

DELINQUENCY AMONG STREET CHILDREN IN KARACHI: THE CHALLENGES TO POLICE AND FORENSIC MEDICINE

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ABSTRACT

Street Children are homeless, isolated and socially deprived children living in streets, parks or shrines. They are without adequate protection.¹ These children, therefore, are at high risk because of their homelessness.² *The objective of this work was to analyse prevailing delinquency among street children (SC) in Karachi, and challenges posed by it to police and forensic medicine experts. It was a descriptive study. The study will be conducted on two hundred SC, at Sadder Town, Karachi.*

Material and Method: A pre-designed questionnaire will be used by the researcher in simple language. Interview will be conducted at Sadder Town, Karachi in the presence of a social worker from Azad Foundation who remains at Jahangir Park with the SC. Simple random sampling technique will be applied. Inclusion criteria will be SC aged between 12 – 17 years, who sleep in street at night. A minimum three years stay on street will be mandatory. Children who visit home or sleep at work place will be excluded.

Results: Interview with respondents who willingly offered to cooperate revealed that the delinquent behaviour among SC is on an increase. Calculated mean age was 14.76 ± 1.47 years. There are 87% SC who are using a variety of substances while 42.2% prefers Glue Sniffing. It is very difficult to survive alone on street, so 88% SC lives in gangs. Among different gangs 82.8% of SC have physical conflicts with each other or with other gangs. The possession of place is the commonest reason in 41% SC for gang conflict. Street children keep some objects which can be used as weapon when needed. Sharp instruments, like blades are carried by 45% SC. Self – inflicted wounds present in 49.2% of cases while the reason for self – inflicted wound in 39% SC is to kill sweet memories.

Keywords: Street Children, Delinquency, Gang, and Substance.

INTRODUCTION

Street Children are homeless, isolated and socially deprived children living in streets, parks or shrines. They are without adequate protection.¹ These children, therefore, are at high risk because of their homelessness.² Delinquency among SC further adds to their dismal situation. Juvenile delinquency is a form of behaviour based on the values and norms of a deviant sub-culture. As a result of juvenile delinquency, enormous costs are involved due to damage to the property, to lives, and the process of judicial trial of the offender. The Juvenile court system is different from adults. It is based on the concept of *Parents Patriae*.³ Thus delinquency among SC possess challenges to police and forensic medicine in particular.

In Pakistan, the number of SC is on the increase. It is already posing a complex social problems.⁴ According to a national survey in 2004, the SC in Karachi are reported to be 12 – 15 thousand.⁵ They get addicted to different kinds of drugs.⁶ These SC forms their gangs, and have the trend to conflict with the law.⁷ It is noticed that SC usually carry sharp instruments, like blades, hidden in their collar. The-

se children are part of an organized in gangs and have frequent conflicts with other gangs; the sharp instruments are prone to cause fatal injuries.⁸ These findings of the study indicate that the SC are shaping a deviant subculture in Karachi. The presence of large size of juvenile delinquents is a source of concern for the law – enforcing authorities especially in the current suicide bombing wave in the country.

The study aims to analyse: types of substance used by the SC; reasons of group conflicts among SC; and reasons for creating self – inflicted wounds by SC.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Two hundred SC aged between 12 – 17 years were selected for the interview from Jahangir Park, Saddar Town, Karachi. They were living in street for minimum of 2 years. A questionnaire was filled by the researcher in a comfortable environment in the language understandable by the respondent. Data collected was organised and analysed on SPSS version 12. The information provided by them was kept secret and locked.

RESULTS

The study shows 87% SC are using some substance regularly including Glue Sniffing 42.2%, cigarette smoking 17.9%, cannabis indica 16.8%, and opium 9.3%. These SC form their group of 6 – 16 children to ease their survivor, 88% street children live in groups. Group conflicts are common in 82.8% SC. Group conflicts are on possession of place 41%, catching new bird 25% power show 20%, and snatching 14%. Forty five percent of these children keep razor blade as weapon and 49.2% SC inflict linear cuts (SIW) to themselves. Reasons to produce self – inflicted wounds are to kill sweet memories 39%, helpless cry 12%, avoid beating by others 16%, and avoid police arrest 33%.

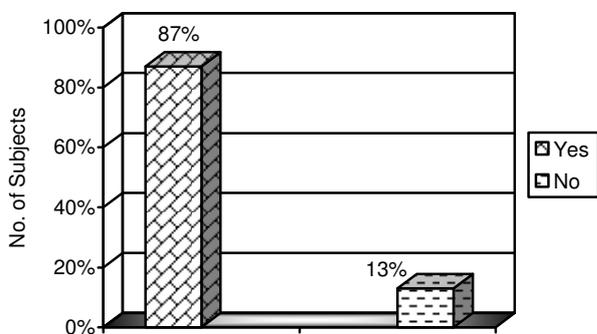


Fig. 1: Substance used.

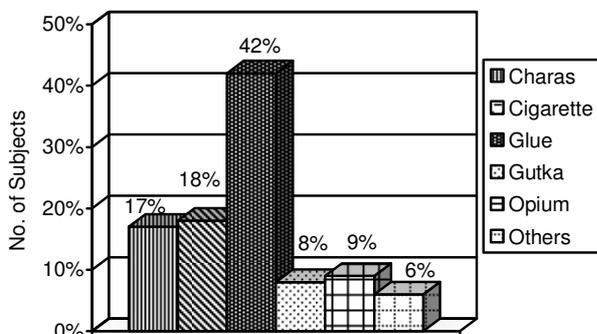


Fig. 2: Type of substance use.

DISCUSSION

Discussion related to each table indicates that delinquency among SC in Karachi must not be taken as a routine matter or a business as a usual affair. The law – enforcing authorities and especially the police and forensic medicine department must take measures to meet the emerging challenges.

The drugs being used by the SC connects them with the agencies illegally supplying these drugs. The reported 12 – 15 thousand SC in Karachi are potential threat to the social order in the city. The situ-

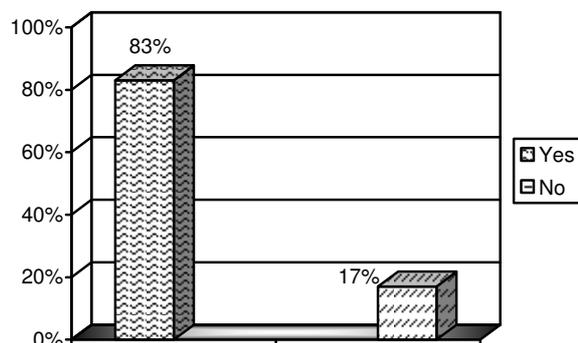


Fig. 3: Group Conflict.

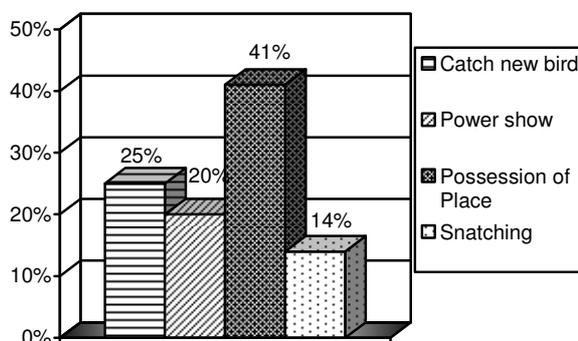


Fig. 4: Reasons for Group Conflict.

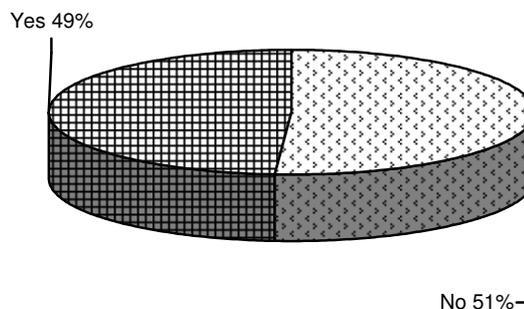


Fig. 5: Self – Inflicted Wounds.

ation calls for immediate check on the increase of SC in Karachi. Besides, a systematic approach should be adopted to control and eventually eliminate these anti-social elements. Innovative research methods on SC are being adopted in other countries by which we may be benefited. The theories of delinquency, and treatment juvenile delinquency suggest the need for research and vigilance police and forensic medicine departments.

It is very difficult to survive alone on the street. These children live in groups of about 6 – 17 chil-

dren. To get good place for living 41%, to capture new arrival at railway station or at bus stop 25%, for show of power 20% and small petty thefts and snatchings are a few examples of their conflicts. These conflicts may end up with serious injuries and create problems to law – enforcing agencies.

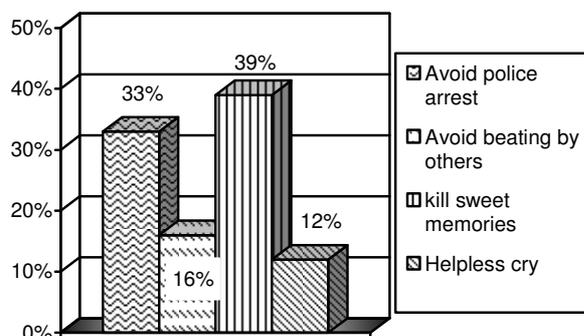


Fig. 6: Reasons for self – inflicted wounds.

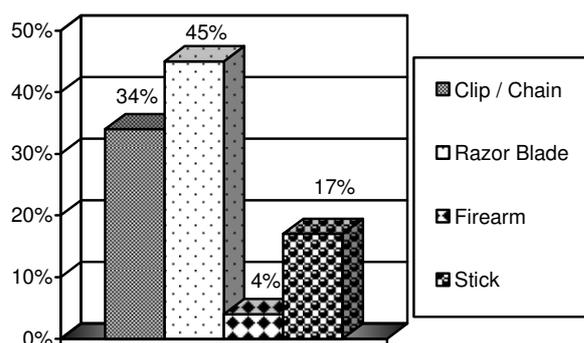


Fig. 7: Objects used in conflicts.

The creation of self – inflicted wounds shows a state of frustration in the individual. Loving and caring family in some cases is missed or sweet memories of past are most common for self creation of linear cuts. Broadly, the reason may be given a psychological or a sociological explanation. The role of the family in preventing delinquency and rehabilitation is essential. Adequate socialisation and the forging of a strong social bond are important dimensions of the family's delinquency prevention role.

It is *concluded* that the data presented above, leads to the following points.

- The drug addiction by most SC shows that they are connected with the agencies illegally supplying these drugs. These agencies clearly belong to the criminal underworld of Karachi.
- The fact that SC carry sharp instruments, like blades, and use these to cause self – inflicted wounds calls for finding reasons for this beha-

viour. The remedy lies in reviving their links with their families.

- The study of causes of conflicts among SC gangs points to their danger for law and order in Karachi, especially in the light of suicide bombing wave in the country.

Suggestions

Delinquency among SC in Karachi poses challenges to police and Forensic medicine. In response, concrete steps may be taken as follows:

- Research on this social problem should be given priority.
- In the strategy to deal with the problem, effort should be made that increase in the number of street children is checked.
- Families of the street children should be involved to ensure the rehabilitation of these children in normal life.
- Supply of drugs to the street children should be monitored, and the dealers in this business must be brought to book.
- The activities of the street children gangs should be checked through careful strategy.
- The problem has global dimensions, the experience of other countries should be benefitted from.

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