



Street Children and Access to Education as a Basic Right

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Abstract: The most powerful weapon that can be utilized to change the world is education. These remarkable words by Nelson Mandela can serve as a benchmark by which South Africa can assess whether children's rights, particularly the right to basic education, are progressively being realized. It seems like South Africa is still struggling to achieve this goal. This is particularly so for street children, a growing and increasingly marginalized group. Street children have a right to a decent education, to be knowledgeable citizens with inalienable rights to play and grow. However, South Africa sees street children as more used to working than studying. They also face numerous societal, practical and health barriers. They are among the millions of the world's hardest-to-reach children, not attending mainstream schools. This paper aims to understand whether street children benefit from the efforts by government towards inclusive and quality education for all. It draws from the ongoing collection of PhD data from street children in the North-West province during COVID19. All (100%) of street children who formed part of that study are not schooling. Most of them dropped out of school when they were in grade 7 and below. The question then arises: to what extent can South Africa be proud of having achieved the noble goal of providing primary education, after more than two decades of democracy? The aim is therefore to explore the extent to which various government Departments can ensure that street children have equal access to education as much as any other children do have such access, which could ultimately assist in eradicating the street children phenomenon.

Keywords: *Street children; access to education; marginalized children; child dropout rate*

1. Introduction

South Africa is currently challenged by an ever-growing number of street children as are other developing nations (Mahlangu, 2002; Malindi, 2009; Vogel, 2001).

Kawala et al. (2020) report that street children numbers are quite dynamic, and the exact numbers are difficult to establish. This makes it challenging for governments to plan for the population of children.

During the 1990s, the number of street children in South Africa was estimated to be between nine and ten thousand (Swart-Kruger & Donald, 1994). It reportedly rose to around two hundred and fifty thousand (250 000) later on (Hills, Meyer-Weitz & Asante, 2016).

It is logical to surmise that this number has also risen over time to the present, although the accurate numbers are unknown.

Street children are among the most deprived and marginalised groups in society because they do not have what is considered appropriate relationships with major childhood institutions.

Among others, street children are deprived of access to what is universally considered a fundamental institution, that of education (Scanlon, Tomkins, Lynch & Scanlon, 1998; World Health Organization {WHO}, 2000).

According to Chitsamatanga and Rembe (2020), the most powerful weapon that can be utilised to change the world is education.

These great words by Nelson Mandela can serve as a benchmark by which South Africa can assess whether children's rights, particularly the right to basic education, are progressively being realised. It seems like South Africa is still struggling to achieve this goal.

This is particularly so for street children, a growing and increasingly marginalised group at risk of being left out of its major institutions (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020).

Sorre and Oino (2013) gave a general overview of the characteristics of street children and reported that, apart from other negative characteristics, the majority of street children are illiterate.

Ferguson (2007) also found that schooling difficulties and dropping out acted as agents that pulled and pushed some children to live in the streets.

According to Uke (2018) street children are not different from other children. They have the right to a decent education, be knowledgeable citizens, and with inalienable rights to play and grow.

Ingleby (2017) writes that children are not expected to work but are expected to go to school. However, South Africa sees street children as more used to working than studying. Street children also face numerous societal, practical and health barriers.

COVID-19 also revealed the literacy level of street children, especially when they could not access COVID-19 protective information (Kawala et al., 2020).



Such vulnerable groups of children are among the millions of the world's hardest-to-reach children not attending mainstream schools. Their fate seems to be locked in a system of high drop-out rates from formal education programmes (Uthayakumar & Vlamings, 2019).

This paper aims to understand whether street children benefit from the efforts by the South African government towards inclusive and quality education for all. It draws from an ongoing qualitative doctoral study conducted on street children in the North-West Province, South Africa.

All (100%) street children who formed part of this study are not schooling. In the process of this study, the question arose: to what extent can South Africa be proud of having achieved this noble goal of providing primary education after more than two decades of democracy? (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020).

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to explore the extent to which various government Departments (viz., Social Development and Education) ensure that street children have equal access to education, as much as any other children do have such access, which could ultimately assist in eradicating the street children phenomenon.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Childhood

According to the United Nations, "any boy or girl under the age of 18 years is considered as a "child" (UNICEF, 2000)

When children were regarded as primarily the concern of their mothers and their teachers, they were studied as 'units' within the family and the school system (Clark, 2010)

Norozi and Moen (2016) state that there is an argument in the history of childhood that it is a recent phenomenon. So, it is a modern construct which has given childhood a 'special space' in society.

Indeed, according to some historians, the notion of childhood as a distinct phase of life did not develop until the 16th century. Childhood has undergone the process of social construction.

Norozi and Moen (2016) find that different approaches, such as the Social Constructionist approach, have been used to study children and childhood. Social Constructionism seeks to understand how children and childhood knowledge is constructed, by whom, why and most substantially, what purpose it would serve.

Social Constructionism offers alternative ways to find out about children and childhood.

The social constructionism of childhood studies is grounded in varying conceptions among different cultures, societies, and periods in history. It also emphasises the diversity of situations and circumstances in which childhood is experienced (Norozi & Moen, 2016).

2.2 Street Children Defined

Street children are defined in the South African Constitution (1996) as persons below the age of 18 years, who live on the streets on their own without any form of parental or adult care.

They are identified as children in harsh or challenging circumstances, some of who are associated with chronic poverty in their homes (Maepa, 2021).

The United Nations defined the term "street children" to include "any boy or girl... for whom the street in the broadest sense of the word... has become his or her habitual abode and source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults".

Therefore, it follows that all children found in or on the street would fall into this category. Such children must have been observed to spend a substantial part of their time on the street (Owoaje et al., 2009).

2.3 Factors Contributing To the Street Children Phenomenon

Several contributory push factors are exacerbating the street children phenomenon in South Africa.

These include urbanisation, divorce, parental deaths from H.I.V/AIDS or COVID-19, substance abuse, domestic violence and child maltreatment.

Other factors that pull children to the streets include the need for money, peer pressure, food, freedom from family or lack of parental control and discipline (Mokomane & Makoae, 2017).

2.4 Apartheid as a Historical Contributory Factor to Street Children Phenomenon

Kilbride, Suda and Njeru (2000) argue that South African apartheid and racial isolation contributed to the phenomenon of street children.

A strong motive for the presence of street children in South Africa is the social and political upheaval caused by the domination of one group over another, and in the former occupying a higher status over the dominated group.



A high number of children in the South African streets are from the black population, and the situation is strongly tied to the circumstances that resulted from the urbanisation process in South Africa.

Due to that, compared to other population groups (White, Indian and Coloureds as per the apartheid classifications), black children became more vulnerable to poverty and poor parent-child relationships (Le Roux, 2001).

Still, Malindi and Theron (2010) found that street children in South Africa mainly come from the black, Indian and Coloured populations, of whom 9 000 were black as per the apartheid classifications.

This means that there are far fewer white children on South African streets, and this is historical as the apartheid system previously favored them. South African street children are usually males, between ten (10) and seventeen (17) years of age (Idemudia et al., 2013; Ward 2007: Ward & Seager 2010).

2.5 The Importance of Education For Street Children

There is a correlation between the street children phenomenon and their socio-economic and educational status. This means that children out of school are likely to go to the street.

According to Ranjan (2021), the first place a child is socialised is at school, though one may also add that the family is also primary. Children are exposed to new concepts as well as exposed to peers their own age in schools. Empathy, friendship, teamwork and helping others are all valuable skills in a child's life.

While the home gives a restricted outlet, a child's energy can be channeled into more sociable avenues at school. Furthermore, the provision of activities such as sports, crafts and like activities in school allows a child to channel his or her endless energy into something beneficial.

Children can acquire valuable activities largely through education. It is one of the primary sources that can ignite this world. Children's major development is influenced by their education (Ranjan, 2021).

If children are not schooled, they cannot focus their energy and attention on educational activities on their own. They thus lose out on the opportunity to learn and experience extra-curricular activities offered at school, including sporting activity that is also known to contribute to a person's well-being.

Extra-curricular activity can keep them busy and shift their focus and attention to a life-world that is important to develop at an early age.

Without schooling, children might not have the opportunity to interact with other children and engage in age-appropriate developmental activities to assist with their socialisation process.

Consequently, by the absence of such opportunities and not experiencing the school environment, they are left to their vices, and this could then ultimately lead them to turn to the street.

2.6 Street Children's Basic Education Rights

The South African Constitution reigns supreme, and the 'best interest of the child' is a cornerstone of this law, as stated in Section 28. (2). The right to education is one such right.

However, it seems like South Africa is still struggling to achieve this goal (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020). This is also evident in the findings of this study, where all the street children interviewed are not schooling.

Street children are not different from other children, and they also have the right to obtain a decent education, to acquire knowledge and play as asserted by Uke (2018).

However, street children are used to working rather than studying. Uthayakumar and Vlamings (2019) state that the universal right to education has a solid basis in international law and is a key component of the United Nation's 2030 agenda, centred on the principle of 'leaving no one behind.'

With the aim to get all children, adolescents and youth into education by 2030, there is a rising global enrolment rate that has reached 82% (2017), and the figure is reaching a high of 91% for primary school-aged children.

Despite this commendable progress, street children are at risk of being left behind. Furthermore, Chitsamatanga and Rembe (2020) believe that as part of the South African constitutional and human rights culture, children's rights to education should be recognised and supported.

The current state of the education system necessitates a re-examination of how the government of the Republic of South Africa has approached the education sector, which falls short of providing millions of children with their full right to education, particularly regarding equal access to schooling.

Despite the rising enrolment, which could be misinterpreted as equal access to high-quality education for all learners, school drop-out rates have reached a national crisis point, as they remain extremely high (Lewin & Wang, 2011).

Weybright et al. (2017) wrote that Secondary school drop-out rates were very high in 2017.



Hartnack (2017) adds that most school dropouts in South Africa occurs in grades 10 and 11, resulting in 50% of learners in any one cohort dropping out before reaching grade 12. Around 60% of young South Africans effectively drop out of school, with no school-leaving qualification to their names (Hartnack, 2017).

Ward and Seager (2010) reveal that playing truant from school, or dropping out of school, is often an early sign that a child is likely to take to the streets. Street children are highly likely to have experienced failure in the school setting, including one or more learning disabilities.

Many street children in their study reported school failure, extreme punishment at school, or an inability to attend because their parents were unable to pay fees or buy uniforms. The educational needs of street children have to be assessed, and they need to be placed in an appropriate setting.

Ward and Seager (2010) further reveal that the longer a child has been on the street, the harder it is to intervene, and the less likely chance there is that family reunification and educational interventions can succeed.

2.7 Poverty Implications of Street Children's (lack of) Education

The government of South Africa has created several social grants in response to high poverty levels, including a social-economic foundation as a net for the poor. However, these have not had a positive impact on improving poverty levels.

For example, the General Household Survey (2015) revealed that more than 70% of South Africa's 14 million learners walked to school daily. This exposed the learners to fatigue, absenteeism, late coming and dropping out of school (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020).

According to Clark (2019), even though education in various countries is free, there are numerous hidden costs of education, including uniforms and textbooks. This is partly why many children in low-income families become adrift from their educational endeavour.

According to Sorre and Oino (2013), most street children are illiterate and emerge out of single-parent, large families and choose street life largely due to socio-economic factors. Many street children in this study are from single-parent families headed by women who are unemployed and struggle to take care of their children without the help of the father of the child.

This is supported by Olaleye and Oladeji (2010) that there is a structural logic in a single-parent family that affects both parents and children.

A basic point here is that the responsibilities that are supposed to be shared by both parents now rests solely on a single individual: this makes life more demanding and challenging. If this is not well managed, it might lead to maladjustment in life.

Street children from such single-parent families in this study cited poverty as the main reason for their children turning to the street.

As a result, Clark (2019) states that for the many street children driven to the streets due to poverty, going to school would take time away from income-generating activities. The vicious circle of poverty and illiteracy is thus complete.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

2.8.1 The Structural Functionalist Theory

The Structural-Functionalist theory has been employed for this paper. The theory draws its inspiration mainly from the ideas of Emile Durkheim, who sought to explain social cohesion and stability through the concept of solidarity.

This theory assists in interpreting the macro factors in the society that contribute to the street children phenomenon. It helps analyse how particular historical (apartheid) processes or macro-level social forces such as poverty contribute to the street children phenomenon.

Poverty and other social miseries are largely due to social structure, which is how society functions at a macro level. Some societal issues, such as racism, sexism and segregation, constantly cause disparities in education, employment and income for marginalised groups.

The function of a school is to transmit skills and knowledge to the children, (Ferrante, 2016). According to Uke (2018), street children deserve a decent education to upgrade their knowledge and time to play and gather around with their friends, but they cannot obtain what they are supposed to get due to financial concerns.

Instead, they are more concerned about earning money to meet their family's needs. Some street children make a living by working as street bearers, parking attendants, street musicians and even beggars. Lack of knowledge about the significance of education in their lives is one other reason for their lack of awareness to attain a decent education.

One cannot talk of South Africa without referring to its legacy of apartheid as a historical process that led to the disruption of the family institution, and which affected its children and led them to the street.



This is supported by Sooryamoorthy and Makhoba (2016), that the family, as an institution in charge of socialisation, was exposed to historical processes that affected its structure, roles and functioning.

Hall and Richter (2018) asserts that the physical separation of family members for sustained periods dates back, in some forms, to pre-colonial times. Family members were separated by the upheavals of the Mfecane wars of 1815 – 1840 and the waves of migration that followed.

Pre-apartheid labour migration to (and within) South Africa also contributed to family fragmentation. The extended separation of labour migrants from their family homes was common in the region as far back as the late nineteenth century when gold was first discovered.

Children's living arrangements were often restructured, and informal kinship care was common (Hall & Richter, 2018). The result of this was wholly unpleasant for children, especially as they struggled to adjust and adapt to such restructured living arrangements. Quite a few households became intolerable to children, which often led such children to turn to the streets (Hall & Richter, 2018).

This paper further applies the Structural-Functionalist theory to explain how the street children phenomenon relates to dysfunctionality, by affecting and disrupting social order and stability. Elements of society are functional if they contribute to social stability and dysfunctional if they disrupt social instability.

Merton (1976) identified two types of functions: manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are the intended, anticipated and commonly recognised consequences, which are overt.

Dysfunctions are also either manifest or latent. The manifest dysfunction of the street children phenomenon is evident. Street children can be dysfunctional in society in several ways, some of which are the following.

The street children phenomenon could cause a manifest dysfunction because street children may not attend school and thus deprive themselves of education. Clark (2019) expands on such manifest dysfunction of street children and the lack of education. He states that street children face unique barriers to accessing education which many other children don't have. Street children are often unable to enrol in formal education due to poverty.

Clark (2019) further elaborates that excluding street children from efforts to improve educational access will only perpetuate their poverty and the countless human rights violations that they endure daily on the streets.

Giving them access to education can provide them with safe spaces and protection while they are on the streets, and it could also fulfill an opportunity to leave the streets and live a happy and healthy life.

Furthermore, Durkheim used the metaphor of an organism in which many parts (social institutions) function together to sustain the whole. When one system is disrupted, it disrupts the entire functioning of the body (Allen & Henderson, 2016).

This is the case with street children too, as the disruption or breakdown of a family institution due to apartheid made them struggle to adjust and adapt to the restructured family living arrangements, which in turn led them to turn to the street (Hall & Richter, 2018).

Consequently the ousting of such children has disrupted the national goal of universal education for all. Ferguson (2007) adds that, amongst other challenges, school difficulties and dropping out are individual-based causes that either push or pull children to live on the street.

Additionally, Ingleby (2017) writes that Functionalist Sociologists are interested in the type of social circumstances that lead to the social creation of the concept of childhood.

In the context of the United Kingdom, Ingleby (2017) indicated that U.K.'s society modernised childhood as a social concept became increasingly important. The identity of childhood became defined by particular social conventions.

He gave an example that children were not expected to work but expected to go to school.

2.8.2 Critique of The Structural Functionalist Theory

Parsons sees the schools as neutral places organized to provide students with necessary skills and knowledge they will need to function in the wider society.

He also looks at schools as venues that pave the way to equal opportunity that facilitates the promotion of students' standing in the social hierarchy (Sever, 2012).

This equal opportunity, however, brings some differences in attainment. These differences are theorized to originate from ability, family orientations and individual motivations or level of interest in education (Sever, 2012).

Street children are among those who don't have equal opportunity in attaining education due to, among other reasons, dropping out as a result of lack of motivation or interest to attend school and mainly due to their poor family backgrounds.



Functionalist theory has therefore been criticized for neglecting the role of conflict in the society (Sever, 2012). Thus, Ferrante (2016), writes that the conflict theory sees the apartheid education system to have firmly established patterns of segregation, discrimination and inequality across the differently classified race groups.

The advent of better opportunities was meant for all, but this has not materialized for many South Africans who continue to live in poverty. Schools are not perfect and not all minds are liberated; students drop out, refuse to attend or graduate but with deficiencies; and schools may also misclassify students.

According to Bourdieu, no institution does more to ensure the reproduction of inequality than education. Upon close scrutiny, educational systems actually perpetuate pre-existing inequalities, (Ferrante, 2016).

However, according to Parsons, differences in educational attainment are acceptable because, even though students are born into unequal cultural or material conditions, education has the ability to erase these differentiations, based on the proposition that those who do well in school are highly rewarded, (Sever, 2012).

These “natural” outcomes do not change the fact that schools are organized to disseminate opportunity to all members of society equally and that every society has such ‘common culture’ (Sever, 2012).

Also, it is still not guaranteed that education could erase the individual’s differentiations such as their poverty status. One cannot ignore the fact that not all individuals in a society that attains education are guaranteed equal opportunities of being employed.

Race still plays a role, even in democratic South Africa, in terms of access to employment.

The informal network of ‘connections’ is another way of landing a job in South Africa, meaning you can get a job based on who you know. This would be unlikely for students from poor families as they may have not such connections: for example, with people in higher government levels or in companies positions to hire them or ‘connect’ them to the relevant people.

Additionally, Ferrante (2016) admitted that during apartheid, black communities were poverty-stricken and lived in low socio-economic contexts. Not much has changed because many still remain disadvantaged and marginalized in a democratic country in which they were promised better lives and promising futures.

Education is viewed as the only way to break the cycle of poverty and hardships.

Parents in poor families often plough all their resources and make enormous sacrifices to pay for their children’s education. This is done with the hope and expectation that when the child benefits from the education, the whole family could be alleviated of their poverty and hardships (Ferrante, 2016).

Ferrante (2016) further asserts that many children see education as the route out of poverty, to make tremendous sacrifices under difficult conditions to ensure a good matric result. However, with the prevailing high unemployment rate there is no guarantee of employment whether with a matric or even a higher qualification in South Africa.

Previously, having a university degree or diploma almost guaranteed one a job, but presently for many young graduates this is not the case as thousands of young people struggle to find employment.

While the ‘born free’ generation has more opportunities to further their education and to get gainful employment, the promise of education often remains elusive due to the backlog and high levels of inequalities that still persist even after two decades since the first democratic elections in the country.

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative research method was selected for this study because it is primarily concerned with understanding human beings’ experiences in a humanistic manner and through an interpretive approach.

In the qualitative method, the research strategies employed generally create words, meanings, procedures and developments instead of simply gathering numbers and percentages, as is done in the quantitative data analysis (Patton and Cochran, 2002).

The North West Province in South Africa was selected as the location of the study because of the increasing number of street children there and in other parts of the country.

Non-probability purposive sampling has been used. Data was collected from street children receiving services from the Drop-in Centres in Leeudoringstad and Ventersdorp in the North West province. Nine (9) children from the ages of fifteen (15) to eighteen (18) years were sampled from each of the two selected Drop-in Centres with the assistance of Centre managers.

Face-to-face semi-structured open-ended interview questions were used for street children. Generally, semi- or unstructured, open-ended interviews were preferred to allow for more flexibility and responsiveness to emerging themes for both the interviewer and the participants (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007).



4. Results and Discussion

Education level as one of the demographic characteristics of street children was presented. Presenting such demographic characteristics was essential for the study because such demographic factors such as the level of education influence the street children phenomenon.

Figure 1 indicates that all the street children were not schooling, reflecting a 100% dropout rate of street children who formed part of this study. Furthermore, as the quotes below show, it's not just dropping out that's the problem but also not ever having attended school. This relates to the problem of access to education.

On 21 June 2021, the researcher interviewed street children from Kgakala drop in centre and Letsema drop in centre in North West: Below are some of their responses when they were asked if they are schooling:

An eighteen year-old male street child from a single parent family said: *"I am not schooling, I haven't been schooling in a long time, since I left school when I was in grade two"*.

A fifteen year-old male street child from a single parent family headed by an aunt stated the following: *"I am not attending school. I have never been to school."*

A fifteen year-old female street child from a step-family reported: *"I don't attend school. I left school last year (2020)"*.

A sixteen-year-old male street child from a step-parent family said: *"I am not schooling, I left school when I was in grade three. I would love to go back to school."*

A fifteen-year-old male street child from a male-headed single parent gave the following account: *"I am not schooling, since I left school when I was in grade five. I left school because the teachers accused me of smoking."*

An eighteen-year-old male street child from a step-family indicated the following: *"I don't go to school, since I left it when I was in grade six."*

The above responses indicate that most street children in the study dropped out of school when they were in lower grades or in primary schools.

However, one street child stated that he did not attend school at all. Ferguson's (2007) statement thus rings true, that school difficulties and drop-outs are individual-based causes that either push or pull children to live in the streets.

4.1 Implications of Street Children's Illiteracy during COVID-19

Lack of access to COVID-19 information and protective wear Whilst people that stay at home could easily access information from the mass media in the form of radios, televisions, phones, and the internet, street children could hardly receive such targeted information.

They found themselves excluded from information sources (Kawala et al., 2020).

Some support groups suggested printing and distributing pamphlets to these children. However, it appeared this approach was not prioritised.

Street children therefore remained uninformed, thus hampering national efforts to combat the spread of the virus (Kawala et al., 2020).

Low literacy levels amongst street children impeded interpreting the minor health information they could access. Thus, they were primarily left misinformed and relying on rumours and myths.

As a result, street children could quickly spread the virus in the family and community due to negligence, inadequate education, financial inability, lack of access to necessary medical facilities and not following the required steps for treatment.

While street kids spend most of the day in public and on the streets, they generally did not only wear masks and gloves, they did not even know the correct ways to prevent the virus.

They easily ignored the principles of individual hygiene (Khammarnia & Peyvand, 2021).

They then either spread the disease or increase their own risk of morbidity.

These problems relate to the unavailability of safe spaces required to practice physical distancing and isolation, thus rendering them highly vulnerable to the pandemic.

This is corroborated by Olanipekun's (2020) findings when he interviewed street children who shared their COVID-19 experiences. One of Olanipekun's participants related his experience during COVID-19 as follows:

"Nobody tells us anything. But we hear side talks about the situation of things now. So, we do what we see people do. That's why we are using masks too. We usually pick the mask we see by the road. We don't go out again like before. All of us sleep and wake up here and hope that people bring food so we can eat."



Olanipekun (2020) states that the above response shows how street children's lack of access to information puts their lives at risk.

The above discussion indicates the importance of education for street children. The COVID-19 hard lockdown in South Africa exposed the level of literacy of street children, as they were not able to access the COVID-19 protective information due to their low literacy level. It also reflects how important it is for street children to also be included in access to quality education.

This can put them in good stead to read basic texts, such as consuming important public information of concern, which in this case was the official information regarding COVID-19 information.

It is also clear that the Health Department was ignoring these street children during such a period: there was no assurance that the health of such children was also being considered.

This is the case even though the street children of this study are part of an institution, viz., Drop-in Centers from which samples were taken for interviews.

Drop-in Centres primarily provide non-formal education, free lunches, recreational activities, preventative health services and basic medical treatment to street children for a few hours during the week (Mahlase & Ntombela (2011).

For example, in the absence of parents and other caregivers, Drop-in Centres are better positioned, through multi-sectoral collaboration, to provide for physiological needs (*in the form of food, clothing, medical care, and school supplies*) and to ensure that children get age-appropriate guidance and assistance (viz. capacity building, pastoral and psychological support) to develop positive self-concepts (Mahlase & Ntombela, 2011).

Street children did not have access to all that during COVID-19 due to the closure of such Centres due to public health restrictions.

In 2021, the Researcher could not go to the centres to interview the street children while conducting the mentioned study.

As gatekeepers, Centre Managers had to tell the Researcher that they stopped providing services to their street children beneficiaries due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

The pandemic resulted in street children losing access to the above-mentioned set of services from the Centres and access to safe spaces to receive material and emotional support.

4.2 A Critical View of the South African Governments' COVID-19 Interventions Towards Street Children (C.S.C., 2020)

The Consortium for Street Children (C.S.C.), (2020) has revealed that during COVID-19, where governments were sharing COVID-19 information publicly, it might have remained inaccessible to street children due to lack of access to the necessary technology, inability to read or a lack of understanding of the language used.

Despite being at risk of contracting the virus and other severe illnesses due to their poor living conditions and already compromised immune systems, most street children continue to be deprived of access to healthcare due to a lack of capacity in the national systems.

The Consortium further indicates that the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasised the need to provide street children with access to health education and services tailored to their specific needs.

The pandemic has brought to light, stark inequalities in how people enjoy their right to health. Due to their extreme poverty and the circumstances in which they live, street children were vulnerable to COVID-19, despite their young age.

In its strategies to mitigate the pandemic, there were no measures to reduce the additional barrier in accessing education that digital exclusion presents to some groups of children, such as street children.

Due to public health restrictions, many organisations have had to stop their outreach activities with street children, including awareness-raising campaigns about the health situation and measures.

This has prevented street children from accessing vital information about health education. For example, awareness-raising campaigns carried out by social workers were limited.

Social workers who usually spread information to street children directly during outreach work had to stop. Non-formal education programmes that support out-of-school children and youths in the street were shut down (C.S.C., 2022).

The Consortium further indicates that Article 11(h) of the African Charter guarantees the 'promotion of the child's understanding of primary healthcare' as a core component of their right to education, and in its COVID-19 appeal, the Committee reminded nation states of their obligations to promote COVID-19-related information appropriate to the age, maturity, language, gender and culture of every child.



The Consortium, therefore, suggested the following recommendations:-

- Nations parties should promote information that is pluralistic, diverse, inclusive of marginalised groups, and use local and African languages.
- Governments should always provide street Children with accurate, accessible and adequate information and health education that is appropriate to the age, cultural context and educational/ literacy level of every child.
- Social workers should organise awareness-raising campaigns to provide street children with pandemic information.
- Governments should cooperate with non-governmental organisations by setting up or equipping shelters and drop-in centres with adequate facilities and professional capacity to host educational and training activities for children.

4.3 Recommendations on the Inclusion of Street Children In Accessing Quality Education

A child has the right to education (SAHRC, 2012). However, this is not the case for the street children in this study and probably for many such children in South Africa as well as in many other parts of the world.

Street children face unique barriers to accessing basic education that many other children don't have. They are often unable to enrol in formal education.

Those who can enrol are often faced with marginalisation, stigmatisation and discrimination by their teachers and peers, affecting their well-being and performance in class (Uthayakumar & Vlamings, 2019).

Uthayakumar and Vlamings (2019) further highlights the fact that many unique barriers street children face to accessing education highlight the importance of tailoring education initiatives to their specific needs.

Acknowledging their realities is crucial for developing education programmes that leave no street child behind. The need to develop alternative, inclusive models for street children is clear.

Government departments such as the Department of Education and the Department of Social Development have to work collaboratively with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and the Centres for street children or shelters, to be successful and sustainable.

Allowing street children to be left behind in terms of the efforts at improving access to education will only perpetuate their cycle of poverty and add to the countless human rights

violations they face daily on the streets (Uthayakumar & Vlamings, 2019).

These children should not be immediately reintegrated into the formal education system since they may require or even prefer informal education with a curriculum relevant to their life experiences.

Such programs aimed at preventing street children at the community level should prioritise the provision of basic services, such as job creation, education, advocacy, school improvement and the strengthening of social capital.

According to Shrivastava et al. (2015), it is also vital to ensure that powerful familial bonds are built or enhanced, that they maintain and sustain a nurturing environment and that there should be an encouragement to enrol children in schools.

5. Conclusion

This paper explored whether street children benefit from the efforts by the government towards inclusive and quality education for all.

Based on the literature and the findings of this study, it is clear that street children, albeit a small sample of such children, are excluded in efforts to distribute quality education by the government. This may be the pattern in many parts of the world.

The Departments of Social Development and Education in South Africa should jointly function to ensure that street children are out of the street and enrolled in schools. If the effort to take them out of the street may not succeed ultimately, at least those that remain on the street should have access to education.

Uthayakumar and Vlamings (2019) assert that it is time to take action to ensure that street children no longer remain invisible and can benefit from the efforts towards inclusive and quality education for all.

Providing street children with access to education may not only provide safe spaces and security whilst they are on the streets but also offer opportunities to move away from the streets and go on to lead happy and healthy lives.



6. References

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