Research article

Factors Influencing Rising Number of Street Children in Urban Centers in Kenya: A Survey of Eldoret Municipality, Kenya

Dr. Kirui Kipyegon

Kisii University
Director Eldoret campus
P.O. Box 6434-3010 Eldoret, Kenya
E-mail address: kiruikk2000@yahoo.com

Francis Nyarombe Nyachwaya

Kisii University- Eldoret campus
Coordinator Faculty of commerce
P.O.Box 6434-30100 Eldoret,Kenya
E-mail address: francisnyarombe@yahoo.com

Clement Achimba Okirigiti

Rongo University- School of Business
P.O.Box 103-40404 Rongo ,Kenya
E-mail address: achimbao@yahoo.com

Isaac Kamar Kipchirchir

Kisii university- Eldoret campus
Deputy Director Finance and Administration
P.O.Box 6434-3010 Eldoret,Kenya
E-mail address: caasiramak@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

This main purpose of this study was to determine the causes of rising number of street families in major urban centres in Kenya specifically Eldoret town. This research intended to determine specifically the extent family dysfunctions; poverty, elections violence and conflicts have resulted to an increase in the number of street children. The research used a survey strategy, the study target population consisted of street children, and community based organizations, government agencies, Non-governmental organizations involved in rehabilitation of street families. Questionnaire and interviews were used to collect data from the respondents and out of one hundred and twelve (112) who were sampled one hundred and seven (107) of them responded, giving a response rate of ninety six (96) percent. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The research finding reveals that hostile environment at home has generally had an impact on street families. The findings on rehabilitation measures by government authorities has not realized meaningful results due to lack of proper policies on who takes responsibilities on resettlement of street families, those who are rescued from the streets find their way back to the streets due to lack of meaningful work and no home to live. Society seems to isolate former street children and due to the stigma the former street urchins find it difficult to be integrated with the other members of the society. However despite the many challenges faced in rehabilitation and resettlement of street families, there are successful former street children who own and manage successful businesses in the town.

Keywords: Street Children; Poverty; Family Dysfunction ; Conflicts; Violence

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The concept of street children refers to all boys and girls below the age of 18 years, for whom the street in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings and wastelands, more than their family, has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adult (Black, 1992). Street child is a term for a homeless child residing primarily in the streets of a city (typically in a developing country). The exact definition of a street child is debatable due to the lack of precise categories. The term has largely been used in reference to children who live entirely in the streets, without adult supervision or care (Ayuku 2004). They are often subjected to abuse, neglect, exploitation, or, in extreme cases, murder by cleanup squads hired by local businesses or police. In Western society, such children are commonly treated as homeless children as opposed to criminals or solicitors.

There are an estimated 150 million in the world, and numbers are increasing across the African continent (Kilbride 2000). By 1992, the OAU estimated that Africa had about 16 million street children. This figure was expected to double to 32 million by the year 2000. Within the same period, the number of Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDCs) was expected to increase from 80 million to 150 million (OAU-UNICEF, 1992). This

increase is apparently due to the rapid growth in the estimated number of working and street children in some African countries. A study conducted for UNICEF between 1991 and 1994 in Zambia, found that the number of street children doubled from 35,000 to 70,000. In Nairobi, Kenya, the figure rose from 4,500 to 30,000 between 1990 and 1994 (Kanji, 1996). There are now estimated to be around 250,000 in Kenya alone (Abdelgalil, 2004). The street children in Eldoret are not a new phenomenon although they were first recorded in 1989. They were estimated 1000 street children in 1998 (Ayuku, 2005) whereas in 2008, in a census done for Save the children UK by the ex-street children community organization (ECCO), figures of 2,500 were reported (Lalani, 2009).

1.2 Problem of Study

Most urban centers in Africa are struggling with an upsurge in the number of street families which have become a common phenomenon and a menace in the centers .In Kenya the number of street children seems to increase at an alarming rate despite the efforts of the government to rid them from the streets and rehabilitate them .Charitable institutions and community based organizations have continued to partner with government to improve the livelihood of street families and relocate them .In spite of these concerted efforts the number of street children is on the rise in most urban centers in Kenya. Eldoret town is among the fastest developing towns in East Africa which is struggling with huge numbers of street children.

1.3 Objectives of study

This study was specifically guided by the following objectives

(a) Establishing how family dysfunctions have led to increasing number of street children in Eldoret town

(b) Establish causes of the increasing number of street children in Eldoret town

(c) Establish whether conflicts and election violence led to increase in number of street children in Eldoret town

(d) To find out the challenges facing the rehabilitation and resettlement of street children in Eldoret town

1.4 Research questions

This study was guided by the following research questions

(a) Have family dysfunctions led to increasing number of street children in Eldoret town?

(b) What are the causes leading to increasing number of street children in Eldoret town?

(c) Do conflicts and election violence contribute to an increasing number of street children in Eldoret town?

(d)What are the challenges facing the rehabilitation and resettlement of street children in Eldoret town?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empirical review

Street children are increasingly recognized by sociologists and anthropologists to be a socially constructed category that in reality does not form a clearly defined, homogeneous population or phenomenon (Glauser, 1990). There are many, often overlapping, reasons why children are led to the streets (Kopoka, 2002). They can be loosely grouped into push and pull factors (Le Roux: 1996). There are macro-level causes that push children onto the streets including poverty and economic need, the impact of structural adjustment programs, war, rural-urban migration, famine, HIV/AIDS and politically instigated violence. Then there are micro-level causes, which are predominantly concerned with internal family dynamics. Poverty is the most cited response in street-children studies (Abdelgail, 2004). Pull factors include the draw of social networks and the sense of freedom and excitement, and the thrill of innovative survival strategies (Aptekar, 1994).

Wright et al (1993) in their study in Honduras found that street children were better nourished than home children this may be due to donations from well-wishers and tourists, but it also reflects the parlous state of home environments in the slums from which street children predominantly emerge. The unemployment status of many parents, peer pressure, unwillingness to submit to parental control, parental neglect leading to children running away are some of the many factors leading to children being in the streets. But most of the time when we trace their parents, it is pathetic to see the poverty of the homes they come from

Plummer (2007) asserts that at times children are forced to live under very harsh conditions. Parents staying together but with misunderstandings: causes instability to children. Widowed man/women lead to change of living conditions after the death of one parent. Stepparent: some stepparents mistreat children forcing them to run away. Orphaned: some children are forced to find how to make their own ends meet due to loss of both parents. Child born out of wedlock: not accepted by some families. Placed away: at times we place our children to live with our relatives against their wish and very poor families: There are families where children must go out to fend for food and some end up in the streets (UMP, 2000) .Lack of school fees and school uniform, peer influence and corporal punishment are mostly with secondary school students cases (age 14 – 18). Not so common currently but is still a problem in some schools, some factors that pull and maintain children in the streets. Availability of drugs and easy access to

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them, to some extent the services provided by organizations handling children (some children get attracted) and Peer influence. Drugs commonly used by street children: Leather glue, Petrol and diesel, Cigarettes, Bhang and Kuber (tobacco) (Kopoka, 2000).

2.2 Poverty and the emergence of street children

Economic factors have been cited most frequently as the reason the majority of children are engaged in street life. According to Lusk et al (2009) unlike street children in United States and other industrial countries, Latin American street children are gravitating to the street out of economic necessity. In Kenya, economic factors were also cited as the primary factor pushing children to streets (Wainaina, 1981). Poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood. Impoverished children often grow up to be poor parents who in turn bring up their own children in poverty (UNICEF, 2005). A crucial support for this cycle was a belief in a cultural inheritance of poverty. It was held that there was a distinct culture of poverty, which shaped people's attitudes to work and relief. Unless they were properly motivated, it was felt, paupers would be unable to improve their situation, and their attitude to work and to welfare would be passed on to their children (Scott, 1994). Research evidences show that most parents seem to replicate the basic parenting style they experienced as children (Chen et al, 2001). Save the Children, in a report "Number of street children rising in Eldoret" (IRIN,2008), said the burden of extreme poverty was causing some parents to neglect and even abandon children as they returned to their original farmland and struggled to make ends meet.

The giving out of foodstuffs and money is realized to be attracting more children to the streets, but some individuals apparently find it difficult to refuse a hungry child or to tell him or her to go to an institution instead. The current situation seems to be that donors often come up with new ideas they want implementing organizations to put into practice at very short notice. Perhaps there has been a change in the donor country itself that puts the funding agency under pressure to urge implementing organizations to reflect a similar change. Since many implementing organizations do not have a clear vision or objectives on which their choice of strategies and specific interventions can be shown to rest, this leaves the way open for the donors to insist on compliance (Lalani, 2009).

2.3 Elections violence and conflicts in Kenya

 Ethnic clashes and politically instigated violence in Kenya have caused a rise in the number of displaced children, particularly those clashes before and after the 1992 and 1997 general elections (Mutuku and Mutiso 1994, Lugalla

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and Kibassa 2002) in all conflicts; it is the children who suffer the most. They have few rights and little understanding why their lives are torn apart. In the wake of the most recent post elections violence (PEV) 2007, many more children made their way to Eldoret. Following the ethnic clashes of 1991-93, 1997 and 2008 the numbers, however, further increased (Child protection centre, Eldoret: personal communication 2012). There are over 47,000 children living at internal refugee camps in the province.

A report compiled by Consortium for Street Children NGO (2002) found that, Africa has the fastest rate of urbanization in the world (4.7%). It is projected that by 2015 more than 50% of Africans will be living in towns and cities (UNICEF 1985). The slum growth rate at 8% is more than double the population growth rate in most countries. Local authorities find it difficult to cope with rapid and uncontrolled urban growth. Largely rural to urban migration is driven by rural poverty. There is therefore the need to build the capacity of communities and empower families to address both urban and rural poverty. The process will, however, require the creation of an enabling environment through supportive infrastructure, good governance and awareness rising on available services and resources. UNICEF (1985) correctly observes that, street children were no more than a footnote. Today, street children are a major issue. Tomorrow, if present trends continue, they could be blight on urban civilization. The world and Africa in particular is witnessing rapid and wide-ranging socioeconomic and political changes. There is rapid urbanization, run away population growth and increasing disparities in wealth (Lugalla and Kibassa 2003). While all of the above are substantive factors contributing to the existence of street children, increasing mass poverty stands out as a major factor for the existence of street children. It is poverty that is breaking up homes and families; it is poverty that makes grownups turn children into sources of income or into articles for sale (Ocholla, 1989).

2.4 Conceptual framework

This study used the following conceptual framework to show the relationship between the independent and dependent variables in the study

Independent Variables   **Dependent Variable**

(Causes)   (Number of children in streets)

| Family dysfunction causes |

| Poverty causes |

| Conflicts and elections violence |

| Urbanization and overcrowding causes |

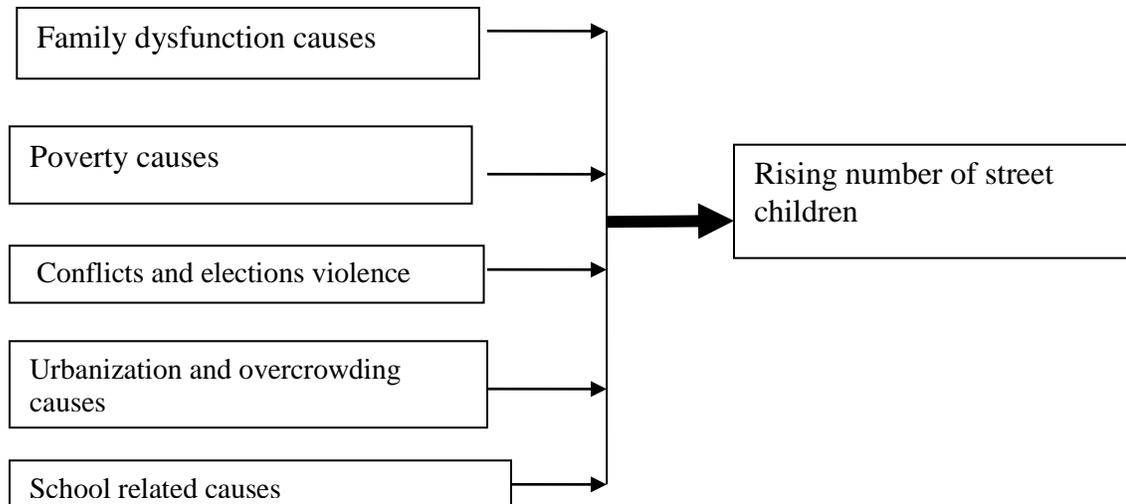| School related causes |

| Rising number of street children |

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing influence relationship between independent and dependent variables

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey .This enabled the researchers to document the factors that have led to an increase in the number of street families in urban centres. The target population consisted of street children, community based organizations, government agencies and Non-governmental organizations involved in rehabilitation and resettlement of street children. The population was grouped in strata and simple cluster random sampling technique was used to select a sample of one hundred and twelve (112) respondents. This study relied on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected was collected using questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire contained structured and semi structured questions. Secondary data was obtained from documented information provided by government agencies for comparative purposes. Data analysis involved several stages .Completed questionnaires were edited for completeness and consistency. The data was then coded and checked for any errors and omissions. The responses from open-ended questions were listed to obtain proportions the percentages were computed. Data was then presented in form of tables.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic information of respondents

The study sought to establish the demographic information regarding gender of the street children, age, years in streets, origin of the street children, status of parents, time spent on the street, family size, working status of parents and residence. This information was paramount since it provided the basics and background information regarding the circumstances which might have necessitated the presence of street children in the towns .The findings are shown in table 4.1

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

1-Gender	Frequency	percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Male	58	77.3	77.3	77.3
Female	17	22.7	22.7	100.0
2-Age				
5-8yrs	3	4.0	4.0	4.0
9-11yrs	7	9.3	9.3	13.3
12-15yrs	30	40.0	40.0	53.3
16-18yrs	35	46.7	46.7	100.0
3-Years in Street				
<2yrs	20	26.7	26.7	26.7
3-5yrs	42	56.0	56.0	82.7
6-8yrs	10	13.3	13.3	96.0
9-12yrs	3	4.0	4.0	100.0
4-Place of origin				
in Eldoret	16	21.3	21.3	21.3
out of Eldoret	59	78.7	78.7	100.0
5-Survival of parents				
Mother alive	25	33.3	33.3	33.3
Father alive	11	14.7	14.7	48.0
Both parents alive	21	28.0	28.0	76.0
both parents dead	10	13.3	13.3	89.3
do not know	8	10.7	10.7	100.0
6-Time spent in street				
all day	44	58.7	58.7	58.7
all night	1	1.3	1.3	60.0
Throughout	27	36.0	36.0	96.0
when out of school	1	1.3	1.3	97.3
now and then	1	1.3	1.3	98.7
6	1	1.3	1.3	100.0
7-Family size				
1	5	6.7	6.7	6.7
2	3	4.0	4.0	10.7
3	9	12.0	12.0	22.7
4	7	9.3	9.3	32.0
5	20	26.7	26.7	58.7
6	15	20.0	20.0	78.7
7	13	17.3	17.3	96.0

9	1	1.3	1.3	97.3
10	2	2.7	2.7	100.0
8-Working status of parents				
Working	28	37.3	37.3	37.3
not working	38	50.7	50.7	88.0
do not know	9	12.0	12.0	100.0
9-Place of residence				
in street	39	52.0	52.0	52.0
informal settlement	35	46.7	46.7	98.7
here and there	1	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	75	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey data 2014

On gender it was established that 77.3% were male and 22.7% were female, the findings on age established that 4% of the street children are aged between 5-8 years, 9.3% between 9-11 years, 40% between 12 -15 years and 46.7% between 16-18 years. On the number of years the children have spent on the street the study found out that 26.7% have been on the street for a period of less than 2 years, 56% for a period between 3-5 years. 13.3% between 6-8 years and 4% between 9-12 years, on the origin of the street children the study established that 21% originated in Eldoret and its environs and 78.7% came from outside Eldoret town. On the separation of parents, the study found out that 33% of the street children have their mother alive, 14.7% their fathers were alive, 28.0% both parents are alive, 13.3% both parents are dead and 10.7% do not know whether their parents were alive or dead. On the time spent on the streets the study found out that 58.7 spend all day on the streets, 1.3%spend all nights on the streets, 36.0% spend their time throughout on the streets,1.3% when out of school and 1.3% now and then. On the family size of the street children it was established 36.7% identified 1, 4.0% identified 2, 12.0 gave 3, 9.3% selected 4, 26.7% identified 5, 20.0% identified 6, 17.3% mentioned 7, 1.3% mentioned 9 and 2.7% identified 10. On the working status of the parents, 37.3% identified working parents, 50.7% identified not working parents and 12.0 did not know whether the parents are working or not. on the place of residence of the street children, 52% of the respondents identified the streets, 46.7% identified informal settlement. The findings show that majority of the street children are male aged between 12-18 years. They have stayed in the streets for a period of between 3-5 years and most of them originate from outside Eldoret town. Most of the street children spend all their time on the street both day and night.

4.2 Family Dysfunctional causes

The respondents were asked to indicate factors that have facilitated their move to the streets from their homes. The results are as in table 4.2 below

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Table 4.2 Family dysfunction causes

Cause	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Beating at home	18(24.0)	25(33.3)	1(1.3)	2(2.7)	12(16.0)	15(20.0)	2(2.7)
Neglected by parents	8(10.7)	15(20.0)	2(2.7)	0	7(9.3)	27(36.0)	16(21.3)
Too much work	12(16.0)	39(52.0)	0	0	14(18.7)	8(10.7)	2(2.7)
Being harassed	14(18.7)	15(20.0)	0	0	19(25.3)	25(33.3)	2(2.7)
Feeling rejected	19(25.3)	24(32.0)	6(8.0)	0	7(9.3)	17(22.7)	2(2.7)
Parents separated	63(84.0)	1(1.3)	0	2(2.7)		2(2.7)	7(9.3)
Parents died	35(46.7)	2(2.7)	0	0	1(1.3)	1(1.3)	36(48.0)
Child born out of wedlock	63(84.0)	2(2.7)	0	0	2(2.7)	1(1.3)	7(9.3)
Parents brew, take and sell illicit brew	34(48.0)	19(25.3)	0	0	2(2.7)	13(17.3)	5(6.7)
Sexual abused at home	59(78.7)	0	0	1(1.3)	1(1.3)	5(6.7)	2(2.7)

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e: Survey data 2014

From the research data the findings on family dysfunctions show that on beatings, 20% of the respondent strongly disagree, 33.3% disagree, 2.7% undecided, 0% did not know, 17.3% agreed, 24.0% strongly agreed and 2.7% very strongly agree. On neglect by parents or guardians 12% strongly disagree, 16% disagree, 2.7% undecided, 8.0% agreed, 38.7% strongly agreed and 22.7% very strongly agreed. On too much work 17.3% strongly disagree, 53.3% disagree, 1.3% undecided, 17.3% agreed, 10.7% strongly agree . On harassment 17.3% strongly disagree, 20.0% disagree, 24% agreed, 33.3% strongly agreed and 5.3% very strongly agree. On rejection 25.3% strongly disagree, 30.7% disagree, 8.0% undecided, 12.0% agreed, 24.0% strongly agreed and 0% very strongly agreed. On parents separated 84.0% strongly disagree, 1.3% disagree, 2.7% did not know, 1.3% strongly agreed and 10.7% very strongly agree. On death of parents 48% strongly disagree, 2.7% did not know, 1.3% agreed and 48% very strongly agree. On child born out of wedlock 80.7% strongly disagree, 2.7% undecided, 2.7% agreed, and 8.0% very strongly agree. On illicit brew taking, making and selling 46.7% strongly disagree, 22.7% disagree, 2.7% agreed, 20.0% strongly agreed and 8.0% very strongly agree. And sexual abuse at home 80.0% strongly disagree, 5.3% disagree, 1.3 % did not know, 1.3% agreed, 9.3% strongly agreed and 2.7% very strongly agree .The above findings reveals that family dysfunction causes have led to the rising number of street children especially when both parents die, the children are often neglected by family members who are supposed to take of the orphaned children.

4.3 Poverty as a cause of increase in the number of street children in urban centres

The study sought to establish the effects of poverty and the upsurge of street children in urban centres. The findings are shown in table 4.3

Table 4.3 Poverty causes

Causes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
lack of food	2(2.7)	2(2.7)		1(1.3)	14(18.7)	27(36.0)	29(38.7)
very poor family	3(4.0)	1(1.3)			2(2.7)	6(8.0)	63(84.0)
handout(food, clothes, money)		2(2.7)			38(50.7)	26(34.7)	9(12.0)
living conditions at home are poor	3(4.0)	2(2.7)	20(26.7)		4(5.3)	5(6.7)	41(54.7)

Source: Survey data 2014

From the research data on table 4.3 it was established 50% of the respondents cited that lack of food as the main reason that made them leave their homes to go to the streets in search of food ,63% indicated that they are from very poor families and the living conditions were pathetic at their homes hence the resolve to move to the urban centres in search of better living conditions,38% of the respondents moved to the streets in search of handouts while 41% were forced to relocate to the streets because of the very poor living conditions at home. This indeed shows that poverty is a major cause that has led to the mass increase in street children in urban centres.

4.5 School related causes

The respondents were asked to indicate school related factors that led them to the streets. This was on a scale of 1-5 in which; 1-To a very large extent; 2- To a large extent ;3-To some extent; 4-To a small extent; and5- To no extent. The results are as shown in table 4.5

4.5. School related causes

Causes	1	2	3	4	5
Peer pressure	44(46.5)	19(22.1)	10(11.6)	5(5.8)	8(9.3)
Lack of school fees	48(55.8)	12(13.9)	4(4.7)	16(18.6)	6(6.9)
Corporal punishment	17(19.7)	32(37.2)	15(17.4)	8(9.3)	14(16.3)
Deviance	29(33.7)	22(25.6)	9(10.5)	18(20.9)	8(9.3)
No freedom at school	40(46.5)	15(17.4)	21(24.2)	4(4.7)	6(7.0)
Never had a chance to join school	13(15.1)	43(50.0)	7(8.1)	19(22.1)	4(4.6)

Source: Survey data 2014

From the research data on table 4.6 on the issue of peer pressure 46.5% of the respondents agreed to a very large extent that they were influenced by their peers to join them in the streets,22.1% indicated to a large extent 11.6%

indicated to some extent 5.8% indicated to a small extent while 9.3% indicated to no extent. 55.8% of the respondents to a very large extent agreed that lack of school fee was a major reason why they joined the streets as they were unable to get school fees, only 6.9% of the respondents indicated to no extent as reason why they are in the streets,37.2 % of the respondents agreed to a large extent that corporal punishment moved them to join streets while 9.3% felt that to a small extent did corporal punishment lead one to join the street familes.40% of the respondents were of the opinion that no freedom at school led them to the streets in search of freedom while 4.7% indicated that no freedom at school led them to be street children.50% of the respondents indicated to a large extent that they never had a chance to join school whereas 4.6 % did indicate to no extent lack of chance to join school as a reason for them being on the streets. Indeed school related factors have led to the upsurge of street children in the urban centres since majority seem to be operating in the streets at the age of school going children.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The conclusions of this study are based on the research questions leading to the main purpose of this study. First the study sought to establish how family dysfunctions have led to an increase in the number of street children in Eldoret town ,it was found that majority of the street children are from families which are dysfunctional, as more families break the number of street children is on the rise in the town. Children who don't have parents find the streets as the convenient place to be as there is no one to care for them , they resolve to fend for themselves in the urban centres. Second, poverty has forced many children from the slums to migrate to the streets in search of food, most of these children are of school age going but are unable to attend school because of poverty. The study findings shows poverty has propelled many children from the slums in Eldoret town to drop out of school and now are found in the streets begging. Thirdly most people who have been displaced from their homes because of the rampant violence especially during general elections do not have where to stay and some have ended up in the streets. Eldoret town was one of the most affected towns during the 2007-8 post-election violence which saw many people left homeless and forced others join street families. Majority of the street families are those who were displaced from their homes as back from 1992 when tribal classes occurred and this situation seems to be aggravated as almost in every general election are displaced due to violence related to elections .Skill training for street children along with guidance and counseling is also considered as useful measures to develop a sense of self-reliance in the street children.. Efforts

should be made to reunite street children with their families where they still exist. Strong efforts should be made to increase access to food, clothes, shelter, education and healthcare .

5.2 Suggestion for Further Research

Areas for further research that were identified include a similar study to be carried out in other towns to establish the factors influencing the rise in the number of street families in major urban centres in Kenya. Crucially further research should be done to determine how to reverse this worrying trend which pose security risks, drug abuse menace and other social and economic challenges in the country.

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