

Situations of Independent Rural to Urban Migrant Street Children: The Case of Jimma City, South Western Ethiopia

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Abstract: The phenomenon of rural to urban migrant street children is rapidly becoming one of the Ethiopia dynamic social problems. The problem is pervasively found in Jimma city where the number and situations of those children is so complex and demanding. To this end, the study aimed to explore the situations of independent rural to urban migrant street children in Jimma city, South Western Ethiopia. The study employed qualitative approach. In-depth interview with fifteen rural to urban migrant street children; key informant interview (KII) with nine key experts from Jimma City Social and Labour Affair Office, police office, and Jimma city Women and Children Affair Office; three Focus group Discussion (FGDs), and observation were methods of data collection. Samples were selected through purposive and snow ball sampling techniques. Thereby data were transcribed, categorized, schematized and interpreted based on their respective contents and themes. The study revealed that the majority of rural out migrant street children were males. Various causal factors have contributed for their streetism, and poverty was found to be the leading one. Those children drive their life by involving in numerous multifaceted livelihood strategies. They are vulnerable to wide range of violation. Their situation becomes worse by the negative attitude and actions against them. Consequently, they develop abnormal behavior like inhaling plastic, chewing chat, drinking alcohol, robbing and theft, and insulting others. Even though some local NGOs and Jimma University have been providing them with some basic needs and educational materials, they couldn't decrease the number and worse situations of those children. So the issue needs an intervention of all stakeholders at all levels in improving the life style of rural people so as to decrease the number and harsh situations of rural to urban migrant street children.

Keywords: street children, rural to urban migrant, independent child migration, violations, situations

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Internal migration is a global phenomenon that has always been part of human history (Wakessa 2014; Gomez 2015; Muhamed 2016). The world has estimated 763 million internal migrants (IOM 2017). Within the 1950s and 1960s internal migration was valued as an essential element of the economic development process (De Brauw, Mueller & Lee 2014) while nowadays it is viewed as the causes of vulnerability (Romano 2014; Gomez 2015). It is a much larger phenomenon that affects the lives of more migrant children specially independent child migrants, and one that is consistently given much less attention.

The issue of rural to urban migrant street children is rapidly becoming one of the global social phenomena (Mahderehiwot 2014). The Internal migration of children has been historically connected with industrialization, urbanization and economic growth (Wondimagegnhu 2012). The term children are defined as any person under the age of eighteen according to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (2007); this definition will be used throughout the study. The independent migration of children is defined as children migration from home and live at destinations without a parent or adult guardian (Yaqub 2009a), and it is emerging as specific phenomena all over the world in general and in developing countries in particular (Van de Glind 2010; Spieker 2017). Likely, significant numbers of children move independently from place of origin to destinations within the country though there is no accurate estimate of the number in Ethiopia (Ali 2011, Bezu & Holden 2014; Blunch & Laderchi 2015).

It has created innumerable problems to millions of children in all parts of the world (UNICEF 2007). Due to the fluid nature of the problem, nobody knows exact number of street children globally (Mekonnen 2011; Haile 2016). The number has been expected to increase because of wide spread recession, political turmoil, civil unrest, increasing family disintegration or family breakdown, urban and rural poverty, natural disaster, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, the death of a parent, war, and rapid industrialization (Beyene 2011; Mekonnen 2011; Habtamu and Arindam 2016; Haile 2016).

Migrant children are the most vulnerable since migration in itself may have a negative impact on the well-being of the children (Abebe, Lien, & Hjelde 2014). World Vision Australia (2017, 1) defined vulnerable children as “children whose quality of life and ability to fulfil their potential are most affected by extreme deprivation and

violations of their rights. These children often live in catastrophic situations and relationships characterized by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion and discrimination.” The four vulnerability factors which will be used to identify the vulnerable independent child migrant in this study are: abusive or exploitative relationships, extreme deprivation, serious discrimination, and vulnerability to negative impact from catastrophic or disaster (World Vision International 2015). Consistently several researchers conducted other countries depicted that independent child migrants are facing the above listed problems. Girls are especially susceptible to sexual abuse during the migration process and share a high proportion in domestic work (Erulkar, Mekbib, Simie, & Gulema 2006; Yaqub 2009a; Yaqub 2009b; Van de Glind 2010; Miheretu 2011).

Particularly in Africa where the problem of rural to urban migrant street children is relatively new unlike the situation in Asia, the presence of large number of children has now become a major issue (Kopoka 2000, Mehta 2000, and Abebe and Bessell 2011). It is instructive to note here, that, the emergence of large numbers of children on the streets of Africa today was partly a reflection of the extreme poverty and the lack of social services that are endemic in many highly populated urban areas in Africa (Omiyinka 2010).

Ethiopia is the second-most populous country in Africa with a population of 91 million and one of the world’s poorest countries. It has experienced political instability, war, famine, economic hardship, and environmental degradation and natural resources depletion over the course of its history. As a result, migration within Ethiopia borders has been common (Tegegne & Penker 2016). Its urban areas are challenged by the growing intensity of street children (UNICEF 2007; Mekonnen 2011). According to Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) news report, humanitarian news agency, on street children rehabilitation projects in Ethiopia (2011) mentioned the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs report that some 150,000 children live on the streets in Ethiopia of which about 60,000 live in the Addis Ababa city (Kebede 2015; Gavonel 2017). Jimma is also another city where a large number of rural to urban migrant street children found, thus studying the issue scientifically was found an indispensable.

Those rural to urban migrant street children are exposed to various forms of abuse like physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse all of which have adverse effects on the growth and development

of children (Eshetu & Beshir 2017; Hutchison 2010); Kebede 2015; Mekonnen 2011).

It has also attracted a great deal of attention from scholars both in and outside Ethiopia (Mekonnen 2011; Tesfaye 2012; Gudina, Naga, and Tariku 2014; Mahderehiwot 2014; Kebede 2015; Habtamu and Arindam 2016; Atnafu, Oucho, & Zeitlyn 2014; Gomez 2015; Muhamed 2016; Wondimagegnhu & Zeleke 2017; and Haile 2016) have conducted research on this issue so far. Majority of those researches conducted were confined to only Addis Ababa, Baharder, Hawasa, and Ambo cities; selecting Jimma city with even by the same topic conducted at other sites is demanding since the number of street children whose origin is surrounding rural areas is increasing at an alarming rate in the city. Therefore, there was a pressing need to find out the vulnerable situations of internal independent child migrants and live on street in order to achieve a basic understanding of the scope and dimensions of the phenomenon particularly in Jimma city and its surrounding rural areas, southwestern Ethiopia, as well as for the formulation of policy recommendations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General Objective

The general objective of the study is to explore the situations of independent rural to urban migrant street children in Jimma city, south western Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the initiative factors for independent rural to urban migrant street children
- To describe the dynamic process of their migration
- To find out the livelihood strategies of those children
- To explore the mistreatment against those children

RESEARCH METHODS

The study at hand deployed only qualitative approach. Regarding time of study, cross-sectional design was employed in gathering necessary information at a single time. Moreover, this study is descriptive since it defines about the situations of rural to urban migrant street children and taken interventions to minimize the problems.

In-depth interview, key informant interview (KII), Focus group Discussion (FGDs), and observation were employed to collect the required data with well-prepared interview guide and check list. In-

depth interview was employed in collecting detailed information. Hence, fifteen children, who were selected through purposive and snowball sampling technique were interviewed. The key informant interview was held with nine key experts who were from Jimma City Social and Labour Affair Office (three experts), police office (three experts), and Jimma city Women and Children Affair Office (three experts). The researcher selected those participants assuming that they are intensively familiar with the social behaviors of rural to urban migrant street children. Besides, in order to get detail information three FGDs were employed with purposively selected discussants. The criteria to select members to FGD were sex (one FGD with male and the left with female street children whose origin is rural) and encompassed six and eight children respectively. The collected data were transcribed, categorized, schematized and interpreted based on their respective contents and themes. The meanings, words, symbols and argumentative texts form basic premises in the structures of reporting the sub-titles and sections.

In conducting this study, ethical considerations and safety measures were made. The purposes and importance of the study was explained for the participants of the study and informed consent was obtained from each of them. Thus, participants were given the authority to permit or refuse in the collection of data in any form; full right was deserved to withdraw at any time: to change ideas or to edit recorded materials. Besides, the privacy of the participants was promoted and they were informed that whatever information they provide be kept confidential. That is, the confidentiality and anonymity of information were strongly maintained.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This article deals with data analyses and presentation of the collected data. Specifically, it includes the presentation of: (a) demographic and socio-economic information of respondents; (b) determinants of children migration from rural to urban; (c) the mistreatments children are facing while engaging in their livelihood strategies; and (d) the interventions taken to resolve the mistreatments of rural to urban migrant street children by various stakeholders like government and non-governmental organizations.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Overall, males accounted for 70% and females for 30%. The age range of rural to urban migrant street children sampled was 7-17 years. The age range 13-15 accounted the largest of all rural to urban migrant street children while the age range seven to nine accounted the smallest. Regarding their education status, 60% percent of interviewed street children have never attended school while (40%) attended their school at various education centers (Priest school, Koran, regular school) of which only three rural to urban migrant street children have been attending their school till today at regular school. Majority of those who had been attending at regular school (53.8%) and all of those who had been attending priest school (30.8%) and Koran (15.4%) were now out of school or have withdrawn from school because of finance, no support, no relatives, to work and pressure of family.

Determinants of Children Migration from Rural to Urban

The number of rural to urban migrant street children who came to live in Jimma city from rural areas is alarmingly increasing. There are myriad dynamic and interdependent factors for rural to urban migrant rural to urban migrant street children. According to the data from in-depth interview and FGDs, poverty, family disorganization, natural resources depletion, child home violence, lack of public infrastructures, and expected opportunities in the city are some of the factors. Let us see the details and cases of these factors one by one.

Participants of the study argue that poverty is pervasively and increasingly playing an adverse role in pushing children from rural areas to Jimma City Street. There are the complex factors for the spreading of poverty in the rural areas of South-western parts of the Ethiopia. Population growth, inflation, decrement of livestock, natural resources depletion, lack of public infrastructures, and social policy related issues are among those factors. Utmost of the participants of the study confirmed that always their family feed them only one time per 24 hours. Annoyingly, there are few times when they can't get any type of food except spring water for more than 48 hours particularly during the summer time. Rural children couldn't cope up with those problems and thereby choose the worst choice of moving to the city where they don't know about. The case of the 12 years old from one of Limmu Ganat district rural kebeles is the typical illustration for the deepening of poverty in the rural areas and driving children to urban

areas. He said “I came here to escape from poverty. But I end up on the street.”

Family disorganization in the form of divorce, death of one or both parent, and polygamy related problems are other immediate causes for the migration of children from their origin home – rural to destination – Jimma city. As a result of these problems children obliged to live with one of their parent; might be send to their extended relatives; face verbal, physical, and sexual abuse; engage in exploitative child labour; and finally they dream to join new challenging life style on Jimma City Street. In rural areas of the study these factors are inextricably associated with each other. For example, children are punished if they fall to play the given responsibility like ploughing and mowing, looking after animals (shepherd), collecting firewood, and fetching spring water. Consistently, the personal experience of seventeen years old that is from Sokuru rural areas described below is typical example:

While I was one year my father took me with his sister because they divorced. I grow up there till I was nine. The life I spent there was very miserable and notorious. She had been sending me to fetch water and collect firewood from far jungle areas for about five years. The responses of my demand for basic needs like food, clothes, and education were verbal and physical abuse. She didn't allow me to play with children in our community and treat me equally with her own children. I had been forced to wash the legs and clothes of her children. Generally, I decided to leave her house to Jimma City Street where I have been living for more than eight years.

It is commonly known that majority of the rural people in Ethiopia are natural resources dependent. However, as the number of inhabitants increase, the nature and scope of natural resources is getting depleted. The farm land and farming activities which is the base for the livelihood strategies and outcome for rural households is losing its position from time to time. To this end, though elders hesitate to leave their origin place where they had flung their teeth, children are ubiquitously migrating to the complex situations of street life in Jimma city.

Lack of public infrastructures like the all-weather roads, education centers, health centers, electricity, and pure water also facilitated the migration of the children. Along with this, children are deceived by deceitful information from their friends or other about employment opportunity in the city. The returnees for a very short period of time

also spread untruthful information of the goodness of the city than which they live in those rural areas. For instance one of interviewee elaborated this case as the following:

One friend of mine requested me to leave the rural kebele in Seka district to Jimma city. Our intention of the time was to get job opportunity in Jimma city for the purpose of improving our life and that of our family. Overall, information we had about Jimma city isn't consistent with the one we are living.

There were also children initiated to the street by their siblings as they may become old and strong enough to work.

Some interviewed children said they were pressurized by family members to go to the city to work. A typical response from 13 years old boy interviewed whose place of origin is rural - Bulbul kebele in Kersa woreda and had been in the Jimma city for 6 months. His initiation to the street occurred in kebele:

When I was 10 years old, my mother suggested to me to go out and work and get some money for our food. There were these children who moved to Jimma city and worked on the street from our kebele so I joined them. Then I got a job as street seller.

Dynamic Process of Children Migration from Rural to Urban

Rural to urban migrant street children make several decisions before they start movement from their original place to destination. Depending on the above discussed causes of children migration from rural to urban areas, children firstly think repetitively over the distasteful situations with which they are living. Then after they attempt to gather information about the proposed destination and they discuss over it with their friends. As much as possible they prepare themselves financially and psychologically to cope up with new environment and life. To strengthen themselves financially for their journey they either unsuspectingly steal money or sell one of existing and potential asset of their family or somebody else. Then they knowingly fail to play out expected responsibilities from them which urgently lead to conflict with their parents or significant others. Finally they fled to the new life and environment of urban street.

During their movement children attempt not to be seen by anybody since they might be prohibited or followed by their parents or significant others. They prefer moving lonely or with their best friends in the early morning or late night while others asleep. To sum up, the

participants of in-depth interview and FGDs migrated during the above time from various corners of the south-western parts of the country to the largest city in the area – Jimma city.

The synthesized data of the study shows that rural to urban migrant children encounter complex social problems within the first week. It is the time when migrant children, especially those who move independently, regret for their migration since they face problems beyond their capacity. They don't know where they sleep, with whom they communicate, what and where they get food and drink, and what and where they work. The outmost of the participants finished the money they had brought with them within the first three days. Language was also obstacle to communicate and work in the urban during the referred time. Accordingly, the socio-psycho problems the rural to urban migrant rural to urban migrant street children facing is too high and dynamic.

The Life Situations of Rural to Urban Migrant Street Children

The main means of income for rural to urban migrant street children who came from surrounding rural parts of south-western parts of Ethiopia are begging and carrying while few of them participate in street vending, shoe shining, stealing, robbing, and sex work. Let us see some major livelihood strategies of them in detail.

a) Begging

Begging is the typical method of children below ten years old. This doesn't mean that children above ten years old don't beg. The public places like religious organizations, bus station, and Jimma University are where we can find an innumerable rural to urban migrant rural to urban migrant street children while they beg to drive their life. They should also very calculative and arrange their time and place for begging. Majority of those children are found in front of Mosques every Friday and on the gates of Churches every Sunday since a large number of Muslims and Christians go there for praying respectively.

The researcher observed various strategies those children use to get more money. They don't ask everybody they encounter rather they run after the person (male and female) whom they feel or assume as a good male or female. They say "please help me for the sake of God! Please let you buy me bread, please give me a birr, and please let you buy me an exercise book." 'Please buy me bread' is common request though those questions are contextual. For example, on the morning, at launch time, and at the evening they commonly ask for a bread, While they

are in front of religious organizations they say ‘please help me for the sake of God’, and during the commencement or opening of the school they ask for exercise book and if they get it they immediately sell it or change it to money.

The response of their request is varying from person to person. There are people who give hand, provide advice, and make promise for another time and contrastingly there are people who give deaf ear to the questions, insult and hit rural to urban migrant street children. All participants argue that female are good than male in responding positively to what they demand.

Among other places, begging on the gates of religious organizations on Friday and Sunday is an interesting setting for rural to urban migrant street children. The description about what they do with the money they get through begging is used to buy food and substance abuse.

b) Carrying

Carrying luggage, sack with full of thing, and other heavy materials is pervasively practiced by rural to urban migrant rural to urban migrant street children between ten to eighteen years old. Marketing areas, taxi station, and vehicle cart extension are the places where the rural to urban migrant street children extensively work. It is dynamic and contextual from time to time and from street to street. Age, sex, and physical capacity are among an immediate factors while the perceivably the socio-economic information of customer are external factors which influence this livelihood strategy. For instance regarding sex and age, female and below ten years old children hardly involve in it. There is no standardized payment for this exploitative job. On the marketing date they can get averagely up to fifty Ethiopian birr while on Sunday there is nothing expected from carrying.

c) Shoe shinning and Street Vending

Few children who could save small money and being counseled by others engaged in street vending and shoe shinning. Comparing to the children who drive their life though begging, carrying, and others; the children who select street vending and shoe shinning as their livelihood strategies are street off children, follow their education, save money, contact their family, and practice religious activities.

d) Others

The collected data shows that criminal activities like stealing, robbing, participating in homosexuality, sexual abuse, crushing and squashing

others or each other are the main means of income or characteristics for the children who:

- stayed in the city for more than five years a
- pessimistic about their life in the future
- drink 'xejji' –local beer and 'Aracke' (liquor) always
- use substance like khat, cigarettes and inhale shoes' plastic always and
- act as gangsters

Mistreatment against Rural to Urban Migrant Street Children and Interventions

Rural to urban migrant street children face numerous concomitant mistreatments along with an engagement in their livelihood strategies. Focus group participants and interviewed children illustrated that they were highly facing verbal and physical abuse during their working hours.

Interview data from Women and Children Office of the city also indicates that verbal and physical abuses are very common among street children of the city. Moreover they point out that there is some sort of homosexuality among rural to urban migrant street children. Besides, people deceive children giving money and material in return for sexual intercourse with either male or female rural to urban migrant street children. This indicates that homosexuality is being practiced among them.

According to the officials from Bureau of Labor and Social Affair in Jimma City sometimes there is police brutality on the rural to urban migrant street children without any sufficient cause. When they are considered to be engaged in certain theft on the street, everybody on the street run to them so as to hit by what they have in their hands. The researcher observed a wound and twisting on the faces of many rural to urban migrant street children since most of the time their life is characterized by brutality. FGD data reveals that being beaten by older street boys is very common. The following case deals with 12 years old boy. He explains the type of abuse he suffers on the street as follows “many times I used to get beaten by police for no reason. Sometimes also older street boys beat us for no reasons and snatch our clothes and money which we get either by begging or work exploitatively.”

Finally, data from FGD participants and key informant interview further reveals the lives of rural to urban migrant street children leave

them with few opportunities to access basic needs like food, shelter, education and basic health services. Almost all the health problems reported by rural to urban migrant street children are probably closely related to their life style.

Data from in-depth interview, key informant interview, and FGDs indicates that even though a large number of interventions were attempted by various stakeholders like family, government, non-Governmental Organizations, and philanthropists; majority of them failed because of various dynamic factors. The growing role and importance of NGOs in development are recognized and supported by the political bodies though they view and justify their importance in different perspectives. The most common supports stated by FGDs participants were cash money, education/training, and clothes. Generally, even though preventive approach is advisable to address the long term problems of the street children, government bodies and various NGOs emphasizes on curative approach which focuses only on short term needs of the children.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that boys from rural areas were more visible to street life than girls. The result of in-interview with officials of Bureau of Labour and Social affairs and Office of Women and Children of Jimma city also shows that most of the time girls do not make conflict with their family members like boys because of the nature and context of their social behaviors. So that they are not exposed to street life like boys and even those girls who are exposed to street life are involved in prostitution and associated behaviors which are hidden than staying on the street. The problem of harassment may consequently give rise to other psycho-social problems such as aggression, fear of society, suspicion, unruliness and theft. Such problems prevent rural to urban migrant street children from leading peaceful lives (Fransen, & Kuschminder 2009). In explaining this, Tatek (2009) attributes the small proportion of girls on the street to the fact that families attempt to keep girls at home, where they help with household chores. Hunnes (2012) also explains the reason why number of female street children is smaller than male rural to urban migrant street children as follows: females may work as maids in bars, back street hotels and domestic workers. Street boys, on the other hand, typically engage in more visible activities such

as car washing, shoe shining and peddling which is similar with the studies conducted by Abebe in 1999.

According to the findings of this study, the leading factor pushing children from rural areas onto the street life was poverty. Various literatures also confirm poverty as one of the major causes for child streetism. For example, Kopoka (2000) stated that those poverty forces children to the streets to support themselves and their families. The finding of this study further indicates majority of street children engaged in menial jobs like, carrying goods, begging, shoeshine and street vending (selling small items). The focus of rural to urban migrant street children for income-earning activities is informal sector (Dorosh, & Schmidt 2010). The finding of the study also shows that the situations of independent rural to urban migrant street children are complex and discouraging. This is consistent with the study conducted in Pakistan (Amir and Rana 2002). In this study though some of NGOs and government bodies played a role in alleviating the socio economic problems of rural to urban migrant street children, it wasn't successful because of the nature of the problem, political interest, and corruption.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The profile of rural to urban migrant street children in the study indicates that the proportions of boys who have joined street life were more visible than girls. The majority of these children come to the street because of poverty followed by conflict with their guardians. Death of parents, family breakdown, peer pressure, large family size and lack of parenting skills were also other factors.

Rural to urban migrant street children faced a wider range of challenges and experienced incalculable exploitations and sufferings while they were working and living on the street. So they are more vulnerable to physical, verbal and sexual abuses. Harassment by police and by older street boys is common problems faced by the rural to urban migrant street children.

Street children use several strategies to survive the difficult conditions of the streets. They engage in menial jobs like, carrying goods, shoe shining, car washing, work as a taxi boy and street vending (selling small items). Regarding interventions there is an inadequate commitment by the government and non-government bodies preventing the number and dynamic situations of rural to urban migrant street children. In other words an engagement of the organizations has been employing preventive approach but curative

approach. Generally, the mass media should work a lot in raising awareness about the strains of children's street life. Two fold programs should be designed by the concerned government offices, consisting of short-term and long-term programs. Short-term program should be rehabilitative, while long-term program should be preventative.

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