Chapter 5
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In India, children constitute one-third of the total population and realizing their need for protection and nurture, various welfare measures are being taken up. Family is accorded the prime position in taking care of the children and efforts are being made to involve it much more actively in the holistic development of children. In spite of these efforts, children continued to be exposed to various kinds of problems.

The UNICEF identified a special group of disadvantaged children in late 1980's, and named them as 'children in difficult circumstances'. They include street and working children, neglected orphans and destitutes, children of prostitutes, juvenile delinquents, children of AIDS affected parents or AIDS affected children and AIDS orphans, and drug addicted children. Among them street children can be referred as 'exceptionally vulnerable children' because of their living and working conditions. But, very little work is done for them as they are misunderstood as child labourers for quite sometime.

UNICEF identified three groups of street children, viz., children on the street, children of the street and abandoned children keeping in view the family ties they have and their exposure to street environment. But, still there is a confusion on the magnitude of the problem, as the estimates conducted in different parts of the world as well as India failed to give a correct figure of street children because of constant mobility of these children from one place to another in absence of a stable residence and a safe environment.
UNICEF and other international organisations shifted their focus on street children in late 1980's. A major step taken by the Government of India in collaboration with UNICEF is conducting the situational analysis of street children in major cities of the country. A scheme for street children was launched in 1992-1993, extending its support to the NGOs working for street children. Understanding the severity of the problem, different states, including Andhra Pradesh, also launched independent programmes. Various NGOs came forward to stretch their activities and service programmes to street children.

A glance at the available literature reveals that very limited studies are conducted on street children in India, particularly in Andhra Pradesh. Further, these studies have failed to examine all the needs of street children. Since the problem is widespread, there is a need for evolving a comprehensive framework for their rehabilitation. The present study is a modest attempt in this direction.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study mainly aims at an assessment of the needs of street children for a better rehabilitation. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the socio-economic characteristics of street children;
2. study the living and working conditions of street children;
3. assess the needs of street children on a comprehensive basis, and
4. suggest measures, in the light of the findings of the study, to improve the conditions of the street children through a need based rehabilitation approach.
METHODOLOGY

Since the study was undertaken by an individual scholar, it was confined to one city. Vijayawada was purposively chosen for the study, as it constitutes a large number of street children. As it is a descriptive study, the survey method was adopted for data collection and the convenience and snow-ball sampling methods were used for selecting the sample respondents. Case study method was also followed to get deeper insights into the problem by focusing on unique cases.

The sample size was restricted to 100 street children and confined to boys only. As the respondents were children with a low educational status and as it needed a direct personal observation to get a reliable information, interview schedule was chosen for data collection. The schedule was pretested before going for data collection.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following are the important limitations of the study:

1. Though street children are spread into different parts of Vijayawada, the study is confined only to few parts. As the street children are completely mobile in nature and the sample size is restricted to 100, the convenience and snow-ball sampling methods are followed. The nature of the study and the sample made the researcher to adopt this method, even though the sample may not represent the universe in its entirety.

2. Though proper care is taken to include all the needs of street children at a comprehensive level, needs related to sexual exploitation, child abuse and
drug addiction are completely neglected in the study. Moreover, as it was felt that probing into such areas may spoil the whole work, they were purposively avoided. This also could be one of the limitations of the study.

3. Though the title signifies the needs of all the street children, it is focused only on the needs of street boys. Reasons for not considering the girls under the study are -

a. As there would be very few girls without adequate protection and shelter, they are not represented in the sample. Another reason for not including the girls in the sample is that it may be difficult to gather information from them without anyone's interference and the chances of reliability would be low.

b. It was felt that there should be a separate criteria for the assessment of needs of street girls keeping in view the aspects like gender and their legal age.

4. In view of the limited size of the sample and the place of study, it may be difficult to generalise the findings.

The above limitations may be borne in mind while analysing the results.
MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the study may be summarised as follows.

1. The majority of the street children are Hindus (70 per cent), followed by Christians (20 per cent) and Muslims (9 per cent). The religious composition of street children broadly corresponds with the religious composition of the study area and its surroundings. A similar finding was reported by Salim Reza (1999).

2. Though there are street children from upper castes (24 per cent), the majority are from socially and educationally backward castes like SCs and BCs (37 and 30 per cent respectively). An earlier study conducted by Rao (1989) in Vijayawada revealed similar findings.

3. Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of the street children hail from the district itself or the adjoining districts. Even the rest are native of other districts within the State (30 per cent) and a few from other States (6 per cent), which are well connected to Vijayawada by rail network.

4. About three-fourths of the street children are from the poor (with the family income up to Rs.2000/- per month) and the lower middle (with the family income between Rs.2000/- to Rs.4000/- per month) income groups. Only one-fifth of them are found to be from fairly good economic background.
5. Over two-thirds of the street children (68 per cent) have both the parents alive while 25 per cent have only one parent alive. Their parents have low education status and are mostly engaged in the unorganised sector.

6. The important reasons that forced the respondents to the streets centre around the disturbances within their families such as child battering, alcoholic parent/step parent harassment and lack of affection, which together account for 53 per cent of the total. About 27 per cent of the respondents left their homes either because they are forced to attend the school or to undertake economic activities.

7. As many as four-fifths of the street children belonged to the age groups of 12-14 and 15-16 years (45 per cent and 35 per cent respectively). Though a majority of them attended school (78 per cent), those who crossed primary level account for about one-third of the total. Except 7 per cent of the respondents, all others are physically fit.

8. About half of the respondents have taken to the streets only for the past one year, while 16 per cent were living in the streets for more than 5 years. Most of them (57 per cent) spend their nights in Railway Station/Bus Stand or on the pavements/parks/bridges. Only 27 per cent stay in Shelter homes and 8 per cent at their employers’ homes, while the remaining 8 per cent move from one place to another. As such, most of them face or perceive the threat of exploitation/abuse from different persons including their parents.
9. As many as 95 per cent of the street children are engaged in some kind of economic activity or the other. They are found to be engaged as hotel workers, *bogi* cleaners, rag pickers, mechanics and other such jobs that fetch them some income on the spot. Nearly 70 per cent of them earn an income of less than Rs. 1000/- per month and spend mostly on recreation and bad habits after meeting their bare subsistence needs. Only about one-fifth of them are in the habit of saving some money for their future while another one-fifth keep sending some money to their families.

10. While nearly two-thirds of the street children (65 per cent) are able to get three square meals per day most of the times, a majority of them do not have at least two pairs of clothes (55 per cent), safe place to sleep (57 per cent) and a safe place to keep their belongings (72 per cent). As such, a majority of them are susceptible to the changes in the weather conditions and frequently suffer from some sickness or the other. Even though a majority of them take care of their personal hygiene, they got habituated to smoking (59 per cent), *ghutka, paan* and tobacco chewing (38 per cent). Some others also have taken to alcohol and snuffing the fluids. Most of them (60 per cent) are not aware of serious health hazards like AIDS and Hepatitis B. Only 44 per cent are getting some kind of medical help/assistance.

11. Most of the respondents are able to satisfy their recreational needs by spending money on movies and video games as well as watching TV either in night shelters or in Railway Station/Bus stand.
12. About one-third of the respondents do not trust people and 17 per cent do not even enjoy the company of friends. While about one-third of them do not feel free to express their emotions, over half of them feel that there is nobody to recognise their talents and encourage them to do good things. Though about half of them are maintaining fairly good social relationships, as many as 78 per cent feel that they need care and protection to safeguard themselves from external environment.

13. A majority of the street children derive some sort of job satisfaction because of sense of freedom at work and regular payments and about two-thirds of them described the treatment of their employers as good. About two-thirds of them work for more than 8 hours per day and 36 per cent feel that they are undertaking hazardous work. As many as 72 per cent are interested in technical training and if given a chance 38 per cent want to pursue higher education.

14. As many as four-fifths of the street children feel isolated at one time or the other. Nearly three-fourths of them do not like to be identified as street children. About two-thirds of them have poor self-dignity and confidence.

15. The different needs of the street children are positively correlated to one another. The relationship is found to be significant at 1 per cent and 5 per cent probability level in respect of most of the needs. There is, however, a negative correlation between educational and economic needs but the relationship is not significant.
There is no significant variation in the needs of the street children across different age groups with the exception of health needs which are higher in the case of those falling under the age group of 6-11 years as compared to the older ones. On the other hand, the variation between different categories of street children is significant, with the intensity of needs being highest in the case of the of the street category with regard to physical, psychological, emotional and social needs and orphans with regard to esteem needs. However, there is no significant variation in respect of the overall needs of the street children across different age groups and categories.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above findings, the following broad conclusions may be drawn.

1. The problem of street children appears to pervade the entire society cutting across the religious and caste barriers and even the different income groups. The number of street children is on the increase.

2. Estranged relationships within the family appear to be the root cause of the problem of street children. Over-protection and imposition of strict discipline at home by the parents also could make the children take to the street life. Very few children leave their homes with a positive attitude of helping their families in economic distress. Thus, disturbances within the family rather than the economic factors appear to be responsible for the problem of street children.
3. The living conditions of the street children could be termed as poor as evidenced by inadequate food and clothing and absence of a proper place to take shelter. As a result, they are exposed to various kinds of dangers and exploitation by the vested interests.

4. Almost all the street children undertake some job or the other that would fetch them spot payment. Most of them work for long hours and the nature of jobs undertaken by them is often hazardous and harmful to their health. They spend most of their earnings on recreation rather than better food and clothing and most of them do not save money for future needs, perhaps because of lack of a safe place to keep their things and proper guidance.

5. The needs of the street children are complex and many and they are all closely related to one another. Moreover, there is no significant variation in the overall needs of the street children across different age groups and categories. However, the intensity of needs appear to be higher in the case of of the street and orphan categories when compared to on the street category.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The growing numbers of children pouring into the streets signifies the ineffective way of tackling the problem by the Government, NGOs and the society at large. Though it’s been 10 years since the problem is receiving some attention, it appears that all the concerned agencies failed in preventing the problem.
The rehabilitation programmes being implemented for the street children also appear to be inadequate both in terms of the coverage and approach. Often, they focused upon meeting the basic needs of street children and neglected other needs which could be satisfied through a comprehensive approach. This is perhaps due to lack of proper coordination between the concerned agencies and lack of appropriate policies, besides allocation of limited funds by the Government. In addition, the problem of street children has not been sensitised in a proper manner resulting in negative attitudes against street children which make them feel isolated and rejected and turn hostile towards society.

Street children do not trust others easily because of the threats and experiences they faced on the streets. However, irrespective of age, most of them crave more intensely for acceptance and recognition in society. It can be noticed more in those children who have less or no contact with families, i.e., of the street and orphan category children. Though most of the street children prefer to have contact with their families, most of them seem to be unwilling for a complete reunion with their parents. The reasons could be fear of punishment, fears related to adjustment, fear of over-protection and control, consciousness of observation by others in the family and guiltiness about bad habits they have acquired on the streets.

Hence, an integrated comprehensive need based approach is required to tackle the problem of street children effectively. The components of such an approach should include outreach programmes and family reintegration programmes involving community based and child-to-child approaches to bring about proper sensitisation.
about the problem in the society paving way for the rehabilitation of existing street children as well as prevention of the problem in future.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are offered to deal with the problem of street children.

1. **Efforts should be initiated for the enumeration of street children in different towns and cities with the active involvement of students of social work.**

2. **The specific problems being faced by the street children should be identified and their needs assessed on a periodical basis by engaging professional social workers.**

3. **There should be a coordinating agency within each Municipality / Municipal Corporation to focus undivided attention on the problem of street children and to execute/coordinate different programmes related to them by both Government departments and NGOs.**

4. **The rehabilitation programmes should be designed with the active participation of the concerned street children either on individual or group basis and integrating them with the ongoing anti-poverty programmes for the urban poor.**

5. **The rehabilitation programmes should be subjected to proper monitoring with a view to incorporate necessary modification to suit the changing needs of the street children.**
6. Training should be imparted to the counselors, street educators and other social workers dealing with the street children on a continuous basis.

7. Efforts should be made to involve the already rehabilitated children in all the intervention programmes for the benefit of street children right from the identification of problems and needs to their rehabilitation.

8. Adequate facilities must be provided in the night shelters to provide a friendly environment so that the street children can feel at home in such places.

9. Rehabilitation programmes should focus upon educational, skill building and income generating activities. At the same time the psychological and social needs of the street children must also be given due attention.

10. There is a need to document the efforts being made to tackle the problem of street children by initiating action research studies.