

Perceived Impact Of Child Neglect And Abandonment On Rate Of Streetism In Major Towns Of Taraba State.

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Abstract

In Nigeria, there has been a search for the cause(s) of child streetism. Even though some interventions have been made based on the recommendations by earlier studies, the phenomenon of child streetism is still on the rise. This is a reflection of the inadequacies of the known causes of child streetism largely from the perspectives of the street children themselves. This study examines the impact of child neglect on the increasing rate of streetism, from the perspectives of the street children themselves as well as from significant adults, parents and/or guardians of street children, with the view to recommend measures for curtailing the phenomenon in Taraba State. Primary data was collected using two sets of structured questionnaires, namely, "Causes and Extent of Child Neglect Questionnaire" and "Impact of Child Neglect and Abandonment Questionnaire" administered to three hundred respondents. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistic of mean and standard deviation and percentage. The hypothesis was tested using chi-square. The study revealed that, the major causes of streetism in major towns of Taraba State were financial hardship (90.7%), followed by single parenting (87.9%), communal clashes and insecurity (81.4%), parent constant conflict and domestic violence (78.4%), deviant criminal activities of a child (76.1%), influence of hard drugs on parent (75.9%) and lack of parenting skills (70%).

The study recommends that, there should be community level sensitizations through civil society organizations (CSOs), governmental and non-governmental agencies collaborations, filling of gaps in the educational system at the basic level to meet the aspirations of parents/guardians, a rejuvenation of useful traditional values and practices and above all a policy on parenting and enactment bye-laws to bring irresponsible parents to order.

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I. Introduction

The family is generally believed to be the smallest unit of the society. The family in Nigeria is made up of father, mother (and children). Basically, everyone in the formation of an ideal family has a role to play. In the case of the children, in a young family, they are occupied with house chores while the parents provide food, clothing shelter, education and sundry other needs. In a bid for parents to meet up with provision of these needs, sometimes they become overwhelmed to the point that they pay little or no attention to how the children are faring. Some leave the children to wander about while others leave them in the custody of inexperienced or incapable caregivers. This can escalate to neglect or abandonment of children. Child neglect is the failure to provide the needed food, clothing, shelter or love to a child (Ogwo, 2020).

Style of parenting and young couples who are inexperienced on what children need at every stage of their development can lead to neglect of children (Teti, 2001 & Ogwu, 2020). Regarding parenting some children cannot endure the corporal punishment at home thus feel abused and therefore, resort to finding solace in the street. Forced marriage of underage children is another factor that drives children to the street.

Other factors are poverty, disability, dysfunctional families, teenage single parents (girls), cohabitation, crises, and banditry (Ogwo, 2020; Olusegun & Adegbite, 2023). Olusegun and Adegbite, (2023) identified the different categories of neglect such as: physical neglect, medical neglect, environmental neglect, emotional neglect, and educational neglect. These result in intellectual, physical, social, psychological and developmental problems for children. Furthermore, these forms of neglect contribute to forcing children to the street, a situation that gives rise to 'streetism'. Streetism simply means living on the streets or being of the streets.

Longs (2017) reported streetism is a recent or novel term in sociology though it is a problem that has been in existence for centuries right from the time of industrial revolution in England. For instance, Charles Drekens in *Oliver twist* (1966) and *Great expectations* (1968) and other novels discussed the issues of children who did menial work or serve as errand boys at the factories just to earn their bread. The two great wars i.e

world war I (1914-1919) and world war II (1939-1945) all served to push not only woman to work as a result of the enlistment of their husbands in the wars and those who never came back, but Children also were pushed to labour because some lost both parents to death while some were separated in the rush for safety. This rendered the children homeless or unmonitored. The above scenario gives us an idea of what streetism. However, Barrete (2004) in Longs (2017) sees streetism as the living of homeless or unmonitored children on the street, especially when related to drugs, diseases, crime or delinquency.

Based on the two foregone paragraphs, Streetism is directly related to child neglect as no child who is adequately monitored and cared for medically, physically and emotionally at home, leaves such comfort for what the street has to offer. This however does not rule out possibility of having some Children who have all these comfort and still run to the street. Such cases are negligible.

Streetism exposes children to a lot of health problems and other hazards. Children found on the street show some or all of these characters or behaviours; are physically, educationally, emotionally, and medically neglected. They live on the street and survive by doing menial jobs, pick pocketing, scavenging refuse dumps, begging and prostituting. This is a worldwide phenomenon. Therefore, this study examined the impact of child neglect and abandonment on the rate of streetism in major towns of Taraba State.

Statement of the Problem

There had been a number of studies on streetism in some cities of Nigeria. For instance, Adeyemi and Oluwaseun (2012) discussed Economic factors as correlates of streetism among urban children in Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria. Others looked at cultural, religious and economic factors promoting child abuse mostly in cities and towns in the southern part of Nigeria. They reported that some children live on the street and survive by doing menial jobs, pick pocketing and prostituting. In Taraba State, the situation is not different. Many children are seen on the streets of major towns, without adequate provisions and care. Less attention seems to be given to the presence of streetism in north east, Nigeria. Questions still begging for answers include: what is the major cause of streetism? What can be done to ameliorate this problem? It is in a bid for solution that this study examined the impact of child neglect on the rate of streetism in Taraba State.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. investigate the causes of child neglect in Taraba State,
2. determine the extent of child neglect abandonment on the streets in Taraba State and ,
3. examine the impact of child neglect and abandonment on society.

II. Literature Review

Child neglect is defined as a type of maltreatment related to the failure to provide needed, age-appropriate care. Unlike physical and sexual abuse, neglect is usually typified by an ongoing pattern of inadequate care and is readily observed by individuals in close contact with the child. Once children are in school, personnel often notice indicators of child neglect such as poor hygiene, poor weight gain, inadequate medical care, or frequent absence from school (Lawson, Piel & Simon, 2020, Ogwo, 2020; Olusegun & Adegbite, 2023). However, picking up signs of neglect in children on the street is often difficult for a number of persons who are not always in close contact with them. Thus, Marc and Hanafi (2016) submitted that child neglect calls for cooperation between professionals for detection, diagnosis (medical and psychological), and legal and social protection.

Professionals have defined four types of neglect: Physical, emotional, educational and medical (Giardino, 2017). More children suffer from neglect in many parts of the world than from physical and sexual abuse combined. For instance, the US Department of Health and Human services found that in 2007 there were 794,000 victims of child maltreatment in the US; of those victims 599 were victims of neglect. Some researchers have proposed 5 different types of neglect: Physical neglect, emotional, neglect, medical neglect, mental health neglect, and educational neglect. States may code any maltreatment type that does not fall into one of the main categories-physical abuse, neglect, medical neglects, sexual abuse, and psychological or emotional maltreatment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, Olusegun & Adegbite, 2023).

In spite of this, neglect has received significantly less attention than physical and sexual abuse by practitioners, and the media. One explanation may be that neglect is so difficult to identify. Neglect often is an act of omission. But neglecting needs of children can be just as injurious as striking out at them (Chao, 2004, Ogwo, 2020). A number of neglected children present are suffering from medical conditions, failure to thrive or malnutrition, which in severe forms may be life-threatening. More observable signs include the following: dirty skin, offensive body odour, unwashed, uncombed hair; tattered, under or oversize and unclean clothing, clothing that is inappropriate to weather or situation, frequent participation to crimes. Hildyard and Wolfe (2002) corroborated this saying it is self-evident that neglected children face a multitude of risk factors known to impair

normal development. Chronic poverty, serious caregiving deficits, parental psychopathology, substance abuse, homelessness, family breakup, and poor prenatal and postnatal care are all associated with neglect, and each of these risk factors has been shown independently to increase children's vulnerability to psychopathology, especially in the absence of compensatory strengths and resources. Similarly, Kuczynsk (2003) opined that child neglect can lead to the following impacts: The child is frequently absent from school, steals or begs for food or money; Lack needed medical or dental care, immunizations or glasses; the child is consistently dirty and has severe body odour; the child lacks sufficient clothing for the weather; The child abuses drugs or alcohol (Chao, 2004). Further consider the effects of neglect on the parent or adult care giver as:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed.
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs.

Physical neglect happens when parents or guardians do not make provisions for the basic needs of the child. This includes the refusal of seeking necessary health care for the child; abandonment, which is the desertion of a child without arranging for reasonable care or supervision, the rejection of a child leading to expulsion from the home and failing to provide for the child's safety as well as their physical and emotional needs (Jasper, Mazarin & Levitas, 2022). Other physical neglect includes inadequate nutrition, clothing, or hygiene; conspicuous inattention to avoidable hazards in the home, and their forms of reckless disregard of child's welfare such driving intoxicated, leaving a child at home unattended to (Joan, 2008). Neglected children can be dirty, hungry, withdrawn and lonely (Jasper, Mazarin & Levitas, 2022). In the same vein, scholarship, according to Robinson (2019), attests that neglect plays a significant role in a suite of problematic effects such as increased presentation of internalizing and externalizing behaviours and a lack of ego resilience. Furthermore, delays in cognition and emotional development; poor school performance; antisocial behaviour and association with deviant peers; insecure attachments; difficulties with emotional regulation; and increased fear reactivity and negative cognition, are some of the reported long-term effects of child neglect. By implication, association with deviant peers potentially leads to streetism. Usman (2018) reported that the diverse causes of streetism of which child neglect is one, are on the increase. Children are neglected by their parents or caregivers because of either poverty, separation and the worst of it all, unwanted pregnancy by the female folks which later will lead to school dropout. The consequence of these forms of neglect on the child could be living on the street for livelihood. Some of these children constitute a significant proportion of the 13.2 million out of school children in Nigeria (Nextier Security, Peace and Development, 2022).

This study was anchored on Kenneth Allan Attachment theory which believed humans develop behaviours as result of how their caregivers nurture them. According to attachment theory, the type of bond that develops between child and caregiver affects the child's later relationships and living. More so, Child neglect most typically begins at an early age and has an accumulating effect on subsequent developmental abilities and limitations, one of which is streetism. Thus, there is need to investigate the impact of child neglect and abandonment on the rate of streetism in Taraba State, Nigeria.

III. Methodology

The study was conducted in Taraba State, North-East, Nigeria. The State had a population of about 2,300,736 people as at 2006 (NPC, 2006). With a projected population growth rate of +2.94% a year, the current population of Taraba State is over 3,066,800 people. There are 16 Local Government Areas and two Development areas in Taraba State. The major towns are Baissa, Bali, Baruwa, Donga, Garba-Chede, Gembu and Gindin Dorowa. Others are Ibi, Jalingo, Karim Lamido, Lau, Lissam, Mararaban Baissa, Mutum-Biyu, Suntai, Takum, Tella, Wukari, Yorro and Zing. The study was however conducted in Gindin Dorowa, Jalingo, Mutum-Biyu, Tella and Wukari Towns. Due to commercial activities as a result of the presence of weekly markets, banks, schools and some small scale factories, there is the presence of many people in these towns. Some of these are children and other young persons who migrated from the rural areas to the towns in search of means of survival. Some of them roam or loaf about the streets of the towns.

Data Collection

A pilot study was conducted to identify the major flash points on the streets of the Jalingo town where the children on the streets are active. A total of 500 children on the streets were randomly selected in the study area according to the proportion of the population in the towns. Data was collected through the use of two sets of structured questionnaires, namely, "Causes and Extent of Child Neglect Questionnaire" and "Impact of Child Neglect and Abandonment Questionnaire" which were responded to by the children on the streets and the adults around the children on the streets respectively. The duration of data collection was three (3) weeks.

Method of Data Analysis and Result

The data were collected using a structured questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistic of mean and standard deviation and percentage. The hypothesis was tested using chi-square. The data collected was analyzed in accordance with the research questions and hypothesis.

Research question 1: What are the causes of child neglect in Taraba State?

Table 1: Causes of child neglect in Taraba State

S/N	ITEMS	Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Financial hardship causes child neglect	264	90.7	27	9.3
2.	Single parenting causes child neglect	254	87.9	35	12.1
3.	Child neglect is caused by parent constant conflict and domestic violence	228	78.4	63	21.6
4.	Parent ill-heath causes child neglect	196	67.4	95	32.6
5.	Aggression of child toward his/her siblings and peers causes neglect	184	63.7	105	36.3
6.	Poor academic performance in school causes child neglect	156	54.2	132	45.8
7.	Lack of parenting skills causes child neglect	203	70.0	87	30.0
8.	Communal clashes and insecurity causes child neglect	237	81.4	54	19.6
9.	Low level of education of parents causes child neglect	200	69.2	89	30.8
10.	Constant illness of child causes neglect	154	53.3	135	46.7
11.	Deviant criminal activities of a child causes his/ her neglect	220	76.1	69	23.9
12.	Physical disability of a child causes neglect	156	54.0	133	46.0
13.	Stubbornness and disobedience of a child causes neglect	200	68.7	91	31.3
14.	Influence of hard drugs on parent causes child neglect	220	75.9	70	24.1
15.	Cultural and religious belief of parents contributes to child neglect	193	66.6	97	33.4
16.	Learning disability of a child causes neglect	184	63.4	106	36.6

Table 1 presents the causes of child neglect and abandonment in Taraba State. The major causes of child neglect and abandonment was financial hardship (90.7%), followed by single parenting (87.9%), communal clashes and insecurity (81.4%), parent constant conflict and domestic violence (78.4%), deviant criminal activities of a child (76.1%), influence of hard drugs on parent (75.9%), lack of parenting skills (70%) and other minor causes.

Research question 2: What are the extents of child neglect and abandonment on the street in Taraba State?

(a) **Where they live:**

Table 2: Extents of child neglect and abandonment on the street in Taraba State (Where they live)

S/n	Where they live	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Market place	26	9.1
2.	Motor Park	8	2.8
3.	Friend	15	5.2
4.	Home	94	32.8
5.	Relatives	89	31.0
6.	Church/Mosque	26	9.1
7.	Street	29	10.1

Table 2 presents the extent of child neglect and abandonment (Where they live). The most common abode of children suffering neglect and abandonment was at home with parents (32.8%), followed by relatives (31%), on the street (10.1%), at the marketplace (9.1%), church/mosque (9.1%), with friends (5.2%) and motor park (2.8%).

(b) **Where they sleep:**

Table 3. Extents of child neglect and abandonment on the street in Taraba State (Where they sleep)

S/n	Where they sleep	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Market place	19	6.6
2.	Motor Park	15	5.2
3.	Friend	17	5.9
4.	Home	100	34.8
5.	Relatives	84	29.3
6.	Church/Mosque	25	8.7
7.	Street	27	9.4

Table 3 shows the extent of child neglect and abandonment (Where they sleep). The most common place for spending the night among neglected and abandoned children was at home with parents (34.8%), followed by relatives (29.3%), on the street (9.4%), church/mosque (8.7%), at the marketplace (6.6%), with friends (5.9%) and Motor Park (5.9%).

(C) Who feeds them:

Table 4. Extents of child neglect and abandonment on the street in Taraba State (Feeding)

S/n	Who feed them?	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Philanthropist	19	6.6
2.	Friend	20	7.0
3.	Home	57	19.9
4.	Relatives	124	43.2
5.	Church/Mosque	24	8.4
6.	Passer-by	43	15.0

Table 4 shows the extent of child neglect and abandonment on the street in terms of feeding. Result shows that (43.2%) of the children are fed by relatives, followed by parents in their homes (19.5%), Passerby (19.5%), church/ mosque fed (8.4%), friends (7.0%) and philanthropist (6.6%)

Who takes care of their health:

Table 5. Extents of child neglect and abandonment on the street in Taraba State (Healthcare)

S/n	Who takes care of their health?	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Friend	21	7.6
2.	Passers-by	22	8.0
3.	Relatives	143	52.0
4.	Church/Mosque	35	12.7
5.	Self	54	19.6

Table 5 presents result on the healthcare of the neglected and abandoned children on the street of Taraba State. Result shows that (52%) of their health issues are handled by relatives, followed by self-medication (19.6%), church/mosque take care of the health challenges of (12.7%), passerby (8%) and friends (7.6%).

Who is their confidant:

Table 6. Extents of child neglect and abandonment on the street in Taraba State (confidants)

S/n	Who do they confide in?	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Relatives	159	57.6
2.	Pastor/Imam	43	15.6
3.	Friend	74	26.8

Table 6 presents result on the confidants of these abandoned and neglected children on the street of Taraba State. Finding shows that (57.6%) confide in their relatives, (26.8%) confide in their pastors or imams and (15.6%) confide in their friends.

Who takes care of their clothing:

Table 6. Extents of child neglect and abandonment on the street in Taraba State (clothing)

S/n	Who takes care of their clothing?	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Passers-by	23	8.4
2.	Home	37	13.5
3.	Friend	9	3.3
4.	Relatives	129	46.9
5.	Church/Mosque	26	9.5
6.	Philanthropist	51	18.5

Table 6 shows the result on who cloth the abandoned and neglected children in Taraba State. Result shows that (46.9%) are cloth by their relatives, philanthropist cloth (18.5%). This is followed by homes who cloth (13.5%), church and mosque are responsible for (9.5%), Passerby (8.4%) and friends (3.3%).

Who takes care of their education/ skill acquisition:

Table 7: Extents of child neglect and abandonment on the street in Taraba State (education/skill acquisition)

S/n	Who takes care of their education/skill acquisition?	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Not engaged	95	33.2

2.	Self-sponsors	16	5.6
3.	Passers-by	19	6.6
4.	Home	31	10.8
5.	Friend	4	1.4
6.	Relatives	73	25.5
7.	Church/Mosque	25	8.7
8.	Philanthropist	23	8.0

Table 8 shows the result on who is responsible for these abandoned and neglected children education or their skill acquisition. Result shows that (33.2%) are not engaged. This implies that they are neither in school or learning any skill. (10.8%) are sponsored by their parent at home. Relatives sponsored (25.5%), church and mosque sponsored (8.7%), philanthropist sponsored (8 %), passerby (6.6%) and self-sponsors (5.6%).

Research Question 3: What is the impact of child neglect and abandonment on the society?

Table 9: The impact of child neglect and abandonment on the society

S/N	STATEMENT	High impact	Moderate impact	Low impact	No impact	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1.	Child neglect and abandonment result into relationship problems in future marriage	92	51	6	1	3.56	.607	High impact
2.	Constant drug intake of neglected children can result and increase psychiatric disorder in the society	92	53	4	1	3.57	.583	High impact
3.	Neglect and abandonment can harden children to be an arm robber, cultist and kidnapper	87	52	9	2	3.49	.673	High impact
4.	Lack or low education of abandoned children makes them less productive in the society	48	60	37	4	3.02	.826	High impact
5.	Child neglect and abandonment causes high rate of suicide in the society	45	65	39	1	3.03	.768	High impact
6.	Neglect and abandonment can lead to depression and low self esteem	64	71	13	1	3.33	.662	High impact
7.	Neglect and abandonment of children increase transmission of diseases in the society	50	50	39	8	2.97	.910	High impact
8.	Child neglect and abandonment encourage corruption in our society	53	59	31	7	3.05	.865	High impact
9.	Neglect and abandonment of children leads to breach of law and order in the society	62	68	17	3	3.26	.737	High impact
10.	Neglected parents have the tendency of neglecting their children in the future	53	67	21	7	3.12	.824	High impact
11.	Neglected and abandon children engaged in premarital sex and high rate of abortion in the society.	64	62	20	4	3.24	.783	High impact
12.	Neglected and abandon children usually end up as political thugs and street fighters.	88	51	7	4	3.49	.712	High impact
13.	Neglected children are used in the selling and distribution of hard drugs in the society.	71	62	12	2	3.37	.695	High impact
14.	Neglected children contribute to traffic challenges in the society.	53	74	21	1	3.20	.697	High impact
15.	Neglected children experience self-isolation and peer rejection.	73	64	9	4	3.37	.719	High impact

Table 9 shows the responses of respondents on the impact of child neglect and abandonment on the society, all the items have mean in the range of agreement (2.97-3.57). This signifies that child neglect and abandonment has a high negative impact on the society.

HYPOTHESIS 1: There is no significant impact of child neglect and abandonment on the society

Table 10: Chi-square test of significant impact of child neglect and abandonment on the society

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	48.716 ^a	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	46.695	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.812	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	2149		

The result in table 9 presents Chi square value at 9 degrees of freedom ($X^2=48.716$, $p = 0.000$) at 0.05 level of significance. With this result the null hypothesis which states that “There is no significant impact of child neglect and abandonment on the society” is rejected. This implies that child neglect and abandonment have a significant negative impact on the society.

IV. Discussion of Findings

The result of this study shows that financial hardship, single parenting, communal clashes and insecurity, parent constant conflict and domestic violence, influence of hard drugs on parents and lack of parenting skills are the major causes of child neglect and abandonment in Taraba State. The findings are in line with Usman (2018) and Robinson who affirmed that poverty and separation from parents are major causes of streetism. For ease of understanding, the present study findings in percentage shows that major causes of child neglect and abandonment were financial hardship (90.7%), followed by single parenting (87.9%), communal clashes and insecurity (81.4%), parent constant conflict and domestic violence (78.4%), deviant criminal activities of a child (76.1%), influence of hard drugs on parent (75.9%), lack of parenting skills (70%) and other minor causes. The most common abode of children suffering neglect and abandonment was at home with parents (32.8%), followed by relatives (31%), on the street (10.1%), at the marketplace (9.1%), church/mosque (9.1%), with friends (5.2%) and motor park (2.8%). The commonest place for spending the night among neglected and abandoned children was at home with parents (34.8%), followed by relatives (29.3%), on the street (9.4%), church/mosque (8.7%), at the marketplace (6.6%), with friends (5.9%) and Motor Park (5.9%). On the extent of child neglect and abandonment on the street in terms of feeding, the study found that (43.2%) of the children are fed by relatives, followed by parents in their homes (19.5%), Passerby (19.5%), church/mosque fed (8.4%), friends (7.0 %) and philanthropist (6.6%). Result shows that (52%) of their healthcare issues of neglected and abandoned children on the street of Taraba State are handled by relatives, followed by self-medication (19.6%), church/mosque take care of the health challenges of (12.7%), passerby (8%) and friends (7.6%). Finding also reveals that (57.6%) of these abandoned and neglected children confide in their relatives, (26.8%) confide in their pastors or imams and (15.6%) confide in their friends. The implication is that these children are vulnerable in terms of counselling. Whatever is given them by their confidants is what guides their behaviours.

On clothing, findings revealed that (46.9%) are cloth by their relatives, philanthropist cloth (18.5 %). This is followed by homes who cloth (13.5%), church and mosque are responsible for (9.5%), Passerby (8.4%) and friends (3.3%). The study reveals further that (33.2%) of these children are not engaged in any form of education or skill acquisition. This implies that they are neither in school or learning any skill. (10.8%) are sponsored by their parent at home. Relatives sponsored (25.5%), church and mosque sponsored (8.7%), philanthropist sponsored (8 %), passerby (6.6%) and self-sponsors (5.6%). The study also found that child neglect and abandonment has a high significant (negative) impact on the society (2.97-3.57 mean range). This finding supports the view of Robinson (2019) who affirmed that child neglect plays a significant role in creating problematic effect on a nation’s development.

Also, the findings are in agreement with Lawson, Piel and Simon (2020), Ogwo (2020), and Olusegun and Adegbite (2020) who revealed that neglected children are exposed to poor hygiene, poor weight gain, inadequate medical care and absence from school.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research concluded that financial hardship and single parenting are the top-most causes of child neglect and abandonment in Taraba State. This situation has created negative impact on the development of the state. It is therefore recommended that the economic situation of the State be improved through deliberate efforts attracting investors and opening manufacturing companies which will engage significant number of the citizenry in productive activities. This could ameliorate the issue of poverty and eliminate or drastically reduce the number of children on the street. Also the Education Management Information System office of the State should carry out a survey of the number of this category of children in order to provide viable data for Free Education Programme. Sustained provision of free food in schools and social services such as conditional cash transfer to vulnerable families could also encourage these children to leave the streets.

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