

# Problems Faced By The Street Children: A Study On Some Selected Places In Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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**Abstract**—The aim of this study was to shed light on the predicaments of the street children in their street life, their coping mechanism in response to innumerable problems and survival status. Pondering the gravity of the research topic qualitative method with the juxtaposition of FGDs (focus group discussion) and case studies was employed to generate descriptive data. With the organizational support of Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs (UCEP) 4 FGDs were administered on a total respondent size of 74 beneficiary and non-beneficiary street children in Mirpur and Lalbagh areas in the Dhaka city of Bangladesh. Meanwhile, 9 case studies were conducted that gave extra flavour in the research to present more vivid and cross-checked data. The findings drew the flamboyant picture of the ongoing endangered livelihood mostly and mainly triggered by poverty, insecurity, powerlessness, weak or no social network and social capital, insufficient institutional support etc. Since the respondents lacked proper capabilities to secure a descent job, they had to endure oppression, torture, insecurity and other problems to survive on the streets. Drawing upon their problems this research finally dismantled some specific coping mechanisms adopted by the street children whether by avoidance of or approach to the predicaments and stress they face to survive on the street.

**Index Terms**—Street Children, Beneficiary, Non-beneficiary, Life Style, Problems, Coping Mechanism, Survival.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Children 'lost, stolen and disappearing' (Stephens, 1995: 8-9) and 'robbed' (Hecht, 1998: 72-3) of their childhood below 18 years old "living, working, playing and sleeping on the street who are deprived of basic rights are the street children" (ARISE, 1999: 13). They may be categorized into street living children, street working children and children at risk of coming to the streets (Ferguson, 2012). Like all other children although street children have the basic rights to develop, survive and thrive, they encounter innumerable problems and their predicaments are shocking and surprisingly most of the people in Bangladesh even do not "bat an eye at street children sleeping in the mid-afternoon sun" (Timmerman, 2012, p. 26). So now it is time: "[l]et their plight be known to all- let the conscience of humanity revolt" (Agnelli, 1986, preface). According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2003) among a total child population (5-17 years old) of 42.39 million the total number of working children in urban areas of Bangladesh is estimated 1.5 million. Many of these children, below the age 18 years, living, working, playing and sleeping on the streets and are deprived of their basic rights (Black, 1993), generally known as 'street children' as well as 'Tokai' (in Bengali, remnants collector from garbage) or 'Pathashishu' (in Bengali, street living children) and they have become a common sight in Dhaka and other big cities of the country (Mesbah-us-Saleheen and Huda, 2008). Street children in Bangladesh have emerged to be a distinct group as a direct consequence of extreme poverty mainly, which compels them to earn a living (Moula, 2002) anyhow and it also "threatens every right, depriving children of the capacities they require to survive, develop and thrive" (Bellamy, 2004, p. 36).

Besides, there are many conspicuous causes behind the harsh curtain of their street life, such as overpopulation, family disintegration, unemployment, illiteracy, unplanned urbanization, landlessness, natural disasters, oppression of step father/mother (Islam, Haque & Rahman, 2001) etc., which are indeed quite pathetic and matters of investigation. Those problems are to be tackled in the best possible ways for the overall betterment of these ill-fated children. As a response to the unwelcomed street occupancy by the gradual proliferation of street children in our society although variety of supportive initiatives have already been taken both by the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh and different local and international non-government organizations, there is still deficiency in research work based on the needs and rights of the street children to penetrate the gaps lying in service providing and in policy implementation. To do so at first it is necessary to address these children in terms of what problems they face in their everyday life, what is their survival mechanism and in a broad sense their livelihood process. This research is an attempt to shed light on these cruxes in the context of Dhaka city in Bangladesh.

### 1.2 STUDY OBJECTIVES

The study was broadly an attempt to pick out the problems faced by the floating street children who come from extremely poor families in the struggle for subsistence in Dhaka City, Bangladesh. More lucidly, the study intended to:

- Examine the lifestyle of the street children,
- Identify the problems faced by the street children, and
- Assess their survival and coping mechanism in response to the problems they encounter.

## 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been a "prodigious outpouring of texts" (Rizzini, 1996, p. 26) on different issues of street children. This may include their lifestyle, migration status, predicaments of street life, and threats of being robbed, trafficked or torture, involvement in devious activities etc. researches also include the vast array of their socialization on the street environment, social network, aspirations, and recreational activities and so

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on and so forth. Considering the research objectives an attempt was made to deal with the existing literature in terms of the lifestyle, predicaments and coping mechanism of the street children. In most literature lifestyle is defined as the ways we live in order to fulfill our needs and goals (Liau, 2006, p. 6), encapsulating representations, institutions, behaviours and habits, beliefs, values and social and economic systems. According to Rajan Saxena (2006), "Lifestyle refers to the beliefs, attitudes, interests, and opinions that an individual has about himself, his family, and the world" (p. 173). It is "a concept that refers to alternative ways of living, usually conspicuous through values and modes of consumption" (Scott & Marshall, 2005, p. 365). In another words, "lifestyle refers to the physical, mental and spiritual actions of a man on a day-to-day basis" (Jain, 2007, p. 7). There is general agreement among sociologists that lifestyle refers to a mode of living, which is distinctive and therefore recognizable. Lifestyle refers to a way of living of families, individuals and societies. Street children have to encounter an endangered, inadequate lifestyle (Hobbs, Lavalette and MacKechnie, 1999) which is thoroughly transient (Sukla, 2005; Pape, 2013) with their most visibility "in the streets, far from any identifiable home" (Chidebell, 2013, p. 270). Street children live single, in pairs or in group(s). They sleep on railway, launch and bus terminals, by the sides of high roads, pavement, market places on an under the overbridges, water logging areas, abandoned homes, slams and shunts, broken cars, mosques and temples, working places, i.e., hotel and employer's shops, manholes and ceramic pipes, etc. They, even most of the time, do not bath on day and keep one set of cloth they wear it until torn. They eat discarded food considered rationally impure and medically harmful. They have no abode, no seat to sit no possessions, no family bindings and no society (in general). As a result they remain as the most vulnerable group (ARISE, 1999) and serious challenge to the country's development (Edwards 1989). Devoid of material resources and the support system that are indispensable for survival, these children lead nomadic life on the streets and work at any occupation (Nalkur, 2009) that pays, which ranges from street vending, rag picking, dealing with drugs and contraband items to prostitution (Save the Children UK, 2000, p. 2). Many times it is found that "they wipe the dirt off the cars and extend their [tiny] hands for a Taka or two, knowing not whether they would get it" (Hasina, 1992, p. 49). Street children, as a special group of children in difficult circumstances (Ehiri, 2009; Saxena and Sharma, 2005), are being recognized apart from the urban poor families who are pavement dwellers (Sukla, 2005). The plight and predicaments of the street children on the street society are respectively immense and innumerable, which include insufficient nutrition, inadequate safety and security, substance abuse, physical injuries and assault by mass people, health problems etc. (Sukla, 2005, p. vii). The social problems they face can be defined as "...an alleged situation that is incompatible with the values of a significant number of people who agree that action is needed to alter the situation" (Rubington and Weinberg, 2011, p. 4). In different parts of Dhaka city, a common and familiar sight is a street child, working and residing on the streets. They are the children of the urban and rural poor who are the most vulnerable, exploited and who face the highest risks. They work, eat, play and sleep in "the glaringly public venue of the byways of society" (Hartzen and Priyadarsini, 2012, p. 57). Undernourishment, hazardous environments and adversity

obstruct their development in their growing age. Actually they are "simply poor children in the wrong place" (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman, 1998, p. 358). These floating children are often subject to discrimination, beating/torture and sexual harassment (Gupta, 2000). They are manipulated into taking risks, hazardous work and political activity for obtaining food. Basic amenities like education, clothing, shelter, and medicine are less or sometimes not available to them (Wells, 2009). These street children are engaged in different works of adult people i.e. rickshaw pulling, begging, prostitution, factory work, domestic work, etc (ICDDR, 2004). According to Taiabur Rahman (2009) "these children work long hours for little pay, have their money stolen, and often get sick because they live in an unsanitary environment. These children are vulnerable to violence, abuse, public humiliation and harassment and often find themselves incarcerated with adult criminals" (p. 205). Encountering diversified harsh realities street children soon become habituated to cope with different predicaments daily (Aptekar, 1994; Scanlon, Tomkin, Lynch and Scanlon, 1998; Aderinto, 2000; Kombarakaran, 2004; Sethi, 2004). Coping mechanism can be defined as "any behavioral and psychological thought or action aimed at tolerate, reducing or mastering stress" (Morrison-Valfre, 2013, p. 84). Street children are bestowed with "remarkable survival instincts and courage in daily struggle" (Verma, 1999, p. 5). In response to innumerable odds and chaotic life trajectories many street children are obliged to make out their coping strategies, while among others the value of social capital, networks and resources, caring and sharing of happening with those in penuries are considered valuable (Kelletta and Moore, 2003). Running away from villages and other home localities due to a complex multitude of factors like domestic violence, broken family structure and different family centered factors (Ali et al., 2004), harsh slap of poverty (Richter-Kornweitz, 2010), rapid urbanization and modernization (White, 1996), they, finally, face a routine of exploitation, intimidation and harassment (Human Rights Watch, 1999) on the streets due to lack of adult protection and guidance (Mander, 2001; Desai, 2010) and thus they become anti- social elements (Onyekakeyah, 2013) indulging in theft, prostitution, drug dealing and addiction etc. (Deb, 2006) which our society encounters every day. On the streets these immature children have to face social, political and economic problems in diversified ways from a very close point of view. Some of them know the harmful effect of some kind of attitudes; therefore, they try to avoid these too. But most of them are not very much keen, so their fate or uncertainty pushes them to be misguided and go in vain. This is a common picture of most of the respondents of my study areas. However, in response to their pain, shocks, suffering and difficulties the coping mechanisms and strategies adopted by them are viewed "rational within the confines of their social world" (Wanger, Lyimo and Lwendo, 2012, p. 43).

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND ROLE OF RESEARCHER

Studying street children is critical because they may shy in certain situations or assume roles and feelings that are unexpected from them by the researcher (Langston, Abbot, Lewis & Kellet, 2005) and they lack "proper knowledge and understanding to relate their experiences" (Kellet & Ding, 2004, p. 165). They seem reluctant to interact with people because of their fear, feeling of being alienated and of lower

social status (Behura and Mohanty, 2005). Since most of the street children mistrust adults and remain unwilling to express their life experiences “to a stranger on a survey instrument, no matter how sensitive or friendly the interviewer may be” (Bourgois, 2003, p. 12), to conduct this research assistance was taken from UCEP by conducting research in its two schools in Mirpur and Lalbagh areas in Dhaka city. UCEP is a prominent NGO working with the working and disadvantaged children by mainly supporting them with basic education and skill development trainings. As most street children are suspicious to disclose their life experiences to others (Conticini, 2007), rapport building with enough gentle patience was found crucial and ultimately effective to gauge as much reliable data as possible.

**3.2 PREPARATION OF DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENT**

A checklist was developed as an instrument to collect empirical data. The checklist was comprised of different parts containing questions based on the objectives of the study. Broad topics to be covered were: (a) baseline information, (b) conception about vulnerability, (c) migration, (d) livelihood of the street children (night shelter, sources of water, use of toilet, frequency of taking shower, clothing, food habit, , health, occupation, income, expenditure and savings, ownership), (d) the problems street children face in their everyday life (livelihood related problems, sexual abuse and violence related problems, drug abuse etc.) and (e) the survival mechanism of the street children (educational status and skill, earnings and savings, begging, theft and other criminal activities, creative thought, Go and NGO support etc.).

**3.3 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

To grasp their life experiences through the lens of the identification of the problems they face and their survival and coping mechanism, qualitative data seemed inevitable approach to undertake. Therefore, to generate a ‘procedural framework’ (Remenyi et al, 2003) for the study a combination

its effects. Focus Group Discussion, widely used in qualitative research, is “limited to those situations where the assembled group is small enough to permit genuine discussion among all its members” (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990, p. 10). Here the role of the researcher is facilitative. He/she knows in advance what topics or what aspects of question he/she wishes to cover. Here the respondents have the freedom to explore their own ideas and thoughts. In the current study four FGDs were conducted: two FGDs were held in Mirpur and two others

**TABLE 2**  
BASIC INFORMATION OF FGD CHILD PARTICIPANTS

Name of Places		Background of the Street Children					Sl. No. of FGDs	Name of NGOs & Places of FGDs Held	
		Boys who stay on pavements	Boys from NGO	Boys who stay on/under over-bridges	Girls from NGO	Girls who stay on pavements			Girls who live in slums
No. of Respondents according to Location	Mirpur	04	02	02	02	02	03	1 <sup>st</sup>	UCEP
		06	02	02	02	00	05	2 <sup>nd</sup>	UCEP
	Lalbagh	06	05	01	04	02	05	3 <sup>rd</sup>	UCEP
		04	04	00	03	01	07	4 <sup>th</sup>	UCEP

were held in Lalbag in Dhaka city. In both of these places FGDs were held in the UCEP School. In the FGDs a total number of 74 respondents (both beneficiary and non-beneficiary street children) were interviewed in 4 different segments in Mirpur and Lalbagh in Dhaka city of Bangladesh with the organizational support of UCEP (See Tables 2). In the FGDs the participants (street children) were asked to tell about their socio-economic status with the application of checklist prepared on the basis of the stated research objectives. Open questions and answers formed the main areas of discussions with the technical session at the time of FGDs.

**Case Studies**

As one of the prominent tools in qualitative research case study, “an attempt to gather information on an individual from as many sources as possible” (McQueen and Knussen, 2002, p. 12), was also adopted in this study. Nine (09) case studies were conducted during data gathering period from the street children. Case studies were administered among 9 respondents in the mentioned places.

**4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Background Information**

According to certain indicators like dwelling condition, income level, food habit, education and health the street children who were interviewed at the time of focus group discussion represented mostly landless lower-class category. The respondents were of ages between 5 and 18 years. An absolute majority of the respondents could recollect the name and address of their parents. On the streets most of the respondents were without their parents, fathers or mothers. Most of them were Muslims. All of them were unmarried except one. In table 1.1 it can be observed that among 74 respondents there were pavement dwelling (i.e., by the sides of roads, on footpaths, by the sides of buildings etc.), over-bridge dwelling, slum dwelling and some beneficiary both male and female street children at the time of FGDs.

**TABLE 1**  
DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT EVENTS IN THE STUDY

Name of the event	Total No. of Event	Number of Respondents/Participants in Different Places (Age Limit: 5 -18 Years)						
		Mirpur	Lalbagh	High court Maszar	Dhaka University	Kawrar Bazaar	Framgate	New Market
Case Study	09	02	02	01	01	01	01	01
FGD	04	02 (32)	02 (42)	...	...	...	...	...

of FGDs (focus group discussions) and case studies were applied in the field investigation in different places of Dhaka city (See Tables 1) with an intention to find out the problems faced by the street children. In Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh with a population of 15 million people (Plan Bangladesh, 2005), there are about 5 million of people who are very poor (CUP, 2005). Among many others some of those who live in the greatest poverty are the street children. There are up to 500,000 street children living and working on the streets of Dhaka City (ARISE, 2001).

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

In Focus Group Discussion (FGD) the main function of the interviewer is to focus attention upon a given experience and

## 4.1 Life Style of the Street Children

### Conception about Vulnerability

According to the respondents of the FGDs and case studies the vulnerable children are those who live on the street, who works on the street. Many of them mention that the vulnerable children are those who suffer from malnutrition, insufficient food, lack of shelter, lack of education, lack of proper treatment facilities, lack of emotional support, lack of security, who are engage in criminal activities, drug addicts, sexually abused ones, child prostitutes, and Tokais. According to most of the respondents the parentless and guardianless children are the vulnerable children. One of the respondent in a case study said, "Amago moto somossay ar keda ase? Khaite pai na, raite ghumer somossa, pulisher gutani ar mainser bokuni khaia konomote baicha asi" (Are there anybody suffer of problems like us? We have been passing a mere livelihood with scarce food, insufficient problematic night sleep even enduring torture of police and rebukes and scolds of people).

### Conception about street children

The respondents viewed that the conception of street children are different to different persons. Some people call them as raster pola, bejonma, kangal, fakir, chotolok etc. Considering many other things the respondents decided that s street children are those who are without their parents, who are guardianless, who are scolded by other people, who are unsecured in their every sphere of life, who have no other means to leave the street. One of the respondents said while case study, "Amrai to potho shishu. Amoago loke Totaki koy. Ar koiboito: amra tokaia choli, vhangai bechi, moila ghati" (We are street children. People call us Tokai. Rightly they can say so since we collect things from garbage and sell those relinquished goods to earn a living). Another respondent said "Nam amar Rani. Loke amare 'Nisi Rani' boila dake: raitee amar gotor naki ranir lahan dehai" (My name is Rani. People call me night queen: people think that my body seems to be the body of a queen.)

### Migration status

From my study I found that many of the street children came to Dhaka with their relatives like father or mother or both, with uncle (maternal uncle in general and rarely with paternal uncle), local neighbours and the like. Many others came alone. Reasons like poverty and lack of opportunities for income generating activities (IGA), absence of guardians after the demise of parents, stepmother's oppression, unwillingness to study, physical torture by parents, neglect by adult member of family, stepfather's oppression, natural calamities like flood etc., attraction of urban life, absence of father and burden to maintain the family etc. were mainly forced the children to come to the streets of Dhaka from different places like Gazipur, Mymensingh, Khulna etc. All the respondents reported that such a migration to Dhaka was viewed by them to be a solution to their problems. Many of them came to Dhaka either sitting on the roof of a bus or train at almost little or no cost. A large part of children found not willing to go back home because of no income opportunity in the locality, oppression by stepmother/father, attraction to city life, becoming addicted, and emotional hit mainly. It can therefore be said that as an emotional attachment to economic and non-economic reasons children are pushed and pulled to migrate from their locality to the destination Dhaka for a desired or

better living. Such reasons and factors are also applicable for their decision whether to return back to their place of origin or locality.

### Night shelter/ sleeping place at night

Street children congregate wherever there is a possibility to find money and food. Mostly they have no fixed and permanent place to live and sleep. Limited numbers of beneficiary children have the scope to sleep in the day care centres (DICs). A standard place to live and sleep is secondary- they choose to sleep near the sources of income, taking some care to avoid being rounded up by the policemen and other governmental officials. During day time they used to move from here to there and take rest at market places, road side and other places. In the night boys mainly sleep in the areas like pavements (footpaths, public parks, etc), under and over the over-bridges. Most of the girl participants live in the slum with their parents and relatives. They frequently change their living place. There are some problems for what they need to change their address off and on. Even, they change their locality as well as staying place. Some of them reported that they never stay always in the slums. Therefore, most of them have the experience to live and sleep in different places as floating people. Interesting to note that many of the respondents sai, "Jekhane Rat, Sekhane Kat" (Sleep there, where the night falls).

### Sources of water (drinking, bathing and others)

Most of the respondents use supply water including some other sources like footpath restaurants, tea stalls, shops etc. Beneficiary children can drink and bathe in the drop-in-centres (DICs). Some other respondents use pond and river water for bathing and washing clothes. Generally for bathing in a public tub (locally called house) it costs 2/3 TK for a bucket of water. In slum areas they have to face a lot of difficulties (especially in the summer season) for collecting drinking water. Stalking between the slum dwellers for this purpose to collect water from a government set public tap or tube-well. One of the respondent interestingly mentioned, "Therefore, children of the slums at that time search out WASA pipe line, make whole in it and collect water very secretly."

### Frequency of taking shower

Street children who live on pavements take shower when they happened to be around the source of supply water and if they get a chance. Such chance comes once or twice in a week and is termed as "irregular". Some children take bath regularly in ponds, in different day care centres and in the slums. Beneficiary children in some cases have the opportunity to take bathe almost regularly in some of the DICs.

### Use of toilet

Street children use different locations for toilet purpose. Pavement dwellers generally use road side places early in the morning generally. In case of slum dwellers one slab toilet are generally assigned for 20 to 30 families which is quite time consuming, boring and often chaos causing because of the big lines where even there is the priority of the 'mastans'. It is common to spend 1 TK for discharging urine and for releasing stool it costs 2/3 TK. Most of them discharge urine anywhere under open sky. At suitable times as a decent choose they use mosque toilet, medical toilet and the like. However, for toilet purpose many times they selects places under open sky at the

edge of a field, rail-lines, roadside places, in pond etc. Since under open sky discharging becomes critical for girls mostly for security and shyness, mostly in day time they are, therefore, obliged to use public toilet mosque toilet, medical toilet and the like even it costs. Sometime some of the vulnerable girls discharge those while bathing in the river Buriganga or in a pond. It is common to the beneficiary street children to use drop-in-centres both for bathing and discharging without any cost. However, most of the girls use open sky place mostly early in the morning or in the dead of night if it is urgent. One of the boy respondents said: "Gorib maiyara r ki korbo. Nodite gosol korte giya panir vetor haiga dukki diya onno dike jay r gop koira gu vaisa ute panir upre" (What else can do the poor girls? At the time of bathing in the river they release faeces dipping into water and rise in some other place. Soon the faeces skimmed up the water and floats to distant places).

### Food habit

Circumstances decide which food the children should eat. Most of the street children usually take rice once or twice a day if they have money. Puffed rice, bread/cake prepared at roadsides are taken as Tiffin in the morning. Sometimes they also eat at a very lower price in the roadside open sky restaurants squatting almost on the pavements and footpaths. Street children who do not have capacity of earning take squandered food thrown away in the garbage by hotels, community centres and city dwellers etc. Most of the respondents eat twice in a day. Beneficiary children have the opportunity in some of the DICs to get food at the cost of just a token money. However different times they are also given snacks. But for the vast majority of the street children access to food is precarious. In some acute cases some of the street children have to pass a day with little or no food at all. Actually, their sources of food collection vary. They encounter an acute hand-to-mouth existence.

### Clothing

According to the respondents most of the street children do not have more than one set of cloth which becomes most of the time torn, dirty, and undersized. Girls are forced to wear the same cloth even after bathing. This case is also true for the male children also. However they have experiences of losing their clothes if kept in insecure place. It is common to the street children that they lack secure place like locker etc. to preserve safe their belongings. They have to suffer a lot in the winter for the lack of suitor, jacket or other warming cloth. Since most of the street children live on the pavement of streets, in the rainy season sometimes they are forced to wear wet clothes since there is no timetable of raining and they lack more than one set of cloth.

### Means of survival (occupation)

It was evident in the responses of the street children that most of their occupations were informal. However, the means of their survival were found to be quite atypical. Some of the street children, who used to live with their parents in the roadside shanties, had to do different kinds of unpaid household works by the sides of income generating activities mostly on the roads. But majority of the street children used to do non-domestic works for their living. However, considerable numbers of street children were found to be involved in different marginal occupations (e.g. begging, street vending,

remnants and edibles picking from dustbins, prostitution, selling flowers on the roads to the passerby etc.) and few of them responded for wage labour (Minti, working in tanneries, lathe machine etc.)

### Income, expenditure and savings

The daily income of the street children was found quite different and unequal. Generally a Tokai used to get at least Taka 30, while a flower seller's regular income was Taka 25-30. A floating child prostitute was reported to earn Taka 150-300 generally on a daily basis. Even it was found that some street children were too small to earn their bread. Moreover, most of them lacked surplus although had to maintain and support their family with their little earnings. In an acute hardship of hand to mouth economic condition most of them had to struggle the hardest for a mere subsistence. Although a considerable number of street children used to save money to mohajans (remnant traders) and 'bara bhais' (local hoodlums/senior street children), in most cases these deposited money were misappropriated by them at lame excuses. Therefore, sometimes such provocative almost forced deposit revealed to them futile. Since younger and unpopular street children were found insecure and most vulnerable to torture, threats etc. the so-called 'bara bhais' used to compel and comprehend them to deposit security money and/or toll so that they could be protected and mostly a regular deposit so that the deposited money could be used for the depositor at the time of his/her emergency. Very few respondents spoke for the NGOs micro financing activity as a means of depositing their money for their own sake. One of the respondents said: Kam koira khaita teka kamai kori. Ar hei takath thon boro bhaigo teka deon lage. Baicha asi konomote (Working hard and soul physically I have to earn money. But alas! I am obliged to pay extortion to local hoodlums/ senior street children. I am surviving somehow). Another respondent said: Saradin kam korleo pet voira khaoner teka hoy na. Teka jomamu kemne? (The earning at the cost of all day long hard working becomes insufficient to eat according to my need. How could I save money?)

### Healthcare, diseases and treatment

Street children were found suffering from different skin diseases. However, cold fever, sneezing, diarrhoea, dysentery, cough, headache etc. are common diseases to those children. In the FGDs it was observed that most of the beneficiary street children were aware about different sexually transmitted disease (STD) and none of them reported to be a sufferer of that. The only one street girl flesh trader in the case study reported that she was very careful all the time of her work to force her clients to use contraceptive like condom. Nevertheless, some customers few times forced her previously to trade flesh without any of those. Fortunately she was lucky not to attack by STDs. For treatment purpose the beneficiary street children generally get minimum medical facilities from some of the DICs. There are some referral systems among different medical centres that the beneficiary could get support from other specific places as well. Children who are not beneficiaries of any organization and live on pavements suffer from skin diseases, pain in stomach, defects in eyesight. Their friends help them during sickness. These children have limited scope of free treatment and other medical facilities. One of the respondent at the time of case study said, "Asukh hoile r kedai dekhbo. Asukh loiyai kame jaite hoy, naile khamu ki. Besi soilda kharap hoile kam o nai, khaon o nai" (There is none to

look after me at the time of my sickness. No matter whether I am sick, I have to go to work to earn my living. If I become very ill, then no work and therefore I have to starve).

### **Substance abuse and street children**

The use of drugs by street children although functional in most circumstances, tends to add to their health and other difficulties. The drugs used by street children are usually those, which are most readily available and cheap like Gul (a kind of tobacco intoxicant). Some of the respondents said that they had smoking habit, while some other replied to be addicted to grass (Ganza). Street children get used to substance abuse to keep themselves awake for work or being intoxicated for thrill like Bamboo Cigarette (long self-made item with the remnants of few used cigarettes pouring a part of the tail of a lizard into it with some tobacco elements sometimes with grass as well). To get to sleep, they may use drugs like dandy (a type of glue) etc. to anaesthetize physical or emotional pain, or to replace the need for food. These are likely to increase health risks and may lead to higher levels of exploitation and violence. Few of the respondents said that they had previously smoking habit, but the guidance of UCEP personnel had inspired the beneficiary street children to forsake smoking and other addiction.

### **Educational status and skill**

As evident in tables 1 and 2, most of the street children who participated in the FGDs and case studies were non-school going. Most of the school-going street children were the beneficiaries of UCEP NGO. The school-going street children reported that they were being taught some skill development training in the mentioned NGO. Among the vast majority of the street children the absence of any specific skills were stunningly found to secure a decent living. Most of them were adept in their informal occupation like remnant collection, rag picking, Minti (carrying shopping goods of other to the destination of the purchaser mostly in a basket on head) etc. Most of them wished to study if they get adequate financial support maintain their living because they themselves had to earn their living at the cost of very hard lowest paying works. One of the respondent at the time of case study said, "Satmar auttchar and baper abohelae amare baddho korche porerbarite kam korte. Ami porber chai, schoole jaiber chai"(the torture by step mother and father's carelessness forced me to work in others' houses. I want to study; I want to go to school).

### **Ownership**

In the study street children were found to have minimum booty and belongings with them. It was also found that girl street children had more belongings than that of the street boys. Most of the street boys' had torn shirt and pant that they wear, gunny or big synthetic bags, etc., and the iron road through which they find out the required materials from the dustbins. Most of the girls of the study area had one-two sets of cloths though there were two little street girl children who had only a pant and not more than that and some cheap cosmetics. Even many of them reported to have some cheap possessions. Most of their parents' had no homestead and cultivable land in their own locality, though few having only homestead area.

### **Recreational activities**

Most of the respondents said that they had little scope for

proper recreational activities since they had to earn their own living daily. However, sometimes they used to gossip mostly on the latest films and action heroes/heroines, visit Shishu Park (children's park) freely once in a week, watch television programs standing by the sides of restaurants, television show-rooms etc. Sometimes playing blind man's bluff, hide and seek, Dang Guli (a local game played with one big and one large pieces of sticks in an open space with at least two persons) etc. were common to them. Among the beneficiaries puzzle box games, carom, watching television inside the premise of NGOs were usual forms of recreational activities. They also liked to visit different shopping centres, but unfortunately in most centres they were not allowed to enter. One of the street children said, "Amago abar anondo kiher? Kam koira, loker laththi-guta khia choli" (Why should we have amusements? We have to survive by toiling the hardest enduring misconduct by common people). One of the girl children said, "Amar valal vala putul kinna khaloner khub mon chai, kintu ki korum taha nai abar furti kiher?" (My mind lingers to purchase best dolls and to play with them. But alas! I have no money to purchase. Why should I play with dolls for enjoyment?).

### **Social bondage: sharing of happenings, group networks and gang culture**

In the FGDs and case studies it was quite clear that the street children were found to be the polarized segment of the mainstream society mostly excluded, ignored and deprived of their basic human rights. Nonetheless, almost all the street children responded for having group relations and interaction with same categories of children mostly of same age category. Those street children living with parents in the slums and streets had also interaction with their family members. Street children share their joys and feelings mostly with their friends. Interestingly they said that when they were about to make friendship or intimate bond with other child/children a mutual understanding of blood mixing was a requisite to execute. That is, by piercing any part of the body with blade (mostly the hands) of both of them, the street children join together their hands with one another in the pierced places and make oath to keep close friendship between them. Such kind of bondage can be created among more two children as well. But this was not the cases among most of the respondents. The respondents mostly used to stay in groups and share their happenings and feeling with each other. They used to make themselves up-to-date with information on Kangali Voj (feast may be arranged by any person or organization for the poor and destitute people), Kulkhani (feast arranged on the occasion of the death of any person at anytime from day of his/her burial till the following 40<sup>th</sup> day), political strikes and hartals, raids by policemen etc. The information of political strikes and hartals were important to them since they were paid by the leaders to participate in the procession, to march holding the placards or for picketing. Since most of them used to live and sleep on the sides streets and different pavements, so they got the chances of being caught by policemen on any occurrence mostly occurred in any market place or nearby locality or in the political processions. If they were caught by the policemen, many times they were detained in the police custody and were being tortured in few cases. So the information of raids by policemen was also crucial to them that they used to get from their siblings. Moreover, since most of the non-beneficiary street children used to loiter in different

places, therefore, they had the susceptibility of being caught by policemen and local hoodlums and consequently being tortured. Therefore, for their survival, security and earning of a better living, some of the street children became the part of or formed different gangs and were, therefore, indulged in anti-social activities like hijacking, drug dealing, theft etc. In most cases the Bara Bhais (senior mastan street children or adults) controlled them, tortured them, protected them as best as possible and guided them so that gangs could last long and flourish. Few of the respondents said that in the gangs they had different pseudonyms as a safeguard of not being identified by police or other authorities for any criminal activity.

### Aspirations

Although the respondents gave varied response on their future aspirations, most of them wanted to be doctor, advocate, hotel owner, driver nurse, police or mastan (hoodlum). Many of them said that they were not sure what they would like to be but a good earning job was most cherished by them. A large number of them wanted to get married (mostly the girls). Few of them hoped to go back home. They admitted that their previous attitude was bad, referring running away from home, and some added, becoming deviant and drug addicted. They hope to do well in future if they get proper support booth from the GOB and NGOs. One of the boy children said, "Vaijan amner lahan jodi kopalda hoito- jodi sikhit hoite partam taile kosto dur hoito..." (Brother, if I were like you, if I were an educated person, then all my sufferings would be vanished). Another boy child said, "Amar kono dukkho nai. Amar Ukil hoite mone chai..." (I have no pain in my mind. I want to be a pleader) One of the girl children said, "Maiya hoiya jonmanda paap hoise. Pothe-ghate loke ku nojor dey, baje einggit kore, takto koira chare auneke. Ekbar biada korbar parleii hoilo. Samiye dekhbo" (It has become a great sin to be born as a girl. In the roads people look with lust, wave for illegal sexuality, many tease a lot. Once, if I can get married, my husband will look after me). Another boy child said "Ami nayok Mannar lahan police hoiber chai. Police hoiya soitander pidamu. Loke vala koibo" (I want to be a police like film actor Manna. Becoming a police, I will teach good listen to the evil doers. People will appreciate me.).

### 4.2 Problems Encountered

In the FGD and case study sessions the participants expressed their views/ comments and listed a series of problems that the street children face in their street life. Livelihood related problems including poverty, criminal activities, torture, environmental hazards, diseases, sexual abuse, insecurity etc. in terms material condition, economic condition and social condition have almost identical threat to the endangered street life of the street children. Their service providers also delivered important information about this nitty-gritty.

**Lack of access to basic amenities:** Most of the days the street children had insufficient food intake. Uncertainty in accessing daily food sometimes forced them to stay without food by fasting and skipping meals. No specific and secured place of residence and/or lack of shelter had forced a lot of them to sleep in the open places like the pavements of roads, buildings, houses etc. Use open public places for defecating-squatting, difficulties in bathing, and washing clothes and drying them. Moreover, no safe places to keep their valued

goods like cloths, gunny bags etc. had encountered them of being robbed.

### Lack of capabilities

Hard working for a mere livelihood had triggered many of the street children with no opportunity and time to get basic education and skill development activities to draw a good job. Although most of them wished to overcome their endangered street livelihood related penuries, but they lacked adequate will-power and confidence to do so. To keep the wolf of hunger away from their stomach many of them were obliged to embrace hazardous jobs. Aladdin's lamp is a myth to change their situation.

### Powerlessness (disempowerment, social exclusion, discrimination, injustice, abuse)

Most of the street children reported of being bullied by unscrupulous people, troubled by musclemen, police and child lifters, robbed by elders who used to snatch money, forced to do menial and dirty jobs/acts by devious persons and looked down upon by society. Many of them were forced to do difficult type of work at very low wages in comparison of others although even enduring exploitation and violence by employers. Ill treatment by police and adult members of society, unscrupulous persons, and parents/step-parents/guardians was common among considerable number of street children. Molestation by hoodlums and bara bhais (mastans) was reported by some of the street girls. They found none to pay heed their voice. Moreover, during Hartal (political strike) and other such evening they were being captured and in some cases were detained by the police.

### Poor health and vulnerability

Weak health due to hard work, diseases and malnutrition were common health problems of them as the respondents said. Inability to access medical treatment was acute among the sick street children. Almost all of them had to face frustration of hard working street life in comparison of the children of mainstream society.

### Weak livelihood

Low income, hazardous working conditions mostly saturated with physical and mental torture and abuse by employers and seniors, severe job insecurity, not enough earning to meet daily needs and, for many, to get two meals in a day were the representation of very weak livelihood of the street children. However, no place to keep cash and very often being robbed by bara bhais (local mastans/senior street children) were responsible for the agglomeration of their predicaments. Few of the respondents reported that they were cheated by the bhangari mohajon (remnant trader) who very often on different lame excuses used to misappropriate their deposited cash.

### Lack of protection and security (physical, economic and emotional)

Absence of parents/ family members, no near and dear ones, no affection and loved ones were great emotional threats among the respondents. They had a continuous feeling of being scared and insecurity due to endangered street living without guardians, protection from hoodlums and miscreants, mostly temporary and hazardous working condition with low wages etc.

### Lack of recreation

Lack of playing time due to tiresome long hours of work for mere subsistence was a common situation among most of the respondents. However, many lack the idea of a sound and healthy recreation and therefore, indulge, in some case, in wicked thoughts and activities.

### Lack of social ties and networks

Since most of the street children were found instable to stay specifically in a specific place for a longer period, they actually lack proper social tiers with others. Since the mainstream society, in most cases, hates them due to their dirt living on the street, they lack social relation with them. Moreover, they did not have any union to uphold their needs and rights.

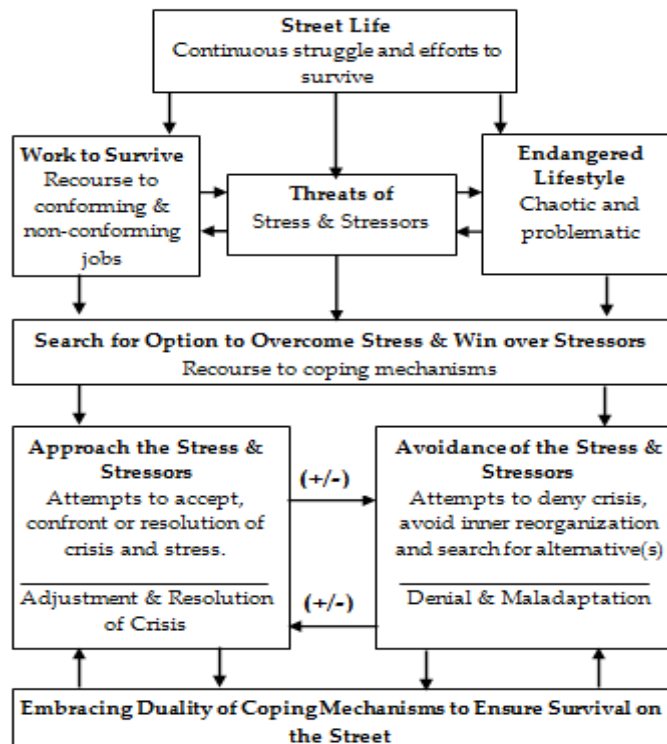
### Insufficient institutional support

According to the respondents the institutional supports were insufficient to ameliorate the predicaments of all the street children.

### 4.3 Street Children's Coping Mechanism to Survive

Although how the street children survive to the respective lifestyle issues combating whether by avoiding or approaching different problems as already outlined in the earlier point, for an in-depth understanding of some of their specific and special coping mechanism to survive are necessary to mention. In response to lack of access to basic amenities, a common strategy generally adopted by the street children was to keep patience and endure the problem until they found any solution. Such attempts to keep patience and endure the problem is the representation of their approach strategy of coping and once finding an alternative, if possible, displays their avoidance coping mechanism. If it was a food crisis, many of them used to eat the leftovers at open restaurants, stay

without food by fasting and skipping meals, try to collect waste food from restaurants, sometimes take food by begging or buy at lowest price 'Puliser Bhat' (the relinquished food of the patrolling police) or relinquished food sold by 'khala's (the roadside temporary rice and curry selling hotels run by ladies) on the street when they got/ earned money. Street children and youth, who attached together in groups, may also used to cook according to their purchasing ability, beg or steal. In food related facts it becomes apparent that street children can use both approach strategy of coping and avoidance coping mechanism simultaneously at a time. All most all the street dwelling street children had to take the risk of sleeping on the street, wherever space is available under the open sky although during rainy and winter season they had to suffer a lot. Due to lack of proper bathing facilities and opportunities many non-beneficiary street children had to stay without bathing for 2-3 days together. Such denial of bathing is an example of short term avoidance coping mechanism. Although sometimes they used to bath but it was in most cases without washing clothes. Moreover, in most times getting into the water after washing the dress the used to dry those on their body since they generally lacked more than one set of cloth. Squatting in the open places at the cost of risk and shame was common among most of street dwelling children. It was common to the non-beneficiary street children to lack adequate capabilities to seek and secure any suitable job. So, generally they had to look for mostly informal jobs of both conforming (socially accepted jobs) and non-conforming (socially rejected/prohibited jobs) ones. If it is a conforming job (e.g., flower selling, remnant collection etc.), it still offers insufficient earning to bear their livings. As a result they had to suffer from hunger, ill or no treatment during diseases etc. So still they had to encounter different kinds of stress and stressors in the like manner. Therefore, many street children had to indulge in drug addiction and intricate in anti-social activities which are non-conforming jobs and are responsible to throw them ultimately into the negative and stigmatized world. To face their weak livelihood, most of the respondents used to work the hardest, in some cases, even by begging, stealing, pick-pocketing, violence, prostitution, drug dealing including acts of self-mutilation and self-humiliation etc. At this moment street children are in conflict with law. So their continuous struggle and efforts to survive on thorny path of innumerable threats of stress and stressors obliged them to find out coping strategies (Fig. 1). In response to the powerlessness issues like disempowerment, social exclusion, discrimination, injustice and abuse the respondents used to avoid musclemen and change locations when facing major problems, yield to pressures and bullies and sexual assaults by musclemen's and others, tolerate beatings, ill-behaviour and abuse by adults, try to find elders who can protect them from trouble ('Bara Bahais'), seek sympathy, try to avoid talking to unknown people as much as they can, and/or try to avoid or run away from police and crooks on the street. Being most of the time unfed, torn and dirt clothed, unclean, unwashed, the street children reported to be susceptible to various diseases and most of the times they used to endure the suffering of diseases since they lacked money. In response to physical, economic and emotional insecurity and lack of protection the respondents used to make friendship with other street children, try to cope with the emotional vacuum within the surrounding environment, always feel scared and unwanted, save money to Bhangari Mohajans,



**Fig. 1:** Duality of coping mechanism adopted by street children either approaching or avoiding stress and stressors.

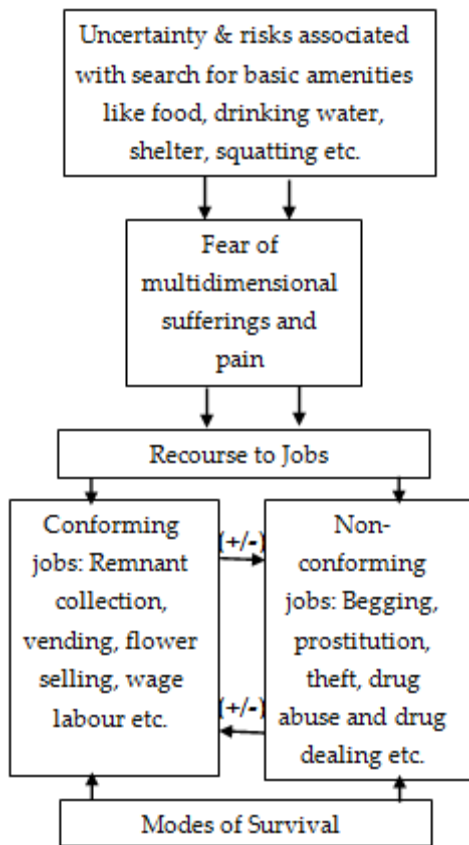


Bara Bhais etc. Street children reported not to feel huge upsurge for lack of recreation. However, indigenous and local games were common to them to play at the time of their leisure. Since most of the respondents had weak social ties and networks, they got used to exploitation by others, listened to foul language used by others and got beaten up for the slightest cause, tried to shy away from people etc. A big part of the respondents were non-beneficiary street children who used to lack institutional support for a decent life. Therefore, they practiced the habit of patience at their danger, taking aid from familiar and close street kids mostly from those who were the beneficiaries of different organizations or indulged them in the gangs of 'Bara Bhais'.

**4 CONCLUSION**

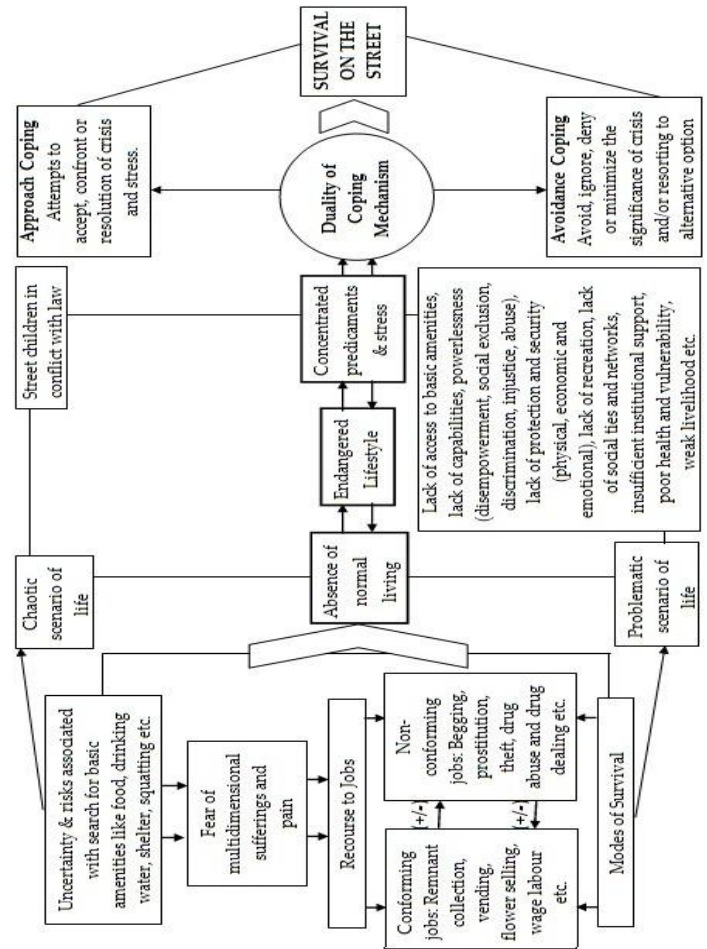
The present menace of mushrooming of different categories of disadvantaged, abandoned, vulnerable, destitute street living, working and playing children in the cities has posed an

street survival. Although many of those jobs as found in the findings are conforming like remnant collection (the tasks of Tokai), street vending, flower selling, wage labour, Minti etc., some other are viewed non-conforming with norms and values of the society. Drug dealing, theft, drug abuse, prostitution, begging etc. are examples of such non-conforming jobs. Those conforming and non-conforming jobs either both or alone determine the modes of survival of the street children (Fig. 2). Consequently those modes of survival many times fully or partially becoming chaotic and problematic conspicuously bring forth 'street children in conflict with law'. On the other hand, street children have to face multifarious problems spawned by economic deficiency, lack of social and family



**Fig. 2:** Modes of survival adopted by street children

intense threat to humanity and child rights. The livelihood trajectories of the street children entangled with terrific and aggregated predicaments and problems is nothing but the presentation of their endangered and chaotic livelihood that requires very selective and careful choice and application of coping mechanisms to survive on the streets. Palpably the aforesaid findings have already distilled the fact that the uncertainty and risks associated with search for basic amenities like food, drinking water, shelter, bathing, squatting (use of toilet) etc. impose fear of multidimensional sufferings and pain (e.g., hunger, insecurity etc.) among street children. Therefore, they have to recourse to jobs for securing their



**Fig. 3:** Surviving on the street.

protection, illiteracy, powerlessness, deprivation, social exclusion, physical and mental harassment etc. Being atypical with the mainstream children of the society the lifestyle of the street children in terms of their food habit, night shelter/sleeping place at night, sources of water (drinking, bathing and others), frequency of taking shower, use of toilet, clothing, means of survival (occupation), income, expenditure and savings, healthcare, diseases and treatment, educational status and skill, ownership, substance abuse and street children, recreational activities, social bondage: sharing of happenings, group networks and gang culture and aspirations, as revealed above, is symptomatic to continuous challenges, threats and struggles. Therefore, as evident above, the

lifestyle pattern of the street children is devoid of normal standards. The absence of normal living becoming chaotic and problematic offers street children an endangered lifestyle, which is entangled and concentrated with innumerable predicaments and stress. Such problems and predicaments compel them to excogitate coping mechanisms either by avoiding or approaching those pondering their gravity and street children's own capabilities. As viewed by the street children, such duality of coping mechanism is destined to ensure their survival on the street (Fig. 3).

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