Chapter 5

Street Children: An Area for Social Work Intervention

In the preceding three chapters we have examined the theory–practice relationship vis-à-vis Social Work education and training, and the development of social work profession in India. A major finding of all these chapters is that Social Work is primarily practice-oriented. Social work practice includes interventions with various sections of the population, especially the marginalised sections, who are more in need. The nature of relationship between theory and practice in Social Work can be analysed with reference to any area of social work intervention like social work practice in hospital settings, social work practice in community settings, social work practice with the disabled, women-centric social work, social work practice with notified and de-notified tribes, etc. One such area of social work intervention chosen for analysis in this study is street children, an area in which I have experience of working as a para-professional and it is also the area in which I want to engage myself as a trained social worker.

The attempt in this chapter is to understand the theoretical assumptions underpinning the interventions that practitioners (both trained social workers and para-professionals) make in this area. This exercise must naturally begin with delineation of street children as an area of social work practice. It hardly needs elaboration that the people living on the streets exemplify the extreme manifestation of socio-economic inequality and poverty. Every aspect of their life is exposed to the public gaze; they epitomize social degradation, and this is further emphasised when they are unaccompanied children and adolescents (de Moura 2002). Street children are, thus, a marginalised and vulnerable section of the population that calls for the attention of social workers.

As Social Work education and training is wide in its scope and captures different areas of social work practice, there is no specific focus on street children in its curriculum and pedagogy. However, different fields of specialisation in Social Work, such as ‘criminology and justice’ and ‘family and child welfare’, do capture certain aspects of the problem of street children and recognise the importance of intervening with them. The methods of social work practice such as casework and group work are recognised as important in guiding interventions with street children. Also, the fieldwork component in the Social Work curriculum recognises street children as an area of intervention and places students in organisations that work with street children for their on-field training process.

Before we examine the nature of relationship between theory and practice with regard to street children as an area of social work intervention, it is necessary to develop an
understanding on the issue. Thus, based on the secondary literature available on the subject, this chapter examines different aspects of the issue of street children. Firstly, it covers the definition and profile of street children. Secondly, it covers the aspects of street culture and the problems that street children face on the streets. Thirdly, it examines the worldview of street children and the attitude that they have towards different sections of the population. Following this, it examines factors that lead to the street-children phenomenon and the interventions made by both the government organisations and non-government organisations to address it. After examining different aspects of the issue, based on the findings of the previous chapters, this chapter finally seeks to analyse the connections between Social Work education and training, on the one hand, and social work practice with street children, on the other. The attempt here is to analyse the implications that theory has for on-field practise with regard to the problems of street children.

Street Children: Who are They?

Street children are largely an urban phenomenon. In the wake of rapid industrialisation, there has been large-scale migration of people from rural to urban areas all over the world. The underdeveloped as well as the developing countries have been unable to deal with such a huge influx of people into towns and cities, especially with regard to housing them. A major consequence of this has been the proliferation of slums and shanty towns in the cities. According to Rajendra Pandey (1991), urban poverty has become a common characteristic of the new human habitat. Trapped in poverty, children and youth have become one of the most vulnerable groups to face the risks of rapid and unregulated urbanisation. Children in cities are encountering a variety of problems such as child labour, sexual harassment, physical abuse, neglect and abandonment. Moreover, many international organisations, such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), as well as Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have expressed that the most marginalised population in the cities is that of street children whose numbers are growing rapidly.

Street children are variously termed in different countries. In the developed countries, they are referred to as ‘homeless youth’, ‘runaways’ or ‘throwaways’. In the developing countries, they are known as ‘parking boys’ (in Kenya), ‘pogey boys’ (in Philippines), ‘pivetes’ (in Brazil), ‘ragpickers’ or ‘sadak chaap bachche’ (in India), ‘gamines’ (in Bogota), ‘scugnizzo’ (in Naples), ‘pajarito frutero’ (in Peru), etc. (ibid.). Interestingly, the popular names with which they are called in different countries invariably carry a negative connotation indicating the society’s attitude towards them.
Although there have been many attempts to define street children, the first globally accepted definition was framed by UNICEF, and it runs as follows: “Those for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, that is, unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults” (cited in Dabir 2005: 9). UNICEF has further divided street children into three operational categories:

1. **Children on the Street**: Forming the largest category, these are largely working children who have homes; most return to their families at the end of the day.

2. **Children of the Street**: These children are a group who has chosen the street as their home and it is there that they seek shelter, livelihood, and companionship. They have occasional or rare contacts with their families.

3. **Abandoned Children**: These children have no contact with their families. They are entirely on their own, not only for material survival but also for emotional and psychological support. They include orphans, runaways and lost or destitute children. Often these children are also referred to as “nowhere” children because they may not be traceable.

UNICEF’s definition and categorisation are based on the relationship of these children with their families. Others have critiqued and expanded this definition on the basis of factors such as socio-cultural conditions in different countries and gender of street children. Lewis Aptekar has proposed to take into account a number of factors to provide a modern definition of ‘children in particularly difficult circumstances’:

The term describes children whose suffering indicates the highest risk to mental health, and includes children traumatized by war, natural and technological disasters, and street children [as per the UNICEF definition]. While the modern definition will take these facts into account, the stress will be on how they are coping with whatever brought them to the street in the first place, as well as the variety of problems they encounter once they are on the street (2004: 19).

In India, many interventions with regard to the problems of street children are made by voluntary organisations/NGOs. Due to the ambiguity in defining street children each organisation has adapted its own definition based on its area of work. Thus, there are many definitions of street children in India depending upon the specific problems that the organisations are working on.

**Street Children in India: A Profile**

Street children are a mobile population; they not only keep on changing their place of stay and work in a city, but also move back and forth between different cities. In the absence of a
common definition, estimates about the number of street children in India are at best guesstimates. UNICEF (1988) puts the figure at eleven million (considered as conservative by many voluntary organisations), with over 100,000 street children each in Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. Rashmi Agrawal (1999) puts the figure at seven per cent of the child population in India, which works out to nearly twenty million street children.

**Gender.** The majority of street children in the cities are boys. Their number is more than double the number of street girls. A major reason for lesser number of street girls being enumerated in the estimation of the population of street children is that they are often not visible and difficult to trace. The moment a girl lands on the streets, there are high chances of her being trafficked for sex trade (Agnihotri 2001).

**Age.** If we classify the age of children as 0–18 years, then a majority of them are found in the age-group of 11–15 years (Rane and Shroff 1994). But the figures with regard to the age of street children are distorted. NGOs have pointed out that, due to the harsh circumstances faced very early on in life, street children become street-smart and they often lie about their age (in the hope of getting more material help and sympathy). Also, the physical appearance of a street child may give a false impression about her/his age; the frequent abuse of drugs by street children stunts their physical growth, and they might look younger than their actual age. According to Sharon Pretto,

Children who live on and off the streets seldom look their chronological age. Deprivation of proper nutrition and other facilities from an early age, while surviving on the streets, stunts the normal physical growth and development of the child. As a result, the child may appear to be younger than he/she actually is. At the same time the harsh realities of life on the streets may force the child to grow up and mature at an early age (2006: 119).

**Religion.** Some studies indicate that the majority of street children in India are Hindus followed by Muslims and then Christians (Philips 1994; Dabir 2005; Save the Children 2011). However, organisations have also observed that around mosques and *dargahs* in major cities, the majority of the children are Muslims.

**Caste Background.** Again, with respect to the caste background of street children, there is lack of clear data. But, recently, a study conducted by Save the Children (2011) in Delhi highlighted that social class is a key determinant in leaving the child on the street to work or live because, as per the findings of the study 36 per cent of the children are dalits, 17 per cent adivasis, and 38 per cent belong to the other backward classes. In Mumbai, half of the Hindu street children come from SC/ST category (Rane and Shroff 1994).

**Family Background and Connections.** Contrary to the popular belief that most of these children are without family support, practitioners with an experience of five or more years of working with them have been able to, in most cases, trace the families of these children. Often these children are in contact with their families. Some street children are in everyday touch
with their families (these include children who work on the streets and return home every night and children of homeless families). In most cases, these children come from extremely poor and illiterate families from rural areas. Even children from homeless families are migrants from rural areas (due to lack of work and extremely poor survival conditions there). Asha Rane and Neela Shroff (1994) have pointed out that a vast majority of street children belong to low-income families whose earnings are less than Rs. 600 per month.

The Street Culture and the Problems Faced by Street Children

Street children, unlike other children, experience a very different childhood on the streets. Early on in their life they are exposed to an unprotected environment on the streets. They are individuals who are a significant part of the political economy of the streets. Not much has been documented or discussed in the ‘mainstream’ media about this. This perhaps signifies the stigma that is attached to ‘street life’ and consequently to street children. The life on the streets highlights certain aspects about its political economy. From their experience the practitioners have observed that there is a nexus between street goons, police, and municipal authorities for forcing street children into illegal activities such as begging. Begging on the streets generates a lot of money for the local goons. Since it is considered illegal, the police and the municipal authorities get an informal license to engage in corrupt practices vis-à-vis these activities on the streets. The money that a street child makes through begging at the end of the day includes shares of all these stakeholders. But, irrespective of the amount of money that the child makes, s/he is given only a fixed sum by the goon. The rest of the money is divided between the goons, the police, and the municipal authorities. If a child, who makes a good amount of money through begging refuses to do the job, s/he by use of brutal physical force is dragged into it. John, a practitioner from Bangalore, observed this with regard to street children being forced into pick-pocketing by the street goons. Altaf Shaikh, from his observations with respect to the working life of street children at Chowpatty Beach in Mumbai, has hinted on the political economy of the streets and how in a hidden form it utilizes the labour of street children for meagre returns:

Earning commissions as high as 50 per cent each day from pony rides, baba gadis and game stalls, they are probably best off among Bombay’s street children – making as much as Rs. 300 on a good Saturday [. . . .] I could not fathom why the stall and pony owners of Chowpatty paid such large commissions . . . It was not long before I learnt the chilling answer [. . . .] the trap that opened for them every morning on the beach – the gambling den . . . Run by the brother of a game-stall owner . . . on Chowpatty. The plan was deadly – pay the children handsome commission at night, and get it all back from them in the morning at the gambling den (The Times of India 1995).
Then there are other ‘legal’ businesses as well where street children serve as cheap labour. For example, in the area around Jama Masjid in Delhi, there is a wholesale market of different commodities such as electronic items, medicine, and clothes. Employing street children for such work at cheap wages is a regular practice there. Street children serve as low-wage labourers to perform temporary and menial jobs, subsidising many activities for the affluent and non-poor. Thus, street children are quite useful to many individuals and groups, who take advantage of and greatly benefit from their services (Desrochers 1999).

Moreover, these children are large consumers of other illegal commodities such as drugs. For these children, drugs might be a coping mechanism to deal with the harsh realities of street life, but it is a vicious circle in which they are trapped by drug peddlers making the street culture even more complex. Practitioners from Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai expressed that more than 90 per cent of the street children are addicted to one or more forms of *nasha* (drugs, alcohol, and inhalants). The most popular form of *nasha* among street children is inhalants such as shoe-glue and whiteners, as they are easily and cheaply available. Barnabe D’Souza has observed,

> The street has its own security, unwritten norms, and survival modes. The constellation of a street child’s relationships juxtaposes a sub-culture that is very unique to the streets. A street child having to fend for himself on the streets, is vulnerable to a complex array of influences: physical, social, relational, and environmental. [...] Drug consumption is not a physiological necessity, but a survival strategy, “to conform to” and “to belong to the clique” who (sic). in essence becomes his [street child] nucleus. A street child’s drug consumption . . . is one that brings him acceptance and initiates him into the mainstream of street culture (2004: 44).

The examples cited above point to the fact that street children get dependent on street life once they are trapped in drug addiction and other survival needs such as employment (whether legal or illegal). But, more importantly, the streets and the stakeholders there are equally in need of their services, whether for legal or illegal activities. Once on the streets, children are part of a different social realm and display personal characteristics which defy the norms and values of the ‘mainstream’ society. Children away from mainstream society are said to be completely regimented by the lifestyle, values and norms of a subculture of their own – the ‘street society’ (Lusk 1992). The power structures on the street are clearly defined, wherein street children are stuck at the bottom end of the pyramid. Activities such as gambling, sexual abuse, drug abuse are a common part of the street culture (D’Souza 2004). Such a culture gives rise to many economic, social, psychological, and health problems that street children encounter in their everyday life.

**Living and Working Conditions of Street Children**

In India, more than half of street children live and sleep under the open sky, while the rest spend most part of the day on the street, but sleep under a roof or some kind of a covered
shelter at night – perhaps a ramshackle hut, under a tarpaulin sheet, or the home or workplace of their employer. This makes ‘shelter’ the most acute problem of street children. They make their living through rag-picking, working as helpers in small tea shops or other vending shops, shoe-shining, drug-peddling, begging, pick-pocketing, working as porters, rickshaw-pulling, etc. Most of these children live for quite a long period on the streets, though not in one place. The nature of their work is temporary, which makes mobility easier for them.

These children are deprived of basic human needs of health and nutrition, shelter, education, training or recreation. Though many street children live with their families, their essential needs are hardly met due to extreme conditions of poverty. In unhygienic, dirty, and filthy surroundings their living conditions are appalling (Rane and Shroff 1994).

The working conditions of the children who are working under employers (on roadside stalls) are worse due to the exploitation that they face from the employers. The employers make these children work for long hours at lower wages without any social security (Goyal 2005). The return on their work is not sufficient to even meet their basic needs. A study conducted by IPER (1991), revealed that 39.3 percent of the working street children are paid inadequately and more than one-third of them complained of overwork. Despite the harsh living and working conditions, these children are able to cope with street life because of the peer support on the streets.

**Peer Group.** Usually, street children form groups of two or more friends on the streets who live together for most of part of the day and, in many cases, at night too. They often gather into gangs – a distant echo of their families they lost or never had (Desai 2009). Also, the friendship is on the lines of same sex. Although, street children may have limited number of close friends of the same sex, in general, they are on talking terms with almost all other children irrespective of their gender. In addition, the employment status also plays a crucial role in the organisation of peer groups among street children. For example, child beggars around the same area might be close friends with each other and might belong to the same peer group with one of the senior members (youth) of the group as their leader (ibid.). Children often organise themselves in different groups, as it makes easier for them to cope with street life and the harsh conditions that they encounter on the street. In times of need, especially when they are undergoing severe health ailment, these friends are the only support system for them. Sharing of food, drugs, and clothes is a common practice among street peers. However, even among peers, the senior children sexually exploit the younger ones (Philips 1994). Due to such harsh living and working conditions, they resort to coping mechanisms such as drug abuse, which when coupled with physical and sexual abuse adversely impacts their physical and mental health.
Physical and Sexual Abuse

Street children are victims of physical and sexual abuse by their families (the ones who have them), the police, the municipal authorities, the local goons, the employers, and also the peers. NGOs working in different cities with street children have pointed out that a substantial category of street children in Delhi are those who have run away from their homes due to broken families and physical abuse by one or both the parents. When they come to the streets, the story of physical abuse continues for them; the abuse by the family is replaced by abuse from goons, police, and employers.

The Human Rights Watch conducted a study in 1996 to understand the nature of harassment of street children by the police. They observed that Indian street children are routinely detained illegally, beaten and tortured and sometimes killed by police. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon: police perceptions of street children, widespread corruption and a culture of police violence, inadequacy and non-implementation of legal safeguards, and the level of impunity that law enforcement officials enjoy. The police view the street children as vagrants and criminals (Dabir 2005: 18).

The harassment by the police and municipal authorities is prevalent because of two reasons; (i) street children are young, poor, unauthorised occupiers of city roads and vacant places, and most importantly ignorant of their rights, and (ii) it helps the police to develop a fear psyche in street children so that their share from the income of these children is secured. Owing to such an attitude of the police and authorities, street children often develop a very hostile and negative attitude towards them (Desai 2009). Moreover, these children are a soft target, which is evident from the fact that they are accused of crimes, which, in most of the cases, are not committed by them. Many a time, on false allegations these children are picked up by the police and forced into observation homes (which the children refer to as bachcha jail).

The local goons also physically and sexually abuse these children. Often the street goons are those who have themselves grown up on the streets and earlier have been victims of similar exploitations. Having grown up on the streets, they are well aware of the various activities and nexuses that exist on the streets. Once they assume the leadership of a group of street children, they force them into illegal activities for money and, if a child refuses to oblige, they beat him brutally. Moreover, they use these children for sexual gratification. Both boys and girls on the streets are victims of sexual abuse; however, the problem is more acute and regular for street girls. According to Pandey (1991), street girls encounter many problems, such as lack of privacy and toilet facilities, teasing, molestation and sexual abuse, lack of a protective night shelter, and lack of educational facilities.
**Addiction to Nasha**

One of the common habits that children develop on the streets is addiction to one or more forms of *Nasha*. They consume *bidis*, cigarettes, inhalants such as shoe-glue and whiteners, alcohol, *ganja*, smack, etc. Often, the children are not even required to buy a full tube of shoe-glue or a bottle of whitener as they buy small portions of the same at Rs 2 from those who are carrying a full tube or a bottle. The expensive drugs such as smack are consumed by only those children who are able to make a higher income of over Rs 200 per day. Those children who are able to earn a good sum of money prefer to spend all of it on drugs or alcohol, as they know the extra money after meeting their basic food requirements will be anyway snatched away by either goons or the police.

One reason for initiation into tobacco, drugs, and alcohol is that when children come on the streets, they witness an environment where many people (both children and adults) are consuming these substances and they get attracted to follow them. But, the predominant reason behind involvement in this habit is forced. Drug peddlers on the streets are on the constant look out for not only consumers but also those who can sell the drugs for them. Street children are the easiest target. The peddlers first influence them with attraction of drugs and the associated high, and then provide the same to them free of cost. Once the children get addicted to it, they force them to sell the same in return of drugs at a cheaper rate. Thus, the addiction to drugs is an easier way to trap children into the vicious circle of street life. But there is another viewpoint with regard to drug addiction that it is a coping mechanism for street children. Aptekar, on the basis of his vast experience of working with street children all over the world, makes a pertinent observation with regard to the problem of drug abuse:

> Because I have witnessed so many children inhaling glue yet still maintaining their ability to cope with the demands of the streets, I began to think there was more to their use of inhalants than the explanations most commonly given. These included the use of drugs to self- medicate (sic), to deal with fear and depression, to kill hunger, to provide strength to live in difficult circumstances, or as indications of a pathological need for immediate gratification (2004: 11).

The regular consumption of drugs has a serious affect on both the physical and mental health of street children resulting in poor health conditions for them.

**Health Conditions**

The benefits of immunisation programmes sponsored by the government or the international organisations hardly reach the street children because of lack of family identity (even if they have one), high degrees of mobility among street children, and lack of association with any community (street population is not recognised as a community in itself). Street children suffer from minor diseases such as fever to serious diseases such as tuberculosis, asthma, dysentery, and various kinds of skin diseases (Desai 2009). Lately, owing to the dangerous
conditions that street children live in, practitioners have emphasised the need to consider street children as a high risk group vis-à-vis HIV/AIDS as well (Pretto 2006 and Rane 2004). According to Rane and Shroff,

Most of the street children are exposed to dirt, smoke and other environmental hazards. They are constantly exposed to sun, rain and cold. The health condition of street children is generally poor and many suffer from chronic diseases like asthma and dysentery. Though there are government and municipal hospitals in all cities, street children do not have easy access to them due to the indifferent or hostile treatment meted out to them. Majority of street children do not have bathing or toilet facilities (1994: 87).

It would also be insightful here to sight an observation made by Altaf Shaikh that highlights the physical and mental health conditions of street children:

Shyam is not the first street child to die, and certainly won’t be the last. But to me, each Shyam is a chilling, almost unbearable, reminder of the dark shadows that wait at the edges of a street child’s life. Death comes to the street child in many guises— but normal illness is not the commonest one. Indeed it is the difference between me and them so striking that I have not been able to ignore it. For me slightest temperature is a small crisis, requiring attention and medication. For a child of the streets, even a high fever is nothing— he will live as though nothing were the matter. When the end comes before the street child, it emerges from the very risks that are accepted as part of life on city streets. Some children, slide slowly into a deadly affair with drugs, and meet their end in some urban alley, wrecked and stupefied. Some like Shyam, pay a heavy price for their reckless flirtations with the transport system. Many commit suicide, torn between the homelessness and the ignominy of street life (The Times of India 1995).

As stated earlier, the street children not only face tough life situations from early on in their life, but also undergo physical and sexual abuses and are addicted to drugs in their life on the streets. Such an exposure has an adverse affect on their mental health. As the street children face so many problems in their life, their socialization process is far different from that of other children. Accordingly, their worldview is also different and they have a hostile outlook towards different people they encounter in their everyday life. The next section seeks to highlight the same.

**Stigma**

Street children have very low or absolutely no social status; as their backgrounds are not known to the so-called ‘mainstream’ society, they are not trusted. This has an adverse affect on the attitude they develop towards the society. Exposure to the vicious cycle of the street in their childhood leads to an expert ‘education’ in the art of survival and a growing anti-social stance developed by the resentment and distrust caused by societal rejection (Panicker 1999).

Moreover,

Street children have become cultural scapegoats portrayed as carriers of all large-scale problems, including inequality of income, changing family values with concomitant alterations in the roles of men and women, and the reduction in personal security in the context of the an overly romanticised past (Aptekar 2004: 21).
Such stigma perpetuates the social exclusion of street children. The problems that street children face for their survival coupled with stigmatisation by the society develops in them a worldview that is composed of feelings and emotions such as insecurity, mistrust, fear, and hostility.

**The Worldview of Street Children**

Any person forced into emotional, social, intellectual or economic seclusion, or driven to survive on the very fringes of society is bound to be adversely affected. Experiencing prejudice and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, caste, social class, gender, and/or sexual orientation, especially at a young age, foils the development of a sense of competency, control, identity, and connectedness to societal institutions (Spencer 2007).

Although street children are found on the roads and pavements all over a metropolitan city, there are certain ‘hubs’ or ‘hotspots’ in every city where one may find a lot of street children – such as the area around Mahim Dargah in Mumbai, Hanuman Mandir in Cannaught Place in Delhi, Sealdah railway station in Kolkata, Egmore railway station in Chennai, and Majestic in Bangalore. This is because of the availability of free food, drugs, and work in the unorganised sector or options of self-employment as vendors, rickshaw pullers, etc. The nexus between the goons, police and municipal authorities (as mentioned earlier) is also most prominent around such places. Prone to hostile environment, street children form a certain attitude of hostility towards the people they come across around such places of work and residence.

**Attitude towards the Local People around the Hotspots**

The local people who work and reside around the hotspots (such as those mentioned above) express a very hostile attitude towards street children. Due to the unorthodox life-style of street children and the activities they indulge in, these people develop a negative attitude towards them and want to maintain as much distance as possible from them. Seldom do they care to understand the reasons for the involvement of these children in such activities. Reciprocally, the children do not have a positive attitude towards the people. They often get scared with the rude remarks and beatings, and this invokes in them a feeling of self-pity. Also, many of them aspire to be more physically powerful so that they can take revenge against those who abuse them (Aptekar 2004; Desai 2009).
**Attitude towards Police and Municipal Authorities**

The street children have an extremely hostile attitude towards the police. Street children are regularly harassed by the police and the municipal authorities, and hence are extremely scared of these authorities. Street children who have been on the streets for more than two years get used to the harassment from police constables and often, while interacting among themselves, make fun of them. But the moment they see a constable coming near them, they get scared and run away. There are reasons for such an attitude: the economic share of the police in their earnings, regular beatings and treatment as vagrants, and forcing the children in the observation homes on false charges.

**Attitude towards the Employers**

The employers of street children (in illegal or legal activities) are either the local goons or the owners of small shops, hotels and garages. The goons employ the children in illegal activities such as begging and pick-pocketing which are full of risk and but give them a very meagre return for their work. The other employers also pay insufficiently in return for the long working hours. Moreover, they often ridicule the children abusively and beat them for minor mistakes such as breaking a tea-glass. Many street children are not even paid in cash; they are offered only two meals and a place to sleep in return for their labour. Although street children complain against such a treatment, paradoxically they express that they are helpless and do not have much of a choice if they want to survive on the street (Desai 2009). According to Joe Paul (1999), as street children have no social entitlement, they are left to rely on their labour alone, thus generating low incomes. This, in turn, forces them to spend their earnings on food, which is always at the forefront of their minds, and on other necessities. As a result, they can hardly save any money.

The attitude of street children towards the people they encounter in their daily life also shapes their attitude towards the society in general. The insecure environment on the streets makes them horrified initially, but, as they spend more time on the streets, they get used to the environment and develop coping strategies to deal with it. But the impact that such experiences have on their psychology is significant and they show lack of trust towards the society. My experience suggests that, despite a friendly attitude and regular meetings and interactions with street children, it takes months to develop a rapport with them and win their trust in order to start any intervention programme.

**Street Children: Self-Aspiration and Worldview**

The struggle for survival early on in life develops independence in street children. Practitioners from Delhi and Mumbai were of the opinion that most of these children value
freedom a lot. They do not like to be confined to a particular place such as observation homes and shelter homes. Such an attitude is more prominent among the runaway boys. The life on the streets, which is full of harassment and violence, still interests them because of the freedom they enjoy in street life. But to live independently on the streets and be embedded in the sub-culture of the streets requires the development of habits such as gambling, drug abuse, and sexual abuse which force them into premature adulthood (Dutta 2004).

Although street children have friends, they hardly develop a strong personal bond with anyone. The loss of strong family ties early on in life makes them indifferent. This does not mean that they are not in search of support and love. But, due to continuous harassment by different sections of the population, they are overcautious in developing close relationships. These two factors together, lead to a mentality where street children do not think about long-term impacts of their current living conditions. They become street-smart, which, though facilitates their everyday survival, is accompanied by a weakly developed self-identity and fear complex. According to Paul,

> These children are not substandard ignorant kids. They have acquired the valuable knowledge, attitude, emotions, abilities and skills that are necessary for their survival on the street. Though self-esteem is the answer to all childhood problems, street children have a weakly developed identity. This identity is derived from their interactions with the peers on the street and with adults who often abuse or deceive them, instilling in them fear of rejection (1999: 83).

Another important characteristic common among street children is their bloated ‘ego’. There is a desire to prove to the world that they are capable of doing ‘something’. Those who are working in shops and hotels have a desire to own a shop. Many of the runaway boys want to earn money and go back to their families to prove their worth to them. But the biggest hindrance is that the lifestyle they get used to on the streets does not allow them to easily break free from it, both due to psychological and social reasons. As mentioned earlier, the children who are involved in illegal activities on the streets are not allowed to move out easily unless someone else takes their place. Addiction to drugs is another reason why they cannot move out easily. This calls for support from social workers and other people from voluntary organisations to reach out to them through counselling and economic support in order to mainstream them. The task is not easy, as it requires long-term engagement.

Society in general regards these children [street children] with suspicion. The conception is that a dirty child is always a beggar or a petty thief and the child of a commercial sex worker has to face even worse allegations. These groups are marginalized and this affects the child’s social and psychological development. Shrewd employers use them for cheap labor, often abusing them physically and emotionally. The child then develops either an inferiority complex or a sheer hatred for society (Doiphode 2006: 141).

Having discussed the definition, the problems, and perceptions and attitudes of street children towards the society, let us discuss the aetiology of the problem.
Why are the Children on the Streets?

Street migration is a complex process in which a variety of factors – such as poverty, abuse, abandonments, violence, natural calamities, and freedom – that either push or pull the children from their families (some do not even have that) and communities into the harsh life on the streets (Connolly 1990). Thus, every street child has a reason to be on the streets of metropolitan cities. Varghese Pallipuram (1999) has highlighted the following micro-factors that are responsible for children to leave their homes and come on the streets: (a) harassment from alcoholic parents, (b) ill-treatment from step parents, (c) broken families, (d) influence of peer group (often two three children from the same native place run together to explore glamorous life in the cities), and (e) disinterest in education.

Desai (2009), on the other hand, has pointed out macro reasons responsible for the street children phenomenon. According to him, the phenomenon of street children has emerged as a concomitant to industrialisation across the world. Industrial growth and economic development have not been uniform throughout a country and this has often resulted in imbalances between the rural and urban areas. This has caused the migration of people from the rural to the urban areas in search of employment. The worst to be hit by this process are women and children. Also, due to extremely poor familial conditions, for many children, it is an economic compulsion to be on the streets. Often, parent’s earnings are insufficient to provide for the family’s minimum needs. Children have to be sent to work, mostly in the unorganised sector to supplement the family’s income.

P. Lakshapati and Kshithij Urs have taken an even more radical stand in describing the phenomenon of street children. According to them,

In spite of the increasing visibility of India’s ‘overall’ development on the international scene, the ‘inner contradiction’ has been that the enrichment of a few is accompanied by the marginalisation or exclusion of millions of others. The real issue is that development continues to benefit some people, while many others are left out and pushed out. The phenomenon of street children has its roots not just in what meets the eye (poverty, family problems, etc.), but in the whole gamut of development itself (1999: 86).

D’Souza (2004: 13) has given a more comprehensive picture of the entire issue by illustrating the forces (macroscopic, mesoscopic, and microscopic) that seem uncontrollable and which perpetuate and consequently produce street living patterns that are enduring, and invert reality (see Figure 6.1). Thus, we may conclude this section with the following observation: micro-reasons such as broken families and abusive parents reflect upon causative factors that explain the macro-reality, responsible for the street children phenomenon in urban cities and towns.
Having drawn out the aetiology of the problem, let us now shift our attention to the programmes and policies that government, NGOs, and international organisations, have put in place for addressing the problems of street children.

**Programmes and Policies for Street Children**

Social work vis-à-vis street children is challenging both at the micro-level, in terms of individual interventions, and at the policy level, due to lack of common consensus on the definition of street children, the heterogeneity of the group, and the mobility and lack of identity of most of these children. NGOs have played the biggest role with regard to designing and implementing programmes for street children. However, individual NGOs, due to lack of requisite human and financial capital, have only been able to work around specific issues that are faced by street children and have always looked upon the government to take greater responsibility. In addition, there are international organisations like UNICEF and Action Aid that have shown interest in the issue in developing countries like India.

**Figure 6.1**

*The Street Child Phenomenon – An Inverted Reality*

Source: D’Souza (2005: 43)
The Programmes and Policies of the Government

The Constitution of India makes certain provisions for the protection of the rights of children. For example, Article 24 of the Constitution prohibits the employment of children (below 14 years of age) in hazardous occupations, and Article 45 enjoins the state to provide free and compulsory education up to 14 years of age to all the children. However, as regards street children, there are challenges that need to be recognised vis-à-vis the Constitution. Firstly, the Constitution is applicable to those who can furnish their identities as Indian citizens. The question of identity for many street children is a big problem, especially for those who are orphans or whose families (especially homeless) themselves cannot produce any proof of identity. Secondly, it is a well-accepted fact that most of the street children are working, and largely so in the unorganised sector. This problem becomes more acute for those children who are employed in illegal activities such as begging, pick-pocketing, and drug-peddling.

Another important policy that impacts street children is the National Policy on Child Labour (1987), which seeks to not only prohibit employment of children in hazardous occupations, but also to provide for the welfare of working children in areas where the incidence of child labour is high. Again, the recognition of the category of street children (most of whom are working) falls out of the purview of the policy.

Then there are legislations to guard the interests of children such as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 for the welfare and development of children (extremely relevant for street children). The Act recognises juveniles as those who are below 18 years of age and covers two categories of children, namely, (i) juveniles in conflict with law and (ii) children in need of care and protection. According to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs (Legislative Department), Government of India, it is

An act to consolidate and amend the law relating to juveniles in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection, by providing for proper care, protection and treatment by catering to their development needs, and by adopting a child-friendly approach in the adjudication and disposition of matters in the best interest of children and for their ultimate rehabilitation through various institutions established under this enactment (2000: 1).

Under this Act, there is a provision of observation homes, special homes, and shelter homes for the children (for the above mentioned categories). Overall, the government efforts under the requisite legislations are more directed at institutionalised programmes for rehabilitation of children. A major limitation of this legislation is that it does not recognise the rights of street children as a separate category. This Act was introduced as a revised version of an earlier act, namely, Juvenile Justice Act, 1986. People from the NGOs and child rights activists had criticised the Act and the juvenile justice system, especially with regard to the implementation of the Act. Rita Panicker, a child rights activist from Delhi observed, “The Juvenile Justice Act has generally been perceived as a progressive step towards ensuring
justice to children. In reality, it has become an instrument of harassment and violation of human rights” (1999: 95). Moreover, the running of the institutions (observation homes, juvenile homes, and special homes), established under the Act has come under criticism and activists claimed that children in these homes are physically and sexually abused. This can be highlighted through the following narrative of a 12-year-old boy, who worked as an unlicensed porter at the Bangalore Central Railway Station and, was picked by the police and put in an observation home:

At the observation home, I was stripped naked by the caretaker. He told us newcomers to call him ‘Daddy’. He made us face a pool of water. Then he asked us to look at the pictures of Gandhi and Nehru on the wall. While we were doing that, he kicked us into the pool of cold water. Later, he just made us stand still while he kicked us. When ‘Daddy’ was tired of beating us, he gave the younger boys to the older boys – they get the boys of their choice . . . They beat and molest the younger boys. I was in the remand home for three months and then let off (ibid.: 95).

Thus, in the revised version of the Act, the government came up with the idea of permitting voluntary organisations also to run homes (if found fit on verification) for children in need of care and protection who may be catering to street children as well. Another positive development on the side of the government that impacts street children was the ratification of The United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child (UNCRC). Although many people have questioned the impact of the government policies and programmes on street children, any such development has been widely accepted by the NGOs. Also, the government, in collaboration with NGOs, has established a 24-hour phone helpline for children called Childline. Street children have widely used this helpline, especially when they have suffered from major health ailments or harassment from employers.

From the above discussion it is clear that the government has played a limited role, following an institutionalised approach, in addressing the issue of street children. According to K.C. Venkatesh, “While institutionalisation meets the street children’s most basic physical needs for food and shelter, it increases their psychological and social marginalisation, undermining their ability to cope with the world upon discharge” (1999: 79). This need has largely been addressed by NGOs and other committed individuals interested in working with street children. But, it has been accepted that the primary responsibility for addressing the issue lies with the government and they should formulate the policy framework. However, the NGOs should take the responsibility for implementation of the programmes and policies. Moreover, the NGOs can design, organise and deliver the services to street children effectively (as compared to the government) because they operate with greater flexibility (ibid.).
Programmes Initiated by the Non-Government Organisations

In India, many interventions have been made by individual NGOs and NGO forums, which have been working for provision of services to street children, and fighting for their rights. These interventions can be classified into three levels: (i) primary prevention, (ii) secondary prevention, and (iii) tertiary interventions. The primary preventive efforts are directed towards community development. They aim at providing assistance (help vis-à-vis educational expenses, day-care facilities for working mothers) to economically and socially vulnerable families to prevent them from disintegration, so that children living in absolute poverty are stopped from entering street life. Secondary prevention involves work with ‘children of the streets’, to prevent them from drifting into criminal activities and generating awareness about the dangers and long-term risks of street life. The aim is to motivate children (especially adolescents) as they mature into adulthood to leave street life. Also, there is micro-enterprise development in this approach, as NGOs help children to secure legal income on the street. Tertiary interventions are made for those children who have no family contacts, through residential care institutions (shelters). However, this approach has been widely critiqued for being cost-intensive and having low success rate (see Dybicz 2005).

Another approach that has lately gained momentum through NGO forums is the rights-based approach that advocates for the rights of street children and demands policy changes. This approach seeks to deconstruct the myths about street children. For example, the myth that all street children are delinquents and the reasons for their being on the streets emanate out of personal maladjustments has been critiqued. Moreover, factors leading to street life are rooted in poverty has been accepted. It looks at street children as actors who respond to the situations they face. The rights-based approach involves active participation of children in advocating for their rights and aims at drafting intervention strategies that are in consonance with the felt needs of the children. It involves political consciousness-raising to stimulate calls for empowerment and social justice. This shifts the focus of intervention from ‘responsibilities and rehabilitation of the individual’ to ‘the rights of street children’ which need to be demanded from the government. According to Phillips Dybicz (ibid.), this approach is relevant for developing countries, as the voluntary sector does not have sufficient resources to provide services to street children individually. Let us now discuss a few intervention strategies/programmes that have been designed and practised by NGOs.

A given NGO might be focussing on one or more programmes. Depending on the problem on which the organisation wants to focus and its financial resources. For example, an organisation might be working only on the problem of drug abuse through a detoxification programme or an organisation might be working only on recreational needs of street children. Then there are organisations that are working on long-term programmes for mainstreaming street children into the society. Mostly, the smaller organisations tend to work on a single
problem and try to meet the other needs of the child through referrals to other organisations. The advocacy-based work critiquing the development paradigm and fighting for the rights of street children is carried out as a collaborative activity through NGO forums.

**Community-based Contact Programmes.** These are ‘outreach programmes’ to contact the street children in their habitat, that is, in the areas where they live and work. The programme involves setting up of ‘contact centres’ around places that are frequented by street children and encouraging self-referral from the children once rapport has been established with them on the streets. There are three broad objectives of these programmes: (i) to create awareness among street children about their life and work situation, and stimulate in them motivation to help themselves, (ii) to enable them to have access to various basic services like education, health care, vocational training, employment, recreation, and counselling for their growth and development, and (iii) to enable them to improve their self-image and self-esteem by meeting their emotional needs for love and acceptance (Rane and Shroff 1994).

In order to achieve these objectives of the programme, different activities have been initiated by NGOs. These include, establishing street contacts to build meaningful relationships with the children, provision of basic health care facilities, provision of services for sanitation such as toilet and bathing, generating awareness about issues such as health and hygiene, nutrition, drug-abuse, organising recreational and cultural activities, provision of non-formal education for working children, educational visits and camps, provision of facilities like lockers where children can save their money, issuing identity cards to ensure the security of the children, and organising children so that they can voice their plight and demand rights for their growth and development.

In the execution of such programmes many organisations have found that working with ‘groups’ is important along with individual counselling, as the peers have a strong influence among street children. Thus, it is important to involve the children in the planning and implementation of the ongoing activities at the contact centres, as they can best identify their own needs. The community-based approach is largely non-institutionalised in nature. It was realised through experience that street children have undergone a different socialisation process (where they value freedom and care-free life), and therefore they have a tendency to run away from institutionalised settings. Thus, before mainstreaming them through institutionalisation, it is important to establish rapport with them on the streets and prepare them psychologically towards integration into the mainstream.

**Night Shelters.** As has been pointed out earlier, the most acute need of street children (‘of the street’) is shelter. To meet this need, night shelters have been established where they can come and sleep at night. Many of these shelters have become permanent shelters where children who are not working come for rehabilitation. These shelters also take care of other basic needs such as food, education (for younger children), vocational training (for older
children), and recreational activities for relaxation. Gradually, children are introduced to a structured and disciplined life through constructive group-living experiences in these shelters. These are also places where children experience love and affection (probably something they have not witnessed before and after coming on the streets) of NGO personnel. Thus, the setting up of shelters is an intervention strategy that is considered as the next step after the initial community-based work. Similar to these shelters is the group home approach. The group homes for older children (youth), besides providing vocational training, also generate employment opportunities for them. Once they start working, they are encouraged to exit the home and together rent a house till the time they can individually sustain on their own (outside of the street environment).

**Work with Families and Communities.** The work with families and communities is preventive in nature. The effort is to prevent slum children from becoming children of the street. The intervention strategy involves the following activities: (a) work with community leaders (predominantly those communities which are of low socio-economic backgrounds) to generate self-effort for upgrading the quality of life by getting more civic amenities, (b) generating awareness with respect to the importance of education and, if possible, offering educational sponsorships to keep children in school and within the family, (c) provision of day-foster-care facilities for the children of working mothers, and (d) provision of foster care for families in crisis situations, especially for children with single-parents.

The work with families and communities focuses on micro-level (with families) and meso-level (with communities) social work practice to prevent the growth in the number of street children. Varghese Pallipuram has suggested the following intervention strategy for preventive work with street children:

> If potential run-aways can be helped, the number of street children will be reduced. Rural-based NGOs and the govt. should therefore work towards improving the quality of family life. Preventive cell composed of village leaders, teachers and govt. representatives could be established. Such cells could also be in touch with urban NGOs and ensure that run-aways are brought back and their family situations improved. In slums, NGOs and government bodies like the Juvenile Justice Bureaus should work towards preventing children from leaving their homes (1999: 71).

This strategy indicates that preventive work takes place at both the micro-level and the meso-level. At the micro-level, the effort is to prevent fresh runaways from getting addicted to street life and repatriating them to their families at the earliest. At the meso-level, the effort is to prevent children from running away by working with the family and others in the village or slum itself. Thus, it can be seen that the interventions with regard to the area of street children are beyond individual-centric work with only children.

**Macro-level Interventions.** The macro-level intervention strategies include work with different categories of people. The police harassment that street children face has already
been discussed earlier in the chapter. Thus, one intervention strategy that has been adopted by NGOs is training and sensitisation of the police personnel. Again, the stigmatisation of street children is a major hurdle to their growth and development. Thus, another intervention strategy involves sensitisation of the people in general. For this, awareness campaigns with regard to the problems that street children face and the reasons behind getting pushed into street life are initiated with the help of press and media. Another intervention strategy, suggested at the macro-level, is building a mass movement for fighting against the exploitation of street children and taking up issues of juvenile justice collectively. According to Banu Kiran (1999), considering the state of street children, it is not only important, but necessary, to mobilise public opinion about the gravity of the situation, and to take it up with the government. This requires the organisations coming together in forums to collectively voice the needs of street children.

Many NGOs and child rights activists have felt the need to organise themselves in forums for not merely collaboration and networking but also for taking up macro-level interventions collectively. The most important document that has been used for mobilisation of people for this is UNCRC. It discusses in detail the rights of children such as right to identity, right to shelter, right to dignity and respect, right to security, right to protection, right to leisure and recreation, and right to participation. The people working with street children have expressed that most of these rights are violated as regards street children. Thus, there is a need to advocate for them involving more participation from the central and the state governments. In addition, NGO forums such as the Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children (CCVC), Mumbai, Bangalore Forum, and Tamil Nadu NGOs Forum have come up with declarations, recommendations and demands for the rights of street and working children in India. Broadly, macro-interventions revolve around the eliminating stigmatisation and gaining societal acceptance and recognition for street children.

It has been recognised and voiced by child rights activists that in individualistic interventions with street children and their families, work with communities, and macro-level interventions, the approach should be one of working with children in order to empower them. Lakshapathi and Urs have emphasised the importance of street children’s participation in macro-level interventions:

Empowerment at the micro-level helps the child to realise her/his rights and responsibilities to protect himself and to opt for the right alternatives. The participation of the empowered children at the macro-level raises the provision of basic needs to the status of rights. It entails the creation of a space for children within the polity and the implementation of an agenda for street children. This is genuine development (1999: 88).

When the street children’s worldview is taken into account, they emerge as social actors who develop a ‘specific micro-culture’ that comes from balancing what they need to survive with
the hostile and often widespread cultural reactions that impinge upon them (Aptekar and Abebe 1997). Such a view is not only empowering for children, but it also expands the assumption among the social workers that street children are not merely victims of abuse and neglect (who are in need of services for their survival), but are social actors who make sense of the reality around them.

Till now, in the chapter, we have discussed the definition, the aetiology, and the intervention strategies vis-à-vis street children. The magnitude and complexity of the issue call for greater understanding of the social, cultural, economic, psychological, and political factors responsible for the phenomenon of street children. Thus, the role of social scientists in developing such an understanding through research on different aspects of the issue becomes significant. Also, it highlights the importance of drawing connections between different causative factors to develop a holistic understanding of the issue.

Moreover, the existence of children on streets and the problems associated with street life call for the attention of social workers. But the complexity of the issue, and continuous mobility of street children as experienced by social workers on the field, creates difficulty in designing and implementing intervention strategies. Thus, the challenging nature of work in this area explains the need for developing an understanding of the street-children phenomenon not merely through research studies, but also through on-field practice experiences (interventions) of social workers. This explains the intertwined/cyclical nature of relationship between theory and practice, and the importance of developing an understanding on the same for social workers.

**Social Work Education and Training:**
**Implications for Practice with Street Children**

In the previous chapters, especially those that deal with curriculum, pedagogy, and fieldwork training, the discussion revolved around the process of educating and training social workers in theories, methods, and research (both in generic and specialisation-based curriculum) for drafting and implementing intervention strategies to work with vulnerable and marginalised sections of the population. So far, in this chapter, we have highlighted the issue of street children vis-à-vis their background, living and workings conditions, the problems faced by them, their worldview, their reasons for being on the streets, and the interventions undertaken by the government and NGOs to deal with the issue. Also, the chapter highlighted that, the magnitude and complexity of the issue and the recognition of street children as a vulnerable and marginalised population makes work with street children an important area of social work practice.
Let us now analyse the implications that Social Work education and training might have for practice in this area. The methods of social work practice taught in institutions of Social Work entail organised practice at individual, group, community, and policy levels. For example, social casework presents a structured process of dealing with individuals and their immediate social environment, drawing on theories and concepts from the social sciences, especially psychology. Many NGOs make individualistic interventions with street children. Thus, knowledge of this method might help them function in a more organised and structured manner. Lately, the work with street children involves advocacy for their rights, involving negotiations with state and central governments. Knowledge of social action and social work research methods might be helpful in this process.

Social Work education involves, in its supportive domain, developing understanding about the theories and concepts (borrowed from the social sciences) to help students in comprehending the larger social phenomenon and functioning of different social, economic, political, and cultural systems and sub-systems. Most practitioners and activists have identified poverty, social exclusion, and subsequent family disintegration as causative factors for street children phenomenon. This highlights the importance of the knowledge that Social Work students develop through theories and concepts for making interventions in this area.

Another important area that is emphasised in Social Work is the fieldwork training of students. The idea is to facilitate learning from practical situations through direct on-field experiences. This is also emphasised in the pedagogy as educators draw from both their field experiences and that of students in the classroom. The interventions in the area of street children involve work with different stakeholders such as employers of children, street goons, police, and politicians, besides the children themselves. This approach of direct engagement with children and other stakeholders has been developed through the practical experience of the practitioners. Thus, the intervention strategies are developed on the basis of both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The same is emphasised in Social Work education and training (as has been stated in earlier chapters) highlighting its inherent connection with practice in the area of street children.

Thus, with regards to this area, Social Work education and training has an important role to play. Social Work has to address itself to the social reality of street children. The profession of social work needs to build up a knowledge base for understanding the dynamics of the problem of street children and for the development of appropriate policy and programmes to deal with the issues related to street children (Rane and Shroff 1994). But, in the curricula of the eleven institutions of Social Work (covered by the study) no such provision exists because of multiple areas of social work practice. However, for fieldwork training, these institutions do place students in NGOs working with street children. In addition, the institutions of Social Work can initiate their own field action projects to work
with street children (few efforts such as ‘Vatsalya Project’ have already been initiated by the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai). Also, the institutions of Social Work can play an important role in conducting policy-based research studies on the street children phenomenon (ibid.).

**Summary**

The practice-orientation and commitment to work with marginalised and vulnerable sections of population, recognises work with street children as an important area of social work practice. It is well known that ‘street children’ is largely an urban phenomenon, triggered by the migration of people from rural to urban areas in the wake of rapid industrialisation.

The ‘street life’ has a unique sub-culture and political economy, wherein children are trapped in the vicious cycle of drug abuse and illegal activities, as a result of which, street children face multiple problems. In addition to the problems of meeting basic survival needs of food, clothing, shelter, and sound physical and mental health, street children undergo physical and sexual harassment from goons, police, municipal authorities, and even their peers. Another major challenge faced by street children is the stigma attached to street life that adversely impacts their self-esteem.

People who have been working with street children observe that there are both micro-factors and macro-factors either pushing or pulling children on to the streets. Micro-factors such as broken families, abuse by alcoholic or step parents, and peer group influence arise because of macro-factors such as poverty, unemployment, and migration leading to the existence of street children phenomenon. Thus, in order to address the issue holistically, programmes and policies have been initiated by the government and non-government organisations at both the preventive and rehabilitative levels.

It has been assumed that the issue needs to be addressed through macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level interventions. Macro-level interventions involve advocacy-based work, fighting for the rights of street children. Meso-level interventions involve work with marginalised communities, to prevent disintegration of families living in absolute poverty. Micro-level interventions involve work with children on the streets to rehabilitate them into the ‘mainstream society’.

Moreover, it has been emphasised that participation of children in intervention strategies is equally important as they best understand their own needs. Such a view is considered as empowering for children, and it expands the assumption that street children are not merely victims of a harsh street life but are social actors who make sense of the reality around them.
The complexity of the issue highlights the need for developing greater understanding on the social, economic, cultural, psychological, and political factors that initiate and sustain the ‘street children phenomenon’. This emphasises the need for social science research on these aspects to design holistic intervention strategies. Moreover, as the issue needs to addressed using different ‘intervention strategies’, it highlights the important role of social workers in the process.

In addition to this, from the findings of the previous chapters, we can highlight the implications that Social Work education and training have for practice in the area of street children. The education and training of social workers in different methods of social work practice might help in organising and structuring interventions that take place at micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level with street children. Also, Social Work education imparts knowledge of theories and concepts (borrowed from the social sciences) to help students understand the larger social reality. This might be helpful in developing a holistic understanding of the issue and subsequently drafting effective intervention strategies vis-à-vis the issue of street children.

From the experiences of practitioners, the importance of dimensions such as gender, caste, street culture, etc. have also been identified. It has been realised that street children act and reflect upon their life based on the nature of their socialisation process. Therefore, their active participation in the intervention strategies is equally important. This highlights the implications that practice has for revision of existing theories and developing new theories that are taught to Social Work students in the master’s programme.

Having analysed the various dimensions of the issue of street children, in the next chapter, drawing from the individual experiences of the practitioners, an attempt is made (a) to examine the implications that practice has for theory vis-à-vis the area of street children, and (b) to understand the assumptions with which practitioners operate in the field and how they guide their practice. As practitioners interviewed for the purpose of current research also include those who are trained in Social Work, their reflections on the implications that Social Work education and training has on their practice and vice-versa will also be highlighted.