



## Mental well being of street children in Lucknow City, India

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### Abstract

*This paper presents the mental well being of street children of Lucknow City. A child either a girl or a boy for whom the street or even an unoccupied dwelling wasteland has become his/her habitual abode or is the source of his/her livelihood is a street child. Such children are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults. Mental well being describes your mental state-how one feels or how well one can cope with day-to-day life? As the study is exploratory in nature, survey method was adopted to collect the information from the target population. The main tool in the study was a self prepared interview schedule which consisted of general and specific information of the respondents targeted for the study.*

**Keywords:** Mental well being, street children, OVC well being tool.

### Introduction

**Street children:** There are many definitions for street children, The definition of street children varies from person to person as every organisation have its own measure to define it, but as defined by Inter-NGO Programme<sup>1</sup>–

Any child either girl or boy ... who lives on street, spends his/her maximum time on street or earns his/her livelihood by working on street comes under the category of street children. These children are inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults.

Street children have been categorised in two groups. The first group 'Children of the street', refers to children who are homeless, and urban streets are their source of livelihood, where they spend most of their time. The second group is 'Children on the street', who work for their livelihood on street in the daytime but have home to spend their night or only sometime spend their nights on street<sup>1</sup>.

The term 'street children' includes a very wide range of children who lack a home; work on the streets for livelihood but sleeps at home; either do or do not have any family; works in open market; live on streets, railways platforms with their families or alone; lives in day or night shelters<sup>2</sup>.

**Who are street children:** UNICEF has defined three types of street children: Street-living, Street working, and Street-family.

Street-living children are those of 12-18 years (20% of them are girls) and spend most of their time on the streets. These are children who doesn't have any contact with their families and live alone on the streets. Many of these children may have left

their families at a very young age due to some type of physical or emotional abuse.

Street-working children are 6-15 years of age (50% of them are girls) and they spend most of their time earning for their/their family's livelihood on. These children have a home to spend their nights. It is estimated that there are approximately 10,000 of these children in Phnom Penh alone.

Street-family children are those who live with their family and together they strive for their livelihood on the streets. They are of all ages (50% of them are girls).

**Mental well being:** Mental wellbeing describes the mental state of a person - how one feels? How well one can cope with day-to-day life? Mental wellbeing of a person is dynamic. As per Sarah S. Brown, mental well being of a person can change with time. If one have good mental wellbeing he/she will be able to feel relatively confident in himself/herself, will have positive self esteem, express his/her emotions, build and maintain healthy relationship with others, work productively, cope quite well with the everyday stresses, manage the changes and uncertainties very well<sup>3</sup>.

"Feeling happy and fully involved in day to day work is a part of one's mental wellbeing. Feelings of contentment, enjoyment, confidence and engagement with the world are all a part of mental wellbeing along with self-esteem and self-confidence. Feeling to do the things you want to do, understanding good relations, which bring joy around you is an important part of mental well being". Good mental wellbeing does not mean that a person never experiences negative feelings nor difficult in certain situations, but it does mean that you feel you have the mental capacity to cope when time that are tougher than usual.

No-one can give wellbeing to anyone. It's the person himself/herself who has to take action"<sup>4</sup>.

**Five steps to improve mental wellbeing:** i. There are five steps that we all can take to improve our mental wellbeing and feel happier, more positive and strive to get the best from life. ii. According to Sarah S. Brown<sup>3</sup> the five things that can really help to boost our mental wellbeing are: i. To connect – Connecting with people around you, your family, friends, colleagues and neighbors and spending some time to develop these relationships. ii. Being active – Taking out some time for yourself to get indulged in your hobbies or finding an activity that you can enjoy and make it a part of your life. iii. Keep learning – Learning new skills or developing some hobbies that give you a sense of achievement and confidence. iv. Give to others – Helping others in small or big manners in which ever you can, volunteering at your local community centre, can improve a person's mental wellbeing and help him/her build new social networks. v. Being mindful – Being more aware of your present moment, your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you tackle the challenges of your life.

**Objective:** The authors of this research work aims to investigate the mental well being of street children in Lucknow city.

**Review of Literature:** Hai<sup>5</sup> observed that some street children make friends with other children of their age group and profession to cope up with the various traumatic conditions they face in their everyday life. The result of this work found that in such given scenarios of their life the street children tend to become rag-pickers and lead a marginalized and backward life in the society. These children have been found to engage in various works like collecting and selling waste for re-cycling to earn their livelihood. People in the elite society should be sensitized and made aware about child right through various means like campaigning, free and compulsory education to all, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes and income generating programmes.

Arabi and Ali<sup>6</sup> studied the various factors that lead to homelessness of 300 street children in Khartoum State. It has been concluded that most of the street children born in this State had their origins in the western and southern Sudan. Factor that are responsible to develop homelessness in these children are city life, risky behavior, economic reasons, natural and environmental, family disruption, and family abuse. The study suggests that measures should be taken to avoid the indulgence of these children in harmful activities and their families should be counseled and helped to engage these children in creating opportunities for them and also for those vulnerable sections who are affected by adversities. There should be reform and improvement in the legislations and laws to protect the vulnerable children.

Prakash and Singh<sup>7</sup> identified that most of the children who run away from their homes come to cities through railways and

therefore there is a need to safeguard and care these children and other many other children around Railway Stations. At this point these children can be contacted and proper care could be taken to help them get back to their families. Proper measures could be taken to provide them proper shelter and source of livelihood.

Javid et al.<sup>8</sup> in his study observed that Street children either don't live with their families or survive with them on meager resources. There are millions of such street children in the world to live under pathetic situations. For a better insight in the lives of street children, an ethnographic investigation was conducted for 150 days in this study with emphasis on street children found on/around Calcutta railway stations.

Avci et al.<sup>9</sup> reported that the adverse living conditions and poor quality of life leads to mental disturbance, depression and poor physical health which result in pessimism and hopelessness. Street children considered in this study were found to develop hopelessness due to limitation of resources and lack of motivation for a bright future. The results of the study inferred that there is higher percentage of hopelessness among street children as compared to those with proper family support. Children living with parents and attending school were found to have a comparatively better life style. Parental supports to children help them develop a positive attitude towards their surrounding and their future but street children are more prone to physiological and psychological challenges in their day to day life due to lack of some elderly guidance.

Mathur<sup>10</sup> carried out a detailed study with an aim to investigate the socio-economic realities of street children in Jaipur City, India. The field scenario indicated that majority of these street children were boys (71%) of 8–12 age groups. It was observed that 70.5% of these children lived with their families and migrated from different cities in search of livelihood. Gambling/ watching television/smoking/drinking/ taking drugs were the common modes of entertainment for these kids to cope up with the stresses in their life.

According to UNICEF<sup>11</sup> children on street are the consequences of unemployment, migration, lack of municipal and good governance; un-uniform distribution of resources, increasing urban violence and criminality. It has been that the number of children born in urban areas during the period 1960-1980 was quite higher as compared to any preceding decade. The huge number of these children contributed significantly to the poverty cycle due to limited options for their future thus hampering the development of their own, their communities the country as a whole. Urbanization should therefore be considered as a child rights issue.

## Methodology

For successful study explanation of scientific methodology is necessary, as is directly indicates towards the authenticity of the research of the study.

**Local of the study:** The area selected for this work was selected Lucknow City of Uttar Pradesh. Lucknow is the capital city and a centrally placed district of Uttar Pradesh spread over an area of 25285sq. km. Sitapur from North, Barabanki from East, Raibareli from South West are the neighbouring areas of this district. The data of rag pickers and street children was collected from Indira Nagar, Kapoorthala, Tedhipullia and Rajnikhand residential areas of Lucknow.

**Sampling Design:** Samples for this study consisted of total 120 respondents (60 rag picker and 60 street children). and the collection of these was done by purposive random sampling technique from the selected areas.

**Tools and techniques used in study:** The main tool used in the study was a self prepared interview schedule which consisted of general and specific information of the respondents targeted for the study. Closed ended questions were included in the schedule along with Scale written by Shannon Senefeld, Susan Strasser, James Campbell<sup>12</sup>.

**Methods of data collection:** Pretested interview schedule along with OVC Wellbeing tool was used to collect general and specific information.

The range of these categories was as given below:

Categories	Score
Poor	36-57
Average	58-76
Good	77-108

## Results and discussion

**Proposed Criteria to Identify the Target Group: Street Children:** In order for us to identify the street children in Lucknow, following usable criteria were focused on: i. Demographic profile of the respondents: the age of the children, their living conditions, their working place, ii. Health status of respondents. iii. Various reasons of stress among the respondents and the methods adopted by them to cope up with their stress. iv. OVC scale to measure the Mental Well being in respondents. v. The data collected from the study is compiled in the form of tables in this section of the study and the same is discussed accordingly. vi. Demographic profile of the respondents.

This section dealt with the description of the sample information pertinent to the background characteristics of the respondents, sought through schedule.

Data in Table-1 showed that 46.7 percent street children were between the ages of 6-8 years and 53.3 % were of age 9-11

years. All these children lived on the street/ footpath, none of them had house and had never gone to school. 46.6% street children did not have money to continue in school where as 53.2 % street children left home parents or their family did not want them to continue their studies. Only 58.2% street children had both parents alive.

**Mental Health status of Respondents:** This section deals with the general health status of the respondents. Here the investigator has taken into consideration the health issues related to the job of the respondents under study.

**Table-1:** Demographic profile of respondents (N=60).

	Particular	Street children (N=60)
Age (in years)	6-8	28 (46.6)
	9-11	32 (53.2)
Living place	On street/ foot path	60 (100)
	I have a house	0 (0)
	In slum	0 (0)
Gender	Girl	32 (53.2)
	Boy	28 (46.6)
Ordinal place	1	0 (0)
	2	1 (0)
	3	14 (23.2)
	4	21 (35)
	5	10 (16.6)
	6	8 (13.2)
	7	6 (10)
Migrated in this city	Yes	60 (100)
	No	0 (0)
Gone to school	Yes	0 (0)
	No	60 (100)
Reason of leaving school	Did not have money to continue in school	28 (46.6)
	Left home parents / family did not want me to continue in school	32 (53.2)
	Due to disaster / calamity / riot	0 (0)
Have contract with parents	Yes	60 (100)
	No	0 (0)
	Can't remember	0 (0)
Have both parents alive	Yes	35 (58.2)
	No	25 (41.6)

**Table-2:** OVC scale to measure the Mental Well being in respondents.

Statements		Street children		
		None of the time	Some of the time	All of the time
Food and Nutrition	I eat at least two meal a day	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	I have enough food to eat	32 (53.2)	28 (46.6)	0 (0)
	I go to bed hungry	33 (55)	27 (45.2)	0 (0)
Education	My teacher treat me like the other student	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	I have the materials need to do my class work	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	I am not treated as well as the other students in my class	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	I like school	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	I have enough book and supplies for school	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Shelter	I have a house where I can sleep at night	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	I feel secure in my neighborhood	33 (55)	27 (44.8)	0 (0)
	I feel safe where I live	32 (53.2)	28(46.6)	0 (0)
Economic	My school attendance is affected by my need to work	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	My family has enough money to buy the things we need	25 (41.6)	35 (58.2)	0 (0)
	One of the adults taking care of us (me) earn money working at a job	33 (55)	27 (44.8)	0 (0)
Protection	I'm treated differently from the other children in my household	31 (51.6)	19 (31.6)	10 (16.3)
	I'm treated the same as other children in my school	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	I'm treated differently from other children in my village, neighborhood, compound	0 (0)	39 (65)	21 (35)
	I do not get enough sleep and feel tired because of all the work I do before and after school	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Mental health	I have people I can talk to when I have a problem	23 (38.2)	37 (61.6)	0 (0)
	I am able to do things like other people	31 (51.6)	29 (48.2)	0 (0)
	I am as happy as other kids my age	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	I feel I live in a safe place	21 (35)	27 (45)	12 (20)
Family	At home, I have elders look after me. if get hurt or feel sad	35 (58.2)	25 (41.6)	0 (0)
	I have adults that I can trust	5 (8.2)	33 (55)	22 (36.6)
	I get emotional help and support from my family	23 (38.2)	31 (51.6)	6 (10)
	I feel I am support from my extended family	38 (63.2)	20 (33.2)	2 (3.2)

Health	I feel strong and healthy	24 (40)	36 (60)	0 (0)
	I worry about my health	5 (8.2)	23 (38.2)	32 (53.2)
	My health is good	28 (46.6)	32 (53.2)	0 (0)
	I am growing as well as other kids my age	60 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Spirituality	My belief in God gives me strength to face difficulties	0 (0)	24 (40)	36 (60)
	My belief in God gives me comfort and reassurance	7 (11.6)	30 (60)	23 (38.2)
	My faith is important to me	29 (48)	31 (51.6)	0(0)
Community	People in my community try to help	10 (16.6)	29 (48)	21 (35)
	I feel welcome to take part in religious services	16 (26.6)	25 (41.6)	19 (31.6)
	My household receives free support to care for the children who live here	14 (23.2)	29 (48.2)	17 (28.2)

As shown in Table-2 when compared for food and nutrition it was found that none of the street children had any access to two meals a day. 53.2 % street children had no access to enough food to eat while 55 % street children never go to bed hungry as compared to 45.2 percent who were found to sleep hungry sometimes.

When examined for the educational criterion, it was observed that all respondents had lack of material needed to do their class work and were never treated as well as other students in their class. None of them had enough books and supplies and had no liking for school.

When investigated for shelter, it was observed that none of the respondents had house to sleep at night. Among these subjects, 55 % never felt secure in their neighbourhood and 53.2 percent street children never felt safe at their living place.

When studied for economic aspects, it was found that 41.6 % of these children agreed that their family never had enough money to buy the things of their need. 95 % street children felt vulnerable as they never had any adult taking care of them. 95 % ragpickers agreed that they are never treated differently from the other children in their household. All these children agreed that in their school they are never treated as other children.

In mental health criterion, it was observed that 38.2% street children agreed that they never had someone to talk to when in. None of these children feel as happy as other kids of their age. 35% street children never feel that they live in a safe place while 45% felt that they sometimes had safe places to live.

When compared for the criterion for family, 58.2% street children never had someone to look after when they get hurt/feel sad while 41.6 percent sometimes had somebody. 8.2% street

children never had an adult to trust to while 55% sometimes had and 36.6% always had someone to trust to.

It was also observed that 38.2% street children never got any emotional support from family while 51.6 percent sometimes had as compared to only 10% who always got such support from their family. 63.2% of these kids never had support from their extended family (their co-fellow street children).

When investigated for the health criterion, it was observed that 40 % never felt strong and healthy while 60% sometimes did felt so. 8.2% of these children never worried about their health while 38.2% sometimes worried about their health.

When examined for spirituality criterion, it was found that 40% street children agreed that they feel that God gives them strength to face difficulties while 60% agreed that they always feel so. 60% street children agreed that sometimes it happens that their belief in God gives them strength and reassurance while 38.2% believed that it always happens to them. 51.6% street children agreed that their faith is sometimes important to them. 31.6% always felt welcomed to take part in religious activities while 41.6% sometimes and 26.6% never did felt so.

**Table-3:** Distribution of respondents on the basis of score obtained on well being scale.

Scores	Street children F (%)
Poor (36-57)	37 (61.7)
Average (58-76)	23 (38.3)
Good (77-108)	0 (0)

Results in Table-3, showed that 61.7% street children were having poor mental well being while 38.3% street children were having average mental well being none of the respondents were having good mental well being.

## Conclusion

It is not only difficult but also crucial to provide a uniform definition of street children and provide a clear picture of their mental well being. Different organizations, academicians, social work practitioners define them in different ways. Controversies arise over the matter regarding different types, categories and dimensions of the street children that has actually created the scope for the researcher and others to define and identify street children on the basis of the individual. The main aim of this article was to provide clear picture focusing on the livelihood situations and mental well being of street children in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh). In this article we tried to explore a set of four criteria that make a better fit as tool for research work related to street children. In the point, 'general information of respondents, discussion was mainly concentrated on finding out the age range of street children, ascertaining their living conditions and finding out about their family condition. We also found that most of these subjects suffer from either of the health issue mentioned in point two 'distribution of respondents on the basis of health status'. The working places of the street children discloses the nature and types of work the street children do, the uncertainty in their work and work related stress of these children. Lastly the exploitation and vulnerability context of the street children is conspicuous when we find out different variables such as long working hours, the hardest labour, low wages, hazardous working conditions, insults and torture both at their living place and their work place. The discussion provides street children are subject to micro and macro level exploitation, abuse and humiliation, and reveals that these poor livelihood conditions along with various associated threats are some of the various factors leading to poor mental well being in street children. Notwithstanding the barriers, particularly the lack of uniformity in how street children are defined, and the huge range of factors associated with their mental well being, it is feasible to come up with more in-depth and extensive study in this field.

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