



The role of social work in controlling and reducing the social costs from the phenomenon of street children in Isfahan

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ABSTRACT

The compound term 'Street children' refers to a group of children with special age groups who are passing through their adolescence having identity crisis and strongly feeling need for support and help. These children are de facto those who walk on the shoulders of the streets to earn some money for their families. Their contact with their families varies from a daily visit to a few times a year; however, they feel a sense of belonging to them [families]. In the present study, the researcher has tried to investigate the motives/reasons that account for the coming-into-existence and development of the street children who take up jobs that never conform to the norms of the society and he has also strived to scrutinize the different aspects of young age employment.

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Introduction

Most of the adolescents' behavioral and ethical problems originate from their parents and teachers' attitudes and behaviors. The children who are brought up by and live with knowledgeable and decent parents and teachers or instructors enjoy a prosperous, sound, and successful lifestyle. This is indicative of the fact that adolescents can absolutely be educated and trained; that some but a few demonstrate some abnormal behaviors is thanks to their inappropriate education.

Parents' affection and love are the mental vitamin and energy to the children and their need for love and affection is not limited to any specific phase of their [children] childhood, and they need their parents' love and affection at any point of their life.

The Statistics on the Number of Street Children in Iran

In an informal and unofficial statistical report presented in the conference on child education in 2002, the number of street children in Tehran was reportedly 35,000 and this dubious statistical number of street children is thanks to their out-of-sight lifestyle, their changing places and varying number at the time of taking the census. The increasing number of the street children in Iran is not specifically limited to Tehran, but other cities such as the pilgrimage city of Meshed have turned to be home to many of them (Barkhordari).

Factors Causing the Appearance and Increase of Street Children

- Families' Economic Poverty
- Inappropriate Family Environment
- Families' Vulnerability
- Addiction
- Migration

Social Workers and their Role

Social workers usually work in organizations, institutions and organs and/or at times based on their available facilities have established formations where they can play their part. Their activities and measures taken can generally be categorized in three groups:

1. To utilize plans and services and make use of available sources

To meet some of the needs, social workers shall try to use the sources and institutions in the society which people may have no idea about and which people may not have been able to use due to different reasons, but their main job is to help the people unaware of the existing facilities to utilize them.

2. To develop potentialities to utilize services and sources

In this section, too, the assumption is that there are facilities and sources in the society which people have not used, but the problem is their unawareness and more importantly the sources and services rendered have been defective. Social workers are required to help the institutions and sources of services to modify their expertise in different aspects and dimensions and equip themselves to better render services.

3. To develop or establish new formations and services

The assumption is that there are no sources of assistance, services, and institutions to provide help to the people. Social workers are expected to try to start such establishments to help satisfy some of the people's needs. Social workers, to start the work, are required to enjoy sufficient knowledge and skillfulness, social values and characteristics, and to succeed in their work. They apply different disciplines such as sociology, psychology, biology, statistics, economics, etc. They are also expected, by practicing, to have gained the abilities and skills to best use the available sources and disciplines so that they can solve some of the mental and social problems amongst the individuals and groups (Karimi and Aghaee, 2005. p. 13).

To cope with and overcome the societal problems requires formation and unification of thoughts, views, discussions, and plans so that, by reflection, creativity, real participation of people, and people's involvement in thoughts, planning, decision making, and implementation and evaluation of activities through the social patterns of implementation in social work positive modifications can be made in the status quo. Therefore, societal problems govern the difficult situations and

social costs/harms which govern individuals and social groups' actions (Aghabakhshi, 2004, p. 3).

There are many methods to fight against the problems of street children, but they can be grouped under two general categories.

Prevention and cure is one important strategy to deal with the problems. This implies that the children's families should be taken care of and supported. For example, the studies carried out in Brazil indicate that children with poor families are more apt to turn into street children, so their families and even the children themselves should be provided with the least living comfort and earning so that they do not incline to start informal business of streets. The families' dependency on their children's work should be tried to be lessened. Among the many ways to deal with the problem is giving loans to the families so that they can start a business of their own and by employing the children in the concerns established they even help the society in production. Moreover, educational and vocational programs can be highly beneficial in teaching them social skills and abilities.

The Population of the Study

The population studied in this research was comprised of street children below 18 in 89 quarters in the 11-zone Isfahan City.

Objectives of the Study

The researcher was bound:

- To identify the street children and prevent them from scattering in the city.
- To locate and identify them so that helping and supporting their families could be facilitated.
- To make the urban environment healthy.
- To reduce psychological and social costs of the children.
- To have a better statistical picture of the street children.
- To increase the conciseness and awareness of the families about children's vulnerability.
- To generally inform people of the negative and undesirable consequences of children's running away and establish a culture among them.

Procedure

1. To identify the street children through
 - The patrols assigned to locate the street children.
 - The Social Costs Department of the 11-zone Municipalities of Isfahan.
 - The constant and mobile street children identification bases.
 - The social workers, and
 - The locale consultative sittings.
2. To attract the street children through
 - Employing the professional social workers in the overcrowded and vulnerable parts and margins of the city on a mobile and constant basis to try to attract the street children
 - The social workers' establishing professional and reinforced relationship with the fugitive and/or runaway children, which in turn results in their [children] trust and acceptance (Barkhordari).

How to Deal with the Street Children

Social workers should pay special attention to street children thanks to three reasons:

1. To prevent them [street children] from inclining to social costs,
2. To neutralize their likely role in expansion or spreading of social costs, and
3. To protect them as the national human resources.

Social Workers' Duties for the Street Children

Level one or primary prevention

By acknowledging and getting to know the effective factors causing them to resort to the streets, seeking help from the Ministry of Education, TV and Radio departments, Ministry of Culture and Islamic propaganda, and respective institutions, they can develop plans to prevent children from resorting to the streets.

Level two or secondary prevention

At this stage, three series of activities are carried out:

➤ The activities to identify and attract street children

Social workers can form mobile group(s) and identify the street children, and return them to the families if possible, or produce them before the respected institutions.

Collecting these children may not prove appropriate by employing the police or municipality's armed-force because force may not result in good consequences. Although, at times, it may feel necessary to ask the police to help out with collecting them, the police's presence should not be long. The shorter the street children's presence in the streets till their being collected, the better they will be attracted. Therefore to have a dynamic and active attracting system feels required.

➤ The activities to classify the street children

At this stage, social workers can classify the street children by seeking help and cooperation from the psychiatrists, psychologists, physicians and legal counselors.

➤ The activities to organize the street children

At this stage, social workers need to know that the best way to organize and settle the problem of street children is to try to return them to their families. However, if the families are not competent enough to receive and keep their children back, they [social workers] must avoid returning them since it is possible that they may run away from home again or they might be suppressed and oppressed by their families.

Regarding the working children who have to work in the streets to financially help their families with their living, after the social workers have located and identified them, the government should try to organize them by rendering financial support; however, this should never bring on laziness or begging attitudes among them [children and their families]. Moreover, it should not be so little or in such a way that children may not show any interest to give up their street business life because their income might be quite higher than what the government may offer (Barkhordari).

Therefore, at present, the service rendering organizations have started to increase and promote their supportive activities and measures in the streets. These activities are economical especially launching and developing 'Street Social Worker Teams' which has resulted in developing the activities into the streets. Through this mode, social workers try to contact the street children working in the streets, but they do not take them to respective institutions or centers.

In this case, the organizations will be better able to help them and render services to prevent them from getting afflicted and/or affected by the social costs. Despite the limited facilities, this will help increase the budget and workforce of organizations.

Medical services, entrepreneurship, law and psychological consultation, provision of work facilities and equipment, familiarizing the street children with the organizations that can help them are all among the services rendered and activities carried out.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The following suggestions and recommendations are offered to help prevent and/or solve the problems of street children:

- Eradicating poverty and indigence which highly affect the economic disorganization and irregularity.
- Parents' controlling their children's friends.
- Decreasing the social distance between children and parents.
- Developing a suitable ground for promoting children's personality by employing skilful instructors and teachers so that the children grow in such a way that they can strongly avoid the crimes and instead try to protect their grace and honor against them [crimes] because punishment is a temporary sedative.
- Parents' helping to prevent the aggravation of their children's deviation if they find any with them.
- Prioritizing prevention to cure in order to eliminate the likely grounds for children's affliction to social costs.
- Continuously fighting against increasing and systematic growth of informal jobs.
- Creating jobs for the unemployed individuals and preventing the straying of the unemployed children and implementing the unemployment insurance.
- Developing suitable free-of-charge sports and grounds.
- Getting the adolescents to know their social rights.

➤ Encouraging the organizations to cooperate with the anti-street children business cause.

➤ Reforming the existing laws to favor children.

➤ Creating occupational opportunities and effective and desirable cultural activities instead of physical challenge.

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