

THE KEY TO CHANGE: LISTENING TO STREET CHILDREN AND MINORITY GROUPS FOR EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

Nikhil N. Kedar

English Education Study Program, Fergusson College, Savitribai Phule University, Pune-411 007, (India)
nikhilkedar0000@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article synthesizes existing literature on street children, addressing the recognized gap in research that prioritizes their perspectives. While not based on new fieldwork, this review highlights the critical need to amplify the voices of this minority group. It emphasizes the importance of listening, particularly for professionals and policymakers, to inform effective policies and programs. Listening is presented as a crucial tool for understanding the lived experiences and diverse viewpoints of street children. This practice enables the identification of their needs, feelings, goals, and visions, particularly in social, moral, ethical, and educational domains. It facilitates a deeper comprehension of their perspectives on issues affecting their lives. Furthermore, this review argues that incorporating street children's input is essential for developing relevant and impactful programs. It critiques the common practice of implementing initiatives without consulting the intended beneficiaries. By prioritizing listening and discernment, social architects can design programs that address the specific needs of these children, aiming to improve their social, intellectual, religious, and educational well-being. This approach advocates for a shift towards participatory program development, ensuring that interventions are informed by the lived realities of street children.

Keywords: minority groups, street children, listening, advocacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of minority groups and street children has become increasingly evident in recent decades. Despite this, understanding their lived experiences remains limited, often overshadowed by negative stereotypes and societal indifference. This paper utilizes existing literature to explore the characteristics of street children, examine the complexities of defining these groups, and emphasize the challenges inherent in listening to their voices. It posits that increased public awareness of their lifestyles can foster greater sensitivity to their needs.

Listening to minority groups is a multifaceted process, demanding significant time and attention. It involves actively engaging with their narratives to understand their realities. When individuals perceive genuine interest, they are more inclined to share their thoughts and aspirations. This process is dynamic and continuous, requiring specific skills to navigate its complexities. Effective listening can build and maintain relationships while breaking down barriers.

A review of professional literature reveals a scarcity of research on this topic. This non-empirical study employs a critical analysis of research papers, journal articles, and books to assess recent findings related to street children. It highlights the importance of listening to their perspectives without resorting to sensationalism. By focusing on the value of listening, this paper aims to contribute to a more informed and empathetic understanding of these vulnerable populations.

II. DEFINITION OF MINORITY GROUPS

Wikipedia contributors (2022) opined that depending on the context, minority groups connote different usage. Nonetheless, they stated that minority groups can be understood according to demographic sizes based on characteristics or practices, such as: ethnicity, race religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Wikipedia contributors (2022) further added that these groups frequently face discrimination in the social, political, intellectual, religious and educational sphere of life. The editors of Britannica defined minority groups as a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists in a subordinate manner in each society. While the dominant group dictates who should be considered minority groups, it is still unclear what criterion is used to make such a prediction. However, the editors of further included that minority groups are generally separated and segregated socially, politically, and intellectually.

from the wider society. Depending on the given society, some minority groups may have a voice. Minority groups which are exclusively comprised of children continue to suffer on all levels of society admitted that although over the decades qualitative research incorporated children as participants, more needs to be done because ethnic minority children are yet to be represented. To better comprehend the views of children, examined the history of research with children. They concluded that trust is an essential component for gaining access to minority children. They also stated that the voices of children are vital. These voices can advance others to better comprehend the picture of the experiences of children. The voices of minority groups can inform policy makers about these children's ills. Hypothesized that minority children often lack the basic foundations for life. Many of them have little education and are stereotyped by society. Claimed that because many minority children do not engage in physical activity, they are prone to all types of diseases. This type of behaviour is often carried into adulthood. Further expressed that if this issue goes unattended, it can result in serious negative repercussions. It can cause chronic diseases relating to the liver, renal cells, breasts, endometrial, and colon and can even contribute to premature death. Opined that the lack of adequate nutrition can also precipitate diseases among children. Believed that children from minority groups often experience poverty which puts them at a great disadvantage. They experience lower socioeconomic status, live in crowded houses and are prone to illness. This scenario is even more complex when some of these minority children are deemed as street children.

III. DEFINITION OF STREET CHILDREN

It is not simple to accurately define street children. This process is complex, convoluted, and contentious affirmed that street children are not a homogenous group. Their diversity may include age, gender, ethnicity, and nationality. This implies different experiences, risks and needs, explained that some of the children live on the streets and maintain little or no contact whatsoever with parents or significant others. Some work on the streets while others return to their homes at intervals. It is unsurprising that throughout the world nearly every country views them in different fashions. A review of the literature described them as an enigma and inconspicuous.

Consortium for Street Children (2021) hypothesized that they are unnoticeable in the world and are not treated with dignity and respect by many religious organizations, government officials and policymakers. Claimed that they are considered rubbish by some because they roam the streets and rattle the neighbourhood with their rambunctious and boisterous behaviour. These children are marginalized and ostracized. Hence, they are constantly faced with all types of exclusion, discrimination, and exploitation at the social, political, intellectual and religious sphere of life. Reza and Henly (2018) posited that life on the streets is wretched and miserable and these children are continually battered with filth, disease, violence, and poverty. Asante (2019) believed that there are limited options on the streets and these children struggle and battle for survival. Similarly, Bajari and Kuswarno (2020) narrated that because street children are connected to and identified with uproar, upheaval, and abominable crime, they are considered social outcasts. On the streets they are susceptible and vulnerable to the environment. They work on the streets and undesirable places like under bridges, parking lots and vacant land. Bwambale et al. (2021) merely defined them as individuals who literally inhabit the streets. Sah (2019) mentioned that they are constantly at high risk because they are unprotected and defenceless, are exploited and abused. They are also deprived and stripped of their rights and dignity and are disregarded and rejected by society. Sah (2019) also claimed that these children require proper guidance and direction all because their only goal and aspiration is to survive on the streets. With little education and vision, their future is wretched and miserable.

Proffered countless reasons for the presence of children on the streets. Some of them included the loss of parents or significant others and the disintegration of family. Other reasons were extreme poverty, illicit drug abuse in the homes and excessive domestic violence. He further went to indicate that some adults literally send their children out to beg on the streets also agreed that inordinate poverty and lack of parental guidance encourage children to live on the streets. Consortium for Street Children (2019) noted that although many people use the terms.

A review of the literature described street children in a completely undesirable and distasteful manner. The research findings by Prasad (2021) postulated that more than a third of the street children asserted that they chose to live on the streets due to the fact that they were deprived of the affection of their family. As a result, they were disillusioned and distrustful of new acquaintances. Even the efforts to rehabilitate them by non-governmental institutions were

seemingly impossible. As a result of this great mistrust that they have towards others, Prasad (2021) further mentioned that these children may circumvent issues before they reveal the whole truth. This type of behaviour often compounds their ability to achieve their goals and desires.

Dutta (2018) asserted that life on the streets is a constant challenge for survival. According to Dutta (2018) it is paradoxical because, even though they may live in the major city, they are unable to enjoy the comforts of urban life.

Pratap and Singh (2021) believed that street children consistently crop up in several parts of the developing world. They further suggested that in as much as they are not properly protected and supervised by adults, they often end up on the streets. Pratap and Singh (2021) also claimed that street children wander the streets searching for food, water, clothing, and shelter. Their battle for survival is unceasing. In addition to neglect and exploitation, they are also prone to gang violence and various types of abuse. They are easy prey for the drug dealers and sex-traffickers and many of them are forced into prostitution (Parveen, 2019).

IV. LISTENING TO STREET CHILDREN

Hypothesized that listening to street children is an art, skill, discipline and a way of life. He further explained that listening does not mean just giving advice and good counsel. It does not mean criticizing feelings.

Listening does not try to solve problems and troubles. Opined that it is a skill that some people must acquire and hone. When carried out accurately, listening can create and maintain positive relationships postulated that it is necessary to listen to children although communication with them still needs to be explored and researched in greater detail believed that it is imperative to communicate and collaborate properly and effectively with street children. This channel of communication and collaboration ought to be transparent and engage the children as much as possible. Emphasized the value of active listening to children. They mentioned that some people may even need to learn how to listen and be non-judgmental put forward that listening can expose adults to certain language usage such as: similes, metaphors, and idioms and propel them into understanding the insight for certain jargon known and used by children in the majority. He further deduced that albeit listening is challenging and difficult as it is rewarding. Listening to the tone of children and observing their manner of behaviour in response to certain questions are of paramount significance strongly advocated that people ought to create safe spaces for street children to speak of their own free will and without inhibition. They also figured that adults must learn how to listen thoughtfully and carefully believed that listening involves caring, reflecting and not casting aspersions. It also involves empowering children with a voice. He further added that listening is a necessary tool in trying to fully grasp the views and perspectives of street children. Consequently, more prominence ought to be applied to this discipline. Too often listening is undervalued, underestimated, and oversimplified. In this contemporary society, many adults are preoccupied with their jobs and personal pursuits. They sometimes have to work for long hours, and this could hamper and obstruct their capacity and enthusiasm for listening admitted that both respect and listening are convoluted issues. Nonetheless, they were convinced that when adults listen with a respectful ear, a child-centered atmosphere is created. To effectively engage in this process, staunchly suggested that adults should weigh the interests, expectations, hopes, aspirations, and motives of children. In this way, the listening process becomes dynamic and interesting. It energizes and motivates children and moves them into speaking voluntarily and from the heart emphasized that it is essential that minority children are provided with a convenient and comfortable environment to share their stories.

Recommended one of the ways to listen effectively to children is to encourage them in conversation. She suggested that there is value when children are coaxed to express their needs, wants and ways they can achieve them. This simple but important approach gives children a sense of purpose and belonging and consequently they are unafraid of engaging in the dialogue further described that when children actively participate in conversation, they freely express themselves and personal growth and development are both evident firmly advocated that the voices of children must form part of the decision-making process. When this is accomplished in a proper manner, the end result is definitely that of a significant difference. It empowers children and provides them with a sense of autonomy and social competence. They finally embrace the distinct relationships between actions, decisions, and their consequences. They develop a deeper sense of responsibility and duty and in this way take ownership of their lives. It is convoluted but

not impossible and so, it is only fitting that street children be afforded the opportunity to share their stories. Therefore, listening to street children involves building trust and creating an environment of harmony believed/recognized that the various communities can lobby with the government to uphold the rights of children.

DeVito (2006) mentioned that there are five stages in listening: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding knew that listening is an aptitude which involves empathy and trying to appreciate the message others are conveying. Listening to the youth is intricate, sensitive and involves paying very close attention to their utterances. Listening, according to, is inherent in trying to envision the lives of street children since these same children are more likely to communicate their thoughts and feelings to anyone willing and with the enduring patience to lend an ear also hypothesized that it is imperative to listen meticulously to the tone of street children and observe their mannerisms. Very often these emotions and behaviours are useful in coming up with a way to clarify the perspectives of children thought that it is important to listen with a positive attitude since children sometimes have the innate way of cultivating analytical and constructive observations. In this way they can inadvertently react responsibly to the task of identifying factors that may somehow impede their immersion into the wider social community emphasized that although listening to children is a necessary component in perceiving their views, it demands a very special skill and art further added that listening calls for the active use of all the senses. Listening with heart and mind means being totally involved and committed to the relationship. It means being alert and tactful for the simple reason that adults often distinguish things not only through the eyes and ears, but also through their beliefs holds the firm view that listening is a necessary tool in trying to understand the views of street children. More prominence should be paid to this discipline, and it should not be underestimated, undervalued, and oversimplified also observed that children speaking with a tremor in their voice denote nervousness or anxiety. In this way, adults ought to be cognizant and appreciate the tremendous difficulty and great pain that some children experience when attempting to explain something that is very sensitive in nature to them. Listening can facilitate the acknowledgement of children and lead adults to the realization that children are frequently eager to share their testimony. They will only do so if adults are genuinely interested in them. Therefore, the need to clearly comprehend the voices of street children must never be underestimated. Of course, there will be times they may not be able to describe precisely what has happened owing to a lack of the necessary vocabulary. Some street children may even feel ashamed and embarrassed to speak about delicate issues. Nonetheless, adults must make it a point to believe the stories of street children until and unless investigation proves otherwise.

V. ADVOCACY

In simple terms advocacy means speaking and acting on behalf of oneself. It also means deciding what is best and pursuing that particular goal. Advocacy is not just about being afforded an effective voice along with interpersonal skills. However, there are many people who do not accept minority groups and consider self-advocacy as important. On the other hand, advocates among minority groups find themselves in a constant battle for independence and recognition. Several minority groups hold the view that street children should voice their cases on their own behalf. They are the ones who can best explain what they are experiencing. After all, it is their life, and they ought to make decisions that they themselves deem appropriate and describe their own unique journey thus far through life given the circumstances.

Advocacy may also mean challenging the current way of thinking. This may mean reorganizing political trends of thought. Giving children a voice means revolutionizing the structures and the images that society has of street children. It means emancipating children from the conventional and authoritative attitude that certain members of mainstream society may hold towards these children resolutely supports and affirms self-advocacy and believes that street children are quite capable of making their own representation. Many street children are of the opinion that mainstream society is oppressive and intimidating and they do not trust them. Thus, street children must be afforded a voice. Having a voice is the only way they would achieve freedom. Being denied this voice makes the possibility of internalizing their disenchantment more real.

They tend to become more withdrawn from society, resentful and aggressive. Some of them harbour this disenchantment and the resulting pain, fear, confusion, negative self-esteem and the low expectations further compound their daily active lives.

For advocacy to be effective there must be drastic changes in society. To empower street children and give them a voice is more than merely permitting them to express themselves and provide their own comments and suggestions. It is a complete reorientation that forces society to value and appreciate their proposals and contributions to the wider society. It is important to note that advocacy for street children is not easy to attain. In several instances, street children are ignorant of the existence of those who make policies regarding their presence on the streets. Therefore, policy makers must be alerted. They must listen to the voices of street children. They must be aware of their concerns. If their voices go unheard, then their lives as a whole could be disregarded completely, and interests will not be effectively engaged. Advocacy among street children should foster an awareness of how they live. To simply express an interest in street children is insufficient. People cannot identify with them when they are not willing to confront issues and systems that contribute to their presence on the streets. Commitment without confrontation tends to fade quickly into fruitless sentimental commiseration. Commitment involves a diligent effort. This has its own measure of difficulty. It involves political action and critical analysis challenging the misinformed, ignorant prejudicial statements and ideas that are often prevalent within society about these children.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This non-empirical research gathered relevant data through critical studies, systematic review and meta-analysis. Secondary sources were taken from central library books, journals, and the internet. A careful and thorough investigation of appropriate and relevant research techniques such as text criticism, critical examination of biographical studies, narrative analysis, creative writing as a research method, and internet-based research assisted this methodology. Pertinent and apt reading material were also gathered and thoughtfully analysed and evaluated academically and the importance of the findings informed this study.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Existing research reveals a significant gap in focused listening, particularly towards minority groups and street children. This review addresses this deficiency by providing scholars with insights into active listening practices. By synthesizing current literature, it aims to stimulate further research and guide those interested in minority group advocacy. Furthermore, it encourages policymakers and NGOs to confidently provide support, fostering a more responsive and inclusive approach to assisting these vulnerable populations.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This non-empirical study delves into the complexities of defining "minority groups" and "street children," emphasizing the critical importance of actively listening to and advocating for these vulnerable populations. True listening transcends mere hearing or empathy; it necessitates genuine involvement in the lives of socially displaced children. This demanding process requires commitment and time, urging a shift from passive observation to active participation.

A key finding underscores the necessity of incorporating street children's voices into program design. Too often, initiatives are implemented without their input. Therefore, government agencies, NGOs, and stakeholders must engage in meaningful dialogue with street children, valuing their perspectives and concerns to chart effective solutions. Given their resilience and street survival skills, these children possess unique expertise on their circumstances.

Furthermore, this paper highlights advocacy as an essential component of listening. Street children must be empowered to articulate their needs and fight for their rights. It is crucial to recognize that they are not merely passive recipients of aid but active agents in their own lives.

Ultimately, this research aims to inspire a societal shift, fostering a collective understanding that minority groups and all children represent a source of hope and potential for positive change. By prioritizing their voices and advocating for their well-being, we can contribute to the development of a more equitable and just world.

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