

# Human Rights of Street Children: A Study Regarding Odisha

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## How to cite this article:

Tarini Prasad Sahoo/Human Rights of Street Children: A Study Regarding Odisha/Indian J Law Hum Behav 2022;8(2):95-99.

## Abstract

The predicament of street children in the major urban pockets of the state of Odisha namely, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Berhampur, Sambalpur, and Rourkela are taken in this study. Any boy or girl who has made the street to be their regular abode or source of support is considered to be a street child. The towns so selected for the study are rapidly expanding and they were chosen as representative of the whole state for gathering information about the socio-economic and living circumstances of street children. This study suggests that street children should receive thoughtful care, emotional support, and a nutritious diet so that they are not at risk for their health and work. To integrate street children into mainstream society, street education or alternative arrangements be made developed, and also vocational training arrangements be made for substantially aged children who will not be willing to join the school.

**Keywords:** Street Children; Human Rights; Health; Safety; Welfare.

## INTRODUCTION

According to estimates from the Government of India and the United Nations Children's Fund, around 4,00,000 street children live in the Indian cities of Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore, and the rest areas of the country. In addition, United Nations Children's Fund defines street children to be any girl or boy who is inadequately safeguarded, supervised, or directed by responsible adults, and for whom the street

has become his or her habitual habitation and/or source of livelihood.<sup>1</sup> The working conditions for street children are typically deplorable, making them particularly susceptible, especially in the unorganized sector. Because they have low earnings, Indian street children typically aspire to be autonomous or work in various jobs. Street children, particularly those who have lived on the streets for a longer period of time occasionally participate in theft, pick pocketing, drug trafficking, and prostitution. The majority of street kids labour an average of 8 to 10 hours a day at various jobs to earn their livelihood.<sup>2</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have investigated the issues of India's street children and though not all of the children were homeless, about two-thirds of them were, yet they opted to live on the streets rather than reside with their families permanently. According to research titled "Street Children Exposed to

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**Received on** 30-07-2022

**Accepted on** 28-08-2022

Numerous Sexual Hazards", roughly 20-25% of children know where their families are but prefer to remain on the streets. Around 70% spend the day on the streets and come home at night. Only 5-10% of the population is homeless and lives on the streets. Girls are about 25-33% of this population. These kids are plagued by illnesses such as skin and lung infections, sexual violence, gastrointestinal problems, bullying, unwanted pregnancies, STDs, and distress. This study demonstrates the use of a model program to deliver health, nutrition, counseling, and guidance.<sup>3</sup> A study on the "mental health condition of runaway adolescents" indicates that about 20.7% of children and 8% of youngsters experienced despair and depression respectively. Approximately 38% of children have a history of physical maltreatment and 69.33% of children suffer from behavioral problems & 7.8% are neurotic.<sup>4</sup> Though many academic and social studies and literature highlights the issues that street children face worldwide, none have described completely the underlying causes. This study summarizes the characteristics, and the way of life of street children in the cities of Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Berhampur, Sambalpur, and Rourkela.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The cities of Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Berhampur, Sambalpur, and Rourkela were chosen as representations to assess the situation of street children in the state of Odisha since they are the state's Municipal Corporations and are more developed than other areas of the state. This study randomly selected 200 street kids who were wandering through crowded markets, bus stops, platforms, and other areas of various cities. They were then interviewed about their living situations, occupations they follow to support their lives, wages, etc. It is crucial to remember that problems with street children in India and the cities chosen for this study can only be handled if they are approached in a combative manner. Due to their urbanisation, industrialisation, pilgrimage significance, etc., the cities chosen for the study had a higher concentration of children in street situation than the other cities in Odisha. This study has the following objectives:

- To assess the socioeconomic trends among street children.
- To assess the occupations in which they are engaged in.
- To suggest ideas and proposals for enhancing the lives of the street children in

Odisha.

Random sampling method has been used for the study using semi-structured interview schedules. Five Municipal Corporation areas of the state of Odisha i.e. Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Berhampur, Sambalpur, and Rourkela has been chosen for this study as representation of the scenario of the state as a whole. As per the data obtained through Right to Information from the National Crime Record Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Government of India, it is clear that there is no data available regarding the number of street children found in India which also includes the state of Odisha.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, street children for this study were picked up on random basis from the Railway stations, bus stands, busy market places, near over bridges where usually these children reside and take shelter.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The gender of respondents in the study area are depicted in the table no. 1 below. As per the data, the majority of street children are male and only a few are female. Further the age bracket of the street children are found as depicted in the table no. 2 below. Majority are found to be of the age group between 11 to 14 years.

**Table 1:** Gender of Respondents.

| Sl. no. | Gender | Number | Percentage |
|---------|--------|--------|------------|
| 1.      | Male   | 190    | 95%        |
| 2.      | Female | 10     | 5%         |
|         | Total  | 200    | 100%       |

**Table 2:** Age of the Respondents

| Sl. no. | Age Bracket    | Number | Percentage |
|---------|----------------|--------|------------|
| 1.      | 05 to 10 years | 40     | 20%        |
| 2.      | 11 to 14 years | 160    | 80%        |
| 3.      | 15 to 18 years | 00     | 00%        |
|         | Total          | 200    | 100%       |

Table no. 3 deals with the locations from where the respondents were found which shows that majority are found on Railway stations i.e. near about 55% of the respondents which is around 110 numbers of respondents found on or near railways stations whereas second largest population of these respondents are found near Bus stops/stands which amounts around 35% and least were found under over bridges i.e. around 10%.

**Table 3:** Locations where Respondents found.

| Sl. no. | Location          | Number | Percentage |
|---------|-------------------|--------|------------|
| 1.      | Railway Station   | 110    | 55%        |
| 2.      | Near Hospitals    | 00     | 00%        |
| 3.      | Bus Stops         | 70     | 35%        |
| 4.      | Under over bridge | 20     | 10%        |
| 5.      | Market places     | 00     | 00%        |
| 6.      | Shelter homes     | 00     | 00%        |
|         | Total             | 200    | 100%       |

The time period for which the respondents resided on the streets has been depicted in table no. 4 which reveals that the street children so interacted with have resided on the streets for upto maximum 5 years and out of the total respondents around 85% i.e. 170 numbers of street children have lived for 1 to 2 years on the streets and remaining 15% i.e. 30 numbers of street children for 2 to 5 years. However, the majority have resided for 1 to 2 years.

Whereas, Table no. 5 shows the relationship of

**Table 4:** Duration of stay of Respondents on streets.

| Sl. no. | Duration          | Number | Percentage |
|---------|-------------------|--------|------------|
| 1       | 1 to 2 years      | 170    | 85%        |
| 2       | 2 to 5 years      | 30     | 15%        |
| 3       | More than 5 years | 00     | 00%        |
|         | Total             | 200    | 100%       |

Respondents with their families and it reveals that majority of street children have stated that they have no relation with their family members but only 06 numbers of street children stated to have relation with their family members.

**Table 5:** Relation of Respondents with family.

| Sl. no. | Response | Number | Percentage |
|---------|----------|--------|------------|
| 1       | Yes      | 06     | 03%        |
| 2       | No       | 194    | 97%        |
|         | Total    | 200    | 100%       |

Table no. 6 shows the nature of job with which the respondents are engaged with. The data in Table no. 6 reveals that two major occupations are being adhered by the respondents i.e. Begging and Rag picking which occupies around 39% and 36.5% of the total numbers and remaining are engaged with other activities like Bogie cleaning (17%), Hotel worker (2.50%), Hawkaer (05%).

**Table 6:** Nature of job of Respondents.

| Sl. no. | Nature of Job  | Number | Percentage |
|---------|----------------|--------|------------|
| 1       | Bogie cleaning | 34     | 17%        |
| 2       | Hotel worker   | 05     | 2.50%      |
| 3       | Rag picker     | 73     | 36.50%     |
| 4       | Hawker         | 10     | 05%        |
| 5       | Beggar         | 78     | 39%        |
| 6       | Others         | 00     | 00%        |
|         | Total          | 200    | 100%       |

Whereas, Table no. 7 shows the monthly income of the respondents which ranges from less than Rs. 500/- to more than Rs. 1000/- and 156 numbers of street children (i.e. around 78%) have stated their income to be upto Rs. 500/- to Rs. 1000/- and only 44 numbers (i.e. around 22%) have stated their income to be more than Rs. 1000/-.

**Table 7:** Income of Respondents (per month).

| Sl. no. | Income                  | Number | Percentage |
|---------|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| 1       | Below Rs. 500/-         | 00     | 00%        |
| 2       | Rs. 500/- to Rs. 1000/- | 156    | 78%        |
| 3       | More than Rs. 1000/-    | 44     | 22%        |
|         | Total                   | 200    | 100%       |

Next comes availability of food to respondents which is depicted in Table no. 8 that shows that around 170 numbers of street children gave their response in affirmative that they get food whereas only 30 numbers have denied to have food. Then comes the source from which food is available. Out of the 170 street children, the respondents have cited three major sources from where they find or arrange food as 50% of the respondents have disclosed to earn food by themselves, 30.60% get it from social spirited people and 19.40% are getting it from the voluntary organizations.

**Table 8:** Availability of food for Respondents.

| Sl. no. | Response | Number | Percentage |
|---------|----------|--------|------------|
| 1       | Yes      | 170    | 85%        |
| 2       | No       | 30     | 15%        |
|         | Total    | 200    | 100%       |

**Table 9:** Source of arranging food.

| Sl. no. | Source                       | Number | Percentage |
|---------|------------------------------|--------|------------|
| 1       | Self earning                 | 85     | 50%        |
| 2       | From social spirited people  | 52     | 30.60%     |
| 3       | Voluntary organization       | 33     | 19.40%     |
| 4       | Govt. /Municipal Authorities | —      | —          |
| 5       | Other sources                | —      | —          |
|         | Total                        | 170    | 100%       |

## CONCLUSION

The foremost concern that needs to be addressed is the non-availability of exact data as to the number of street children. Therefore, the Departments of Child Welfare and the Departments of Social Justice as well as the connected agencies should gather and save information on street children at the outset. For integrating street children into the mainstream education system, a street oriented education system must be developed. Since most of the kids on the streets are between the ages of 11 and 14, it's possible that they won't be able to handle school or even be interested in learning. As a result, vocational training should be offered as an option so that they may support themselves and live in dignity. One cannot exaggerate how crucial it is to teach street children about health and personal cleanliness. Government funding is required for child protective programmes, and non-governmental organisations must be set up under the direction and control of the Department of Women and Children's Welfare in order to ensure that the programmes are carried out in accordance with their genuine intentions. The government is required to provide advocacy and protection against this violation of these defenceless children's human rights. The Human Rights Commission must also take spontaneous actions to defend the rights of these youngsters who experience various types of human rights breaches virtually every day. Instead of ignoring or intimidating the street children while they are out on the streets, the police department should protect them from the street Gundas/hooligans. As the fourth pillar of our democracy, the media should focus on the rights of street children and draw attention to their problems so that they can be communicated to the relevant authorities and agencies in a very effective way. They have already played a significant role in exposing many loopholes in government mechanisms. According to the aforementioned study, the average age of the respondents was 14, indicating that the majority of street children are in their adolescent years and there is every possibility of them being misused by criminals and notorious people in the society. Begging and rag picking are only two of the many occupations that street children engage in to support themselves. The study reveals that the majority of children on the streets are found in 4 main locations: the railway stations, bus stops, and market places, or nearby over bridges. It appears that they prefer to live in such places where they can find the basic amenities like availability of drinking water, bathing facilities, taking shelter at

night, and getting food. A street child can make between Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 per day on average by participating in a variety of activities. However, they do not keep track of their earnings since they have a habit of spending their earnings entirely because there are no facilities to house them. Due to a lack of identity documentation, banks and the postal service typically decline their requests to open accounts. Although there isn't a specific law to address the problems of street children, there are many laws that deal with children in general, and this unfortunate group of kids hasn't benefited from any of those laws because there isn't any information about them and our system doesn't care much about their plight. Only when these children have been adequately rehabilitated and mapped out by the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can their difficulties and issues be appropriately addressed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Special task force by including at least one member from the agencies engaged for the implementation of provisions meant for children should be formed by the Departments of Women & Child Welfare and Social Justice to map these children and to gather and store information on the state's street children.

In order to mainstream street children into the regular educational system and to provide vocational training for many of them, a street-oriented education system must be developed.

Government funding of child protective programmes is required, and the Department of Women and Children's Welfare should organise and oversee non-governmental organisations to ensure that they are operating in accordance with the law's intent.

The Human Rights Commission should take suo motu steps to protect these children's rights and to realise the human rights violations that these children experience almost daily in a variety of ways. The government must advocate for and defend against this human rights violation against these vulnerable children.

Instead of ignoring or intimidating them while they are on the streets, the police should be more cautious and compassionate to protect these street children from the various forms of abuse and exploitation as well as from street Gundas/hooligans as there is every chance that they will be misused by them.

Due to its pervasiveness and status as the fourth pillar of our democracy, the media must now

be more thoughtful when reporting on issues involving children. It should also make an effort to focus on the rights of street children and draw attention to their problems so that these issues can be effectively communicated to the relevant agencies and authorities.

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