

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

We, Shreya Kalra, II<sup>nd</sup> year M.A Social Work student from Department Of Social Work, Delhi University and Suman Bharti, III<sup>rd</sup> year B.A Political Science student from Miranda College, Delhi University joined at NCPCR as interns on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2013 and 24<sup>th</sup> June 2013 respectively and completed it on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2013. We worked under the guidance of Mr. Asheem Srivastava, Member Secretary, NCPCR on the issue of Street Children in Delhi. Kindly grant us the internship completion certificate and oblige.

Yours Sincerely,

   
Shreya Kalra and Suman Bharti

  
Member Secretary



## STREET CHILDREN OF DELHI

### BACKGROUND

The sight of children on the street has become so commonplace in our country that majority of us have stopped paying any heed to this unfortunate scenario. They are seen everywhere, selling petty things or begging. According to UNICEF, in India, homeless and street children are estimated to be around 47.22 million. These children are driven by torturous circumstances to make streets their home and contrary to their expectations, face even worse situations on the streets. They are neglected, treated as delinquents and criminals, and face the brutality and apathy of the pedestrians' day in and day out. What one fails to understand is that these children have not taken to the streets by choice but have faced circumstances beyond their control which drove them to the present situation. In order to rehabilitate and integrate them in the mainstream, a number of issues need to be urgently addressed. It is important to understand the problems and needs peculiar to the life of street and working children.

#### Who are street children<sup>1</sup>?

According to UNICEF, there are 3 categories of street children. The first is **street-living children** who ran away from their families and live alone on the streets. This includes children from households both in Delhi and outside Delhi. The second is **street-working children** who spend most of their time on the streets fending for themselves, but return home on a regular basis. The third category is of **children from street families** who live on the streets with their families.

It is the first and second category of children who are the most vulnerable as they are easy victims of abuse, and inhuman treatment due to absence of guardians on the street. They are reportedly involved in petty thefts, prostitution and drug peddling for economic survival. There are a host of different reasons as to why these children run away from their homes. Some may have faced traumatic experiences in their homes such as physical, emotional or sexual torture from their parents. The parents may be abusive or have problems with alcoholism, poverty and unemployment. Some children leave their homes in rural areas as they are drawn by the glamour of the big cities.

A study by **Save the Children** revealed the prevailing macro pattern—that one out of three children (34 per cent) reached the street due to poverty and hunger. They were on the street in search of jobs or money to feed them, and in many cases to feed their families, living either in Delhi or in far-away places. Their personal stories

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<sup>1</sup> A child is defined as one who is below 18 years of age.



revealed that if there was any supportive system to address hunger, many of them would never get on to the street.

The conditions were so grave that nearly one out of every five children (19.4 per cent) had ended up on the street with his or her family. There were some children who belonged to street families, but most of them belonged to families who had migrated to Delhi for survival. Migration studies state that the incidence of family migration from rural to urban areas is very high among landless and *dalit* households. Migration is the only available option for survival for these people. They are among the more vulnerable groups on the street due to their migrant status. The study also found families who were thrown on the street because of the government's slum demolition programmes taken up from time to time. Slum demolition mostly occurs without any rehabilitation plan. As a result, slum dwellers become street dwellers who are largely on the move for work. Their children, fall under the street children category and even if they attend school, they eventually drop out and become working children on the street.

Many migration studies report a high incidence of seasonal family migration from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh to Delhi. After all, it is true that a family's incapability to meet its economic needs makes it migrate with children and to eventually put them to work; around 30 per cent of the children had reached the streets in search of jobs, either by themselves (17.7 per cent) or were sent by their parents (12.6 per cent). The search for jobs by the children was also an indicator of household poverty and distress. If a family is capable of meeting its food and other basic requirements without income from a child, the child would have never reached the streets of Delhi searching for work.

The study also found children who had run away (just for curiosity, to escape from abuse, and because of some family issues), kidnapped children, orphaned children, and those who had come here because of incidents such as riots, accidents and natural calamities or had lost contact with their parents while travelling. These children constituted 9 per cent of the total number of street children. Their conditions were depressing because they had been deprived of emotional and parental care, along with having to face poverty and other distress-causing factors.

### **Major problems and characteristics of the children on streets:**

#### **EXPOSURE TO UNSAFE SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR**

The children on the street are exposed to unhealthy sexual activities and behaviours that are not legitimate, unacceptable and self destructive. They are forced to indulge in such activities by their peers. They see and learn adult behaviour at an age when they are not supposed to and when they fail to comprehend its exact meaning. According to a study conducted by Hyderabad Council of Human Welfare, street children are introduced to sex in 2 ways: friendly hugs and same sex rapes. Lying side by side, close to each other on pavements and platforms, children start touching and



teasing each others personal parts. The absence of privacy prevents them from hiding their genitals from their friends. They usually bathe together. Most of the older boys admitted to having sex with prostitutes and acquiring STDs as a result of the same. Usually the younger boys or those who are new to the streets become victims of the older boys and are forced into oral or anal sex.

INCIDENCE OF DRUG USE

A study conducted by Save the Children revealed that nearly 22% of the street children they surveyed were addicted to drugs. Incidences of the use of alcohol, whiteners, and thinners were also reported. The daily drugs of choice were mainly tobacco and pan masala while alcohol was largely consumed on a weekly and monthly basis. These children are easy targets of drug peddlers. They earn and so have the money to spend on drugs. The peddlers' modus operandi is to befriend these children when they seem to be lonely and unhappy. They persuade them to take one puff of smack telling them it would make them feel better. After taking drugs which are given free by the peddler for a week or so, the child falls prey to this habit. Dependency on these drugs decreases the earning capacity of these children but increases their need for these drugs. Ultimately the child is forced to peddle drugs to get his daily quota of smack or ganja.

HARASSMENT

Due to the inability of these children to advocate for themselves and their lack of awareness about the protection schemes and laws present for them, majority of the children face unfair treatment at work such as long hours of work, sexual harassment, beating by the employers, punishments by deduction of their wages, etc. They get low and irregular wages and as most of them are illiterate, they are not aware whether they are being paid the right wages or not. Those street children who are self employed as porters, vendors and shoe blacks are brutally harassed by the police and have to pay these policemen weekly bribes to continue their work smoothly. They are still beaten up at the whims of the policemen. Apart from this, these children are often nabbed by the police for crimes that they have not committed as the police assume them to be delinquents and in the absence of any other culprit, put the blame on these children as they are easy targets without any advocacy. Also, the younger street children are physically and sexually harassed by the adult street boys for pleasure and to show their superiority.

EDUCATIONAL LEVELS OF THESE CHILDREN

Understanding the educational levels of street children is critical for providing them appropriate basic education and skill training. The study by Save the Children revealed that up to 50.5 per cent of the street children were not literate. In all, only 23 per cent had received some form of informal education; another almost 20 per cent had received some kind of education (13 per cent pre-primary; 4 per cent up to primary; and 2.4 per cent up to middle school). Among the **50,923** street children enumerated by the census in Delhi by Save the Children in 2011 , there were 100





children who remained on the street even after being educated till the secondary and above level. The study also found many school-going children who mostly belonged to the categories of 'children of street families' and 'children working on the street'. These children said that after school hours they worked as street vendors for money for their families and a little for their own needs which they said were clothes, cosmetics, and entertainment.

Health and Sanitation Status

It is an accepted fact that street children live in highly vulnerable conditions. They are deprived of access to sanitation facilities and drinking water. They are exposed to extremely harsh climates in cities like Delhi and live in unhygienic and unhealthy conditions without proper food, nutritional care, and even clothing. All these factors enhance their vulnerability to unimaginable levels. Falling sick for them does not mean coming down with a cold or fever; it means problems with heat such as painful heat boils and chickenpox. They also classify falling sick as being bedridden. In that case they normally withdraw from the streets. Also, these children do not report any skin-related problem as a health issue or a condition of sickness, because it was very common among them.

The study by Save the Children also highlighted that the financial requirements of these children revolve not only around food security but also to maintain their personal hygiene. Toilet facilities have to be paid for and they have to buy water. The girls face more problems as they need money to buy sanitary napkins.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF THE STREET CHILDREN

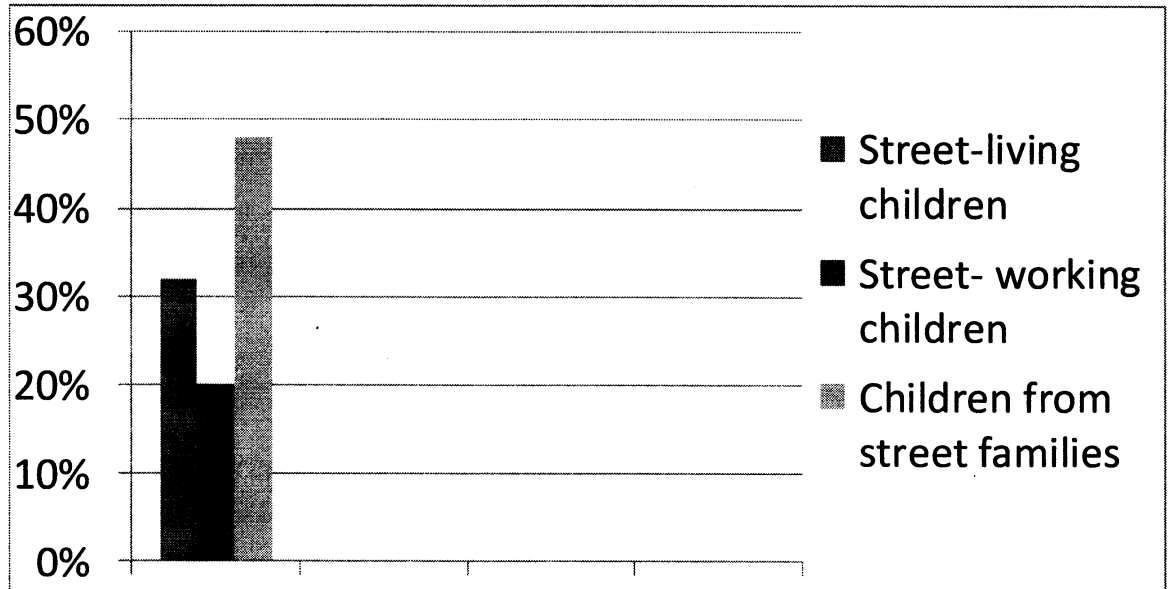
As per the Save the Children Study, rag picking is the most popular income-generation activity, street vending the second most popular, while working in roadside workshops is the third most popular. This is followed by begging. While most children are employed in some kind of roadside enterprise, majority of the street children are self-employed and work as street vendors, rag pickers, and vehicle cleaners. Girls usually work largely as street vendors, beggars, and rag pickers. The girls were engaged in slightly more flexible activities, which they could finish and leave as early as possible. But the boys work under somebody. This could be either in anticipation of getting trained or for a more regular or continuous employment with assured payment. Employers too usually prefer only boys; girls are hardly welcomed as workers in most of the workshops. The hazardous nature of the job requiring long hours even at night could be the reason why girls were not seen in such street enterprises.

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## FACTS AND FIGURES FROM OUR RESEARCH

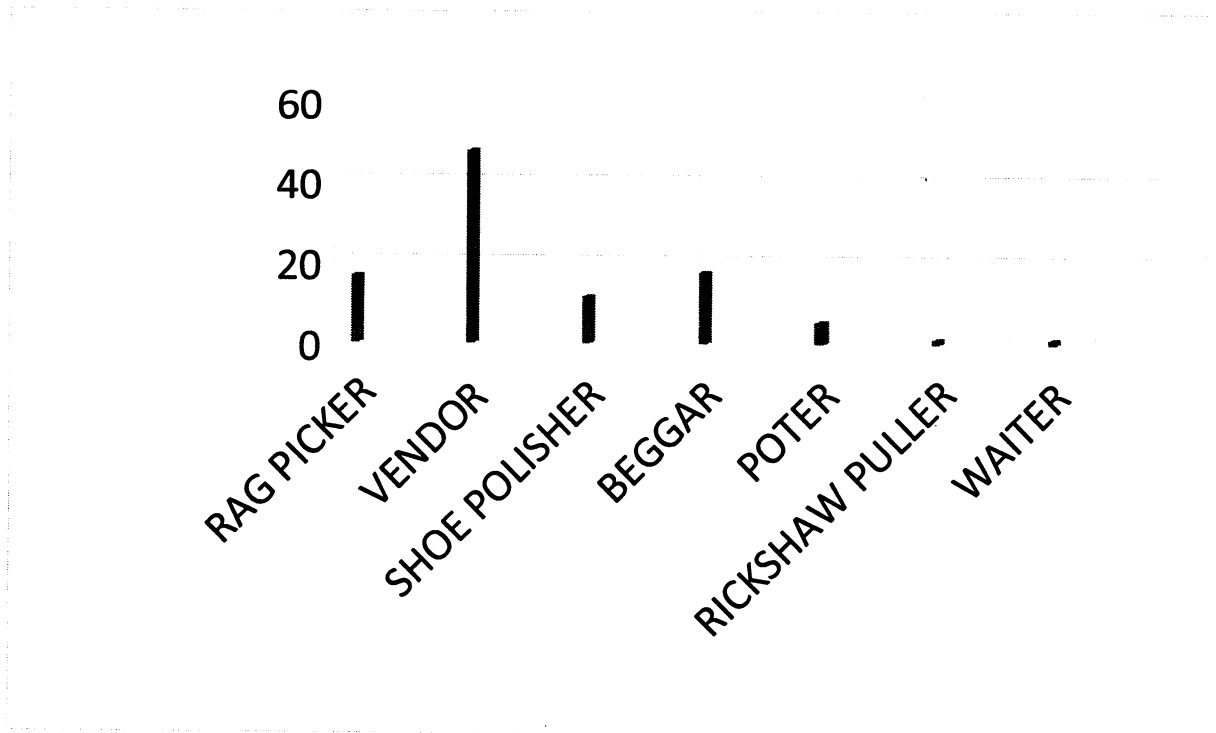
Our research primarily aimed at finding solutions to improve the socio-economic status of street children in Delhi, i.e. the best practices to be followed that can bring about the desired change. In the light of incidences being reported in the already available literature about the income of these children being stolen and snatched by the thugs and police and also how the spending on drugs and alcohol rises due to liquid cash on these children, our emphasis has been on finding ways to provide savings and micro credit facilities to these children and also to find whether the idea of savings appeals to these children or not. We interviewed hundred children belonging to the three different categories as specified by UNICEF. These interviews were conducted in North, Central and Old Delhi in places like Connaught Place, Chandni Chowk, Red Fort, India gate, Karol Bagh and Kamla Nagar from 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2013 to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013. Some interviews that needed attention have been elaborated as case studies focusing on the problems faced by these children on a daily basis such as harassment, drug abuse, sexual abuse from family members etc. The questionnaire used to gather data has been attached below in the appendix. Open ended questions were used.

**Percentage of Street Children as per the three UNICEF categories**

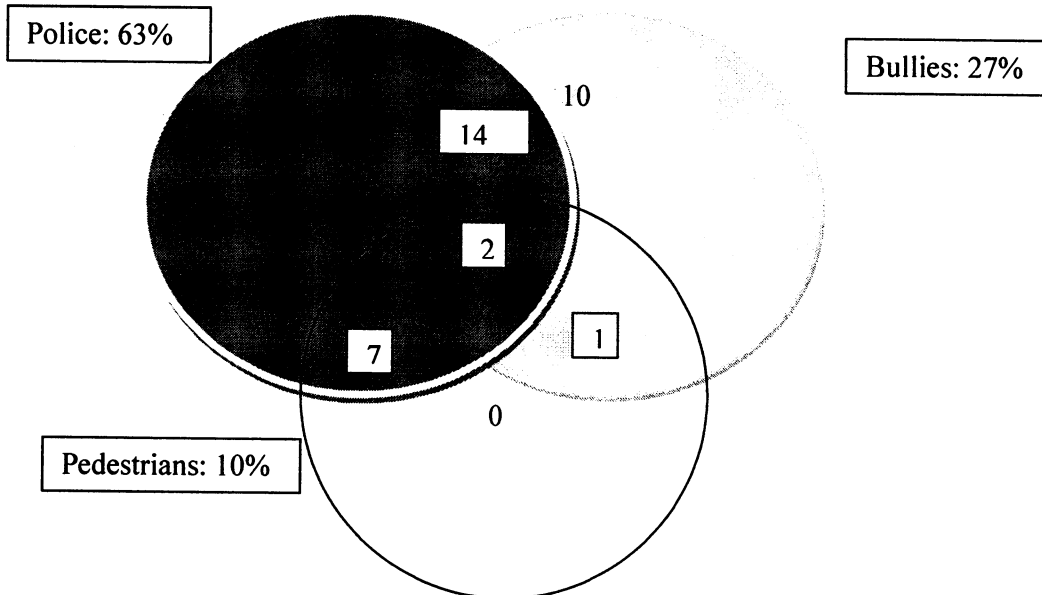


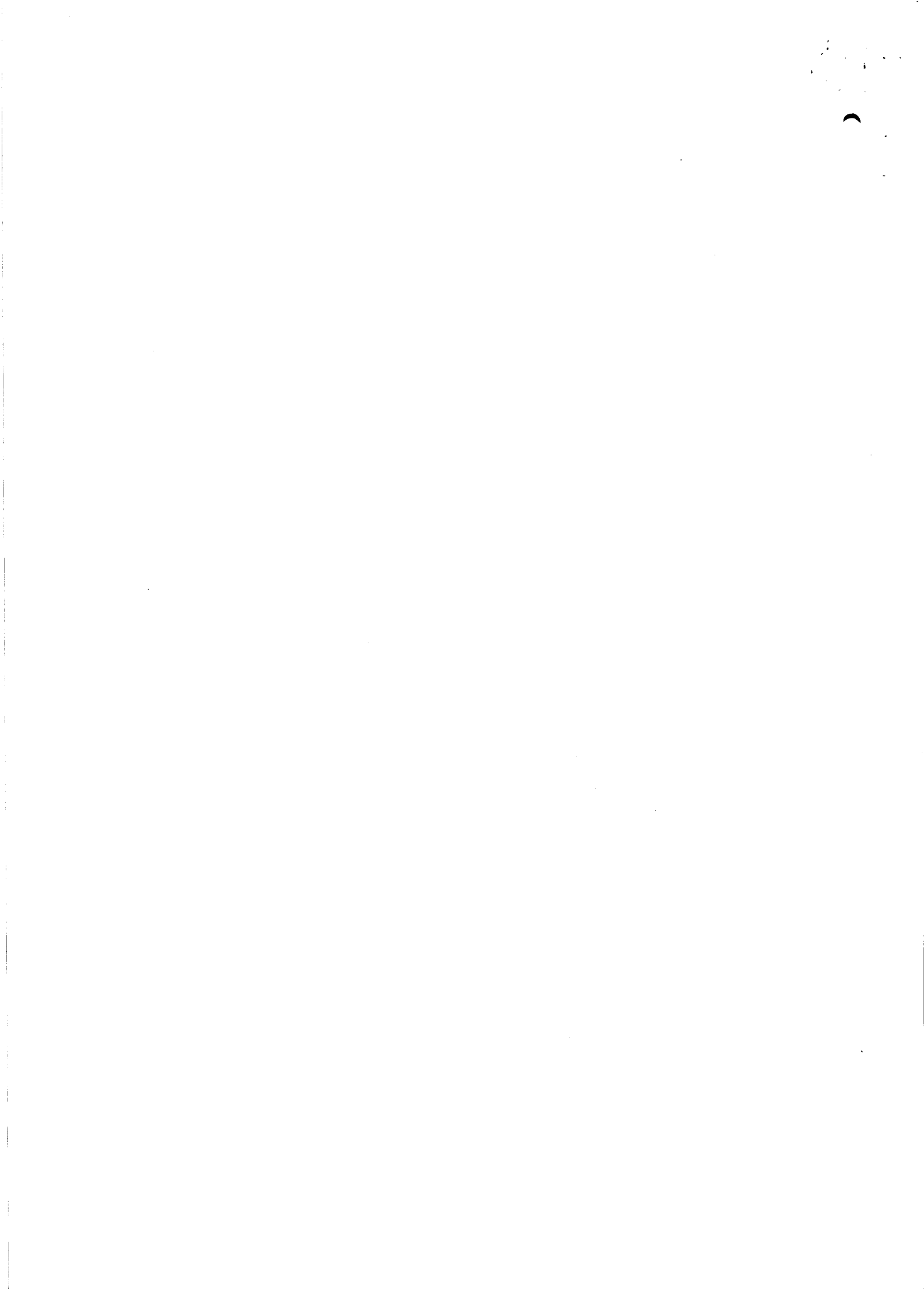


**Different Occupations of Street Children**

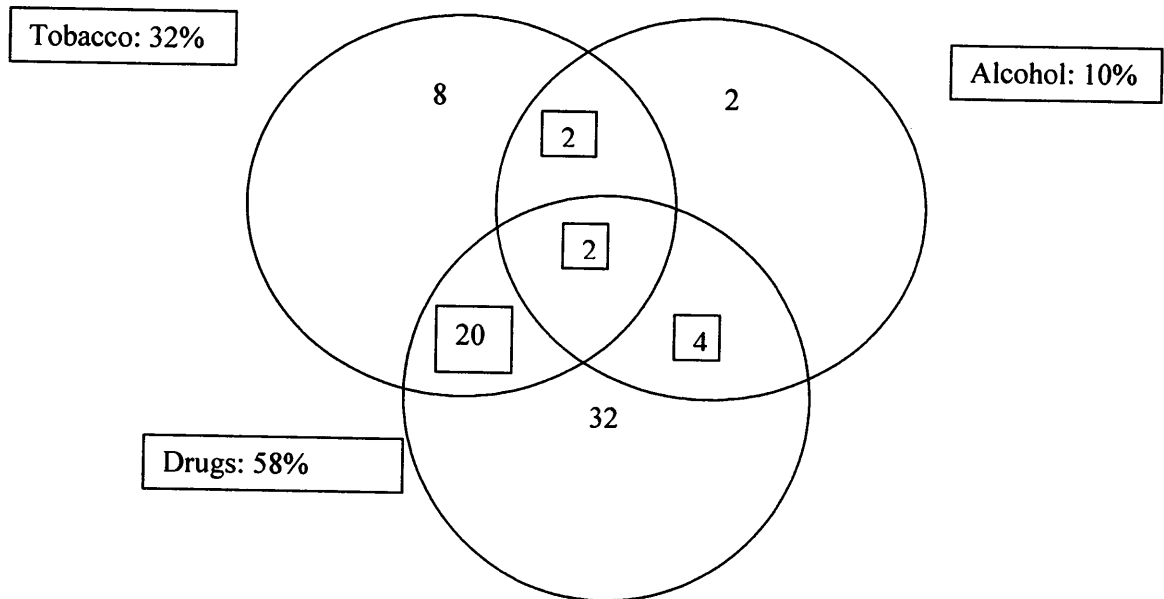


**Harassment faced by the Children**





### Incidence of Substance Abuse



### CASE STUDIES

- SONU

When we talk of informal credit sources, the consequences that one can imagine is a family crushed under the vicious circle of financial burden. But when looked at closely, one can witness a nation losing many capable students to petty earnings. Sonu is a 15 year old boy who falls under the category of 'street-working children'. He works as a shoe polisher in and around Connaught Place. He stays with his family, which includes his parents and a younger sister, in Shadipur. He was enrolled in a regular school till class 7<sup>th</sup> but then was forced to drop out by his father due to a financial crisis. The unavailability of formal credit sources to the family led the father to borrow money from the neighbourhood money lender. The sum borrowed was **Rs. 30000 and after a year he was asked to return back a huge amount of Rs. 100000.** This pushed the family into a deep financial crunch and they still haven't come out of it. The father works as a labourer and the mother and sister stay at home. As the father's income was not enough to pay back the money lender, Sonu had to start working at the young age of 12 years. Since then, he has been on the streets. He manages to earn Rs. 200-300 daily. Out of which, he gives Rs 150 to his father and the remaining he spends on drugs, food, transportation and other miscellaneous expenditure. He tries to save money along with his friend and they manage to save around Rs 6000 – 7000 in 2 to 3 months. He consumes thinner on an





everyday basis and smokes cigarettes as well. He really wants to study; he goes to the home of a neighbour who teaches Sonu basic maths and English from time to time. He tried to go for evening classes as well held by various NGOs but did not find them to be interesting and worth his time. He said he'd rather study on his own.

Sonu is just one of those thousands of children whose families are victims of informal credit sources. They end up borrowing money from community money lenders who take undue advantage of such people's financial illiteracy and charge extremely high interest rates. Having no other way out but to pay the amount asked for, these families struggle to make ends meet and as a result they also force their children into child labour, as clearing the debt is their primary concern and not securing the child's future by providing proper education. Already under a financial burden, the parents can not even think of affording their children's education. They need more bread earners in the family and not liabilities.

- PAPPU

During the survey it was analysed that drugs is one of the major issues that children on and working off the street deal with. It also brought about the realisation that many like Pappu, 27 years old and a victim of substance abuse, don't choose to be on the streets but due to severe addiction and denial faced from society are forced to resort to it.

This feeble bodied wanderer survives near the complex of Hanuman Mandir. He is involved in doing miscellaneous temple chores and is paid for the same by the pandits of the temple. Pappu is originally from Assam and ran away from home at the age of 15 years because he was forced by his father to take tuitions and study. Since then he has been staying in the temple premises. Completely on his own, he made this complex his home and the other boys living there his family. Vulnerable and curious at that age, he got into the habit of consuming drugs due to peer pressure and since then he has been an addict. He regularly consumes tobacco, thinner and at times heroin and smack. He decided to go back home to his family 3 years after he had run away but came back within months as he could not stay without drugs and his family would not allow him to consume drugs. They tried to rehabilitate him but all efforts went in vane and he ran away again. **He belongs to a highly educated family. All his brothers and sisters are well settled and working in top multinationals.** Every time they come to Delhi looking for him, he runs away to places like Haridwar and comes back after a month after they have left. His family has also got him job offers in various companies but he does not want to work there as he is heavily dependent on drugs and can not stay without them. When asked if he had tried to quit, he said that he did not want to and this is his life now and he is very content with it.

This particular example has been included to highlight the level of influence of substance abuse in the lives of street children. **Drugs may not be one of the reasons for these children to land up on the streets but are surely one of the prime reasons for them to stay.** Just to continue the consumption of drugs, Pappu has ended up ignoring his family, education and a well paying job altogether. As per our survey,



58% of children are into consumption of drugs and this is an extremely alarming percentage. Eventually, as they grow older, they get into peddling of drugs as well as it serves their two prime purposes simultaneously i.e. availability of drugs and generation of income. This issue needs to be addressed as soon as possible as many young lives are either getting destroyed or ending all together due to drug use.

• BABU

Babu is a 13 year old boy who works as a rag picker in Connaught Place. He has no family and falls under the category of 'street-living children'. He is a regular victim of police harassment and also gets harassed by other street bullies, boys and men who are older to him. He used to live on the streets with his father to earn a living for themselves. One night, the father was run over by a police jeep and had a major fracture. The police had run the jeep over him on purpose. Sent away from government hospitals and lacking the money for treatment at a private hospital, he soon succumbed to infections and died. His mother passed away while taking care of him. Now Babu is left all alone. He has no place to go to and sleeps on the pavements at night. Streets serve as homes to several to many of these destitute children. But along with it comes its varied consequences pushing them into deeper darkness. Post his father's death, he started consuming drugs and has been an addict ever since. To be able to afford them, he also started doing peddling of drugs. He said that consumption of drugs is the only way that he can feel happy. For him, it is a way to escape the tragic reality. He wants to quit and also wants to study but has never received the required help and roams alone on the streets of Delhi. He is regularly beaten up by the police and has also been imprisoned many a times just because the policemen felt like it. The policemen, who are the guardians of the law and supposed to lookout for crimes against these children are actually the perpetrators. He complained about the policemen getting drunk at night and picking up on any child and beating him. Also, they take away the money which these children earn during the day. Due to this, Babu often buries his money in the ground and marks the spot to come and collect it when he needs it. Given that such children have no one to advocate for them, they are voiceless victims of brutal policemen. There need to be stricter laws to protect these children, and the police needs to be under their scrutiny as well.

• MUKESH

Mukesh is a 12 year old boy and works as a rag picker on the streets of old Delhi. The streets of "Purani Dilli" commonly known as "Old Delhi" or the "Walled City" are famous world-wide for the Red fort, the Jama Masjid and its market places. One such market which is busy and swarming with people all the year round is the Chandini Chowk Market. It attracts tourists and traders in equal numbers and a walk across the market would make one realize that everyone there is on a mission—the tourists are on a mission to shop and the traders are on a mission to sell. But a closer observation of the activities in the Chandni Chowk market would reveal another mission few people are on—a mission for Survival. These are small children who work as Rag Pickers and are usually found near the dustbins and outside the shops

