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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT  
POLICIES IN ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS. A  
CASE STUDY OF FEMALE ADOLESCENT GIRLS (10-17) LIVING ON THE  
STREET IN THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT (CBD) OF HARARE,  
ZIMBABWE**

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**BY**

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**A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters Degree  
in Women's Socio-Legal Studies, Southern and Eastern African Regional Centre for  
Women's Law,  
University of Zimbabwe**

**2020**

## **Dedication**

*This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, my husband and my son. to my father, Cosmas Kanyanta – thank you for being my biggest cheerleader. To my late mother – Sophie Mudenda Habwankuta, Momma I made it. Thank you for being my guardian angel, I know I have made you proud. To my husband and son Brighton and Anaishe Junaid Mazvida, thank you for your love and support.*

## Abstract

Employing primarily the grounded women's law approach, this research critically analyses the extent to which the government of Zimbabwe meets the rights, needs and interests of girls living on the street in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe.

The researcher relied for her data on relevant local legislation (including the Constitution and the Children's Act) and international human rights instruments including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to which Zimbabwe is a party.

She also collected evidence from in-depth interviews with several street girls and representatives from civil society organisations and churches who have been more active in seeking to help these children than the government whose co-operation with this research was minimal. She found that street girls are not only more vulnerable to life on the streets than their male counterparts but far less forthcoming about their experiences. While they share some street challenges with boys (e.g., stress and substance abuse), their suffering is more acute due to their exposure to additional biological and gendered challenges with which they are forced to cope and these include their increased exposure to HIV/AIDS and STIs as a result of their engaging in prostitution in order to earn a living; unwanted pregnancy and their lack of access to sanitary wear. As part of her recommendations to help resolve these challenges, the writer suggests that the government should rectify its lack of specific policy, legislation, strategies or programmes to care for street children and, as part of its efforts, it should engage closely with NGOs and churches who are presently taking some significant steps to alleviate their plight, in particular, that of street girls.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would not have been able to complete this study without the guidance and support of my supervisor, Professor J. E Stewart. Thank you, Prof. I would also like to thank all the organizations that helped with the information they shared. I would also like to acknowledge the street girls I did my research on who shared the stories of their lives.

### **List of abbreviations and acronyms**

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARC	Adult Rape Clinic
CBD	Central Business District
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
Criminal Law Code	Criminal Law (Codification & Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23]
EOM	Eat Out Movement
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
MoHCC	Ministry of Health and Child Care
NGO	Non-governmental organization
STI	Sexually transmitted disease
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation



**List of international human rights instruments**

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

**List of local legislation**

Children's Act [Chapter 5:06]

Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013 (Constitution)

Criminal Law (Codification & Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] (Criminal Law Code)

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Children, by their very nature, require care by adults for their good health, physical and social growth as well as general development so that they can grow up to be responsible members of society. Due to a plethora of issues, however, a significant number of children across the world grow up without adult care. Zimbabwe is no exception and it also has a significant number of children growing up without adult care and supervision and the majority of them live on the streets where they are exposed to a myriad of challenges. Benitez (2007) describes street children as children for whom the street is a reference point and plays a central role in their lives. These are children who call the street their home. The street is their source of livelihood and they have nowhere else to go. This may be due to their having run away from home or having no home at all.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century policy makers, social workers, non-governmental organizations, churches and the general public have increasingly become concerned with the welfare of street children, particularly female children, given their increased vulnerability, juxtaposed with their male counterparts. Despite attempts by these organisations to alleviate the plight of street children, there is growing concern about the effectiveness of government policies aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable adolescents, and, of particular interest to this study, adolescent girls in Harare, Zimbabwe.

#### **1.2 Background to the problem**

Homelessness is a problem that is as old as mankind itself. Homelessness is a problem experienced worldwide, regardless of a country's economic status (Carter & May, 200; Roets et al., 2016). Due to different reasons, people become homeless and in that moment they become people who have no home and fall into the category of the vulnerable. Vulnerable children exist worldwide and these children are divided into a number of categories. Without a doubt, however, street children are part of the most vulnerable, mainly due to the fact that on the streets there are no rules and there are no guardians to look out for them. The girl child and boy child are both found living on the street but there is a huge concern when it comes to the girl child living on the street and how she is able to survive.

The girl child is more vulnerable in many ways in comparison to the boy child living on the street. While they may both face similar problems and forms of abuse, the girl child almost always comes off worse than her male counterpart. For example, in the case of sexual abuse both the boy child and the girl child suffer sexual harassment and the possibility of being infected by sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). In addition, however, the girl child experiences the additional challenges of possibly falling pregnant and having to look after both herself and her baby.

Children living in the street can be broadly classified into two groups: Group 1 comprises children who spend the day on the streets (in the Central Business District), then go home at night and come back again the following day. Group 2 comprises children who spend all their time on the streets since the streets are their home, where they live, work and play. Group 2 consists of children who run away from home, usually from abuse as well as “children of the street” that is those who were born on the streets and the street is all they know, sometimes they have parents, usually also living on the streets or sometimes they don’t know their parents. Children living on the streets do all sorts of activities to survive which include washing cars, scavenging, begging, stealing and prostitution.

According to De Brito (2014), “street children are a major social problem in some countries and the importance is to acknowledge the issue”. To address the global problem of street children, it must first be thoroughly investigated and then it must be determined who is ultimately responsible for such children since they are extremely vulnerable yet also valuable members of society. While no one can ignore the fact that they exist, no one seems to want to take responsibility for them.

According to Ward and Seger (2010) there is a lack of knowledge and information about how to change street children’s situation for the better especially concerning methods and strategies of how to deal with these children. In South Africa, for example, the government which does little to help its street children puts pressure on the NGOs and non-profit organizations (NPOs) to address the social problem. This can also be said about the situation of street children in Zimbabwe. Sadly the government’s efforts to improve the lives of street children through various laws and policies have failed. On paper, street children should be

protected even though they fall into many different categories such as abandoned, neglected, children and orphans and the list goes on. While there are different laws, legislation and policies that apply to the different individuals who fall into these various categories, this does not occur in practice and this is why there are street children living on the street. The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of government policies etc. in addressing the need of vulnerable children, particularly adolescent girls living on the street. This study also takes a look at the global COVID-19 pandemic and how and by whom the homeless have been assisted during this period.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Zimbabwe, just like many other countries worldwide, has children who are living on the street for various reasons. The issue of street children in Zimbabwe arose in the late 1980s after the country gained its independence. While initially it was mostly boys were seen roaming the streets, by the late 90s and the early 2000s girls began to appear as well. The problem has continued to grow, raising concerns among international organizations, community leaders, professionals, the business sector and the government. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), to which Zimbabwe is a signatory, place children, both internationally and regionally, at the top of the agenda for human rights and social justice. It seeks to alter the landscape for children by making explicit the vital roles to be played by those member states which are signatories, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, communities, parents and children themselves in realizing these rights (UNICEF, 2000). The ideal situation when it comes to dealing with street children would be that whatever rights are granted children on paper in the human rights instruments and in the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013 (the Constitution) be realised and practised on the ground; sadly, however, when the theory and reality is compared the two do not match up.

In 1995, there was a conference on street children that was held at the University of Zimbabwe. It was pointed out that the term “street children” did not exist in the law of Zimbabwe. Fast-forward twenty-five years and still, even after the passing of an amended Constitution, the term ‘street children’ does not exist in any legal provisions. This clearly shows that the government of Zimbabwe has not truly recognized the existence of the phenomenon of street children, let alone their needs, interests and rights. With the

government continuing to treat street children as forgotten participants of society, their rights, needs and interests are not taken into account. Even if the term “street children” does not exist in any of the legal provisions, street children do fall under other groups of people (such as “children”, “youth” etc.) who have been recognized in legal instruments. Therefore there really is no excuse why street children should remain forgotten. The ideal situation is to have street children protected in our society in accordance with the letter and spirit of the law as they too have rights and needs that need to be addressed. Unless their plight is resolved street children will continue to live among us and their lives will never improve.

#### **1.4 Justification for the study**

According to a Thai proverb, “Children are the future of a nation. If the children are intelligent, the country will be prosperous.” It is self-evident that today’s children will grow up to become the political, business and religious leaders of the nation, as well as the engineers, doctors and teachers of tomorrow. Some children, however, also grow up to become social delinquents engaging in all forms of anti-social activities such as stealing, drug abuse, and prostitution. As such, it is of paramount importance that every nation takes interest in the development of its children. According to De Benitez (2011), there is a need for prioritising the development of street children. By denying their basic rights and ignoring their basic needs which enhance their development and growth, we are restricting the development of the country.

This study is therefore of paramount importance in that it assists in developing a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the policies put forth by government to address the needs of vulnerable adolescent girl. The results of this study will be useful to the following groups:

- *Government.* The study will assist the government in evaluating its policies and identify the successes and failures of the policy interventions and by so doing assist the government to refine its policies so as to maximise use of its resources. In the long term this will save the government in expenses arising from the negative effects of vulnerable adolescents whose needs are not met, such as prostitution, abandoned children, muggings, theft and murder.

- *Non-governmental organizations.* Assisting vulnerable adolescents is not a competition but rather a collective effort. This means there is a need for NGOs to compliment government efforts. This study's findings will therefore assist NGOs to identify the shortcomings of government policies and thus assist in their programming to make sure that their interventions compliment those being done by the government.
- *Academia.* This study will add to the body of knowledge on vulnerable adolescent girls as well as form the basis for future resources on the most effective policies to meet the needs of adolescent children. The study will fill the gaps that have been left by other researchers like Bourdillon (2000), Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003) and Msekiwa (2009) who recommend that children should be protected from harmful activities. Previous research on street children has focused mainly on the boy child living on the street. When the girl child is mentioned, it is very brief and usually in relation to engaging in commercial sex work and yet there are so many other challenges that a girl living on the street encounters. This study focused solely on the girl child living on the street and how she survives on a day to day basis. This study also interrogates the effectiveness of the government in addressing the needs of these vulnerable adolescents.
- *General public.* The study's findings will be of importance to members of the general public who feel the need to contribute in one way or another to the policies and interventions aimed at meeting the needs of vulnerable children living on the streets. If followed, the study's recommendations will also prevent the occurrence of negative effects of children living in the streets, which will make society safer for the general public.

## **1.5 Research objectives**

This study sought to:

- Define street children and describe living on the street.
- Investigate policies and laws applicable to children, especially that of the target group.
- Understand how girls living on the street deal with issues related to their female development and reproductive health, menstrual health issues, hygiene as well as other issues such as stress, self-image, etc.

## 1.6 Research assumptions and questions

Table 1 shows the research assumptions and questions of this study.

**Table 1: Showing the research assumptions and questions**

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS	RESEARCH QUESTIONS
<p>(1)</p> <p>The laws and policies that have been put in place to protect street children are not effective and often neglect the needs of the girl child.</p>	<p>(1)</p> <p>Are there laws and policies that have been put in place to protect street children effective and do they often neglect the needs of the girl child?</p>
<p>(2)</p> <p>As a survival strategy, adolescent girls often resort to commercial sex work.</p>	<p>(2)</p> <p>Do adolescent girls resort to commercial sex work as a survival strategy?</p>
<p>(3)</p> <p>Street children fall into the category of children; however, the rights of the child including the right to education, health, shelter, etc. do not apply to street children.</p>	<p>(3)</p> <p>Do the rights of the child, such as the right to health, shelter and education, apply to street children as well as they also fall into the category of children?</p>
<p>(4)</p> <p>The government has abandoned its obligation to protect adolescent street girls and left it to NGOs to fulfil.</p>	<p>(4)</p> <p>Is it the case that the government has abandoned its obligation to protect adolescent street girls and left it to NGOs to fulfil?</p>
<p>(5)</p> <p>Previous research about street children has often omitted the needs of the girl child and because their needs are unknown they have been neglected by the responsible authorities.</p>	<p>(5)</p> <p>Is it the case that previous research about street children has often omitted the needs of the girl child and because their needs are unknown they have been neglected by the responsible authorities?</p>



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.0 LAW AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The following chapter will look at literature review as well as the law provisions that have been set out to protect children. Previous literature that has been written on street children has mainly focused on the boy child and this is where I found the gap which motivated her to research and write a paper that solely looked at the situation of the girl living on the streets.

#### **2.2 Previous literature on street children**

Previous papers have written on the lives of street children have described their lives on the street and what kind of activities they engage in order to make a living. Some of these activities are innocent and are more or less about helping other members of society. These activities are washing cars, guarding cars, fetching water and carrying people's luggage. Other activities are crime related such as stealing and defrauding people. When one reads the list, one could call them male-gendered activities. Many of the papers focused on these as the major activities engaged in by street children in order to survive.

When girls were mentioned in these papers, they spoke of their engaging in prostitution as a criminal activity. According to the Criminal Law (Codification & Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23] (the Criminal Law Code), prostitution is no longer a crime and yet many papers list it as a crime, this goes to show that no recent papers have been written. The following quote comes from a paper entitled "Conversations with street children." It focuses entirely on the boy child living on the street and makes no reference to girls living on the street:

"The surveys have been able to confirm that the phenomenon of street children in Harare takes a similar form to the phenomenon in other cities. Most of the children are boys and the boys who work independently are aged from 8 to 18. The boys sell sweets and fruit; mind cars; beg; tout for emergency taxis; and carry goods and luggage. Only about 10 to 15% of the boys sleep on the streets at night" (Conversations with street children).

According to previous research, street children apparently revealed that they engaged in a number of economic activities to survive. Bourdillon (1994) notes that in Mbare (a high density area of Harare) street children are found conducting a variety of money-making activities such as guarding parked cars, carrying luggage for people and vending. When it

came to street vending, the participants in previous research who were boys were said to be selling pirated films:

“The boys said that they usually bought 4 CDs for US\$ 1 from people who seem to be pirates and sell the CD for US\$ 1 each” (Mella, 2012).

Most literature relating to street children also showed that these street children usually start working at very early age. When this occurs the likelihood of their attending school is very slim. These children are then unable to advance themselves academically and therefore their chances of a better future are greatly diminished. According to Linda (2002) cited in Mella (2012):

“a street child who narrated his life story asserted that after failing to cross the border to South Africa he resorted to seek employment as a vendor. He used to sell boiled eggs to people on transit within the main bus terminus in Dulibadzimu, Beitbridge. This boy indicated that he worked for very long hours, especially nights if a sizeable number of boiled eggs were not sold in the day time.”

Once again the above refers to a boy child. The aforementioned examples from past research shows that much attention has been paid to the boy street child and rarely is the girl child mentioned even though she also engages in the same money-making activities. It is arguable, however, that boys are socialized to speak out more in public than girls and therefore getting information from them is easier than trying to get information from girls.

## **2.3 International human rights instruments and local legislative provisions**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

Under this section, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) will be discussed as the international and regional instruments that advocate for rights of the child. Since Zimbabwe has ratified both these instruments they are obliged to abide by their provisions. A look will be taken at the Zimbabwe Constitution and its Children’s Act as well.

### **2.3.2 International human rights instruments**

#### **2.3.2.1 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

The following articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are relevant to this study:

**“Article 19(1)**

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

**Article 19(2)**

Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

**Article 24(1)**

States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

**Article 28(1)**

States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all.”

#### **2.3.2.2 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)**

The following articles of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) are relevant to this study:

***“Article 4: Best Interest of the Child***

In all actions concerning the child undertaken by any person or authority the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.

***Article 5(2): Survival and Development***

State Parties to the present Charter shall ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival, protection and development of the child.

*Article 11(1): Education*

Every child shall have the right to education.

*Article 15(1): Child Labour*

Every child shall be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.

*Article 18(1): Protection of the Family*

The family shall be the natural unit and basis of society. It shall enjoy the protection and support of the State for its establishment and development.

*Article 25: Separation from Parents*

- (1) Any child who is permanently or temporarily deprived of his family environment for any reason shall be entitled to special protection and assistance.
- (2) State Parties to the present Charter:
  - (a) shall ensure that a child who is parentless, or who is temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or who in his or her best interest cannot be brought up or allowed to remain in that environment shall be provided with alternative family care, which could include, among others, foster placement, or placement in suitable institutions for the care of children.

*Article 27 (1) (a) and (b): Sexual Exploitation*

- (1) State Parties to the present Charter shall undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and shall in particular take measures to prevent:
  - (a) the inducement, coercion or encouragement of a child to engage in any sexual activity;
  - (b) the use of children in prostitution or other sexual practices.

*Article 29(b): Sale, Trafficking, Abduction*

State Parties to the present Charter shall take appropriate measures to prevent:

- (b) the use of children in all forms of begging.”

### **2.3.3 Local legislation**

#### **2.3.3.1 Zimbabwe Constitution**

The following articles of the Zimbabwe Constitution are relevant to this study:

*“Section 19 - Children*

- (1) The State must adopt policies and measures to ensure that in matters relating to children, the best interests of the children concerned are paramount.
  
- (3) The State must take appropriate legislative and other measures
  - (a) to protect children from exploitative labour practices;
  - (b) to ensure that children are not required or permitted to perform work or provide services that
    - (i) are inappropriate for the children’s age.

*Section 20 -Youth*

- (1) The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take reasonable measures, including affirmative action programmes, to ensure that youths, that is to say people between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five years
  - (e) are protected from harmful cultural practices, exploitation and all forms of abuse.

*Section 25 – Protection of the family*

The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must protect and foster the institution of the family and in particular must endeavour, within the limits of the resources available to them, to adopt measures for

- (a) the provision of care and assistance to mothers, fathers and other family members who have charge of children.

*Section 27 – Education*

- (1) The State must take all practical measures to promote -
  - (a) free and compulsory basic education for children.

*Section 28 - Shelter*

The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within the limits of the resources available to them, to enable every person to have access to adequate shelter.

*Section 30 - Social Welfare*

The State must take all practical measures, within the limits of the resources available to it, to provide social security and social care to those who are in need.

*Section 76(1) - Right to health care*

Every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has the right to have access to basic health-care services, including reproductive health-care services.

*Section 77 - Right to food and water*

Every person has the right to

- (a) safe, clean and potable water; and
- (b) sufficient food

and the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within the limits of the resources available to it, to achieve the progressive realization of this right.

*Section 81 – Rights of children*

- (1) Every child, that is to say every boy and girl under the age of eighteen years, has the right-
  - (d) to family or parental care, or to appropriate care when removed from the family environment
  - (e) to be protected from economic and sexual exploitation, from child labour, and from maltreatment, neglect or any form of abuse.
- (2) A child's best interests are paramount in every matter concerning the child.”

**2.3.3.2 Children’s Act [Chapter 5:06]**

The Children’s Act [Chapter 5:06] is an Act of Parliament that sets out how children should be protected. It has put restrictions on how children should be treated and if they are treated otherwise at the hands of their parents and/or guardians, etc., then they will be held responsible as they are obliged to protect children (persons who are below the age of eighteen) who are in their care according to the Children’s Act, the Constitution, the CRC and the ACRWC.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.0 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES.**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Kothari (2002) notes that methodology comprises the various steps that are generally adopted by the researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them. In this chapter, various theoretical and methodological approaches that were used in this study and the reasons for choosing such methods will be discussed. This chapter also outlines the study location, study population, research design, sampling procedure and the data collection instruments that were used in this study. It also describes any limitations that came to light.

#### **3.2 Methodologies**

##### ***3.2.1 Women's Law***

Women's law is a legal discipline which explores the reality of women's lives and from that perspective interrogates and investigates the law (Bentzon et al., 1998). This legal discipline was useful in exploring the lives of women, in this case the adolescent girls who are living on the street. The women's law approach was helpful in linking the girls lived realities and the loopholes in the law that is supposed to protect them.

##### ***3.2.2 Human Rights Approach***

The human rights-based approach is focused enhancement of human rights in all aspects of project and program development and implementation.

“It is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights” UNICEF (2015).

The human rights approach is about empowering people to know their rights; when people know their rights, they are able to then claim and exercise their rights accordingly. The human rights-based approach also increases the accountability of individuals who are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling these rights. The human rights approach helps in understanding whether human rights on paper are being protected and practised in reality. This approach was important to use as a way of seeing which human rights the adolescent girls were not enjoying simply because they are on the street.

### **3.2.3 *Grounded Theory Approach***

Grounded theory is an interactive process in which data and theory, lived realities and perceptions are constantly engaged with in order to get a better understanding of the position of women, in this case, the adolescent girls living on the street. As argued by Stang Dahl, the law is one sided and that it is the male norm which we find in the law, hence the need to take women's lives or a grounded approach as the starting point in our understanding of laws and the different impact that they have on women as compared to men. This theory is very important and very applicable to this study as applying this theory gave me a deeper insight to the situation of the street children on the ground versus perceptions.

“Grounded theory is used to uncover such things as relationships and behaviors of groups, known as social processes” (Crooks 2001).

Grounded theory was used in this study to help understand the lived realities of street children and understand what it is they experience as they live on the street.

### **3.2.4 *Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory***

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory explains the psychological theory of human motivation, which includes five sets of needs. These needs are (i) physiological needs, (ii) safety, (iii) love, (iv) self-esteem and (v) self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). Maslow's theory can be used to explain the reason why children resort to living on the street. Human beings are motivated by having these needs fulfilled. According to Maslow, all human beings require the first need in the hierarchy to be fulfilled, that is, physiological needs which are basic needs that every human being needs and these include, food, shelter and clothing. Once these basic needs are met, human beings seek to achieve the next set of needs on the hierarchy. In this case of street children, children may choose to come and work or live on the street in order to secure their basic needs. In the absence of such (that is lack of food, shelter and clothing), it may lead children to the streets where they think these needs can be met or they can engage in activities that will allow them to get some money to then satisfy these needs. In other instances, where families have provided basic needs, but have not met the other needs in the hierarchy (such as security) this may also cause children to leave their nesting home for the streets. This is applicable in the case of neglect, and any form of abuse. Lack of love and affection may cause the child to move to the street. Among the causes of children moving on to the street was a feeling of rejection. When a child feels like no one cares about them or

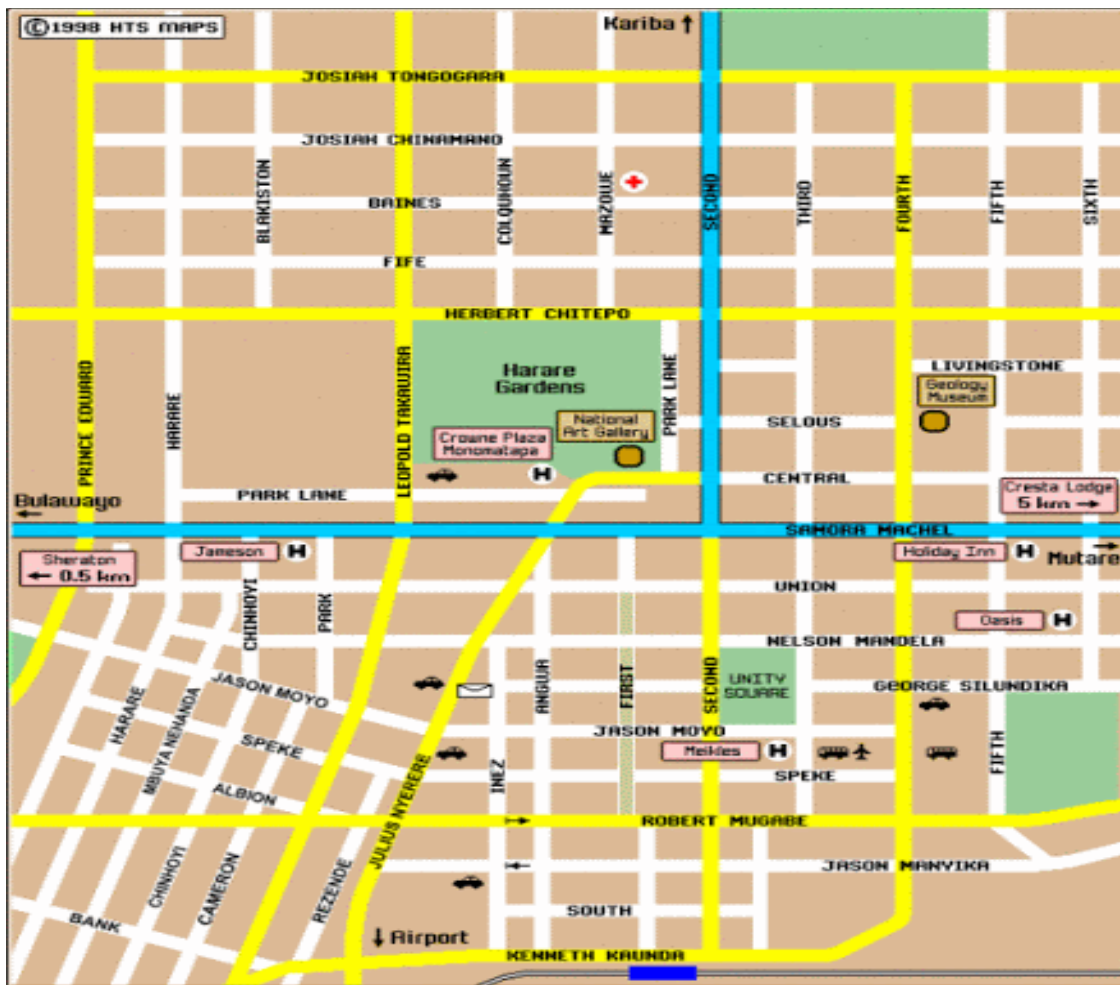


they are treated badly, they may run away from home. These needs are usually violated as the result of domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse. These situations may lead the children to move to the street to work or to stay there permanently. This theory was applicable to every case that I came across during this research. Children left their homes for various reasons and they all derived from their needs falling within Maslow’s hierarchy not being met.

### 3.3 Site of study

The study was undertaken in the City of Harare Central Business District (CBD, Figure 1) where many street children are involved in various money-making activities. The exact area of research was bordered by George Silundika Avenue and First Street, Kenneth Kaunda Avenue by the railway station (in the South) and Samora Machel Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> street.

**Figure 1: Map of Harare Central Business District (CBD)**



### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

#### ***3.4.1 Random sampling***

When engaging in random sampling, I targeted random girls that were evidently street children. A lot of the random sampling happened along George Silundika Avenue and First street in the Harare CBD.

#### ***3.4.2 Informed Consent***

According to Dooley (1995), the matter of informed consent often plays a key role in deciding approval for research. It was therefore of utmost important that I obtained consent from the participants that engaged in some sort of discussion when it came to collecting the relevant information for this study. I also made it clear that it was an academic research paper. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, getting consent was important as the targets had a right to know the purpose of my questions and what was going to be done with the information they shared.

#### ***3.4.3 Direct Observation***

Direct observation was used both during the night time and during the day in order to allow me to see how the adolescent girls were operating without their knowing that they were being watched. I observed the way street children were busy with their daily errands. I needed to see street children working on the street.

#### ***3.4.4 In-depth interviews***

I conducted the in-depth interviews with the participants involved. Interviews were conducted face to face and confidentially. Respondents who did not understand English were asked in *Shona* (a local language) about their background, reasons why they were on the streets, their money-making activities on the streets, how they survive and what hardships they encounter whilst living on the street. I could not administer questionnaires to street children due to the nature of their life on the street. They do not have permanent places of residence, neither do they have places to store questionnaire papers therefore using questionnaires would not have been practical. I noticed that some children shared their stories more freely than others.

### 3.4.5 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used when engaging with the two NGOs that were part of this research. Questionnaires helped in understanding what the NGOs do in relation to their work with street children and whether they receive any assistance from government departments.

### 3.4.6 Girl respondents living on the street

Table 2 shows the number of girls on the street to whom I spoke. This number excludes those girls whom I simply observed and to whom I did not speak.

**Table 2: Showing some details about the girls on the street who were interviewed**

<b>SITE OF STUDY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF GIRLS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF INTERACTIONS WITH THEM</b>
George Silundika Avenue and First Street	5	5
Samora Machel Avenue	1	1
Kenneth Kaunda Avenue	3	3
The Yellow Bus Trust	2	3
Methodist Church	4	1

### 3.5 Limitations of study

I came across a number of limitations when it came from getting information from the relevant Ministries that would have been of use when it came to data collection. The Ministry of Education blatantly said that street children were not their responsibility. The Ministry of Home Affairs would have been of use as one girl brought up the issue of identity as she aspired to be a border jumper. When I approached the Ministry of Home Affairs, they said they do not allow research to be carried out at their Ministry. The Ministry of Social Welfare would have been of help, as I would be able to calculate how many girls are currently living on the street. They got in touch and asked for a proposal and up to this present moment, the Ministry has not reverted to me. While the statistical data of my sample is small and may not represent the total number of street girls in the Harare Central Business District, the information gathered was detailed and may help to effect changes for the benefit of all street children in Zimbabwe. Streets Ahead was an NGO that was often referred to in past research

involving street children. Although I was hoping to contact and obtain information from this NGO, as they seemed to really be involved and up to date with the status of street children, this did not happen as unfortunately this organization shut down a couple of years ago. The Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) would have been important in this research as issues surrounding the girl child's health and how she manages it whilst on the street would have been of utmost importance to this research. I was keen to find out if the rights to health that are offered to everyone else are also to girls living on the street or whether they receive some sort of special treatment as they are living in vulnerable conditions and do not have resources such as money to either pay for medical services and/or medication. However, the MoHCC stalled on giving me access to information up until the country went into lockdown due to the corona virus pandemic. Lastly, since I noticed that girls are a lot less forthcoming than boys, their information had to be bought, for lack of a better word. In other words, I had to trade goods for information and this may have had a bearing on the value of the information received.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4.0 PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Aimlessly roaming around the streets of Harare has become a norm for a number of children. From a very young age till they are teenagers and older, these children wander the streets trying to make ends meet as they are their own responsibility. The following chapter shall discuss the information that I gathered whilst in the field. The following findings are from the target, who are girls living on the street between the ages of ten and seventeen and NGOs.

When collecting data for this research I noticed that girls are not very open and trusting and therefore are sometimes are very distant. For the sake of comparison, I engaged in conversation with some street boys and they were willing to speak. From this, I that in as much as boys and girls both live on the street and street life is hard, for girls it seems to me more of a nightmare as they are probably on the street because of some sort of abuse and then they have to come onto the streets and engage in more exploitation such as prostitution, in order to survive. Prostitution is not something the boy street child has to engage in order to make a living on the street. Therefore, I understood why girls were withdrawn or sometimes required something in order to speak as they are used to transactions that are of benefit to both the parties. If I needed information, I needed to give them something in exchange for the information I needed. The following chapter will discuss the field findings.

This chapter will also look at COVID-19, a virus that was declared a global pandemic in early March 2020. Mainly through desk research, due to lockdown restrictions, I was able to obtain some information on COVID-19 and how it affects the homeless community and how they are dealing with this virus.

#### **4.2 Definition of street children**

The concept ‘street children’ and/or ‘street kid’ according to Michaleon (2006) “encompasses any child or adolescent under the age of eighteen who works and/or lives in the street alone or with his or her family or asylum seekers who are technically homeless and without support.” The legal age of majority in Zimbabwe is eighteen and therefore any child who is below the age of eighteen and lives on the street is considered a street child. Previous research about street children placed street children in two categories. There are children who

live on the street permanently and they are often referred to as ‘children on the street’; then there are those who are on the street peripherally and these are called ‘children of the street’. According to Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003):

“children ‘on’ the streets can be divided further into those who come into the streets daily to beg and do odd jobs and return to their families at the end of their day and those who work on the streets and periodically visit their families.”

Both types of street children were interacted with when conducting this research. Their reasons for being on the street vary from abuse to acts of rebellion, for example, simply because the girl believes her best interests were not being met.

Kopoka (2000) states that the phenomenon of street children is mainly an urban issue. I found this to be true as a large number of the participants ran away from their rural homes and came to Harare in search of greener pastures; they however ended up on the street. The girls who live on the street peripherally came into the CBD to either vend or beg. With the money they make, they then rent out a room in Epworth and stay there. A number of four to five girls will bring their daily earnings together and that is what they use to pay for their accommodation, food and basic needs.

I gathered that the girls who are on the street peripherally usually form a family-like setting with other street children, comprising boys and girls, and that is how they manage to make ends meet. These street children living together can be called a family. Rwezaura et al. (1995) confirm this phenomenon when they state that family includes both kinship as well as household ties. Therefore because these street children share a common residence they can be considered family; they also probably support one another on the street as they face many similar problems. Therefore although they are share household as opposed to kinship ties they are nevertheless a family because they share the same residence and support each other. In further support of the fact that street children create their own kind of family on the street Munkuli (1994) also observes that:

“Street children survive through experience and gather together in gangs to create a family and support structure.”

### 4.3 Reasons for being on the street

When one thinks of street children and how they ended up on the street one automatically thinks that they are orphans and they do not have any responsible adult willing to take up the responsibility. This research showed otherwise. There were various reasons that these girls were on the street. Previous papers that have been written on the lives of street children grouped the reasons for being on the street into two, namely, push and pull factors. Push factors are those of neglect, abuse and poverty, just to name a few. The majority of the cases that I came across, the girls ended up on the street due to push factors. Abuse, neglect, rape, out of wedlock pregnancies were mainly the responses that the targets gave when they were asked about why they were on the street. Therefore, one can say that these individuals were pushed into this situation, they were pushed into living on the street because they felt the street was a safer environment in comparison with their previous living conditions. According to Beauchemin (1999):

“Rural under-development probably may be the biggest trigger for the children leaving the rural areas for the urban areas. Rural areas offer few employment opportunities, low educational standards and poor facilities.”

The latter part of Beauchemin’s statement is true that facilities in rural areas are quite substandard however none of the girls spoken to cited rural underdevelopment as their reasons for leaving their home, whether rural or urban. From the findings as to reasons that children end up on the street, I made a link between push factors and the adults responsible for these street children. Push factors seem to be the result of a parent, guardian or adult in charge of these children violating these children in one way or another. Aderinto (2000) confirms this by saying that:

“Children might decide to move to the street as a result of poor protection at the home environment.”

In other words, when children feel unsafe, they decide to move to a place which makes them feel safer even if this is on the streets. For example, a sexually abused child may flee her homestead and live on the streets because she knows that the sexual abuse from her perpetrator will end.

Pull factors, according to Dybicz (2005), include reasons such as street children being attracted to the adventure that living on the street offers. Though hard to believe this is actually true and I actually came across an individual who came from a family in Kuwadzana, a high density suburb in Harare, and she ran away from home because she felt that her parents wanted her to stay in school but she felt like she was more of an artist and a creator rather than an academic. Most children, when faced with such a situation usually just abide by their parents' wishes; once, however, they are independent enough they then follow their hearts' desire. The idea of living independently is what pulled this girl on to the streets. She felt that she no longer had to worry about her parents forcing her to go to school and she could now do whatever she wanted. This is an example of a pull factor.

Other pull factors that drive children on to the street is poverty. Rural individuals run away from the poverty in their rural homes and seek greener pastures in urban areas. The glitz and glamour of urban areas draw them to the city. They however quickly realize that making a living in the urban areas is not as easy as it looks and they end up being street children. Pull factors are usually rooted in poverty. A child usually gets pulled into street life in the hope of an opportunity to earn an income somehow presenting itself. As a result of poverty, street children end up being so desperate for some sort of income that they end up being economically exploited. The CRC (1990) provides that State parties should recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or that will interfere with the child's education. It also provides that children should be protected from work that is harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development and from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Article 34). However, because of different pull reasons, street children end up engaging in any form of income generating activities, even if they are harmful and exploitive.

The above paragraphs emphasise the underlying causes of the phenomenon of street children which include social and economic problems that pull and push children on to the street.

#### **4.4 Income generation among street girls**

Living on the streets means that street children do not have an adult responsible for them and provides for their basic needs and therefore these children have to fend for themselves. As survival strategies, these street children engage in different income generating activities. According to Musekiwa (2009), children who live on the streets of Harare are involved in a



variety of activities such as vending, luggage carrying, collecting empty containers and begging. Musekiwa also says that some of the children are involved in criminal activities. Of the girls to whom I spoke, none of them engage in any criminal activity, at least they say. One of them did admit that her boyfriend snatches wigs off women's heads and sells them. Although she admitted to her boyfriend's criminal activities, she assured me that she does not engage in any criminal activity herself. The research findings showed that the three most common ways in which street girls make money are begging, vending and prostitution.

#### ***4.4.1 Begging***

Begging is very common among the street children population. Street girls usually stand at traffic light intersections and beg for money or any form of assistance. It is usually the younger girls who beg for money. Sometimes teenage mothers also beg using their children to evoke pity among members of the public. According to the girls with I spoke, not a lot of money is made by begging as they are usually ignored. There are a very few people who actually take time to roll down their car windows and give them some money or food. The younger girls complained that begging was hard especially on hot days when they stand for many hours in the heat and are often ignored by passing drivers. Drivers also often roll up their windows as street children approach them, fearing that they could be targets for theft.

#### ***4.4.2 Vending***

This research confirmed Rurevo and Bourdillon's (2003) finding that vending is very common among street children. Vending includes that of cigarettes, packets of crisps, sweets, fruit and vegetables. The girls who engage in vending said that they go to Mbare market where they buy their produce at very low prices and then sell them in the CBD at a slightly higher price in order to make a small profit. The street girls who engage in vending activities claimed that the profit is not very much but it is better than not earning anything at all. They complained about competition as so many people are vending that on some days, they do not earn any money at all. Another complaint was that the police and council officials usually come into the CBD on operations to rid the city of vendors and when they caught up in this their stalls and goods are confiscated and they have to start from scratch. Then I asked whether they are ever taken into police custody like other vendors. They said that only their property is confiscated because the officials know that if they did arrest them they, as children, would not be able to the fine; so the officials only take away their stalls and goods.

#### **4.4.3 Commercial sex work**

The majority of the girls who live and work on the street engage in commercial sex work in order to earn some sort of income. These girls engage in commercial sex work in order to earn money and not for pleasure. I found this to be sexual exploitation as there are no conditions of any kind to protect these girls when they engage in such work. One girl to whom I spoke in Kenneth Kaunda square declared that if she goes a whole day without eating, she will have sexual intercourse with a man for a loaf of bread. A loaf of bread is ZWL\$27 which is less than US\$1. This brought to light the issue of underpayment which can be considered a highly exploitative practice. Many of the girls complained of being underpaid and in the worst case scenario sometimes not getting paid at all.

Although from their point of view, these children are making money to survive, the practice is highly exploitative. Children living and working on the street are exposed to sexual abuse due to the nature of their life on the street. People are not in the slightest bit ashamed of moving up and down the streets purely for the purpose of picking up these children, who are visibly under the age of eighteen, taking them to a location and engaging in sexual intercourse with them for a very low price. This was also consistent with the findings of Kembo and Nhongo (2002) who note that there where was a large number of children involved in prostitution. Street children, especially those who live on the streets permanently, are vulnerable to sexual exploitation all the time as they feel they have no other option:

“Sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young women in Southern Africa is on a dramatic increase all the time” (Kembo and Nhongo, 2002).

The one girl to whom I managed to speak was thirteen years old. She had a birth name and a street name. She used her street name when she introduced herself to potential clients. According to the Criminal Law Code, prostitution is no longer illegal in Zimbabwe and the girls confirmed this when they mentioned that the police harass them during the day for vending but when it came to prostitution, they were not bothered about them at all.

Engaging in commercial sex work brings with it the possibility on contracting HIV and AIDS. When the girls on the street were asked about their health, they all claimed to be HIV negative but they were open about occasionally being infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The girls said when they get infected with STDs they go to the New Start

Centre where they are helped and treated. The accuracy of this information from the girls living on the street is open to question because they could easily omit or distort information.

When it came to engaging with girls at The Yellow Bus Trust, a local NGO that deals with street children, their information was more accurate as they have self-test kits that they use to test the girls. When I spoke to the NGO officials, they indeed confirmed that with the girls that they work with in partnership with Adult Rape Clinic (ARC), there were many recorded STDs however no HIV positive cases. I found this to be quite interesting, especially considering the rampant spread of HIV. Using direct observation, I also witnessed instances proving that these girls are so desperate that literally nothing can stop them from engaging in commercial sex work. For example, on one occasion I headed out at night in rainy weather and noticed that not even the weather stopped these girls from standing along the street in hope of attracting a client. This emphasized just how desperate these girls are and that whilst other girls of their age are safely tucked up in a warm home, they are out on the streets trying to make a living despite the inhospitable weather.

Engaging in such degrading work in order to make a living often has a negative impact on the adolescent girl's self-image. According to Dube (1997), street children suffer from low self-esteem, fatalism and hopelessness and one can understand why, seeing that they will do virtually anything in order to survive, no matter how degrading. Tudorić-Ghemo (2005) observes that adolescent street children experience abuse and degradation which impact on their development of a positive sense of self-worth and social identity. This was evident when conversing with the street girls. Their lack of positivity leads them to survive under dire conditions and engage in all sorts of activities including substance abuse.

#### **4.5 Street girls' perception of their own lives**

In order to understand street girls it is important to know how street children perceive their lives on the street. Beazley (2003) found that many street children convince themselves that street life is a better way of living than any other. Street life may actually be better for certain very unfortunate children or sometimes it may not but they convince or deceive themselves that it is better so that they are able to endure it:

“Many hardships are ignored, and treated with hilarity, and often the children contend that street life is ideal because they are free to do whatever they want - a way of making life tolerable” (Beazley, 2003).

In many of the cases, street children felt hopeless and that their futures were bleak and one can easily understand why. They feel as though society cares for everyone except them; they feel like an afterthought and/or forgotten. Many of the street children felt that they had no other option but to be on the street and that they would be on the street until they died. This perception of their lives could be the reason why they engage in hazardous behaviors such as substance abuse and reckless living often with fake bravado because they feel that they have no other hope. The street girls mentioned how they would like to go back to school as all of them were once in a formal school setting but had to drop out the moment they relocated to the street. Many of them showed an interest in going back to school but they asked, “*Ndozogarepi ndikadzokera kuchikoro?*” (meaning, “Where will I stay if I am to go back to school?”)

The Eat Out Movement is a local NGO that seeks to end homelessness and engages in some skills training in partnership with Sandvick. They offer skills training to the homeless in order to equip them with skills that can allow them to seek and secure employment. Some of the girls to whom I spoke shared that they had started the skills training but that they had dropped out because the skills being offered felt too gendered. The skills training offered were poultry, welding among others and the girls felt that they were not jobs fit for a girl and felt the best option was to drop out. With having skills training that favors the male sex, the female may feel like they are not accommodated and this then leads to them seeing themselves as less important because the skills being offered in order to upgrade one’s life are male centered.

Muchini (2001) observed that “many street children felt hopeless and helpless about their lives” and this can be said to be true, especially amongst the girls as they feel that the help that is rarely offered to them tends to benefit boys rather than girls. The street girls indicated that their lives on the streets were tough although some did see a future beyond the streets. One girl mentioned how she wanted to be a cross border trader but the only thing stopping her was the issue of proper identification. The girls who live on the streets peripherally seemed to have a more positive self-image which is why they resorted to only coming to the streets to either beg or vend as a way to make money and then return to their home away

from home family set-up. In contrast, the girls who are on the streets permanently appeared to care very little about their own welfare and had a more negative self-image as evidenced by their indulging in substance abuse and commercial sex work. The perception of these street girls' lives is evident in the kind of way they choose to live their lives. Some live on the safer side of street life, while others engage in many different activities that are detrimental to their welfare.

#### **4.6 Substance abuse among street girls**

Substance abuse appeared to be quite common amongst the girls. I found that when they were intoxicated by something, the girls would actually open up and be more willing to talk in comparison to when they were sober. Girls living on the street both permanently and peripherally engage in substance abuse. The substances included alcohol, tobacco, glue, marijuana and Broncleer cough syrup commonly known as Bronco. The girls appear to take these drugs to reduce the impact of the difficulties of living on the streets. Hunger, stress, cold weather and hopelessness become less serious when one is high and I at this is the reason behind taking drugs, as it causes one to live in a fantasy world. Substance abuse is usually linked to negative psychological self-image. It has been recorded that more substance abuse occurs among street-living than street-working adolescent children (Muchini, 1994: 2001).

#### **4.7 Health, hygiene and illness amongst street girls**

One can easily distinguish a street child from among any group of children. They are visibly dirty, sometimes look ill and generally look unkempt, especially the street children who permanently live on the streets. According to Munchini (2001), "street children were found to be dirty and unkempt" and this is exactly what I witnessed during the research. When it comes to dealing with health-related issues and the street population, apparently medical services are available to street children free of charge for as long as they have a certificate of exemption that is issued at the Department of Social Welfare. Most of the street children do not attempt to acquire them, however, for fear that the Department will try and reunite them with their families. Both permanent and peripheral street kids live in surroundings with very poor sanitation and this can result in the spread of diseases. While "these street children reportedly defecated everywhere like dogs" (Ruparanganda, 2008), I did not actually witness as much. She did from time to time, however, come across what appeared to be human feces in public places.

## **4.8 Problems faced by street girls on the street**

There are many problems associated with living on the street. The respondents listed the following as the main problems they faced and regardless of how many years they have been on the streets, they said that these problems do not improve.

### **4.8.1 Stress**

Many of the girls listed stress as one of their many problems that they face on the street. Stress about where their next meal will come from and stress that their products are not being bought. One of the street children said that every day was different and that while on some days they do well by begging and get ZWL\$20 (about US\$0.50), on other days they do not manage to get any cash at all. Listening to their stories, I felt nothing but great pity for these children and for a split second understood just why some of them resort to the use of drugs to relieve their stress.

### **4.8.2 Physical abuse**

Physical abuse was also another common problem suffered by the adolescent girls living on the street. The girls who admitted to physical abuse claimed that the boys and men also living on the street usually beat them up if they refused to engage in sexual encounters with them. The girls know that gender based violence is a crime but because they are girls who live on the street they feel that those rights do not apply to them and that if they reported such abuse, the police authorities would not take them seriously. Therefore, they either endure the beatings or agree to sleep with these boys and/or men simply to avoid being beaten up. Three girls on the street shared that they have boyfriends and said that they also usually beat them up when they find out that they are earning money by engaging in sex work. The reason the girls give is that they are also trying to make money so that they can combine what they earn with what their street boyfriends earn.

### **4.8.3 Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

One of the problems the female street children face in engaging in sexual encounters for money is the risk of contracting STIs. Due to their need of money they agree to engage in unsafe sex and they end up suffering from STIs. ARC does treat these street female children free of charge as the money they are paid after engaging in sexual intercourse is sometimes not enough to be able to buy them treatment. This situation amounts to serious exploitation of

these girls as they are so desperate that they will engage in sexual encounters with no conditions as long as they earn something, no matter how small, from it.

#### ***4.8.4 Unwanted pregnancies***

During this study I did not come across any pregnant adolescents. There was, however, a new mother, a seventeen-year-old girl who lives in Epworth but during the day works on the street at the intersection of George Silundika Avenue and First Street where she vends and begs with her baby on her back. This young girl shared that after her boyfriend found out she was pregnant he did not want her to abort her child even though she wanted to do so as she felt that street life was already hard enough without making it more difficult by bringing her child on to the street as well. Speaking to ARC officials and the founder of The Yellow Bus Trust, I found out that many girls come in not knowing who the father of their child is as they are victims of rape. Unwanted pregnancies are definitely a problem especially for young girls. Even in normal circumstances, at the age of the adolescents in my target research group (ten to seventeen year olds) no girl is mentally, emotionally or psychologically prepared to be a mother. Moving these circumstances on to the street worsens the situation many times over. Dealing with unwanted pregnancies is extremely difficult for adolescent mothers as they remain burdened with the responsibility of looking after their children even if their fathers reject and refuse to support them.

#### ***4.8.5 Lack of sanitary wear***

The lack of sanitary wear is a very big problem for girls who are living on the street. According to Ngulube (2010), with no access or means to sanitary wear or sanitary facilities, street girls go through the worst experiences trying to manage their menstrual health. As it is the cost of managing menstrual health for average middle-class women is becoming more and more difficult as the cost of sanitary wear is constantly increasing. Now just imagine what it must be like for the girl living on the street. The girls who often go to The Yellow Bus Trust are fortunate enough that the officials there give them sanitary wear but not every adolescent goes there. There are some who resort to using pieces of cloth. There are so many problems with this. For example, where and with what do they wash and dry them? If these pieces of cloth are not washed properly the girls could easily become infected with vaginal and other diseases.

#### **4.9 The right to be on the street**

Very interestingly, there is a right to be on the street. I only found this out very late in the research process but felt it was necessary to discuss this right. The right to be on the street is based on the child's rights-based approach which allows children and/or youth to live and work on the streets. This approach is very different from the welfare approach, which is always society's approach when it comes to dealing and finding solutions on how best to deal with the street children phenomenon. The welfare approach perceives children as victims requiring rescue by forcibly removing them from the streets to either be reunited with their family or by placing them in a foster home. According to Shanahan (2003):

“Children have a perfect right to be on the street if they cannot be at home. Not enough attention is paid to a child's alternatives to the street in interventions – for some of them, it is the only real alternative to suicide. We need to trust the children more that they have a good reason to be there.”

Here it is argued that some situations at home could result in children committing suicide, in other words, taking their life which is the ultimate breach of their first and most fundamental human right. The reasoning is that if they feel driven to end their lives because of their situation at home, and they feel safer changing their location from home to the street then they have the right to re-locate to the street. It is also arguable that allowing a child on the street allows them to be responsible in some way as they work on the streets in order to survive. In applying the right to be on the streets, interventions that have previously focused on family reunification should maybe look into interventions that assist these children in achieving their dreams and aspirations while they are living in their street environment where they feel safer.

Allowing children to exercise their right to be on the street is in the line with human rights instruments that mention the best interest of the child. If a child feels safer on the street then this is in their best interest and therefore, they should be allowed to exercise their right to be on the street.



#### 4.10 Services for street children

Table 3 gives details of the activities of churches and NGOs in Harare which have stepped in to try and assist the street children in Harare. From their general observations, these organizations have noted that the main causes of children ending up on the streets are poverty, domestic abuse (which largely affects women), unemployment and peer pressure. These various groups are bringing hope to the homeless in Zimbabwe. They try to offer them services that they would normally have enjoyed had they not been forced to live a life on the streets. They also offer services such as HIV testing, general medical services and educational activities to ensure that the street children are healthy and getting some sort of education, even if it is formal education (Figures 2 and 3).

**Table 3: Showing the activities of churches and NGOs involved in improving the lives of street children in Harare**

ORGANIZATION	WHERE	SERVICES
Eat Out Movement	Harare	Counselling, skills training, meal drive, sanitary wear drives
The Yellow Bus Trust	Harare	Bathing, meals, informal education, reunification with families, counseling
Anglican Cathedral	Harare	Meals every day (lunch)
Methodist Church	Harare	Meals every Saturday
Adult Rape Clinic (ARC)	Harare	Medical services

The Yellow Bus Trust founder, Vikki Drury, mentioned that the majority of the children who do visit The Yellow Bus Trust for their services are usually boys. Occasionally girls will visit out of trust (Figure 4). The Yellow Bus Trust aims at family reunification but sometimes this is not what the children want. During one of my visits to Vikky Drury, she mentioned that one girl found out that the Trust was in communication with her father and she never went back because she feared that her father would be told of her whereabouts and she would be forced to go back home against her wishes. This appeared to be a common fear among many of the girls who live on the street.

The girls proved to be more reluctant to talk than their male counterparts. It was confirmed that girls are protective of their information because they fear that once they reveal anything, they could end up being taken back to the families from which they escaped because of the harm they experienced. All these organizations believe that they are working in the best interest of the child and they have actually done a lot more than the state has ever done for street children. Upon realizing that these children do not always want to be reunited with their family, these organizations are working towards establishing a night shelter for the homeless. It is important that these children have a safe place to sleep at night.

**Figure 2: Photograph of the lunches for street children served at the Anglican Cathedral**



**Figure 3: Photograph of street girls waiting for lunch outside the Anglican Cathedral**



**Figure 4: Photograph of one of the participants with fellow street children at The Yellow Bus Trust**



#### **4.11 COVID 19 and the homeless**

According to Martins (2008) “homeless people lack the basic essentials to ensure a healthy and sustainable life. Many of them do not have access to shelter, clothing, healthy food and phones”. These basic essentials would include proper toilets, bathrooms and proper access to water in order to keep good hygiene. The homeless people basically live in unlivable living situations. Due to these harsh living situations that the homeless find themselves in, they are more susceptible to diseases. In the midst of the corona virus, which will also be referred to as COVID-19, pandemic, the homeless community could possibly be living their worst nightmare. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the spread of the COVID-19 virus a global pandemic in early March 2020.

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. People get it when an infected person sneezes or coughs as this spreads droplet in the air that could be transmitted to others. Global public health officials recommend staying away from others who are sick, avoiding crowds and proper hand washing. They also suggest that since the virus lives on surfaces and lasts for several hours, people should avoid touching surfaces that others may have touched as well as regular cleaning of surfaces. As a recently discovered virus, specific studies on COVID-19 have not been done yet, however there has been concern surrounding this virus and the homeless. In an

online article titled “*An unexpected side effect of the coronavirus? A new urgency about helping homeless people,*” Randall Kuhn, a professor at UCLA’s department of community health sciences has been quoted to say:

“I see one scenario where this virus mercifully dodges the homeless population or another scenario where it hits the homeless population quite hard.”

One can only hope that the former becomes the reality as individuals and families experiencing homelessness are most vulnerable due to lack of access to medical resources, permanent shelter, proper restroom facilities and really cause what is required to not get infected is how they live their lives i.e., crowds and they do not have access to water and soap to regularly wash their hands.

The corona virus is an enormous crisis that has been imposed on an already existing crisis. In order to contain the corona virus, practicing social distance as well as staying home has been advised by public health officials as this global pandemic is dealt with. In as much as this directive from public health officials may be one that is simple to follow for the rest of society, this virus fighting directive of staying home is one that the homeless community are incapable of following. In relation to the girls living on the street in Harare CBD, the corona virus is a huge concern for both the permanent residents of the streets and those that live on the street peripherally.

In order to fight the virus, people have been advised to always wash their hands with soap or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer in order to kill the virus. Both the former and the latter are not options that the homeless girls are able to access easily. Running water is a basic human right and need that people in Zimbabwe do not get to enjoy. If running water is not easily accessible to the general public it is definitely not easily accessible to street children either. Hand sanitizers are also quite expensive that these girls would not be able to buy these sanitizers especially during this pandemic as prices for hand sanitizers, face masks etcetera have hiked as supermarkets and pharmacy’s know that people will come in wanting to buy them and therefore they have seen this as a way to make a double profit as people would rather sacrifice buying expensive protective essentials than risk getting infected by the corona virus.

Zimbabwe declared a national lockdown on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March till the 20<sup>th</sup> of April and this lockdown was further extended. During this time, people stayed indoors and were only allowed to leave their houses if absolutely necessary. The streets of Harare were heavily guarded by police and soldier authorities and they stopped each individual to ask about their movements and if they did not think that your reason for leaving your house was good enough, one was sent back home. During this time the police and soldiers also chased and beat up street children. This act of the police authorities chasing and beating street children baffled me as the question “where are they supposed to go?” came to mind. In protecting the society and ensuring that everyone abided by the social distancing rules, the state and public health officials forgot about street children and their wellbeing during these dire times. Like the everyday needs of the homeless community, outside the corona virus, their needs and protection in the midst of this virus were also forgotten.

At times of disaster and crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, government officials must give the same attention they give to finding ways of dealing with the virus to safeguarding the vulnerable however this has not been the case with the homeless community. Just like how they are forgotten under normal circumstances, their safety and health was also forgotten to be prioritized and yet due to their everyday living conditions they are at the highest risk. In the midst of all the planning and a growing sense of panic and fear amongst the general public, the impact of the spread of COVID-19 among homeless people has not been discussed. It should, however, be of special concern to local government officials.

The corona virus pandemic has gained special attention of government officials and public health officials as they are finding a way to dealing with the virus. The same attention that is being given to dealing with the virus should also be given to communities experiencing homelessness. In an ideal world, law makers need to be able to accommodate the needs of the most vulnerable community in any society and that is the homeless community. This has however not been the case. Despite the states failure to remember the homeless community, Eat Out Movement (EOM) remembered the vulnerable homeless community. (EOM) has spear headed a response initiative called Eat Out Movement COVID-19 Response initiative which was further called We Are One because the movement is now a consortium of many organizations that have come together to help provide a safe place for the homeless.

We Are One is a COVID 19 response initiative that removed all willing homeless people off the street and into temporary shelters amid this COVID-19 lockdown. With the help of various organizations who donated; food, toiletries, blankets etcetera, EOM was able to place a large number of homeless people in various shelters so that they were in a safe place. The We Are Once response initiative has managed to shelter willing homeless people and has grouped them according to age and sex and put them in specific temporary shelters. Removing the homeless community from the streets was is a good initiative, however their living conditions in these shelters is a call for concern. Those in shelters may be in a better position than those that are still roaming around the streets of Harare CBD, that is if the shelter does frequent cleaning and provides access to bathrooms and hand sanitizers. In these shelters, people sleep, eat and participate in activities in groups, which increases the risk if an exposed person transmitting the virus to those nearby. Additionally, many shelters are large spaces with beds placed in close proximity as they need to be able to accommodate as many people as possible, this thus overrules the recommendation of standing not less than 100 meters away from the next person.

My target group which is adolescent girls aged between ten and seventeen have been sheltered at Jamaica Inn which is situated in Melfort, thirty kilometers out of Harare. At the present moment eighteen girls are at this shelter where they are provided with three meals a day and are able to have a safe place to take a bath, have proper hygienic toilets and sleep. Previous research has confirmed that street children who are removed from the street and put into some sort of care usually run away as they come from a life of freedom and independence and do not want to be told what to do, however during this national lockdown, no cases of any street children running away from the shelter have been reported yet. Having these girls in a shelter that provides them with three meals a day, a place to sleep and bath means that the girls are not engaging in other ways of trying to make money in order to survive, such as begging, vending and commercial sex work. Unfortunately, these shelters are temporary and after the lockdown, these girls will have to return to what was their normal life of being on the street.

Response initiatives to COVID-19 that have helped street children show the capacity that people do have, when working together to make a difference in the lives of those that need help.

#### **4.12 How the state has failed street children**

There are laws and policies that have been drawn up to protect children. Despite the existence numerous Acts and penalties for offences, blatant disregard for the rights children continues on the part of the state. In a casual conversation with the Founder of Zimbabwe without Orphans, she mentioned that the social worker to child ratio is 1:48,000. That simply just does not work. Government departments that should be protecting children, especially the vulnerable, are ridiculously inefficient.

I was disappointed by the response of the Ministries to my attempts to find out what they did to improve the lives of street children I wanted to seek information from the relevant Ministries for the following reasons:

- From the Ministry of Health and Child Care I wanted to find out whether health services were offered to street children. If yes, were they offered free of charge? If they were not, why not, in view of the fact that the right to health is provided by the Constitution?
- From the Ministry of Social Welfare as they are in charge of children. I wanted to find out what services they offer when it comes to delivering solutions towards alleviating problems faced by street children.
- From the Ministry of Education I wanted to find out whether they provided education to street children in view of the fact that it is the right of all children below the age of eighteen under the Constitution.
- From the Ministry of Home Affairs I wanted to find out what process is followed when a street child seeks to obtain national identification.

Unfortunately, none of these Ministries were of any help and therefore I was unable to measure the state's efficiency in addressing the needs of these adolescent girls living on the street. The Ministry of Health gave me some hope at one point but continued to reschedule appointments and I never actually received the information I sought. The Ministry of Education blatantly denied that street children were their responsibility and the Ministry of Home Affairs said they did not allow research to be carried out. When one looks at the

overall situation of these street children, one can only conclude that the state has indeed neglected its duties in addressing their rights, needs and interests.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss whether and to what extent the state has assisted street children in Zimbabwe. By ratifying the CRC and ACRWC, the government of Zimbabwe has indicated its intention to comply with the provisions of these instruments and agreed to be bound by them. Although there are not specific rights for street children, they are able to claim their rights simply based on the facts that they are children under the age of eighteen and are citizens or residents of Zimbabwe. It appears that due to the economic and political nature of Zimbabwe, many claw-back clauses have been included in the Constitution meaning that the realization of rights by the government is not mandatory but rather dependent on the availability of state resources. For example, section 30 of the Zimbabwe Constitution states that “The State must take all practical measures, *within the limits of the resources available* to it, to provide social security and social care to those who are in need” and most of the time these resources are not made available, meaning this right given in section 30 can then not be realised.

#### **5.2 Discussion and conclusion**

People may argue that since street children are not specifically protected by any legislation the state has no obligation towards them. The fact is that since they are children they are protected by any legislation which relates to children. For example, children living on the street are of a certain age, so if their age is mentioned in any legislation then such legislation is applicable to them also. Under the Children’s Act, there is provision for abandoned children, orphans, the neglected, etc. Therefore, even though street children are not specifically referred to in the Act, the fact that they are children in terms of the definition of the Act, they are entitled to its protection.

There are a number of policies and law applicable to children that appear perfect on paper but are however poorly implemented and this is the reason why so many street children end up on the street. The state needs to take responsibility for these street children by ensuring that the rights and protection which they have granted them on paper are actually put into practice. The sad fact is that street children continue to be ignored as if they do not exist in society. For example, without the slightest hesitation, the Ministry of Education denied any responsibility

for them; yet, if the law is that the Ministry of Education is in charge of the education of *all children* below the age of eighteen, why then are street children under the age of eighteen being denied their right to be educated? It seems that there is a misuse of funds in that the state seems to prioritize other things over urgent social issues such as the welfare street children.

Using the welfare approach which is currently the most popular approach to solving the problem of street children, the answer is to remove them from their streets and set them up in some sort of foster care or re-unite them with their families. Since there is little evidence that the government is pursuing this solution it would appear that either this task is a difficult one or that the government is just not paying attention to these children.

Although the current situation of the street children is sad, it could be far worse were it not for the activities of certain local NGOs and the church. In order to achieve success in helping these children there needs to be an understanding of why they are on the street. People tend to judge street children and accuse them of being rebels who have probably been chased away from their homes for being undisciplined and their landing up on the street is seen as a just form of punishment. This, however, is not the case. The Department of Social Welfare should be equipped with staff who are well qualified to conduct research into the situation of these street children in order to understand why they are on the streets and how they came to be there. Only then can a solution/s be found as to how best to help them.

The families of these children also need to be investigated because many of the children who land up on the streets do so as a result of sexual abuse, domestic violence and many other causes which are often so serious that their perpetrators should be criminally prosecuted and jailed. The state and NGOs should not be too quick to opt for the solution of re-uniting street children with their families (which is often the only solution pursued) especially if it is found that such families are not safe for the child; such street children should actually be protected from families who endanger their lives and welfare. Any cause that contributes to making their home environment unsafe for the child should be addressed and removed before returning them to their family.

Currently society is adopting a welfare approach towards its social challenges which means that children on the street are perceived as needing to be rescued and that may not always be

in their best interests and ultimately this is the most important principle to be observed. I believe that a step in the right direction would be to exercise a mixture of a welfare and a child rights approach, treating each case differently and on their own merits. Unfortunately street children are presently being treated as members of a homogeneous group to whom a one-size-fits-all-approach is being applied and this is not appropriate nor in their best interests.

Services for street children need to be made available to them even on the streets and this has been done informally by local NGOs. The state needs to formalize these services and offer them to street children who should be given the freedom to reject them if they so wish. A safe place to sleep is also of the utmost importance and this falls under the right to shelter. Homeless shelters are available in First World countries where homeless people can do whatever they want during the day but have a safe place to sleep at night. Providing such facilities for the homeless reduces the incidence of commercial sex work, the spread of STIs and creates a safe place for individuals who choose to enjoy their right to be on the street.

The Corona virus has shown how quickly the government is able to act when it comes to protecting those in need. At the moment everyone is seen as vulnerable and protective measures have been taken to ensure the safety of everyone's health. How society is living in this present moment, in fear, panic and unsure where the next meal will come from seeing as people are not working and in a society where the majority engage in informal work and survive hand to mouth, this is how street children survive on a daily basis and yet ways in trying to make their way of life is often ignored. The current COVID-19 situation has provided for temporary shelters for the homeless, however when this pandemic comes to an end, if it does, what is then to happen to the homeless girls and the entire homeless community? Law makers, therefore, need to prioritize permanent housing options for the homeless community.

In conclusion, the Zimbabwe government policies are ineffective when it comes to addressing the needs of vulnerable street children. The state has failed to protect them in multiple ways. Perhaps there needs to be a specific street children's policy in which the state declares clearly what they can and cannot provide so there is no doubt about their position. But as it stands, street children are treated simply as children and although children are entitled to a number of rights, street children are not afforded the opportunity to exercise

them. This makes one wonder whether children's rights are really for all children or only those who have parents or guardians.

The Department of Social Services has partnered with the EOM in providing necessary services to the homeless community amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This action alone shows that they are able to act as long as they are in partnership with other parties. It should be taken into consideration that the government, in order to make their policies effective, should partner with NGOs in helping the vulnerable because leaving all responsibilities to the government appears to be too much for them to handle and therefore instead of doing a little within their means, they totally ignore their resources and blame it on lack of resources.

The government should be able to lend a hand to street children while on the street by supporting NGOs and the Department of Social Services in protecting street children. Members of the corporate sector, in fulfillment of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), are also urged to contribute to the alleviation of problems that street children are facing. Street children face a plethora of problems and therefore addressing and alleviating their problems is not an easy task. Various services need to be offered such as counseling for those who have been victims of abuse and rehabilitation for those who have been engaging in substance abuse and so forth. Such services should include child-friendly help that provides an education, food, shelter, family reunification, birth certificates, health services and legal assistance to be offered and performed by non-judgmental and well-trained personnel. It is very important that such services offered to the street children should be intended to meet the individual street children's dreams, needs and experiences and should improve their self-respect and self-esteem.

Female members, especially young females, are weaker than their male counterparts living on the street and therefore should be protected from abuse and any form of exploitation. The government should also legally allow street children to work and live on the streets should it be in their best interests. For these services to be effective and successful, a lot of research, work and patience needs to take place as each individual is worked with according to who they are. Different Departments of the government and Ministries also need to come together and partner with other organizations in order to achieve a successful program in protecting street children. Placing the responsibility solely on the government is asking far too much in a Third World country like Zimbabwe as the economy is not at its best and the prioritization of

resources will be 'unavailable' if they are to come from the government alone. If NGOs, the corporate sector and the government work together they are likely to successfully resolve the multiple challenges faced by street children, especially those of young female adolescents who are exceptionally vulnerable to the hard life they are forced to live on the streets.

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