CHAPTER I

CHILDREN IN THE STREET WORLD

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Existence of children in street situation is a growing phenomenon and it is noticed more in the developing nations. It has elicited emotive public concern and has become a matter of priority for national and international children welfare organizations (Panter-Brick 2002). Generally people in villages have large families. As the country is progressing, it is noticed that the villages are growing poorer and the cities growing richer. Poverty experienced by many families interferes with the children’s mental and physical development. The phenomenon of street children has long existed in different parts of the world. It is difficult to ascertain the number and define clearly the children who are found in the streets (George & Sharma 2015). However, the presence of children in the street situation can be considered as the extreme manifestation of deteriorating social capital and social exclusion. Various causes are responsible for such a social phenomenon.

For growing up children the pattern of development is retarded by psychological conditions such as emotional deprivation, parental rejection, loss of a parent, institutionalization and similar unwanted situations (Hurlock 1978). Eventually, the poverty that is experienced in varied ways leads the child to a journey to the unknown, mostly to the city of dreams, which is enveloped with hassles of different types. Children in the streets get used to inhuman living. They eventually lose all hopes about the future and live their daily lives with films, fun and freedom. They live each day as a single unit not linked to the next day. They may have a heart that longs for love, a head that thinks about a decent life, pride that disowns miseries and a strong will to dare anything that can
bring them survival necessities. Eventually, they do not care for others and less for themselves.

As a term ‘street children’ refers to children who live in or with the street situation. The term is stigmatizing or discriminatory. In such a term, the child’s subjective perception is not considered. The child is a subject and that needs to be considered. Hence the preferable term is children in street situations which relate the problem more to the situation than to the child.

‘Child’ is an endearing term. People like children. They are warm, open, friendly and lively. They are weak like a small tiny seed, when sprouted; they need support and assistance in all the ways. Deprived of affection, support and much more of basic necessities for survival they develop survival instincts and head for places wherever they feel they can survive. A large number of them reach the streets with all the innocence and longing for a better survival. When the term ‘street’ is used it means any place that is cut off from their families such as open areas, railway stations, large fields and any place that they make as their shelter where they are not disturbed by others and get the required food to assuage their hunger and thirst.

1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.2.1. International

Urban population is on the increase and almost half the world’s population live in the urban world. Facilities seem to be better there, but it is so only for the richer lot. For the larger crowds, slums become their abode with all its unhygienic conditions characterized by unemployment, pollution, traffic, crime, high cost of living, poor service cover and competition over resources. In 1989, UNICEF estimated that 100 million children grow up in the urban streets around the world (Thomas 2011). In 1997, UNICEF estimated that there are almost 80 million youth living in the streets worldwide (Tudoric-Ghemo 2005). In 2001, the United Nations estimated that 150 million children live in the streets of the world (Dabir & Athale 2011). It is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of children living
in street situations. It is commonly accepted that the numbers are on the increase as the population is on the increase, especially in the developing nations.

The consequences of poor distribution of power and resources are readily evident in the informal settlements and slums where roughly 1.4 billion people will live by 2020 (Lake 2012). As the population is growing, it is estimated that the ones who suffer most are the children as they are the most vulnerable. This leads to the growth in the phenomenon of children in street habitats which is global, alarming and escalating.

Children in street situations are found in developed and developing nations. They are present in much larger numbers in the poor nations of Latin America, Asia and Africa (Mathur 2009). They suffer from the worst kind of deprivation and denial of basic necessities like education, health, food, shelter, physical protection, security and recreation (Nagaseshamma 2010). Many NGOs work to assist children who live in the streets, some of them financially and others in the active field. In spite of the many who work with children in street environments, the world still has millions in its streets. Many of them living such lives die very young.

1.2.2. National

India has one of the fastest growing urban populations in the world. Some of the cities, leading in numbers of urban population are: Delhi with 21.7 million, Mumbai with 19.7 million and Kolkata with 15.3 million (Lake 2012). According to a report of 1996 it is estimated that 18 million street youth live in urban India. India is thought to have the largest street youth in the world having 49 per cent of its total population living at or below poverty line in the villages (Tudoric-Ghemo 2005). Poverty in India leads to exclusion from education, health care services, civic and political rights. The caste system also has its role in leading children to social exclusion. It is estimated that India has over 300 million people living below the poverty line. Landlessness and high dependency on agriculture add to the misery of the common man in the villages (Bhusan 2009).

Unplanned growth of cities with lots of job and living possibilities, in contrast to the stark poverty of the villages increases the number of the marginalized people and among them the major group is that of children. Children being in large numbers in the street situations
haunt the general public and the Government of India. It is astonishing to note that India is leading as regards the numbers of children living on the streets and slums of all the major cities. India is estimated to have over 18 million children living or working on the Indian streets (Sondhi-Garg 2004).

There are children who come to the city to work as their families are very poor; there are children who live with families along the streets and children who live alone making the street their home. Quite often, pangs of hunger or unstable families lead children to the street situations. Large cities seem attractive due to their glamour and various modern amenities. The cities can accommodate anyone who comes in and enable to make a living in harsh situations. The country seems to have sufficient wealth for its citizens, especially for its children and yet we find millions of them struggling to survive without basic needs fulfilled (Gadadhara 2013).

A study in Kolkata, on its deprived urban children, states that it has 1,44,945 out-of-school children in the corporation area of Kolkata. Most of them live in slums and in footpath shanties or along the road (Mooney 1999). The city of Kolkata seems a homely place that welcomes everyone reaching to 20 million people (Flatt 2008). It has the very rich group and the very poor group. With many villages that are under-developed in the state, many rush to the city for survival.

Apparently, every city looks like a promised paradise for the ignorant whose smartness cannot be contained in a tiny village that is poor, undeveloped and problem-filled. It gives hope to a person who is not able to meet his basic necessities for living. Every deprived child having access to the media comes to know the gaudiness of the city. They see many living rich lives, even the poor having sufficient to eat or sufficient possibilities for food. They grow in their love for the street as they struggle to sustain themselves in the various problems, especially that of poverty that haunts them each day.

Once in the city, the children are forced to get trained to survive in street situations and join the community of street dwellers. They form the society of street children. They live parallel to the mainstream society. There develops a constant mental rivalry between the two groups. The street society tries its best to survive on the mainstream society. The
mainstream society considers them as a menace without realizing that they too have their rights, duties and privileges as human beings.

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In many cases, the families are not able to cater to the needs of their children. Children suffer as their basic needs are not met. For some they just leave their families and go to unknown places in search of survival. For many among them apparently every city can offer enough survival opportunities. Cities have easy access as rural buses, trucks and trains move into them. Once in the city, the children are forced to get trained to survive in street situations and join the community of street dwellers. They form a society of a special nature which can be called the ‘street children’s society’.

India is a signatory to the world declaration on children’s rights. It stresses on the survival, protection and development of children. The national plans for children stress on the care of children keeping in mind the 300 million children in the country. But the actual situation is far from what is desired. Many children are being neglected by families and many others are separated from their parents. Exposure to excessive physical maltreatment and emotional deprivation is common among children living in street situations and they affect their behaviour and development (Sondhi-Garg 2004).

The researcher has live-in experience with children, living in street situations, coming to the open shelter for a single day, for weeks, at times for months and eventually entering a foster care home. He knows many children who stay for years in a foster care situation and succeed in getting into the mainstream. They do well in the mainstream society as school students, employed persons and leading a responsible family life. The questions that haunt the researcher are many. Why do children make the street as a habitat? How to help children in mainstreaming? How can the empowerment of children help India to emerge as a world power? These questions motivate the researcher to a deep study of children living in street habitats.
1.3.1. Volume of Children in the Street Habitat
It is very difficult to get accurate numbers of children living in street habitats as they keep shifting from programme to programme and from place to place. In the late 1990s the World Health Organization and UNICEF estimate that there were 100 million children living and working in the streets with the majority being in the developing world (Dlamini, Molewa 2009, Sauve 2003 & Epstein 1999). Regarding street children in India, it is estimated to be 11 million (George 2013). Street girls are less in number. They are most vulnerable.

1.3.2. Miseries of Street Life
Most children are exposed to dirt, rain and cold. Their health condition is generally poor and many suffer from chronic diseases like asthma and dysentery. Circumstances force them to engage in vending, begging, rag picking, bottle picking, being acrobats, cleaning, cobbling, and selling refilled water bottles. Children who live in the railway station are less in contact with family than the children who live in street situations (Dabir & Athale 2011).

1.3.3. Street Risks and Skills
Development leads to displacement (D’Souza 2008). Many children are displaced in developing and developed countries exposing them to risk their lives. They meet their essential needs in their own way. Food is not an issue in a city children get used the street environment. Children move from place to place and get their meal. They can get employed from causal to temporary labour in various small industries, tea stalls, hotels or any other place. Human skill is always in demand in a city (D’Souza 2008). Adaptation to street life with all its vulnerability is difficult, yet they develop coping skills which make them face the harsh realities of the street life.

1.3.4. Street Habit Formation
Once in the street situation, children look out for opportunities for a new beginning. They struggle, they spent lonely days and they work hard and look for support to survive. Accidents are regular in their life through the various games they play: the street fights, night prowlers, ‘thief-police-chase’ and the many more adventurous activities. A few try to go back to their own kith and kin. Some of them get married and settle down adding to the
street misery. Some of them end their life on the street itself at a very early age. Millions live and many die on the streets on a daily basis. It could be a barometer to assess the progress of a nation (Dabir & Athale 2011).

Children are not seen for what they are. They are considered less than human. It is not a phenomenon that is limited to developing nations. It is seen in every industrialized country. They are displaced and found to be in vulnerable situations. They are the most fluid population of vulnerable children who are visible and yet live in the periphery of the marginalized society in almost every country in the world (Dabir & Athale 2011). The factors that push children onto the streets, trials and tribulations, struggles for survival, vulnerabilities as well as resilience in an adult dominated world make them develop street skills. In many situations they are called different names which are dehumanizing such as social parasites, pests, rag pickers, glue sniffers, scavengers, manhole children and homeless children (Dabir & Athale 2011). Children eventually get street addicted.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The researcher is confronted with the problem of children living in street habitats. He sees the need for a change in the social set up that continues to live with the children who are marginalised. Hence three questions are proposed for a scientific study to find possible responses for assisting children to reinstate them in the mainstream society with dignity, as they are in the process of growth to contribute to nation building.

a. Street is not a place for people to reside; however, we do see many people including men, women and children living in street situations. Children seem to be the most vulnerable as they are young, weak and need more protection. Such children do not want to and are not easily accepted in the mainstream society as they need psychological and social rehabilitation. Why do children in street habitats need healing?

b. How can psychosocial interventions heal children in street habitats?

c. What are the psychosocial interventions that can empower children in street habitats?
1.5. OBJECTIVES

Life in its fullness is the dream of every human being. Children in street habitat are socially excluded and marginalized. How to bring fullness to the life of such children? How can children become essential part of the mainstream having their own specific role? What is the role of the members of the mainstream society towards children, especially the deprived? The research is regarding ordinary children who face ordinary psychological and emotional problems due to the negative social situations. Those who suffer from acute problems need professional support and so they are not part of this study. This study proposes to find out the psychosocial status which includes mental, social and emotional health condition of children in street habitat. It explores the process of healing through psychosocial interventions and the process of healing from their ‘wounds’; The study looks into the ways in which children can be helped towards empowerment through psychosocial interventions; i.e. helping them to enter into the mainstream.

1.6. OPERATIONAL TERMS

The current study regarding children living in street habitat makes use of different terms and the understanding of the major terms are explained below.

1.6.1. Children in Street Habitat

In one of the meetings a street child stated that he is not a street child but the child of his parents. He happened to be in the street situation due to varied reasons. This inspired the researcher to look for a new term. After discussion with the children, staff and social workers various terms were considered: children in the street, children of the street, children with street domiciles, children from the street, children with the streets, and children with street habitat. The term most accepted in the various discussions is ‘children in street habitats’.
The largely used term for such children is “street children” which stigmatize them. They are children who did not have the luck to be born in families that could take care of them. They are normal just like any other children born in families who could grow up to be good human beings. Being tagged as “street children” is an injustice done to them. Hence, the term used in this paper is children in street habitats. Habitat is of Latin origin which conveys a place where one stays or makes his habitation.

This term refers to children who have left their domiciles and taken to the street environment for their survival. They live, earn, spend and save from the streets. They make a living by rag-picking, begging, stealing, or by working as porters or helpers in petty shops. They can be called mini adults as they manage their life on their own. The children who are in bondage of poverty, family neglect, victims of any other social evils or mishaps, walk into the world of freedom having no other options and being desperate. As the children continue in their street life the wonderful freedom becomes a dangerous freedom. Their lives are shaped by deprivation, violence, anxiety and fear. While they live on the streets unprotected, they invite exploitation from the unscrupulous (Xavier & Arulraj 1996). Other terms used are: ‘children in street context, street situations and street environment’.

1.6.2. Healing
The children that are weaned from the street normally belong to families that had lots of physical and psychological hazards. They affect the development of the children after birth as well as before birth. They are influenced by traditional beliefs, maternal stress and unfavourable attitudes on the part of significant people (Hurlock 2009). Only finesse can heal the child of these past issues that affect his growth. The person needs to have a sense of security, identity, belonging, purpose and personal competence to develop social integrity and healing (Sherfield 2011). More details regarding healing are discussed in the next chapter.

1.6.3. Empowerment
An empowered person can be spoken of as an adult who is self-reliant and socially responsible. Children in street habitats can be empowered by helping them to earn, spend, save and get merged into the mainstream. The child becomes an adult in age and
experience. He is happy to have a job in hand, to get back to a family that is his own, in a society where he feels accepted, wanted and appreciated.

1.6.4. Psychosocial Interventions

Psychosocial interventions include all the human interventions that can help children to have emotional maturity which can lead to a life that is socially integrated. For children living in street situations, every meeting by a responsible adult, every offer of comfort that soothes him is understood as psychosocial interventions. This study takes care of the way children are enabled to accept themselves, others and the Divine for a meaningful life in society.

For the purpose of this study psychosocial refers to the mental and emotional conditions of children in street situations and their relationship to society. According to Gardener, intelligence is seen in varieties and it is responsive to the cultural situations or the environment in which children grow up (Eisner 2004). Education is required to transform any raw potential into a mature social role. Children develop skills to protect themselves in any given situations. In street situation they develop skills to survive. If they are motivated and guided, they can develop skills that can build up their life and the society in turn (Berk 2007). There is need for a process that helps motivation, perception and learning. Through self-awareness they need to develop self-confidence. Timely positive interventions can lead them to a progressive life which can get them mainstreamed. Interventions refers to family life experience, interpersonal and social relationships, ability to form attachments to caregivers and peers, social roles, social support, communication, leadership, economic stability, education and health.

Children are active and creative social agents having their own specific roles and contributions to the society. They are to be seen as possibilities more than problems and that they lead to a good future (Corsaro 2011). The child gets socialized in the family as they internalize society. He is trained to become a competent and contributing member. According to Parson a child can become a threat to the society if he is not trained well. He is a threat until he is socialized. Socialization takes place as the child learns to act in accordance with social norms and values rather than according to innate sexual and aggressive drives (Corsaro 2011).
1.6.5. Mainstreamed Children

The term ‘mainstreamed children’ refers to children who have lived a street life and have been weaned to the mainstream society. They have suffered during the pre-street life and street life. Through psychosocial interventions they have left their street life. They live in foster care homes or in families taking part in all the activities of the mainstream as a child. They enjoy the ordinary benefits offered to children in a society.

1.7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Many Government and Non-Government organisations (NGO) have been working to help children in street situations. With the declaration of children’s rights people are more aware that children have rights. Children are made aware of their rights. However, the flow of children into the street situation is on the increase especially in the developing nations. There is need for rehabilitation of children who are street addicted. Children need healing as they are wounded with the cruelties of society and suffer marginalization. The present study is to assess the various psychosocial interventions that can heal and empower such children. The study paves the way for their social integration. It helps to make their weaknesses into strengths and develop positive energies for a responsible adult life.

Going through the available sources it is found that a study on ‘psychosocial interventions to heal and empower’ children in street context has not been undertaken in the past in India. Hence, the researcher with his experience of 15 years with children in street habitat proposes a new approach incorporating the existing literature marginally related to the topic. The various findings and proposals of the study can enhance the services offered to children in street habitat.

The research attempts to understand children in street habitats with their problems that haunt them. The hurts they carry along due to their past affect their behavior patterns. This study is to assess the various facilities offered to such children in Kolkata; how they affect their psychological and social upbringing and lead them to responsible citizenship. It can enlighten society at large regarding the initial days of children in the street that are
traumatic and life threatening. Without realising the consequences they get marginalized. They fall sick and refuse to accept mainstreaming possibilities. The study can offer information to general public and those involved in the care of children in street habitat to improve on the concern and quality of service offered to deprived children. It can assist further thinking on preventive and curative measures for deprived children.

1.8. NATURE OF STUDY

The study focusses on children in deprived situation, experiencing street life with its consequences that affect their growth as individuals and members in a society. The approaches used are phenomenological and ethnographic taking into consideration the experiences of the children and the researcher.

1.8.1. Phenomenological Study

Phenomenology is a science of phenomena which takes into consideration the reality in its appearances. Phenomenological research generally has, as its central concern, the return to embodied, experiential meanings aiming for a fresh, complex and rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived. These concrete descriptions of lived situations, often first-person accounts are used to find answers to the research questions (Finlay 2008).

The focus during this research is on various experiences of children as described by them, the caregivers and the researcher through the experience of living with children in street habitats. Their lived experience is well described through descriptive writings, interviews and group discussions. The questions asked on different occasion to individuals offer experiential knowledge of children. The stories that persons relate can help to understand their situation better.

1.8.2. Ethnographic Study

Ethnographic method studies the behaviour of a group of people that takes place in specific social situations. This can include behaviour that is developed or constrained in the given situation (Wilson, William & Anmol 2010). Ethnographic study of children in the street
habitats enables the researcher to understand them with their past life in the village, life in the streets and possible life in the mainstream. Many of the children in the street habitats have a common economic status and history. They live a common life once in the streets and their ethos evolves in the course of their life. Responsible guidance can lead them to healthy social living. Children living an adult’s life and also a child’s life is clearly seen in their life. They take different slants at different moments. All the different steps are taken to survive in the given situation. The relationship the researcher has with them is that of a friend (playing with them), father (assisting and directing them), mother (being kind and affectionate to them), guide (showing the right path), teacher (helping them to learn), counsellor (listening to them) and more basically a healer (of physical problems and mental disturbances). Ethnography helps the researcher to have a broader approach to children’s reality. It allows the children to expose their set of representations, beliefs and values (Santana 2013).

1.8.3. FIRO-B and FIRO-F
Fundamental interpersonal relationship orientation behaviour (FIRO-B) and feeling (FIRO-F) are tools by Schutz (1966) based on the three areas of experience of an individual: inclusion, control and affection. As a triangulation step the researcher uses the tool to assess the extent of inclusion, control and affection of children as they live in street habitats and in the mainstream society. It offers the researcher deeper understanding of the emotional wellbeing of children which affects their social life. The comparative study of children in street habitat and children who are mainstreamed or in the process of mainstreaming clearly states the impact of psychosocial interventions.

1.9. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Growing numbers of children in street situation is considered as one of the most serious, urgent and rapidly growing socio-educational challenges (Dabir & Athale 2011). While living in the streets children are forced to face difficult situations. They need to earn their livelihood. They have to work, beg or steal to earn. Children struggle in the initial days. But as the days go by they find their ways of living in the streets. They form a group that supports them and develop skills to work and earn. They learn interpersonal skills in their
own ways to manage their life with others. These developed skills of survival can be turned to life skills as they get merged into the mainstream society (George 2014). They need guidance and support to accept their actual situation, capacity for a meaningful life in the society and the possibility for development and empowerment.

1.10. LIMITATIONS

The numbers of children in street habitat are large; the research can take in only a sample population. As the street children are mostly illiterate, the responses may be limited. It is an in-depth study; however, the respondents may not reach up to the expectations and so the result may have its own limits. The study begins with children living in street habitats. Many of the respondents may not answer some of the vital questions pertaining to rejection, abuse, exploitation, hunger, cheap pleasures and habits. Though the population in the study consists of both the genders, the pronoun ‘he’ is used and it is inclusive of both sexes when not referring to a particular person. Phenomenological and ethnographic studies have their own limits as explained in the third chapter. The duration of stay in street habitat, the time required for rehabilitation and the process are not uniform to the study population. Some have lived for a long time in the streets while some lived only for a short time referring to two to five years or more. Another challenge can be the fact that every child is unique with distinctive experience in similar situations. However, the children who have been in the street habitats and later healed and empowered are able to contribute much to the study. The researcher has been part of the group for many years accompanying them from the street to the mainstream. He is aware of the possible bias and takes utmost care to keep his bias away as he proceeds with the study.

1.11. CHAPTERIZATION

The first chapter is an introduction to the study to place it in the proper context. It offers the background, statement of the problem, research objectives, justification, definition of terms and significance of the study. The second chapter introduces the different themes relating to children in street situation, children’s development and rehabilitation related
topics from the available literature. Some of the theories bring to light the various aspects of children’s development. The literature highlights the need and uniqueness of the study in the present context of the world with many children living in the street situations.

The third chapter explains the methodology. The chapter speaks about the participants, sampling procedures, data collection, field work, ethical issues and the approaches of the study. It explains the phenomenological and ethnographic approaches as relevant for the current study. Chapter four explains the study results with references to the field reports. It presents the findings in the three stages of pre-street life, street life and mainstreamed life. It presents the descriptive data of the various interventions which help healing and empowerment. The fifth chapter presents the triangulation instrument taken from Schutz (1966) assessing the emotional variations of children in the street habitat and children who have accepted the psychosocial interventions. The sixth chapter draws conclusions and the recommendations that originate from the present study. It also proposes the need for further research in the field as the current study is very limited.

1.12. CONCLUSION

The study takes into consideration deprived children who live in street habitats. The researcher gets wider perception of the topic from the secondary sources which lead him to the new areas with the help of varied population associated with children in street habitats: parents of deprived children in the villages and in the streets, relatives, friends, care givers, key informants and stakeholders. The researcher being familiar to many of them in the field adds to the quality of the study to validate the research topic.