CHAPTER 4
LIFE ON THE STREETS: VERBALIZING EXPERIENCES

The previous chapter engages the reader with information provided by children about their life led on the streets. This chapter moves a bit further in understanding the space as experienced and made sense of, by the child. An attempt has been made to illuminate the life led by children in the open spaces (streets/stations/platforms) of a city. Respecting children’s own perspectives, the phenomenon associated with the street and their interpretation has been looked at. With the turn of the century, the perspective towards children has moved towards the belief that children are active social agents and that their own perception of the world needs to be respected. (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2002; Panter-Brick 2002). Thus, to understand the outsides (the way children refer to life on the streets/stations) as an environmental context for various forms of abuse, first hand experiences of thirty five adolescents in their childhood have been elucidated in this chapter.

Emerging themes

Common issues affecting a child living on the street with her/his family were found to be different from those who have been on the streets by themselves. All the themes that have emerged have thus been seen for the two categories, adolescents living on the street without families and, adolescents living on the streets with their families. Various categorizations regarding street children already exist (Cosgrove 1990; Lusk 1992) and most of them have been criticized, being found to be very simplistic, neglecting internal differences in this broad category of street children (Panter-Brick 2002). Although, contact with families is another basis of classification (Cosgrove 1990) which has faced its set of criticism (Panter-Brick 2002), the researcher has used the arrangement of staying on the street (with or without family) as a basis for dividing the data into broad themes. This in no way implies that these are two mutually exclusive categories. All the exceptions to this classification have been explained in detail. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the group of participants in the study were a mix of adolescents living with or without family.
Six out of twenty-four male participants and nine out of eleven female participants had lived on the streets with their parents [whom Patel (1989) called ‘Pavement Dwellers’]. Four of these participants were born on the street while the others had migrated to the city with their parents. FGDs with these boys and girls suggested that their issues, problems and concerns while living on the streets were quite different from those who live without the “interference” of parents. The remaining eighteen boys and two girls had experienced life “outside”, without a related adult. The time spent alone was much more for boys than for girls. The habits, sources of income and entertainment were similar for both, boys living with and without family. Such a comparison could not be made between the girls. Thus, life of the girls living with families on the street was distinct in its own ways, as explained later in the chapter.

Thus, major themes which emerged during the course of data collection, not only suggest the different lives led by children, based on presence of adult authority, but directed towards gender also appearing as a vital factor in differently experiencing the streets. The interplay of the various factors was thus found to be influenced by these two bigger factors. Figure 4.1 depicts the interplay of all these themes in a diagrammatic way.

![Figure 4.1: Life on the streets - Interplay of factors](image)

**Figure 4.1: Life on the streets - Interplay of factors**
Life outside: The Physical Spaces

Street as a physical space is sometimes referred to as a *disordered* one (Cloke and Jones 2005) in a world constructed and maintained by adults. How a child perceives this street and connects with it might be very shocking for an adult for its contradictory nature to the conventional understanding of *childhood*. The street with the least adult authority could let the child own up in the space as naturally as he/she can, without any moral indignation by an otherwise adults led society. Cloke and Jones (2005), thus, in their article understanding children in disordered spaces, considered them as the ‘others’, thus breaking the hierarchy between the adult and the child. Similar is the standpoint of the researcher in this study who engages with the ways adolescents view their childhood years on streets. But for this study, the child is the central person and the rest are ‘others’. How he/she manages the self in a physically and mentally demanding atmosphere, what are the ways of conducting oneself in an environment giving space for unrestricted mobility and exposure to violence, abuse and adult ways of thinking and acting, were seen through the data received from the FGDs.

Based on the findings of the study, the understanding regarding relationship of a child with her/his environment need to acknowledge the fluidity in moving on and off street or station. The street environment, for those who have experienced both, the home/shelter and the street, cannot be understood in an absolute or exclusive sense. The participants when talked to looked at the street as “living out”, which depicts the compartmentalization between *out* and *in*. This shift between the “out at the street” and “in the centre” was clearly felt and dealt with, by participants who have lived on the streets without families. Those who have been living with families consider themselves as “children on the road”. This speaks volume about their identities and how it’s associated with the physical spaces around them.

The street in its literal sense, is not what the physical space experienced by a child, is restricted to. The public spaces like the station and footpaths, streets and flyovers, garbage disposal sites and largely empty garages are some places they consider their own. Trains comprise one significant physical space that is considered a place for work as well as pleasure. While living outside, boys spent most of their time roaming
around from one station to another, in the same city or sometimes in different cities. Throughout their journey, trains are the connecting element, making it the focal point of their physical existence. More importantly, trains are what connect them to their home towns. Taking a train from their village, they reach a city and are awed by it. Station is thus, first public space in the city that they come in contact with and hence, become central to their idea of “bada shaher” (big city). They talk about the lack of understanding of what a “village” and a “city” is, when they leave their villages. They said, “shahar kya hota hai humein nahi pata tha. Humein toh yeh bhi nahi pata tha ki hum ‘gaon’ mein rehte hain” (We didn’t know what a city was. We didn’t even knew that we lived in a village.)

Early confusion about where to go, the initial shock of flood of people on a busy railway station, absence of money and the lack of confidence to conduct oneself in a completely different situation, made them stick to the station for a few hours or days until someone comes to them. Not even a single participant told that he himself approached another person for help after landing on the station. Rather, the boys already known to the ways of the station (termed as ‘street subculture’ by Awad 2002; Beazley 2003); identified new entrants and approached them. These boys, usually elder than themselves, made them chose one of the already existing gangs and introduced the new ones to drugs and the existing subculture of the street. This role of the sub culture has been validated by Ennew and Swart-Kruger (2003) as well, who talk about the group teaching the new-comers survival skills. These survival skills are most consciously considered to be consumption of drugs.

Slowly, these stations become shelters at night. The interpersonal relations are also constructed and sustained, based on the dynamics at the station which they consider their own. When asked where they come from in Mumbai, they name the stations, suggesting that as their address in the city. “VT, Mumbai Central, Bandra!” (Referring to the stations in Mumbai)

For some participants, Mumbai was not the only place of abode. They used to travel across cities, sometimes for work and sometimes for fun. Their “catering” work, as they call it, used to take them for jobs outside the city. Some of them have been to
Pune, Ahemdabad, Delhi for work. But they do share that they come back to sleep at their own place, i.e. “their station” where they had their friends.

Various places they stay at and the way they associate with the physical space plays a major role in physical socialization of children growing up on the street (Proshanky and Fabian 1987). Children living on the outside spaces of the city and occupying public spaces for their ‘private’ daily life chores, tend to get their identity formation and self-image influenced by the physical spaces and places of the city. Appreciating the importance of the physical surroundings of growing up, Proshanky and Fabian (1987) believe that the interrelationships between the child and the objects and between the objects and other people in a particular physical space indirectly serve to define who the child is to itself and to therefore others as well. Thus, the way a child, living in the open spaces of the city associates with the different locales for performing their daily life activities, for work, entertainment, socializing etc., could, to an extent, determine how others might perceive them. During the FGDs, when asked about their perception of their lives on the street in retrospect, one of the responses was “Koodha khana, koode mein rehna, koode mein sona” (Eating garbage, living in garbage, sleeping in garbage).

This description of their association with the space is strongly associated with the characteristic of the physical space, thus suggesting a link between their image of themselves as per the relationship they enjoy with the concrete physical space.

Those who are living with their families, describe their home as a space below the flyover where a lot of families have occupied some space to set up their cooking stove. A few other possessions do exist initially but are stolen in no time as everything is out in the open. Most of them don’t even have tarpaulin sheets as temporary roofs, even during rainy days. This physical space is never completely “owned”. Every week, the representatives of Birmingham Municipal Corporation (BMC), in an attempt to clear the place, tries to remove away the settlements of the homeless people, dwelling on the sides of roads or under flyovers. Earlier, they used to come with big road rollers and destroy all the settlements. All of their valuables and important documents, like ration cards and election cards, were damaged or lost in the
process. Thus, the lack of respect for being identified as a street or pavement dweller hits them hard. It becomes a cause of embarrassment especially when they are thrown off in front of the girls they like. This puts the idea of ‘self’ as a homeless in conflict with the adolescent needs for acceptance by the peers. In an attempt to impress girls, the boys tend to engage in a lot of image building activities, some universal to all individuals in this developmental phase and some specific to those on the streets. The shame which accompanies the feeling of being homeless conflicts with their image of being strong and having more money attributes which the boys themselves felt are sought after by the girls on the streets.

The understanding of physical spaces among girls was restricted to their family or the temporary arrangement they called home. The freedom and independence to roam around and explore the city’s public spaces was never mentioned by the girls, even by those who lived without families. Thus, owning of the physical space was not visible in girls. Rather, a feeling of vulnerability was constantly evident. One area they did mention was the “red light area”. Three of the six girls living with families, were residing on streets of Kamathipura and nearby areas. In everyday language, they call this area “Ek sau paanch” (One hundred and five) because the buses with route number 105 passes that. They expressed their disgust over the place and the women who get into this trade. One of them expressed their vulnerability of being pushed into a “peela house” (that’s the term they generally use to refer to a brothel). Explaining the place, the girls said

_Udhar na, bahut ganda poster laga hua hai... Dupatte jaisa kapda pehen ke ander se aise nange khade rehte hain. Aur aisa aadmi log khade rehte hain, ek dusre ko aisa pakad ke ander le kar jate hain._

[There (in the brothel), there are dirty posters. Women are standing wearing very little clothes, almost naked. And men are standing. They get hold of each other and go inside.]

This depicts that the contours of morality, which tend to loosen up among boys living without families, become stronger with those living with families on the street. Moral codes embedded in the process of gender socialization were very much visible among girls. Thus, these explorations make one question further the extent of adult authority even while living on the street with the family.
Performing the Daily Life Chores on the Street

Interestingly, survival in a city like Mumbai was not considered a problem by most of the boys unlike some of their counterparts living with families. Maintaining themselves is comparatively stress free as it involves no accountability to another person or any responsibility of the other. This keeps their daily life chores also to a minimum. They say "Khana peena aur sona. Aur kya kaam hota hai" (what else is there to do, eating, drinking and sleeping).

Most of them have enjoyed their lives to the fullest, especially those, who identify themselves with the streets more than any other place. There were exceptions; especially in case of participants who had spent more time in the centre than the streets and/or who had been ‘rescued’ from the harsh environment of the streets at a very young age. But for the ones who have associated themselves more as “raste par rehne waale” feel that survival in a city like Mumbai is never an issue.

Living outside has its own interesting arrangements for food, clothing and of course, a roof on the top, unavoidable during the rainy season. Children and adolescents on the streets/stations/ platforms/ footpaths etc., have their own fixes for everything they need to do or have, on an everyday basis. Some of them shared that they used to bathe in a garage, roam around in the trains for fun and to pick pocket, sometimes in the parks to smoke or drink. The use of public places as private spaces for fun, recreation, employment and survival has been noted well in earlier researches, as their ways of socialization. (Kombarakaran 2004; Mathur 2009; Conolly and Ennew 1996; Swart-Kruger 1997).

The participants remember taking bath at a garage or a local tap. Clothes, on very low prices, could be found at street shops. They all seemed to know these streets and shops very well. They remember how “in their time”, the outside spaces used to provide for everything they needed at a very low cost. They had their ways of obtaining for food as well. Philanthropists and tourists, according to them, gave away free food. There are a few centres, usually near stations, where food is available for free. They talk about a centre called “Jhumka Paapad” which has its branches all over the city, providing free food to children on the streets. This place was very famous
among the participants. Kombarakaran (2004), in his study of street children in Mumbai also found similar trends suggesting that the children on streets are found around locations where donors and charitable organizations serve free food. One small difference in the otherwise similar finding of the present study was the perspective of children themselves, which suggested that charitable organizations exist where they stay, clearly implying that they do not follow free food, rather, these organizations reach wherever children are.

Although, freedom and independence is enjoyed by the boys on the street living with families as well, the struggle to perform daily life activities are more for, mostly because of the added responsibility of the family. Performing the daily life chores, like taking bath and changing clothes becomes difficult, especially for girls. The issues of earning a living or finding a source of income were not raised by the girls though. Other than that, girls were mostly confined to the household work, thus facilitating others in the family to go out and fetch work.

‘Settlement’, an aspect completely missing from lives of children without families, is strongly sought by these children. Families are unable to set up a kitchen.

Setting a home without a house is not feasible. Also, they don’t know how long they will be able to stay there. Arguments between families over fetching water from a nearby tap or dividing money distributed by regularly visiting philanthropists (“Pachchas waala”), as the participants called one of them) is also frequent. Lack of a concrete place to stay, disrupts a lot of their daily life activities in many more ways. Rainy season is a big problem, along with the scare of moving traffic.

Health is also a concern raised. Those living with families discussed how lack of money makes the homeless people ignore their health, sometimes leading to avoidable deaths. They shared how some people in their area passed away for because of no treatment due to lack of money. None of such issues were considered by participants living independently.
Sources of Income

A variety of jobs were taken up by children to sustain them on the street. The most common were rag picking, selling bottles picked up from the trains and “catering work” or “vaadi ka kaam” as children refer to it. Working at wedding parties as one of the most common source of employment has been found earlier by Kombarakaran (2004) as well. However, another source of income in his study, i.e. giving sexual favours in return of money, was not discussed by the participants in focused group discussions in this study. One of the most well known forms of income generation, i.e., rag picking (Kombarakaran 2004; Mathur 2009; Save the Children 2011; TISS-Action Aid 2013) was reinstated in the study but they added that it never fetch them much money. It is thus, not the most preferred way of income generation. At the stations, they used to wait for the trains to stop so that they could pick up plastic bottles inside. They would then fill these bottles up with water and sell them. There were some jobs considered better than the others. For example, rag picking and begging were frowned upon and participants felt ashamed of admitting to have done it. It was observed that children took up begging wilfully when they felt hopeless in getting any other work. Some were forced to beg. Certain stereotypes held against children and jobs low on a hierarchical status, were visible in statements like “UP ke log hi bhangaar chunte hain”. (People from UP are rag pickers)

This not only puts forth the low hierarchical position of rag picking among boys but also suggests an inherent division in the minds of children coming from different regions. A common third-person understanding about children on the streets being rag pickers thus need to be understood as a reason for an internal divide even among the children themselves.

On the other hand, acts of burglary or theft were talked about as examples of their heroics. They went on to explain the ways in which they use to pick pockets or steal stuff like purses, mobiles, watches etc. One boy told how he could keep a blade in his mouth and cut open a bag as soon as he got the chance. Some used to pick pockets in groups. Some other ways of making money was playing cards (“jugaar khlena”). They made Rs. 50-100 in a day. They mostly bought drugs from this money. The illegal activities or the ones which are daring, make the child a hero, the one who is
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idolized by the others in his peer group. These acts are the manifestations of the masculine characteristics which are the most valued and frankly, highly essential, in an open street environment, thus, putting them at the higher level of hierarchy.

Another most commonly done work was that of catering. Vaadi ka kaam provided them the opportunity to earn around Rs 250 a day. The work involved “ghaati ka kaam” i.e. cutting vegetables, making tea, washing utensils etc. The word “Ghaati”, in the local Mumbai language, is a term used to depict a person belonging to lower socio-economic status [the one who lives by the ghaat (river bank)]. One of the boys shared that he used to make Rs 4000 a month doing the same work. Thus, this was considered the most lucrative work (as suggested by Kombarakaran 2004) although, one of the most physically tiring work. They put in the words “sabse zyada gadha mazdoori ka kaam hai”.

Many of them have worked at hotels (small dhabas), cooking and cleaning, but they complained that they never got enough money for their work. (Similar to findings of Kombarakaran while studying street children in Mumbai in 2004) Sometimes, the employer would give three meals a day and a ticket back to the village but no salary. Working at the local vendor on the street has been suggested by Mathur (2009) as the most common way of earning money by street children. Participants shared their experience of that work. Some of them used to catch pigeons and sell them as well. But no matter what work they did, almost a half of them said that they never slept hungry.

They rather fondly remember eating Chinese food and chicken at that time. They strongly believed in Mumbai as a city to provide them cheap and scrumptious food. They put it this way “Mumbai shahar mein koi bhooka nahi sota didi”. (No body sleeps hungry in Mumbai city)

It is important to note here that some times, hunger for food was replaced by the intoxication of drugs which was reported to be helpful in reducing hunger. But this was suggested more by those who lived with families. For these boys, the types of jobs done for sustenance were little different from what the children without families did. However, rag picking and begging were taken up by both. These children were
involved in working with their parents. Some of the parents were labourers who used their sons’ help to improve the efficiency. Some were self-employed and the male child would help them sell their products outside. The boys living with parents used the word “jhol” to make money. They meant illegal things like “Chori chakaari” etc. They also enjoyed the luxury of good food and independence but since the time they have quit work to complete education; they can’t afford even one meal per day. One of the boys did actually say that because the centre provides mid day meal, he is able to eat at least one time a day. Otherwise, his parents have no money to feed him. Daughters according to them are an added problem. The girls of the house are not allowed to go out and work. Thus, if a family has daughters, they have to fend for her as well. They feel bad for such families. Only one girl living in the night shelter of the organization and being in touch with her father expressed her concern over lack of money in the family. Extremely wise for her age, she encourages her father to take up occupation which he is capable of doing in his ailing health. But, the income of the family keeps reducing. This less or no involvement of girls in income generation for families living on the streets has earlier been found by Save the Children (2011) on street children in Delhi.

Hierarchy existed in the kind of work one did on the street. For example, vaadi ka kaam (work involving washing utensils and cutting utensils in a small catering business) was the one demanding maximum hard work but was well paying. Thus, was a popular choice among children. But, on the other hand, begging was looked down upon and the participants, who admitted to have done it, were targets of bullying by others. A sixteen years old boy who was forced to engage in begging by his own mother and grandparents exhibited the shame he felt in vocalizing this reality of his past, doubly stressful as he had to sustain the family. Some of the voices in the group indicated that there are jobs even below in the hierarchy of the kind of work done on the street. For example, mocking a group member in one of the FGDs, another member said “yeh to tatti saaf karne ka kaam karta tha.” (He did the work of cleaning shit). The whole group laughed and made fun of the boy accused of doing this job. None of the boys however, said that they have done this job while on the streets.
Rag picking, another job among children was one of the most commonly taken up jobs to survive on the streets. They remember it with mixed feelings. The garbage dumps which earned them around Rs. 50-100 in a day, was more than just a job site. Participants remembered it as a time when the boys would fight with each other over the bottles and other items, run after each other and play with the garbage. It was fun for some. However, a few voices, coming from boys above the age of 16, felt hesitant in saying that they have done rag picking in the past. One of these boys, with a popular image in the centre expressed his helplessness as a person born to extremely poor parents which pushed him towards rag picking. It is essential here to see that this perception had developed over the years, which could have been influenced by the socialization that existed in the organization to which he is associated with, since three years now. Being an individual who is perceived as more vocal confident and a leader, accepting something like rag picking became difficult, especially for him. Thus, this experience and its internalization over the years, along with the individual and social factors demands attention.

Sources of entertainment

When asked about leisure activities on the streets, a variety of responses were received. Some games which were played are “Titli Bhanwara” (one running after another), “Cart chhaap” (flipping the coins and making money), “Jugaar/ jua” (playing cards for money). A few games mentioned were "Murge ki ladaai" (tying a knife to a cock’s foot and making them fight. Whoever’s cock bleeds first, loses.). Watching movies was mentioned by some, not all. However, it is considered one of the most common ways of entertainment, as per previous studies (Francis 1996; Kombarakaran 2004; Mathur 2009). A possible reason could be the variety of children included in the present study as thus not excluding girls or those living with families. Girls living with or without families, mentioned watching films, but not independently like the boys did. Their entertainment was mostly restricted to engaging with children of their age in the neighbourhood. Watching films in it had different connotations for boys. Watching a Hindi film was different from watching a blue film. When asked about films, one group of boys only mentioned the blue films and “that kind of entertainment”.
Researchers: *Kaan ke alwa kya karte the? Masti mazey ke liye?*  
(*What did you do other than work, for fun?*)

Participant 1: *Ghumte the doston ke saath, ladkiyan chhedte the. Picture dekhte the.*  
(*used to roam around, used to tease girl. Used to watch movies).*

Participant 2: (*implying a hidden meaning*) *Ladki chhedte the, phir picture dekhte the.*  
*Aap ke type ki nahi, humare type ki.* (*the whole group laughs)*

(*first we used to tease girls, then watched movie. Our kind of movie, not your kind)*

Addiction to watch pornographic films has been earlier analysed by Francis (1996), who tried to put forth the reasons for a street child to get used to such behaviour. He suggested peer pressure and the absence of parental control. Although, an interesting area of enquiry for street children in Mumbai in the decade of 90s, his approach towards pornography addiction remains paternalistic.

One of the things mentioned when asked about fun things to do on the streets was Prostitutes. They did not use the word prostitute but said that they used to go to them to “have fun” in exchange of money. They went on to say that they feel helpless when girls on the road wear shirt clothes, thus giving justification for why they used to go to have sex in exchange for money. They also enjoyed teasing girls on the street.

A few said that for entertainment, fighting with each other was enough. Running after each other, taking gangs along and having huge fights was fun. One group of male participants remember the illegal acts they did as a lot of fun, especially when done with a group. These acts included, pick pocketing, stealing money and running away from people and police. Making the police run after them was one of the most fun and adventurous things. *There is a feeling of self-pride among those who are good at theft and robbery and more importantly, who can save themselves. Glorification of crimes and criminals was clearly observed.* Pointing towards a group member, a participant said “*arre yeh toh roz chicken khata hai. Dawood ka aadmi hai*” (*He eats chicken every day. He works for Dawood (an underworld Don).*)
Life outside: The Social and Emotional Space

Initial feelings of coming to the street. The initial experiences of being on the street have been different for those who lived with families. Six boys out of the fifteen participants who have not gone through a separation from parents, still feel that drugs is one of their earliest memories or rather leanings from the street. The male participants remembered learning to play cards ("galat dhanda"). All of them remember the shift made to the city as a blow to their schooling. For some, studies discontinued after shifting and for others, there was a gap ranging from months to years.

For those who have lived on the street without families, initial days are remembered as a time when they were very young. They say that the time reminds them of the two main events; "separation from parents" and "learning to take drugs". They compare their way of adjusting to the street with the encounters of taking drugs in their initial days. Shuru shuru mein ajeeb laga tha.... Yeh drug ki tarah hi hai. Shuru mein ajeeb lagta hai, Phir ahcha achcha achcha lagne laga hai. (The participant used the word "achcha" or "good" to suggest that one starts to keep feeling better as more and more time passes on the street.)

Fear of the unknown was stated as a problem. Previous studies (Rizzini and Butler, 2003) do suggest that children could have someone known in the city, especially someone who belongs to their own native area, but that was not the case with the participants in this case. Also, they said that if a child lands up in the city all alone, bad things happen to him mostly. Someone can make him work without giving any money or one might be forced to start smoking cigarette. One initial fear of the street is that someone can steal a child’s kidney or can cut his hands and force him to beg. One of the participants recollects his first encounter with the city in following words:


(I was scared, really scared. Just kept sitting at the station for two days. Could not comprehend anything. The station was big. So big. All the people. I kept sitting at the bench for two days. Someone kept fruits in my lap but I was too scared to eat them. )
It was found that these initial feelings depended a lot on the circumstances leading to the street. Adjustment to the shamelessness of the street took time depended a lot on the indicator, that is if landing up on the street was voluntary or involuntary. As an extremely protected child in his house, his sudden exposure to a life with no boundaries and directions left him frozen at the initial realization. Similar was the reaction for those who got lost can feel regret and miss the parent a lot as the separation was involuntary. A sixteen years old boy who got separated from his mother at a crowded station, remembers his fear of being on the station alone, looking for his mother, even though all the other memories have faded away. He has completely forgotten what his mother looked like but that fear is always alive somewhere in his heart. He regrets leaving her hand then and landing up on the street all alone. These strong emotional feelings, still fresh in his heart, make him say that street is not the right place for any one. Thus, a connection between the circumstances of getting separated from parents and the personality characteristics can be said to influence the initial feelings of landing up on the street.

For those who ran voluntarily, to avoid the work and stressful conditions at home, mainly due to poverty; also followed their own pattern to get used to the city. Although, the shock was not as much as for those who landed up by chance, the crowd and the magnanimity of the city did scare them at first.

As far as those are concerned who moved to the city with the family, they did not go through the shock initially as much as the others did. All of them were studying in schools back in their village when their parents decided to settle in the city. In some cases, the family (mainly father) was living in the city since earlier. They did not mention the initial anxiety of coming to the street like their counterparts living without families did. Although, they did share that their education in the villages was discontinued. Reasons for coming to the street were largely similar, that is, the search for livelihood. The boys recount the lack of employment opportunities as a reason for their father to bring their family to the city. These boys remember accompanying their fathers to work and helping them, especially in case of those who were self employed. They remember their slow movement from working with parents to working alone on the streets. These boys would work on the street in the morning and return to their
families to sleep at night. If one boy started selling “gajra” (flowers) with his father and mother, another sat with his father at the shop where he worked and helped him fold sheets and sarees. One of them has and is still living with his father in the factory where he is a labourer. For all these Adolescents, the amazement felt looking at cars on the roads is positively remembered. Big buildings also surprised them. But the initial struggle to survive is also not forgotten. Rag picking and begging are the jobs the boys had to do initially to sustain themselves and their families. These two jobs are considered by participants as beneath them. It is interesting to note that the girls (nine out of eleven) staying with families did not discuss the issue of economic sustenance of the family. They were mostly confined to the household work and a few mentioned the insecurity felt at the street as a major shock in the city. They did mention getting awed by the cars and buildings but also remember the gaze of people throughout their stay at the street. They shared their initial inhibitions of sleeping at night on the road or bathing and changing in a make shift bathroom. For two of these girls, move to the city streets was due to being abandoned by father, adding a different dimension to their lives altogether.

**Early Confusion eventually leading to Freedom and Independence.** After leaving his/her family behind and reaching the city’s railway station for the first time, a child gets introduced to the sub-culture at the station and slowly gets accustomed to its social and economic dynamics. But the general feelings associated with the street were different for different individuals. For the two groups of male participants who had lived on the street without families, memories of social as well as emotional experiences of that time generated mixed responses. However, the daily activities were similar for all eighteen participants. Majority of respondents shared that their day involved roaming around from one station to another, pick pocketing in the trains, working in hotels, catering (vaadi ka kaam), rag picking and sometimes begging. But no matter how these experiences were internalized, freedom and independence was enjoyed by all the participants, something which they now miss, living in the shelter. This freedom has been validated as a significant feeling while being on the streets by a number of researches around the world. (Butler 2003; Francis, 1996; Webster 2011). Autonomy which comes with freedom makes them confident to handle themselves on
their own. This realization of handling the self without dependence on any other person is a reason for a high self esteem, evident in their words said below


(The one who lives at home, does not know. We live outside, engage in rag picking, which means that we struggle a lot. Those live at home, get everything for free. So they don’t value it.)

**Fears and Anxieties.** One group of boys living themselves on the streets viewed the life “out in the open” as dangerous. Most of the participants talked about various forms of “misuse” which can happen when a child lands up on the street alone, like stealing the child’s kidney, exploiting him for/during work by increasing the working hours or not paying wages as deserved; cutting the child’s hand and forcing him to beg etc. They also mentioned that some elder boys or adults could force them to do “galat kaam” (wrong thing/s). This suggests that the participants look at streets as space of heightened vulnerability but at the same time, most of them do miss the carefree and independent life on the street. Almost all the studies conducted with street children all around the world, have proved this feeling as the biggest motivation for being on the street. (Rizzini and Butler, 2003). Interestingly, those who had a strong friend circle and/or adults around them, tend to feel that street was a better place to be. The feeling of independence and freedom guided the other group of participants in their survival of streets so when they put their street experiences in words, they only talked about how enriching the life can be for children. They believe that street life has taught them a lot more than a child of their age generally knows. Being able to sustain them in any environment is their biggest learning from the life led on streets. Thus, the fear and anxieties in the early days of landing up on the street, when recollecting as adolescents, is shadowed by their adjustment and connection built with the streets. They, now, in their shield of masculinity, believe that they were too confident to have been exploited by any one. They said that the friend circle always acted as a protective shield (as proved by Rizzni and Butler 2003). The confidence of being able to sustain themselves on the streets “with ease” could be a
reason for this confidence to be oozing out even when remembering the initial days at the street.

**Freedom with responsibility.** This freedom was fully enjoyed by those who are living independently, without any adult authority. Freedom and independence emerged as the one good thing influencing all the other experiences on the street. Also, the need for freedom in late childhood/early adolescence years emerged as an important component while explaining their relationship with parents in the past. The following sentence was spoken by one of the most interactive participant in the group meeting, who acts like and perceived a natural leader for everyone else in the group. They said "Gharwaale log bahut haraami rehte hain, main bahut dekha hai. Kisi ka maante hi nahi hain. Maar khane waala kaam karte hain". (Family members are very bad, I have seen that a lot. They do not listen to any one. They do things which make one feels like hitting them.)

Interpreting this statement of a street living adolescent who has been asked to talk about the relationship with parents, can lead to very interesting meanings. Firstly, giving utmost importance to the phenomenological approach and following *epoche* (Husserl 1999 cited in Cooper et al. 1999), the researcher felt that the adolescent considers the authority of the parent uncalled for. The obvious authoritative right of a parent over the child is not felt in the same way by the participant as is propagated and practiced by the society. As an individual in his/her own right, the parent is seen just as an external actor who is trying to limit his/her pleasurable experiences. When the child says referring to the parents/guardians, “maar khane waale kaam karte hain” (makes one want to hit them), the conflict between the child and parent becomes obvious, more so, because of a role reversal, especially in the case of child who is made to earn, to sustain his family, hence, disrupting the power equation. Also, a developmental age of enhanced physical and sexual energy along with an exposure to work and earn money, gives them a mental outlet to escape a scenario of constant control and nagging at home. Thus, freedom becomes most sought after and thus, most valued when they reach the streets. The realization of the ability to do whatever they feel like makes them try new things which they may later in their life find unnecessary. Visano (1990) had used a social interactionist perspective to understand
the factors that pull the children to street, and freedom and stimulation on the streets emerged as one important factor.

Freedom is enjoyed in various ways. For example, when asked about that one thing that they like the most about the street, they said, "Ghumne ka. Aur hum log ko kisi cheez ka tension nahi rehta hai. Aaraam se jahan mann kare wahan ghumne ka. Maja karne ka, Shivaji Park mein naahaane dhone ka." (Roaming around. And we do not feel the tension of anything. Easily roam around wherever we feel like. Have fun. Taking bath in Shivaji Park.)

They responded to a comparison between their lives and lives of those who live with their families in buildings and the basic difference is made by the independence they enjoy in the open environment of the streets. This experience they say makes them self-sustaining and stronger much more than those, who do not get the chance. These following sentences uttered during a group discussion with boys who are living in a shelter but still are in contact with the street, throws light on the experiences of the street

Un log se zyada achcha hum log ka hi life hai. Kyunki humein maloom hota hai baahar kya hota hai, kaise hota hai. Hum mein apne aap ko manage karne ki kshamta bahut achchi hai… humein kaha jaata hai, baahar jao ge toh khush nahi reh paoge (refering to when they go out of the shelter) Baahar ki zindagi aisi hai, waisi hai. Par jab hum baahar jate hain toh hume lagta hai ki baahar ka life comfortable hai aur hum log baahar jee sakte hain. Hum log kaam kar ke kama kha sakte hain, itni taakat hain hum log mein.

(Our life is better than theirs’. Because we know what all happens outside. We have the ability to manage ourselves… we are told that if we go outside, you will not be able to survive, that the life outside is this or that. But when we go out we feel that the life outside is comfortable and we can survive. We can work and eat, we have that strength.)

This represents their comfort in the street and asks for a look at the socio-cultural factors which makes life, outside in the vulnerable environment of the streets, this comfortable. It could probably be this feeling of freedom, the value of which, is reinstated every time they leave the authority of the shelter. That could be one reason for such a perception of the outside life. Because another group which has no contact with the streets since they have been in the shelters, do not consider freedom a good thing anymore. Many of these children ran from the closed authoritative walls of the
shelter home in the initial years of their transition, they do not long for this freedom on the streets, after an average of 3-4 years in the shelter. The power of a slow process of socialization through the institution of education and planned rehabilitation could be one factor refraining them from the perks of being outside and pulling them away from the pleasures of the freedom felt in the open spaces.

**Discontent with the Temporariness.** Participants, who have lived with their families outside, had mixed feelings about their life on the footpaths of the city. On one hand, they enjoy their freedom and independence to dig into their inner curiosities of seeing the world through a voyage into the physical spaces of the city. But, on the other hand, the struggle of survival pulls them back. These children identify themselves as “raste pe rehne waale” (those who live on the road). They seem to closely associate their self identities with the way they perceive the physical space around them. They repeatedly said “raste par rehne waale ki koi izzat nahi hoti... raste pe sona bikul bekaar lagta hai...Sab log nashe waale hote hain, chillam peete rehte hain. Lafda baazi karte hain. (People living on the street have no respect. (We) don’t like sleeping on the road. Everybody is a drug addict. They engage in fights.)

They said this, time and again, because they feel the need for a settled house where the family can survive, looking for fulfilment of higher goals instead of getting stuck at the everyday struggle of cooking or saving their stuff from being stolen. Their discontent with the temporariness of everything is clearly visible. The helplessness which comes from the reality that they can’t buy anything (even if they have the money to) for the house as it would be stolen immediately, make them feel 'most' deprived and unlucky. Thus responsibility was more profound among the children living on the streets with families. Here, it is worth noting that the finding does not imply that all the children who have families on the streets would take up the responsibility of the family. According to the participants, a lot of adolescents leave homes at day time and engage in drug addiction and other vices, instead of working to earn for the family. But this one was clearly a group of children which had a strong sense of responsibility towards the self and family. One indication of this common sense of responsibility goes with the fact that these children are voluntarily studying in the shelters while staying at the street at night with family, and have a strong urge
to make a better future for them. This group complains of a superficial freedom which does not last long as they have to provide for the family from a very young age.

**Distress and Helplessness.** Distress and helplessness was more profound among those living with families on the street whereas, the feeling of vulnerability was stronger among their independent counterparts. Those living with families announce that the life lead by the people without roofs is the worst life any one can ever have. They mention the everyday struggle due to lack of sufficient money, no shade on their heads, a social environment pulling them towards “nasha”, “galat dhanda” and “patte khelna”; pushing them further away from education. Other than the physical aspects of no settled place or battling heavy rains day and night; they talk about their distress of being out in the open. Central to this distress is the lack of money.

Owing to the kind of life people on the footpaths lead, the urgency to make money takes precedence over everything else. This struggle to earn and fetch food for the family doesn’t leave much chance for thinking about the higher goals like education. Comparing themselves with “building waale”, they say that for them, lack of money is just bad time which shall pass, because they have a roof on their head. But for the children on the footpath, the cycle of no money continues. Habit of working continuously to earn money is ingrained in their heads since childhood. However, they do enjoy the freedom of roaming around anywhere they want, as a result of their life in the open spaces of the city. They consider themselves luckier than children living in buildings who are not allowed to go “out” after a certain time. But they can roam around any where they want. Their aspirations also don’t go beyond building a house, once built, they feel that they can manage everything else. For these adolescents, the future is still scary.

**Girls also shared similar feelings of disgust dealing with the reality of staying ‘out’ but their reasons are mainly associated with lack of safety and security.** Not only they themselves, but also their male counterparts believe that streets are no place for girls. For the dangers that do exist **outside**, the girls are under constant gaze of family members so as to check for any kind of disruption by anyone else, mainly for sexual pleasures. A very few studies exist in the Indian scenario which focus
specifically on the experiences of girls as the number of girls on the street are much less as compared to the boys. However, one of the rare studies done by Bhattacharya (2012) among the girls on the streets of Kolkata did suggest that girls always feel vulnerable and are fearful of being subject to physical and sexual abuse remains. This constant fear and hence an alertness towards the surroundings and even their own body language, all the time while being on the streets, emerged as a major source of distress in the findings of the study.

**Safety and Security: Males.** Interesting things were revealed about issues of safety and security on the streets. All the male participants living by themselves mentioned ghosts as their biggest fear. This has been suggested by the Census of street children (TISS-Action Aid 2013). One group of boys completely denied feeling any kind of fear at the street (other than ghosts). This initial response to any danger was consistent with what Lucchini (1996), in her article *The Street and its image* stated. She says that street children do not feel unprotected in the street and that what children, according to her fear most in the street is the cold. It is very rare for them to mention violence or danger, as was the case with the participants of the present study, at least at the initial stages of data collection. Rather on questions of any dangers at the street, they said “Hum kis se darenge? log humse darte hain.” (What would we be scared of? People are scared of us.)

This statement not only depicts the fearless attitude developed among children while thriving on the street but also their confidence in them and their perceptions of selves based on how others look at them. Whether they accept being fearful or not, they do keep weapons with them for self-protection. These weapons are available at particular shops in exchange for money. One such weapon is called “Chauper” (a big knife), "Punch", to be worn in the fingers. One of them owned a "Ghodha" (revolver), ever since he was 12 years old. They have had "chains and talwar (swords)" to protect them. Friends used to help them buy these weapons. This makes one look deeper into their unacceptance of fear. As they do keep themselves prepared against

However, on probing further, male participants did mention violence by **Police as one of their biggest fears.** Police as one of the threats has been well documented through earlier studies conducted with children on the streets. (Francis 1996; Trussell 1999;
Kombarakaran 2004; TISS-Action Aid 2013). However for a few, the police was perceived in a positive light as well. It is important to note here that the fear of police among children might be because of the fact that they are not prepared mentally and physically to defend them when police beats while they are asleep at the station at night. Otherwise they consider dealing with the police as adventurous and fun.

One of the two groups of male participants, with experience of living without families on the street, did not seem so confident in protecting themselves. They felt that other than the police, somebody could steal money from their pockets or cause them physical harm, especially when they are asleep. This fear was always in their mind which made them restless in their sleep.

But it was agreed that this happens more when they are alone. They shared time and again how friends and gangs they attach themselves to, provided a safety net against all these occurrences. Similar to the findings Kombarakaran’s (2004) research with street children in Mumbai suggested that support of friends is one of the coping strategies to deal with the hardships on the street. Friends were the biggest security cover for children, especially while sleeping at station at night. All the boys strongly agreed to it but the girls; contradictory to the findings of Bhattacharya (2012), who said that the girls on the streets of Kolkata stick with each other so as to keep themselves secured against every day abuse; considered the family responsible for their security. However, they never really felt secure on the street as the family itself cannot stop the men, wandering on the streets; to stare at them. One difference is the fact that the girls in Bhattacharya’s study (2012) were living independently on the streets. Both the girls, who had lived independently on the street and participated in the present study, said that to ensure their security, they married a boy they met on the street. This made them safe from the sexual advances from other men. More in detail about the girls’ feelings of safety and security has been mentioned in the next heading. When asked the boys about any other fears, one group had the general feeling that everybody sleeping at the station is very well known. They are no strangers. Thus, there isn’t a feeling of insecurity otherwise.
While discussing their fears, less than half of the participants did express the need for an elder to protect them. This is very different from the other group which considers itself too confident to express need for any one’s protection. Here, it is important to mention the participants who did live with elders on the street, still felt unsafe and vulnerable. However, the reasons for their insecurities were very different from those of their counterparts. For these adolescents, living with families at footpaths and under flyovers, the biggest fear is of being dislocated by the frequently visiting BMC workers. As mentioned earlier, their families do feel insecure creating a “home” as the BMC can run “bulldozers” over it any time. They share how demoralizing it is for children who are trying to study and do their other daily activities. This frequent menace caused by the BMC creates obstruction in their education by not only destroying (burning, as the participants said) their books, notebooks and stationary items, but also forcing them into the cycle of finding a job, so as to make enough money to create a new settlement all over again. The role of BMC in the context of street children has recently been mentioned by the census on street children in Mumbai (TISS-Action Aid 2013) that mentioned displacement by BMC as a reason for a few children to land up on the streets.

In their discussions about the free time roaming around, the fear of being kidnapped, forced into “galat dhanda” (like gambling) or other dangers of being pushed into habits like drugs, begging, stealing and robbery; were vocalized by all the male participants. They vocalized the usual fears of being mislead on alluring preposition and then sold off for money. On being probed about the things a child might be forced to do once sold off, they say that girls are made to do “galat kaam” but the boys would be made to work as a labourer, for “mehnet mazdoori.” They also mention the fear of accidents. Sleeping at footpath at night, they can be run over by cars.

**Safety and Security: Females.** While discussing their perception on the streets, the threat to safety and security came out as a major concern for the girls living with the families. “Rape” came up as one of the first things followed by other forms of sexual molestation, the most prevalent being; staring in a way making a girl uncomfortable, making passes at them, eve teasing, saying sexually loaded comments and approaching them for sex. Perceiving the streets as extremely unsuitable place for
girls, they shared that there is a constant danger of being approached by a “trepan” (the word they use for a pimp) and being allured to enter “vaishya ka ghar” (house of prostitutes). They mentioned that streets are full of “Gardullas”, i.e. men who are drunk and doped commonly seen roaming on the streets. Interestingly, this term was never used by any of the boys. The girls expressed the fear generated when such men follow you or sometimes even ask for some sexual pleasures indirectly. Taking bath, changing clothes or going for toilet is a major problem as suggested by Bhattacharya (2012) with regard to street girls in Kolkata. Temporary shacks are created for girls of the family to take bath or change clothes. But the girls said that the arrangement is not reliable at all.

The girls who had run away from home and reached the street did not state their fears the way their counterparts with families did. They did mention fears of dying under the train tracks but were optimistic about being rescued and helped. This optimism was associated with the feelings of love and a secured relationship developed with a male found on the streets. They agreed that street can be dangerous but also mentioned that it can be a dealt with, if one finds the person to take care of them. Both the girls who had spent time alone on the streets, were approached by men/boys from the street who wanted to give them a married life, with the all the safety and security. These girls were ‘rescued’ by the organization before they could engage with anyone for a longer time and still feel that they could have a home of their own. One of them who had been married back in her village and had left the house looking for her estranged husband, thought of another marriage as her only chance to have a family and children. The other girl did have friends who were boys but in spite of many interactions for data collection, did not mention the terms of the relationship she shared with them. Although, the organization personnel tried to feed the researcher with information that she was in sexual relationships while on street and that the boys followed her even after she was brought to the organization, the researcher never attacked her with any such presupposition. She was entitled to tell what she felt necessary.

Thus, one can say the way girls are approached by men for sexual pleasures on the street are slightly different based on the presence of their families. With families
around them, men reach out to girls in more subtle ways but the girls on the streets all by themselves, are approached in more direct ways. As the participants themselves think, girls on the streets can be manipulated to engage in sex, could be tempted to join the trade of prostitution and trafficking under the pretense of love and marriage. While similar dangers were felt by the girls living with families also, their engagement in such activities would be more forceful than being just ‘talked into it’. It also needs to be noted that the time spent by girls on the streets, all alone is much less as compared to the others. This could be due to the active organizational mechanisms which are now available (as visible in case of four girls) to ensure the identification, care and protection of such children. Another reason could be the immediate attention they attract by the men and boys on the streets. While comparing the description of their feelings of safety and security, the gap in educational status of these two groups of girls was kept in mind. But, the inability of these girls to express their insecurities in the focused group discussions could be an affect more of their time spent in the highly vulnerable environment of the streets, rather than just education. The articulation of ideas and feelings as well as the confidence to speak was seen to be much better among girls living with their families rather than the ones who have spent time on the streets without any protective figures. One major reason of this could be the stage of rehabilitation they were at, in the two different organizations that they were associated with.

The importance of a ‘family’ here on the street becomes important to discuss. For those who found a person offering a ‘family’ to them in exchange of sex, was not seen as an unfair deal. The family was seen to provide a source of protection and satisfaction even when shelter less in the city. The same family was seen as a restriction in the independence of boys on the street, making both boys and girls more responsible towards it.

The regular “chedh chaad” and “zor zabardasti” is now internalized as indispensible effects of being on the streets, especially when everyone is asleep at night. Starting from the mild feelings of awkwardness because “Gardulla” and “Bewaras” (drunk men) are roaming around them, to the extreme fear of men trying to take advantage, from the ways of eve teasing to repeated attempts at rape. Fear and anger were some
of the feelings the girls remember while dealing with highly frequent teasing and name calling with sexual undertones. A wide range of emotions were expressed, ranging from extreme disgust to even feeling nice if someone they liked is teasing them. Scared of being stalked or forced into sex, made them scared and low on confidence in walking freely by them. Even if just being scared, the gaze is extremely disturbing, following you everywhere. They say that they feel bad and sometimes disgusted at others and themselves. Self blame and cursing themselves for being born as women was visible among them. This was contradictory to the findings of study by Bhattacharya (2012).

\begin{quote}
Gussa aata hai ki ladki kyun bane. Apne upar gussa aata hai.. Agar main ladka hoti toh itna aadmi mujhe dekhta nahi. Ladki ho ke gunah kiya ki ladke ko chance mil gaya mujhe dekhne ka... ganda feel hota hai. Kya apne ka koi izzat nahi hai kya.
\end{quote}

(feel angry for being born as a woman. If were a boy, then I would not have been stared at. It is a crime to be born a woman, that that a man got the chance to stare at me. Feel dirty. As if we do not have any respect.)

Immediate reaction to such acts is confusion over what to understand or what to say. Sometimes the act happens so fast that they don’t know how to react. For the initial 3-4 seconds they space out, not following what is actually happening with them.

**Interpersonal Relationships and the street**

Relationship with elders has been discussed earlier in various forms by researchers (Cosgrove 1990) specifically in context of street children. The assumed disconnect between children and any ‘adult interaction’ has been challenged in the last two decades (Claire O’Kane 2003), owing to the newly identified diversity in the categorization of street children and their relationships with the street and other domains. (Panter-Brick 2003). Probably not as authoritative, but relationships of various kinds do develop with adults while experiencing a life on streets. For example, a concept of a ‘substituted family’ on the street (Kombarakaran 2004) or a ‘family type unit’ (Schimmel 2008) emerges on the street by forming relationships with adults, other than family, which an individual comes across, on her/his journey on the streets. Thus, this section will look at the interpersonal relationships, and not just biological parents, which exist in the lives of children, while constantly moving on and off streets.
Emotional attachment with Parents. Supportive adult relationships are said to have an influence on the lives of children which eventually shapes their sense of self. (Rogers 1995). These supportive adult care giving relationships are recognized as a need for successful rehabilitation of children who have had an early exposure to the harmful conditions of the street. (Schimmel 2008). The present study saw attachment with the mother, whether in contact at present or not, as a means of emotional and sometimes, economic support; also sometimes a reason for emotional turmoil and distress. This relationship per say, sometimes directly or indirectly, had a strong influence on the lives of these adolescents. Mother is remembered fondly by most of the participants. For a few, Grandmother is also remembered with a lot of fondness. One boy, who got separated from his mother at a crowded railway station, doesn’t remember anything else but still misses maternal love immensely. Two girls who came to the city with their mothers were both abandoned by the father. Both of them were extremely attached to their mothers. Two of the participants who had step mothers, did share their strained relationship with them, which was presumably, one of the reasons for both of them to run away from home. One other girl, still living with family believes that her parents are not her real parents. The harsh attitude of her mother and the abusive and highly insulting language used against her has made her very distant from her mother, emotionally.

As mentioned before, six of the thirty five participants belonged to single parent families. All of them had unique relationships with their single parent. One participant, who is the only female in the house consisting of her father and two brothers, feels responsible towards all the members of her family. This family was abandoned by the mother after the birth of the youngest child. Since the age of five, she has been taking care of her father, and playing the role of a counsellor as well as a confidant. The love and responsibility towards the family also has its side effects as she sometimes feels that her own needs are conveniently neglected by every male member in the family.

Another boy who has been raised by his father expressed how his father was the only thing putting his life together, which later on got disrupted when he died. This boy, who had been tried for cases of delinquency before was now put into a shelter home. His major shift from the street to the shelter took place over a period of two years. During
this time, he was getting used to the absence of his father and roaming around on the street with friends. This boy met a lady, friend’s mother who used to let her stay him stay at home after the death of father and also gave him money for performing the odd jobs for her house, in which she ran a brothel. This adolescent had a deep regard for this lady who gave her a shelter and food as well as money. This is the lady whom he calls his ‘mother’, when asked about his own mother. This way of substituting the family with new people found during a life of exploration on the street has earlier been explained by Kombarakaran (2004). A need for care giving relationships to provide an environment of successful rehabilitation to children considered deprived of any adult love and affection, has been proposed by Schimmel (2008) as well, who looked at the whole situation from a humanistic perspective.

One factor which drastically affects the relationship children shared with their parents is the substance abuse by parents. Many of them shared experiences of parents being alcoholics. Sometimes this habit made their parents aggressive and physically abusive. This relationship between the substance abuse among parents and child maltreatment against children has been empirically studied earlier. (Barnard and Mc Keganey 2004; Dunn et al. 2002; Sidebotham and Golding 2001; Tracy 1994). In a few other instances, addiction to “desi daaru” made the parent/s withdrawn from the responsibility of their children and family which forced young children to look for work to make a living. The drug consumption in the family has been stated as a reason for children to leave home as well. (Schimmel 2008).

Half of the male participants living without family on the streets went on to say that when they see some other child getting nice things (to eat) from his parents, they also feel that their parents should have been there. Some said, not only on the street, they feel it now also, that their parents are needed. They went on to share that they miss their family, father and mother, especially around the time of some festival.

Thus, for some participants, love of the adult is missed immensely. But trust is a major issue in building a new relationship in spite of the fact that a few do form substituted families (Kombarakaran 2004). Probably due to the kind of relationships that existed back at home or the experiences from the street, they do not think of seeking help from
an adult as compared to a peer. This mistrust is now a way of thinking for them because they don’t feel confident in trusting an elder person as well. When asked about need for an elder as a help or an advisor, they seem to think that it would have been nice initially but now they have learned the ways of the street and need no one to help them.

**Relationship with Peers.** Friendship is the most important bond shared among children out on the street, especially for those, who live without any family. The importance of friends has been elucidated by many studies in the past. (Komarakaran 2004; Webster 2011). For these children, friends become their social life. As explained before, the moment a child makes entry into a city completely unknown to him, he is spotted by groups of youth wandering around the station, probably with the same history as theirs’. The already existing subculture of the streets slowly engulfs the newcomers in, with formation of new friends. These friends are believed to be a part of a subculture which provides collective identity to children on the streets. (Awad 2002; Beazley 2003).

Whether it is for protection from other ‘gangs’ or need for money or emotional support, friends were there on the streets for all the male participants. More so, as the life of a child, dwelling in open spaces of the city, is not confined to a particular physical space with boundaries, so is their definition of ‘friends’. Some of them believe that all the boys at the station were friends. This very clearly indicates their identity; collectively shared with all those living at a station they call their own.

One of the biggest advantages of belonging to a group of friends is that they provided protection. No matter how much they said that streets were harmless and better than the shelter, they did feel the need of friends to provide a protective cover. These friends, participants recall, were usually elder than them in age having more experience of dealing with life on the streets. At night, all the boys slept together to avoid any theft or abuse by another gang or most expectedly, by the police.

Friends had interesting internal dynamics living on the streets. (as proved by Webster 2011). A gang was always there to represent and support its member, especially when there was a fight. Participants told that these fights used to be for drugs or money. They mentioned “whitener” specifically as a cause of fights. Some other times, being drunk on alcohol led to fights. These fights were remembered joyfully as playful memories. There
were many other aspects to the internal dynamics of friendships out in the open. They mentioned terms like “lallal giri karna, botigiri karna, zabardasti maarna, dalalgiri karna, logon mein ladai karana, aapas mein ladaai lagana, rooth ke chale jana, bawaal karna”, when asked about their relationships with friends. Each of these terms refer to dynamics among friends, like gossiping about one with the other, or saying bad things about one to another etc., to just start a fight. It is worth noticing here that these terms were mentioned during a PRA activity listing bad things about living outside. This indicates that participants now label these internal dynamics as ‘bad things’ about streets although, they remember it with smiles on their faces.

The motivation for friendship was different for different participants. Some strongly believed that friends came to those who had money. This interestingly is called a ‘cynical response’ by Kombarakaran (2004) in his study of street children but is a valid reason as per the children as money is a serious concern for the children on an everyday basis and the protection of this money is least, in the open environment of the street, especially when they are asleep at stations. This vulnerability of the money being stolen by a peer was one of the stressors mentioned about life on the streets. Everybody on the station is not a friend but an acquaintance according to some participants. They would loosely call each other “dost” (friend) or “bhai” (brother). But close friends were very few. Some participants also told that it was hard to maintain long friendships because of their nomadic way of living. They kept leaving many of them behind and forming new bonds on their journey celebrating their freedom and autonomy. This loosely structured gamut of friends is also pointed out by Aptekar (1989) who in the context of Addis Ababa said that street groups are loosely knit and neither socially or emotionally supportive. They consider the strong sense of autonomy among children as one of the reasons which the findings of the present study also agrees with. This nomadic life deprived even those of long term friends who were living with families and were comparatively more settled than their counterparts living on the streets by themselves. But they did mention the strong ties they had with the families and children living around them at the footpath. They did have arguments and fights but then as they grew up, they realized that the fights could be avoided as everyone has to live together. While probing more on the relationships maintained at the streets with families and others, the
response of some of them was worth noting “Ghar waala hi koi apna nahi hota toh baaahr wala kya hoga didi.” (When even the family member is really not the one to be trusted, what to expect from the outsider)

This realization of unavailability of anyone who considers them close enough was shared by the boys without family as well. They strongly felt that no one can be blindly trusted. This opinion was shared by all of them. Some of them said that they have trusted others and regretted it. This is contradictory to the findings of a study conducted by Trussell (1999) who said that a certain degree of trust develops among the children. Although, the boys in this study did mention having one or two close friends, but each time, they also made it clear that nobody can be trusted blindly. They believe that too much friendship is harmful and one has to be careful choosing friends. One of the reasons shared was the attraction towards money blowing up their friendship. Most participants said that the moment a fight breaks up with a close friend; he/she vomits out all of their secrets to the others. It was observed that majority of participants, including girls, felt this major breach of confidentiality as the biggest reason of losing friends.

The importance of peers is not as much as in the life of a girl staying with family on the streets. Lack of trust on friends is one feeling they do share with the boys but still the impact friends have in their lives is very limited, as compared to their male counterparts. Mostly, the girls have to spend their days helping the mother perform the household activities and were not allowed to go out and roam as the boys could. Girls did have some friends, owing mostly to the proximity of their settlement and they bonded over conversations about movies, drugs, men teasing them, making sense of the comments with a sexual undertone, received by passing men/boys etc. This difference in making peer relations has been touched upon by Motala and Smith (2003) who, while comparing the boys and girls on the streets of Durban, found that support systems for girls are not the female peers, which is the case with boys. Rather, they said that boys sometimes act as support for the girl. Although, this was not the case found in this research, the lack of peers on the street and not associated with the shelter home were not mentioned as a part of their lives as much as their male counterparts.
Chapter 4  
Life on the Streets: Verbalizing Experiences

**Relationship with the Police.** The relationship of children living on the streets with the police is unique. Interactions with the police are an everyday occurrence. They all share experiences of playing a cat and mouse game with the police. With memories of a lot of fun and adventure, they shared in the group how they used to make policewallas run after them. One said that the police beats the one who looks washed out, is in old, torn clothes. The ones who are better dressed are not targeted by the police.

They call the policewallas “Paandu”. These “paandus” add fun to their lives. But, clearly, Police is also the first name that comes to mind when asked about their feelings of insecurity or vulnerability outside. Some participants remember police with animosity as they recall being beaten up when they were living ‘on the station’. Police also acts as a help for some children landing up at the station alone. This mixed reaction towards the police by children has been stated by Mathur (2009) as well among children of Jaipur City. Some fear police because it might send them to a particular Children’s Home which has a tainted image among all the participants of the study. This Children’s home features as the most controversial reality that exists in their lives. The role which police plays inside the shelter home is also seen by children as inadequate and insufficient in providing any assurance of safety against the fights and bullying happening internally.

Both the groups also shared that the role of police has changed drastically over the years (since they left the streets). If one boy said how dangerous this change is, another group talks about the increased vigilance of the police to ‘catch’ any child on the street. They meant that the time spent by children at the stations has reduced and more and more of them are being sent to Child Welfare Committees at the earliest.

Interestingly, none of the girls mention any encounters with the police. One of the more vocal male participants feel that with regard to ways in which police deals with street children, dangerous changes are in progress. He possibly meant that earlier, children on the streets had more freedom and autonomy, that staying out in the open and enjoying freedom was possible. But these days, the police have become very vigilant and even before the children are used to the ways of the street, they are put into homes. They discussed among themselves, how the police used to beat them up and they showed each other the injuries caused by them.
Substance Abuse on the street

Substance abuse came up as one of the first things while discussing life on the streets. A lot of work has already been done in India, to understand the prevalence of substance abuse among children and the various effects of it. (Giadhane et al. 2008; Kombarakaran 2004; Mathur 2009; Naik et al. 2011; Praharaj, Verma and Arora 2008; Praveen et al. 2012; Seth, Kotwal and Ganguly 2005; Sharma and Lal 2011; Tripathi and Lal 1999). A study conducted very recently, reviewed the literature from twenty two countries across the world to suggest the high prevalence of substance abuse among street children but also mention the dearth of literature as a whole, on its effects on the physical and mental health (Embleton et al. 2013). In an attempt to understand life on the streets, substance abuse emerged as the most common and frequent response. When looked more closely, it was felt that the organizations which work with these children, consider detoxification as the first and foremost objective of their rehabilitation programs for these children (D’Souza 2012). Intervention programmes at least initiate with the major agenda of helping these children adopt a life without drugs. One more reason why these children could easily share their drug addiction experiences could be because they have gone through a lot of surveys and interviews, which targeted their habits of drugs, making them feel that drug abuse is what these people coming from outside (indicating the researcher here) want to know about. Thus, their ease at putting this habit in words is reinforced by the continuous emphasis of it in their current environment. This comfort in verbalizing substance abuse was not observed while discussing more emotionally charged topics like, relationship with family members, memories of mother/ father, experiences of severe abuse, especially sexual abuse, exploitation and many more which are not talked about in their routine.

The participants actively engaged in discussion among themselves about the kinds of drugs they have taken and the reasons for it. Smoking cigarettes, having locally available alcohol is part of their daily lives at the streets. They mention substances like “Solution”, “Ganja”, “Charas”, “Syrup”, “gutter” (cheap alcohol which, as per children, has contaminated water mixed in it, that is where it gets it name from) “Cigarettes”, “Quarter”, “Beer”, “Daaru”, “Minaar”, “Cocaine”, “Brown Sugar” and pills of various kinds (like “Neutrodang”). These substances come in forms of
liquids and powders, consumed and inhaled in various ways. “Chillam” is the word given to ganja which is smoked like a cigarette. Pills which are called “nashe ki goli” are available with the local paanwaala. These pills are rubbed to form powder. That powder is then mixed with the tobacco they extract from the cigarettes and then inhaled.

They know the economically viable alternatives for the comparatively more expensive drugs as well. They talk about a variety they have used and how new forms of drugs are available in the market from time to time. When asked where these drugs can be bought, they disclose that shops which are referred to be of the “paan waala” are actually shops where drugs are sold. One just has to mention the code name for it.

As soon as a child reaches the city, he is exposed to a life sustained through drugs. It’s a way of street life. The older ones teach the new ones and these new and usually younger ones start experimenting with mild drugs to fit in a new peer culture, eventually leading to addiction. When asked about the reasons for consuming drugs, the first response is “stress”. They all tend to believe that life outside is harsh and thus, drugs help in coping with these external stress inflicting factors. Some others use drugs as substitutes for food. Drugs reduce the sensation for hunger. Also, a doped person does not feel any pain as the body becomes completely numb, which indicates that physical fights and face offs are regular in the street culture, to deal with which, drugs are most famous. They specifically mention that police hits a lot, to tolerate which, drugs are the best resort. They say, referring to those who drink/smoke/inhale, and thus, not accepting that they do it themselves, “Kuch bhi nahi hota hai in logon ko...woh apne aap ko khud bhi kaat lete hain. Jo nasha karta hai usko itne ba de chaaku se bhi marenge na, uska pata nahi chalega” (these people, who take drugs, don’t feel anything. They injure themselves and do not feel the pain.)

None of those living with families accepted to be have taken drugs themselves. They have friends and family who do. They tend to think that boys they see around them have too many tensions of finding a job, sustaining their families etc. They tend to say that no matter what kind of a person you are, the street life teaches you to engage in it. They told the researcher that the life on a footpath is not easy, one cannot identify what one thing would make a person switch to drugs. It is a lifestyle one adopts, not purely
because of choice. Discussing multiple reasons for it, they say that some like to drink and some just show it off, some are totally addicted to an extent that if they don’t get it they become self-destructive. Taking drugs, thus, for some, is a symbol of masculinity, an attribute that puts them at a higher position among the peers, the acceptance of whom, is really valued in teenage years. The specific culture of the street is thus manifested in their developmental tasks characteristic to that age. Sometimes, being hurt emotionally triggers it or some try it just under peer pressure. One of the fifteen years old, addiction to drugs on the streets for a long time before he came to the organization about two months ago, describe the reasons this way

...Shauk rehta hai. Koi koi sirf dikhane ke liye peeta hai. Kisi kisi ko nasha rehta hai, matlab agar usko milega na hain toh paagal sa ho jata hai. Kaatne lagta hai apne aap ko. Kisi ka girlfriend ka tension rehta hai, kisi ko koi baat nahi pasand nahi, kisi ki padaai ruk jaati hai, koi dost ki sangat se karti hai, ya phir khud uske mann mein hota, lene ke baad phir karta hai.

(Some have the habit. Some drink to show off. Some are addicted to it... meaning that if they don’t get it, they becomes crazy, start to harm themselves. Some people have the tension of girlfriend, someone doesn’t like anything that is going on, some have the tension of studies, some do it under peer pressure. And once started, it is indulged in again and again).

It is worth noticing here that the boys living with their families on the footpath are more conscious about their “pareshani” (problems) and articulate them well. Whereas, for a boy alone on the street, the biggest reason is peer pressure, the urge to fit in, the need to belong to a particular group. This does not imply that those living with families do not get affected by negative peer pressure but the consciousness of other factors is also very much there. Resorting to self-destructive behaviour, especially when one goes through a break up, and resorting to drugs to deal with cutting and injuring oneself is very common. They mention the withdrawal symptoms which are too many to handle to restrict the families from helping their members from giving it up. They say the person starts to shiver, cuts himself and becomes really ill physically and “dimaag se paagal” (mentally crazy).

Interestingly, they show their surprise over the school and college going boys also consuming the drugs. This shows that while living on the streets, they were well aware of the distinct identities they have, and how different they are, from the school and college going boys. It seems that although, they have been going to schools now,
ranging from a time period of one to ten years, that distinction still remains, in more subtle ways. Girls taking drugs are perceived by boys as a rare occurrence but it is not completely absent. The surprise accompanied in a male participant’s recollection of observing a girl from a higher economic background ("bade ghar ki ladki") inhaling drugs in a plush suburb of the city, makes clear, the demarcation in their heads regarding different socio economic classes and their association of habits with it.

For the girls, the initial response to drugs is with regard to males, i.e. they have seen men of all ages, drunk and roaming around, harassing or trying to molest the women in the vicinity. These men, they call "gardullas" or "bewaras" are extremely troublesome. They create scenes in the middle of the road and would fight with others living on the street around them. When made to think about girls consuming drugs themselves, the initial reaction in the group is that of disgust. But as the conversation progressed, they shared that girls also take drugs, like "Mishri" or "Tabkil", which is bought from the local paan vendor and rubbed with both hands before consumption. Most of them have also seen their mothers and grandmothers consume tobacco and alcohol. Girls themselves strongly dislike their parents’ addiction to drugs. It is worth discussing that even though females in the households or street consume drugs and alcohol, the immediate response to addiction and women met with a strong response of rejection, suggesting that this idea of women taking drugs is completely frowned upon. But as the discussion progressed, reasons for girls to consume drugs were discussed, with ‘tension reduction’ coming out again as the major factor.

One girl explains how drugs helping reduce tension are actually a misunderstanding. She said that they feel these things help in reducing tension but the tension does not really go away. It is just the prevalent belief that it helps in lowering one’s stress which makes the person actually feel the tension lowering. She was suggesting it is completely psychological. She mentioned a cycle of substance abuse where the person drinks because he is in stress and when others ask him not to indulge in this habit, he/she gets even more stressed and ends up consuming more drugs.
CONCLUSION

The chapter here indicates that the life on streets and its internalization by different individuals is based on a lot of factors, some identifiable and some not. The perception of a child as inherently weak and vulnerable is not necessarily true in all situations, specifically in those where the child gets an opportunity to show his strengths of acceptance, adjustment and maintenance to the maximum extent. The inherent capacity of children to adjust in the environment of the streets and developing their selves accordingly, calls for a deeper look into the process of socialization on the street. An experiential account of the adolescents in this chapter has shown their perceptions towards their every day experiences contradicting with the commonly held notions about innocence of children and their exposure to trauma. A street is an environmental context with heightened vulnerability to abusive behaviours, but a child’s own ways of perceiving and internalizing these events were as distinct as their ways of perceiving the street. Thus, in the next chapters, the experiences of life on the streets have been relooked again to locate abusive experience according to the children themselves and their unique ways of making sense of it.