



EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN – A Worldwide Outrage

STREET CHILDREN – A Worldwide Problem

The phenomenon of street children is global, alarming and escalating. No country and virtually no city anywhere in the world today is without the presence of street children. It is a problem of both developed and developing countries, but is more prevalent in the poor nations of Latin America, Asia and Africa. Poverty, family disintegration due to health or death, neglect, abuse or abandonment, and social unrest are all common triggers for a child's life on the streets.

“Street children” is a term often used to describe both *market children* (who work in the streets and markets of cities selling or begging, and live with their families) and *homeless street children* (who work, live and sleep in the streets, often lacking any contact with their families). At highest risk is the latter group. Murder, consistent abuse and inhumane treatment are the “norm” for these children, whose ages range from six to 18. They often resort to petty theft and prostitution for survival. They are extremely vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. An estimated 90% of them are addicted to inhalants such as shoe glue and paint thinner, which cause kidney failure, irreversible brain damage and, in some cases, death.

- The number of street children worldwide is almost impossible to know, although the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF in the mid '90s estimated the number to be 100 million.
- The social phenomenon of street children is increasing as the world's population grows; six out of ten urban dwellers are expected to be under 18 years of age by the year 2005.

Asia and Africa

- According to UNICEF, there are about 25 million street children in Asia and an estimated 10 million in Africa (1998).
- Africa today has 10.7 million orphans just as a result of AIDS and the numbers are growing (UNAIDS). With fewer and fewer family members left to care for them, many--if not most--of these children will join the street children of Africa who are already there because of poverty, wars and ethnic conflicts.
- In Dhaka, Bangladesh, there are 10,000 girls living in the streets (World Vision).
- There are 5 to 10,000 street children just in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (World Vision).
- In the Philippines, the Department of Social Welfare and Development estimated, in 1991, 1.2 million street children. Action International Ministries says 50,000 to 70,000 street children live in Manila alone.
- India's Ministry of Social Welfare estimated that of the 10.9 million people residing in Calcutta in 1992, there were 75,000 to 200,000 children living in the streets. Agencies agree the number is much higher now, and deaths of parents from HIV/AIDS are likely to cause the numbers to rise more rapidly.

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- UNICEF estimates there are 16,000 street children in Vietnam, 20,000 child victims of prostitution, and 4,300 child drug users.

Latin America

- In 1996, the Inter-American Development Bank and UNICEF estimated there were 40 million children living or working on the streets of Latin America--out of an estimated total population of 500 million.
- In Central America, the majority of street children are aged 10-17; approximately 25% are girls.
- The Government of Mexico has estimated the country has 2 million street children.
- In Brazil, seven million children are abandoned or homeless (WHO 1994). From 1990 to 1994, about 4,600 street children were killed (*Los Angeles Times*).
- Street children are targets of death squads in Colombia; in 1993, 2,190 were murdered (*Ottawa Sun, 1996*).

Europe and North America

- The Council of Europe estimates 7,000 street children in the Netherlands, 10,000 in France, 500 to 1,000 in Ireland, 6,000 to 7,000 in Turkey, 1,000 in Bucharest, Romania.
- In Moscow, the BBC has reported that 5,000 children and young people are abandoned on the streets every year.
- In the United States, the federal government reported there were about 500,000 under-age runaways and "throw-aways" (by their parents)--New York Times 1990.

CHILD LABOR

- The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 work in developing countries. About 120 million children under the age of 15 work full-time and another 130 million work part-time.
- Some 50 to 60 million children between the ages of 5 and 11 work in hazardous circumstances. In addition to traditional involvement in agricultural and domestic work, children are now involved in a whole range of extractive and manufacturing sectors, often in dangerous and exploitative conditions. At its worst, this involves the trafficking of children as child sex workers, a modern form of slavery (ILO).
- The ILO estimates 20 million workers under the age of 15 in Latin America. Child labor is common in the countries where Casa Alianza operates:
 - in Guatemala, 41% of the child/adolescent population work
 - in Honduras the figure is 41%
 - in Mexico, 29%
 - in Nicaragua, 20%.

- An estimated 20 million children, perhaps as many as 40 million, in South Asia toil in debt servitude, weaving at looms, making bricks, or rolling cigarettes by hand, working to pay off debts contracted by their parents in exchange for their labor. Countless others spend their childhood and adolescence in domestic servitude. (UNICEF: State of the World Children 2000)
- Each year, an estimated one million children all over the world are sold or “trafficked” nationally and across borders into the illegal sex trade. (UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child)

VIOLENCE

- During the 1990s more than two million children were killed and more than six million injured or disabled in armed conflicts. According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, at least 300,000 children, many as young as 10 years of age, are currently participating as “child soldiers” in armed conflicts around the world.

POVERTY AND DISEASE

- Of the world’s 1.2 billion people living in poverty, more than 600 million are children (UNICEF: *The State of the World’s Children, 2000*).
- About 130 million children of primary school age are not in school; two-thirds of them girls (UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- Despite some recent economic growth, 90 million (almost 50%) of Latin America’s children live in poverty (World Bank).
- In the United States, 13% of children are still living in poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University).
- Each day, 8,500 children and young people around the world are infected with HIV (UNICEF: *State of the World's Children 2000*).
- In Africa, 10.7 million children under the age of 15 have been orphaned by AIDS and another 500,000 have been orphaned in other countries due to AIDS (UNAIDS).
- Each day, 30,500 children under five years of age die of mainly preventable diseases, and thousands more are ill because of unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation (UNICEF: *The State of the World’s Children 2000*).

INVISIBILITY

- When children do not have official papers, they do not officially exist. Estimates are that one-third of all children born every year, about 40 million babies, are not officially registered. This leads to difficulty in registering for school, receiving basic health care and immunizations. Furthermore, this invisibility make children more vulnerable to exploitation through illegal adoption or abduction, and often leading them into illegal activities such as prostitution or other forms of forced and dangerous labor.