tools which have been designed for adults. The rate of injuries is usually higher for male than for female street children.

**Sexual and Reproductive Health Problems:** Sexual and reproductive health problems affect both girls and boys. However, street girls are more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse and exploitation. Common sexual and reproductive health problems include sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies.

**Common diseases:** Street children experience many common diseases such as tuberculosis; skin diseases, dental problems and parasitic diseases which can be prevented easily if these children have enough resources and their basic needs are met.

**Psychological Problems:**

**A Stressful Past:** Many situations and events that pushed these children onto the street in the first place (like natural disasters, manmade disasters, exploitation and conflicts) may have a lasting impact on their well-being. For example, the family conflict that pushed the child onto the streets continues to deprive the child of emotional and material support for years afterwards.

**A Transitory Lifestyle:** Street children in some large cities move frequently from district to district or between cities. Sometimes they do this by choice, but at other times they are forced to move to hide from the police, welfare authorities, gangs, and drug peddlers. This type of lifestyle leads to problems of social isolation and loneliness and difficulties in developing emotional attachments to special individuals.

**Mental Health:** The stress that street children experience makes them vulnerable to emotional problems, psychiatric disorders and learning difficulties. They do not receive adequate care for these conditions.

**Substance Use:** Many street children are involved in harmful use of psychoactive substances. This can lead to overdose, increase the chance of accidents,

violence, unwanted pregnancy and unprotected sex. Over time, the continued use of substances can lead to complications such as brain and liver damage.

**Occupational Characteristics of Street Children:** Typically street children engage in various odd jobs, some of the common ones are described below:

**Rag-picking:** In many cities, it is a common sight to see children carrying gunny bags on their shoulders, scavenging dustbins, garbage heaps, city dumps to collect waste materials such as papers, tins, plastic material, bottles, etc., which have a recycling value..

**Porters:** Many street children work in railway stations, bus stands, godowns, wholesale markets carrying heavy loads to earn their living.

**Hotel Labour:** Street children also work in subhuman working conditions in small hotels, roadside eateries, dhabas, restaurants, etc. earning meagre wages.

**Begging:** Begging is also a form of earning for street children. Children affected by disease or physical handicap are often forced into begging by antisocial gangs for making money.

**Prostitution:** Many street children, especially those who are entirely on their own on the street are engaged in or exploited sexually. Both boys as well as girls are engaged in sexual activities, either for material gains, survival needs, psychological needs or peer group pressure.

**Odd Jobs:** Street children are involved in various other odd jobs such as jobs in parking areas, work as petty-hawkers, peddlers, messenger boys, shoe shines, cleaners, helpers in shops and establishments, gas stations, garages, as labourers in construction sites, small factories and institutions. All these occupations have a destructive effect on their behaviour pattern and social living.

**Causes of Street Children as a Problem:** It is not difficult to isolate the factors responsible for the prevalence and practice of the phenomenon of street children. Family poverty, family disorganization, maltreatment and abuse of children at home, labour demand suitable to the children in the urban informal and unorganized sectors and the lack of interest in education in these children are the common and specific factors that compel the children to be on the streets. Therefore, it is necessary to take the family situation and family dynamics into consideration for understanding the determinants of the problem of street children. The main reason, which prompts these children to run away from home, is their family background, social structure and economic problems.

1. Broken families and irresponsible parents
2. Torture by family members and step parents
3. Excessive control by parents
4. Large family size

5. Poverty
6. Less wages or low income
7. Father's drunkenness
8. Disinterest in studies
9. Parents' illicit relationship, actions and practices
10. Anxiety to earn and spend lavishly, according to their whims and fancies.
11. Desire to live in towns and cities
12. Desire to do things independently without restriction

**Strategies to Contain the Problem:** There are many social problems which need to be addressed with an approach, a theory and a model. Problem of street children is no exception. The Three models which are popular in dealing with the problem of street children are:

**Containment (Reformation):** This usually takes place in closed institutions where children are subjected to repressive correctional measures.

**Cure Approach:** This emphasizes on weaning children away from street life, generally providing them education and regular work.

**Prevention:** This implies stopping the children appearing on the streets by eliminating urban poverty, providing free and fair educational facilities to the poor and needy, etc., but the existing and available studies reveal that institutional strategy has largely failed, where as cure strategy has yielded some positive results. The preventive strategy is the best among them but least tried upon.

**Economic Position of the street children's Family:**

S. No	Position	Number	Percent
1	Sound	78	17.3
2	Poor	170	37.8
3	Very poor	202	44.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

An analysis of table 1 shows the economic position of the family of the respondents. Out of 450 respondents, for the majority i.e. 202 (44.9%) economic position of the family is very poor, for 170 (37.8%) is poor, and only in respect of 78 (17.3%) family's economic position is sound.'

**Occupation of Parents**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Govt. Employee	53	11.8
Private Employ	15	3.3
Coolie	197	43.8
Agriculture	48	10.7
Business	23	5.1
Industrial Worker	1	0.2
Driver	15	3.3
Beggars	37	8.2
Servant Maid	6	1.3
Topy Work	11	2.4
Welding Work	4	0.9
Fish Hunting	1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>91.3</b>
Not responded	39	8.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

An analysis of table 2 shows the occupation of the father. Out of 411 respondents, majority 197 (47.9%) of the parents are coolies followed by 53 (12.9%) government employs, 48 (11.7%) agriculturists. 37 (9%) beggars', 23 (5.6%) business persons, 15 (3.6%)

private employees, 15 (3.6%) drivers, 11 (2.7%) topy workers (building work), 6 (1.5%) servant maids, 4 (1%) welding workers, followed by 1 (0.2%) each industrial worker and fish hunter.

<b>S. No</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Govt. Employee	11	2.4
2	Private Employ	17	3.8
3	Coolie	212	47.1
4	Agriculture	14	3.1
5	Business	6	1.3
6	Industrial	1	0.2
7	Water Man	1	0.2
8	Driver	3	0.7
9	Beggar	38	8.4
10	Servant Maid	2	0.4
11	Housewife	84	18.7
12	Topy work	1	0.2
13	Welding Work	5	1.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>87.8</b>
14	Not responded	55	12.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Primary data

An analysis of table 3 shows the occupation of the mothers. Out of 395 respondents, majority 212 (53.7%) of the mothers are coolies followed by 84 (21.3%) house wife, 38 (9.6%) beggars, 17 (4.3%) private employees, 14 (3.5%) agriculturists, 11 (2.8%) government employees, 6 (1.5%) business persons, 5

(1.3%) welding workers, 3 (0.8%) drivers, 2 (0.5%) servant maids, and 1 (0.3%) each industrial worker, water man, topy worker (building work).

**Conclusion:** Rehabilitation and reintegration of the street children is very important, and this leads the child to join the main stream of the society, within a

short period. To achieve this goal, a holistic approach is essential and this approach should invariably involve the family, educational institutions, government agencies, and NGOs keeping in view that each child is unique.

#### **Suggestions:**

1. There are many NGOs to address street children's problems but most of them are increasingly isolated. Government and NGOs should work together more effectively to give street children the services and attention needed to reconnect them with their families, and their communities, and develop the right attitude and skills among them by creation a conducive environment through NGOs.
2. Since poverty and discard among the families forced the children to take refuge on streets, some definitive measures should be taken up for improving the economic well being of such at risk families. They can be targeted for income generating schemes such as integrated rural development programme, self employment program for urban poor ,etc. Women belonging to these families can be helped to avail the saving and credit schemes under DWACRA, MGNREGP, Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, availing facilities from Rashtriya Mahila Kosh to improve their financial well being.
3. The income generating programmes for families should also be seen as programs for the prevention of children from continuing as street children. Since poverty is clearly the major cause of mothers and fathers for sending children out to the street in search of work, guaranteeing poor families with some income would certainly reduce their incentive to do this. Also to some extent vocational training for parents, and care for the children of working parents from low income neighbourhoods can prevent children from going on the streets.

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