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Research Article

From Home to the Streets: Identifying Factors Influencing Children's Vulnerability in Dire Dawa City Administration

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Abstract

This study, titled "From Home to the Streets: Identifying Factors Influencing Children's Vulnerability in Dire Dawa City Administration," aims to understand the complex issues surrounding street children in Dire Dawa. It identifies the primary factors leading to children's street involvement, examines the everyday challenges these children face, and evaluates the survival strategies they adopt. The objective is to bridge existing knowledge gaps by shedding light on the lived experiences of these vulnerable children, thus contributing to the formulation of support mechanisms that could alleviate their hardships and potentially help them break free from poverty and marginalization. A mixed-methods approach was employed to achieve a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to children's vulnerability. Data collection involved both qualitative and quantitative methods: personal interviews, focus group discussions, and observations provided qualitative insights, while structured surveys gathered quantitative data on demographics and socio-economic conditions. This dual approach enabled the study to capture both the individual experiences and broader societal trends influencing street children. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically to identify patterns, while descriptive and inferential statistics provided an empirical understanding of quantitative data, examining correlations between variables such as family income and street life. The findings highlight a range of factors contributing to streetism, including economic hardship, family instability, limited access to education, and lack of social support systems. These insights emphasize the urgent need for holistic, sustainable solutions to address the root causes of streetism. Recommendations proposed include expanding access to flexible education programs, strengthening family support systems, and introducing economic empowerment initiatives for the families of street children. Additionally, food security programs, safe shelters, social protection, and inclusive urban planning are essential to address the children's immediate needs and long-term security. In conclusion, addressing streetism in Dire Dawa requires a multifaceted intervention strategy. Poverty alleviation, family support, and inclusive urban planning are vital to ensure that these children have opportunities for a stable future. The study's recommendations offer actionable steps to improve the welfare of street children and foster their reintegration into society, thereby contributing to a more equitable and supportive community in Dire Dawa.

Keywords

Street Children, Vulnerability, Child Exploitation, Social Exclusion

1. Introduction

Understanding the Plight of Street Children: A Focus on Dire Dawa City

The plight of street children represents a critical global challenge, affecting millions of young lives who grapple with the harsh realities of poverty, abuse, and neglect. These children often considered among the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, endure significant hardships, including inadequate access to education, healthcare, and fundamental human rights. According to UNICEF, an estimated 150 million children worldwide live on the streets, navigating the perils of informal economies while exposing themselves to exploitation, violence, and dire living conditions [56]. The phenomenon of street children is not confined to specific regions; it permeates both developing and developed nations, with particularly alarming figures in areas experiencing economic instability and conflict.

In Africa, the situation is especially dire. Research by Gebremariam and Tsegaye highlights that in Ethiopia, key drivers such as poverty, family disintegration, and rural-to-urban migration push children into street life [19]. Similarly, Mulugeta identifies urban poverty and lack of educational opportunities as significant factors contributing to the growing number of street children in Addis Ababa [36]. These trends extend to other urban centers in Ethiopia, including Dire Dawa, where economic deprivation and family breakdown continue to exacerbate the issue. A qualitative study by Alemu explored the coping strategies employed by street children in Ethiopia, underscoring the psychological and social resilience that many develop to survive in such harsh environments [2].

Importantly, street children are not a monolithic group; they range from those who live permanently on the streets to those who maintain intermittent contact with their families [48]. This diversity necessitates targeted policy interventions that address their unique circumstances. In Ethiopia, community-based approaches and collaborations between government entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have shown promise in meeting the needs of these children [27]. However, comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programs remain essential to help street children break the cycle of poverty and vulnerability.

Despite the urgent need for solutions, the challenges facing street children in Dire Dawa are profound and complex. The growing presence of street children in urban areas poses significant social and economic challenges. Factors such as poverty, family breakdown, and abuse push children onto the streets, where they encounter an array of risks, including violence, exploitation, and chronic health issues. Globally, more than 150 million children are at risk of these dire conditions [56]. In Latin America, Pires and Lima documented severe exploitation among street children in Brazil, revealing cycles of violence and crime fueled by inadequate social safety nets [38]. Similarly, Sharma and Sinha found that street children in India are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, drug abuse, and child labor [46].

In Ethiopia, the situation mirrors global trends, as street children have become a significant part of the urban landscape, particularly in cities like Dire Dawa. The combination of rural-urban migration, poverty, family breakdown, and conflict-driven displacement has intensified this crisis. Gebremariam and Tsegaye emphasize that poverty and limited educational opportunities are critical factors driving children onto the streets. In urban areas, many of these children resort to menial jobs such as shoe shining, begging, or selling small items, while often facing abuse and exploitation [19]. Alemu highlighted not only the resilience of these children but also the severe psychological and physical challenges they confront, including hunger, exposure to harsh weather, and violence [2].

Despite the rising numbers of street children in Ethiopian cities, there is a significant gap in comprehensive research focused on specific regions, particularly in Dire Dawa, where the phenomenon is increasing. Although national attention has been given to the issue, region-specific studies are lacking, which impedes the development of effective interventions tailored to the unique challenges faced by street children in Dire Dawa.

Consequently, this study aims to identify the primary causes that lead children to become street children, examine the challenges they face in their daily lives, assess the jobs they undertake for survival, and propose management mechanisms to support them. By addressing this information gap, the study seeks to provide insights into the realities faced by children living on the streets of Dire Dawa city and contribute to the development of targeted support systems that can help these vulnerable children escape the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

Significance of the Study

The study "From Home to the Streets: Identifying Factors Influencing Children's Vulnerability in Dire Dawa City Administration" offers several key contributions:

1. *Understanding Vulnerability*: This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the unique vulnerabilities faced by street children in Dire Dawa. By identifying the factors that lead to their situation, it highlights the critical social and economic conditions that necessitate urgent attention.

2. *Informed Policy Development*: The findings of this research can inform policymakers and stakeholders about the specific needs of street children in Dire Dawa. By providing evidence-based insights, the study can aid in the formulation of targeted interventions and policies that address the root causes of street life.

3. *Enhancing Support Programs*: The study's identification of the challenges faced by street children can help NGOs, community organizations, and governmental

bodies design and implement more effective support programs. These programs can focus on rehabilitation, education, and reintegration, ultimately improving the well-being of these children.

4. *Raising Public Awareness*: By shedding light on the plight of street children in Dire Dawa, the study aims to raise awareness among the general public and community leaders. Increased awareness can foster community involvement and support for initiatives aimed at assisting street children.

5. *Contributing to Academic Literature*: The research fills a gap in the academic literature regarding street children in Ethiopia, particularly in Dire Dawa. It adds to the body of knowledge by documenting local realities and experiences, which can be useful for future research and studies on related topics.

6. *Promoting Multidisciplinary Approaches*: The study encourages a multidisciplinary approach to addressing the issue of street children by integrating perspectives from sociology, psychology, education, and public health. This holistic view can lead to comprehensive solutions that consider the diverse needs of street children.

7. *Guiding Future Research*: The findings can serve as a foundation for future research efforts focused on street children, particularly in other urban areas of Ethiopia and beyond. By identifying gaps in knowledge and areas for further exploration, the study can guide researchers in their subsequent inquiries.

8. *Enhancing Collaboration*: The study can facilitate partnerships between governmental agencies, NGOs, and community organizations. Collaborative efforts can lead to more coordinated responses to the challenges faced by street children, improving resource allocation and maximizing impact.

9. *Empowering Street Children*: By documenting the resilience and coping strategies of street children, the study can empower these individuals by acknowledging their strengths. This recognition can inspire targeted initiatives that build on their resilience and promote their agency.

10. *Long-term Societal Impact*: Ultimately, addressing the issues faced by street children can lead to positive long-term impacts on society. By providing these children with the necessary support and opportunities, the study contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalization, fostering a more equitable and inclusive society.

These significances highlight the importance of the study in addressing the pressing issues faced by street children in Dire Dawa and the broader implications for policy, research, and community engagement.

2. Reviews of Related Literature

2.1. Theoretical Literature Review

Several theories can help explain the factors that force children onto the streets in developing countries like Ethiopia. These theories offer insights into the underlying causes and contribute to understanding the complex dynamics of street children.

2.1.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory suggests that basic human needs, such as food, shelter, and safety, must be satisfied before individuals can focus on higher-level needs like education or self-actualization. For street children, extreme poverty, lack of access to essential services, and insecurity force them to prioritize survival over education or long-term development. This lack of fulfillment in their basic needs drives them onto the streets as they search for resources to meet these fundamental requirements [32].

2.1.2. Attachment Theory (John Bowlby)

Attachment theory emphasizes the critical role of early emotional bonds between children and their caregivers. When these bonds are disrupted by factors like family breakdown, child abuse, or neglect, children may become emotionally detached and seek alternative sources of security, often turning to street life. Without the foundation of a stable family environment, children are more likely to leave home in search of safety, independence, or emotional support, which can lead them to the streets [10].

2.1.3. Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory posits that rapid urbanization, migration, and political instability can lead to the breakdown of social norms and controls. In rapidly urbanizing environments, such as Ethiopia's cities, poor coordination of services, weak social structures, and community disintegration contribute to the neglect of vulnerable populations, including children. This breakdown in social organization increases the likelihood of children being abandoned or fleeing to the streets, where they face harsh living conditions [47].

2.1.4. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explains human development through multiple layers of environmental influence, from the family unit (microsystem) to broader societal structures (exosystem). In the case of street children, disruptions within the family and lack of community or institutional support push them toward street life. The failure of these systems to provide stability and protection increases the likelihood that children will be forced onto the streets in search of survival [11].

2.1.5. Strain Theory (Robert Merton)

Strain theory argues that societal pressure to achieve goals like education or financial success creates stress when individuals lack the means to attain them. For street children, poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education create barriers to achieving societal expectations. In response to this strain, many children may resort to street life as a means of coping with their inability to follow traditional paths of success, using whatever resources they can find to survive [34].

2.1.6. Push and Pull Theory

Push and pull factors drive children toward street life. Push factors like rural poverty, family dysfunction, and environmental degradation (including climate change) force children to leave their homes. Simultaneously, pull factors such as the promise of better economic opportunities, independence, and urbanization attract children to cities. This dual process explains the migration of children from rural areas to urban streets, where they face new sets of challenges [30].

2.1.7. Conflict Theory (Karl Marx)

Conflict theory suggests that societal structures are inherently unequal, concentrating power and resources among the wealthy while marginalizing the poor and vulnerable. In developing countries like Ethiopia, economic inequality and political instability exacerbate the conditions that drive children onto the streets. Children from poor families, unable to access basic resources, education, or social services, often find themselves on the streets as a result of these structural inequalities [31].

2.1.8. Labeling Theory

Labeling theory posits that once individuals are labeled by society, they tend to internalize those labels and act according to societal expectations. Street children, often stigmatized and labeled as delinquents or criminals, may begin to conform to these negative identities. This labeling further alienates them, reinforcing their marginalization and pushing them deeper into the street life, where their opportunities for positive change are severely limited [9].

2.1.9. Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory highlights the importance of education and skills development for economic success. Street children, who often lack access to education or vocational training, are deprived of opportunities to build human capital. Without these critical resources, they are more likely to fall into cycles of poverty and street life. The absence of education limits their chances for stable employment, further entrenching them in homelessness and survival-based activities [8].

2.2. Other Theories

2.2.1. Risk and Resilience Theory

Risk and resilience theory examines the balance between risk factors, such as child abuse, family breakdown, and poverty, and protective factors, such as supportive relationships or access to resources. Street children are typically exposed to high levels of risk with very few protective mechanisms in place. The absence of resilience-building support systems, such as stable family environments or educational institutions, increases their vulnerability and likelihood of turning to street life as a means of survival [42].

2.2.2. Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000)

Social capital theory emphasizes the value of strong community networks and social ties in providing individuals with support and resources. In areas where social capital is low—often due to migration, conflict, or poverty—children are more likely to fall through societal cracks. The lack of strong social connections leaves children vulnerable, leading to isolation and an increased likelihood of becoming street children. Community disintegration further exacerbates their challenges, contributing to their marginalization [40].

In conclusion, these theories provide valuable insight into the complex socio-economic, familial, political, and environmental factors that drive children to the streets. From poverty and unemployment to family breakdown and social disorganization, various pressures converge to push children into homelessness in developing countries like Ethiopia. Addressing this issue requires a multi-dimensional approach that considers the economic, social, and psychological dimensions of the problem, paving the way for effective interventions.

2.3. Root Causes and Contributing Factors of Street Children

The phenomenon of street children is the result of a complex interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors. These factors push vulnerable children into street life, where they face numerous challenges and risks. Understanding the root causes and contributing factors is essential for developing effective interventions. Recent studies in Ethiopia and other countries have shed light on these underlying causes.

2.3.1. Poverty and Economic Instability

Poverty is consistently cited as the primary root cause of street children worldwide, including in Ethiopia. Families struggling to meet basic needs often push children into the streets to beg or find informal work to supplement household income. According to a study by Gebremariam and Tsegaye, children from poor households in urban Ethiopia often engage in street-based activities such as shoe shining, vending, and begging to contribute financially to their families [19]. This economic instability forces children out of school and into

hazardous street environments.

Additionally, Mulugeta highlights that economic downturns and lack of employment opportunities in rural areas have prompted families to migrate to cities, where children are more likely to end up on the streets due to limited access to education and social services [36]. The economic marginalization of families in both urban and rural areas contributes significantly to the rising number of street children in Ethiopia.

2.3.2. Family Breakdown and Dysfunction

Family disintegration, due to factors such as divorce, domestic violence, and substance abuse, is another major contributor to the street child phenomenon. In Ethiopia, the disintegration of traditional family structures, particularly in urban areas, has left many children without stable homes. A study by Alemu found that family dysfunction and abuse are key drivers of children fleeing their homes [2]. Domestic violence and physical abuse push children to seek refuge on the streets, where they believe they will find safety and independence.

In cases where parents are unable to care for their children due to illness, death, or abandonment, children often find themselves forced into street life. Orphaned children, particularly those who have lost parents to HIV/AIDS or conflict, are especially vulnerable to homelessness [44]. Without family support or state welfare, these children are left to fend for themselves.

2.3.3. Urbanization and Migration

Rapid urbanization in Ethiopia has been both a push and pull factor in the rise of street children. Many rural families migrate to cities like Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa in search of better economic opportunities, but once they arrive, they often find that the lack of affordable housing, education, and employment makes life in the city unsustainable. This migration often leads to overcrowded urban areas, where children face higher risks of neglect and street involvement. According to Khan et al., urbanization without adequate planning has led to a breakdown in social services, leaving vulnerable children exposed to exploitation and crime [27].

The lure of urban centers, perceived as offering better economic opportunities, draws many children to the streets. They often leave rural areas due to poverty or family problems, only to discover that life in the city is equally challenging. Mulugeta highlighted the phenomenon of rural-to-urban migration among street children in Ethiopia, emphasizing that urban poverty and poor social services increase the likelihood of children becoming homeless [36].

2.3.4. Political Instability and Conflict

In Ethiopia, political instability, ethnic conflict, and displacement have significantly contributed to the street child crisis. Conflicts in various regions of the country have dis-

placed thousands of families, leaving children without adequate shelter or support systems. Displaced children often end up in cities or border regions, where they turn to the streets for survival. According to Alemu, the ongoing internal conflicts in regions such as Tigray have driven many children to urban areas like Addis Ababa, where they are forced to fend for themselves in the streets [2].

Moreover, the lack of effective social protection programs in conflict zones exacerbates the vulnerability of children. Many of these children come from families that have lost their homes, livelihoods, and social networks due to conflict, leaving them without any form of social safety net.

2.3.5. Lack of Access to Education

Access to education is a critical factor in preventing children from ending up on the streets. In Ethiopia, however, many children are denied the right to education due to poverty, distance from schools, or family responsibilities. A study by Gebremariam and Tsegaye revealed that children from poor families are more likely to drop out of school to support their families financially or because they cannot afford school supplies [19]. Without education, children lack the skills necessary to find stable employment, pushing them toward street life for economic survival.

Education is not just a means of improving economic prospects but also a key protective factor. Children who stay in school are less likely to become involved in street life, as schools provide not only education but also structure and social support. However, the lack of access to affordable and quality education in Ethiopia remains a significant barrier for many children.

2.3.6. Environmental and Climate Factors

Environmental degradation and climate change also play a role in forcing children onto the streets. In Ethiopia, where agriculture is a primary livelihood, droughts, floods, and land degradation have led to rural poverty and migration. Families affected by environmental changes often move to urban areas, where children may end up on the streets as a result of the challenges associated with urban life. According to Save the Children, climate-induced displacement has become an increasingly common factor in rural-to-urban migration, with children often being the most vulnerable to the harsh realities of urban poverty [44].

2.3.7. Social and Cultural Factors

Social norms and cultural attitudes toward children also contribute to the street child phenomenon. In some communities, children are expected to contribute economically to the family from a young age, which may lead them to work on the streets. Moreover, cultural stigmatization of street children as "delinquents" or "criminals" often leads to their marginalization, reducing their access to social services and support systems [27]. This stigmatization further alienates street children,

pushing them deeper into street life and making reintegration more difficult.

Generally, the root causes and contributing factors to street children in Ethiopia are multifaceted, involving a combination of poverty, family breakdown, urbanization, political instability, and lack of access to education. These factors, coupled with environmental degradation and cultural stigmatization, have created conditions where street children face extreme vulnerability. Addressing the street child crisis in Ethiopia requires comprehensive solutions that target not only the immediate needs of children on the streets but also the systemic issues that drive them there.

2.4. Empirical Literature Reviews

An extensive study conducted by Khan, Patel, and Rahman examined the situation of street children in South Asian countries, focusing on India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The study identified poverty, family disintegration, and urban migration as the most prominent factors driving children onto the streets. It highlighted that street children in these countries are exposed to multiple risks, including physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, and exploitation. The research also found that governmental efforts to address the street children crisis were inadequate, with most children receiving minimal support. The study called for stronger legal frameworks, improved access to education, and better rehabilitation programs to address the issue [27].

In Brazil, where the street child phenomenon has persisted for decades, an empirical study by Rizzini and Butler explored the root causes and survival strategies of street children in Rio de Janeiro. The study found that children were often pushed onto the streets due to extreme poverty, violence at home, and family breakdown. Rizzini and Butler highlighted how these children engage in informal labor, such as begging, selling goods, or collecting recyclables, to survive. The study also observed that the Brazilian government's social welfare programs were inadequate in reaching street children, leaving NGOs to fill the gap [41].

In Kenya, an empirical study conducted by Njoroge et al. in Nairobi and Mombasa investigated the rise of street children due to urban poverty and displacement [37]. The study found that children were often forced into street life due to the inability of families to meet basic needs, exacerbated by the rising cost of living in urban centers. The research indicated that street children in Kenya faced similar issues to those in other developing countries, including substance abuse, exploitation, and a lack of access to education. The study recommended targeted social welfare programs and policies focused on family preservation to curb the growing street child crisis.

In Ethiopia, a study by Alemu examined the causes and coping mechanisms of street children in Addis Ababa. Alemu's research, based on qualitative interviews with children and key stakeholders, found that the primary factors leading to street life were family breakdown, rural-urban migration, and poverty. The children who participated in the study described their reliance on informal work, such as shoe shining or selling small items, to survive [2]. Alemu's findings suggested that while there are NGOs attempting to address the issue, there is a significant lack of government intervention, and reintegration programs for these children remain underdeveloped.

A quantitative study by Gebremariam and Tsegaye in Mekelle examined the socio-economic challenges faced by street children in the city. The researchers surveyed over 200 street children and found that most of them came from broken families and were driven to the streets by poverty. The study identified the lack of access to education and healthcare as major issues for these children. Furthermore, it highlighted the absence of government-led rehabilitation programs aimed at reintegrating street children into society. The study called for increased public awareness and policy reforms to address the growing problem of street children in Mekelle [19].

Mulugeta conducted an empirical study focusing on the causes and consequences of street children in Dire Dawa. The study found that street children in the city were predominantly from rural areas and had migrated due to poverty, family issues, and lack of access to education. Mulugeta's research underscored that these children faced significant risks, including abuse, malnutrition, and exploitation. The study also revealed that many street children engaged in petty crimes as a means of survival. Mulugeta concluded that more targeted interventions, including family-based solutions and educational opportunities, were essential to curbing the issue [36].

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The most appropriate research method for the topic "From Home to the Streets: Identifying Factors Influencing Children's Vulnerability in Dire Dawa City Administration" is a descriptive research design. This approach is ideal for uncovering and analyzing the key factors that make children vulnerable in Dire Dawa. By employing surveys, interviews, and observations, descriptive research offers a comprehensive view of the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental conditions impacting these children.

This method also facilitates the comparison of local data with global studies on child vulnerability, highlighting both similarities and unique challenges in Dire Dawa. This global comparison deepens the understanding of local issues and emphasizes the need for context-specific interventions.

Ultimately, descriptive research enables the development of evidence-based strategies tailored to the local context, ensuring that recommendations for policymakers are both relevant and actionable. It provides the necessary foundation for effective interventions that address the unique vulnerabilities of children in Dire Dawa.

3.2. Sources of Data

The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations. Secondary data comprised written materials on street children sourced from literature reviews, academic journals, articles, websites, newsletters, e-books, and other relevant documents.

3.3. Types of Data, Methods of Data Collection, and Data Analysis

The study used both qualitative and quantitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to children's vulnerability in Dire Dawa. Qualitative data, gathered through personal stories and experiences of street children, offered deep insights into their struggles and coping mechanisms. Observational data further enriched this by capturing the children's environments and social interactions. Quantitative data, collected via surveys, included demographics such as age, gender, and family background, along with socio-economic details like family income, education, and housing conditions.

Various methods were employed to collect this data. Semi-structured interviews provided detailed accounts of the children's experiences, while structured questionnaires gathered demographic and socio-economic information. Focus group discussions with street children and community members explored common challenges and coping strategies. Field observations across different locations offered a real-time view of the children's daily lives. Additionally, document analysis of existing reports and government documents added essential context.

Data analysis combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and recurring themes in interviews and discussions, while content analysis categorized observed behaviors and interactions. For quantitative data, descriptive statistics summarized survey results, and inferential statistics explored relationships between variables, such as the link between family income and street life. By blending both types of data through mixed methods analysis, the study provides a more holistic understanding of the factors driving children's vulnerability in Dire Dawa.

3.4. Target Population and Sampling Design

The target population for the study on street children in Dire Dawa City included those aged 6 to 18 years who spent significant time on the streets. Reports indicated a dramatic increase in the street child population, rising from 454 in 1999 to 496 in 2017, and then surging to 2,234 by 2019. This marked a growth rate of approximately 9.24% between 1999 and 2017, followed by an astounding 349.6% increase over just two years. Based on this trend, it was estimated that the number of street children could reach around 4,468 by 2021, with the actual figure likely higher due to undercounting, suggesting a range of 4,500 to 5,000. This estimation reflects ongoing challenges in accurately tracking this vulnerable population [29].

The sample design focused on specific areas in Dire Dawa city where street children gather, such as Keffira market, Coca and Dil Chora area, Dechatu/Megala, Sabian Seido, and Jerba Sefer. It employed a mixed sampling approach, using purposive sampling to select children based on age and living conditions, along with snowball sampling for participant referrals. Random sampling was also applied to parents, guardians, and community leaders to capture diverse perspectives on child vulnerability. The estimated sample size included 200 participants, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of factors affecting children's vulnerability in the city.

This design aimed to comprehensively represent the experiences and views necessary for a detailed examination of the factors influencing children's vulnerability in Dire Dawa City.

4. Presentation and Data Analysis

4.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic characteristics including: age, gender and level of education are summarized using frequencies and percentages as indicated in the following table 1. The age distribution of street children in Dire Dawa city shows that 40% fall within the 11-14 age group, a period marked by heightened vulnerability to street life. This aligns with global findings, such as those by UNICEF, which highlighted that early adolescence is a critical phase where children are at greater risk of neglect, exploitation, and abuse [52]. These factors often push them toward the streets. According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory, this stage is characterized by identity crises, particularly when family or community support is lacking [16]. The absence of a nurturing environment during this crucial period increases the likelihood of children turning to the streets in search of survival, belonging, and identity.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics.

Age Distribution	Ages 6-10	45	30%
	Ages 11-14	60	40%
	Ages 15-18	45	30%
Gender Composition	Male	120	80%
	Female	30	20%
Level of Educa-	Elementary	51	34%
	First cycle	95	63.34%

tion	First cycle complete	2	1.33%
	Second cycle	2	1.33%

Gender composition data revealed that 80% of street children in Dire Dawa city are male, a trend seen in various other contexts where boys are more visible in public roles such as begging or selling goods. This is partly due to societal expectations that boys should be more self-reliant from a young age. Research by Human Rights Watch suggested that boys are more often engaged in street activities, while girls, though less visible, may face more hidden vulnerabilities, such as being forced into domestic servitude or sexual exploitation [23]. Social learning theory helps explain these gender differences, as children learn societal roles and behaviors through observation, imitation, and the internalization of cultural expectations [6].

The educational attainment of street children, as revealed by the survey, is alarmingly low. A significant portion (63.34%) of the children have only completed the first cycle of education (grades 1-4), while only 34% have had some elementary education. Even more concerning is the fact that only 1.33% have completed the first cycle, and another 1.33% have reached the second cycle (grades 5-8). This data reflects both systemic and individual challenges that hinder the education of vulnerable children, such as those living on the streets.

The low levels of education among street children can be explained by several theoretical perspectives. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, education is often a lower priority for children whose basic physiological and safety needs are not met. Street children, who face homelessness, hunger, and insecurity, often cannot focus on education when their survival is at stake [32]. The lack of access to stable shelter and the need to work for their own subsistence can lead to school dropouts, as education competes with immediate survival needs. This aligns with empirical studies, such as Aptekar and Stoecklin's, which found that street children prioritize income generation activities over schooling due to the pressing need to meet their basic needs [5].

4.2. Origin of Street Children

The survey results regarding the origin of street children in Dire Dawa city highlight significant trends in their demographic background. A total of 200 respondents were included in the survey, with notable variations in representation from different regions.

The largest group of street children originates from Oromia, accounting for 42% (84 children) of the total. This high percentage indicates that Oromia, which is Ethiopia's largest regional state, is a significant contributor to the street child population in Dire Dawa. The socio-economic challenges prevalent in this region, including poverty and rural-urban migration, likely drive many children to seek survival in urban centers.

Somali and Harari regions follow, contributing 15% (30 children) and 11% (22 children), respectively. The presence of street children from these areas suggests ongoing challenges such as inter-regional migration due to conflict or resource scarcity, prompting families to relocate to urban settings in search of better opportunities.

The SNNP region contributes 12% (24 children), while Dire Dawa, the host city, accounts for 8% (16 children). This indicates that while some children are local to Dire Dawa, a significant portion still comes from other regions. This reflects a pattern where economic conditions compel families to send their children to cities, hoping for improved living conditions.

Conversely, the Tigray and Amhara regions represent the smallest shares of the survey, with 5% (10 children) and 7% (14 children) respectively. The lower numbers may reflect both the socio-political context in Tigray and possibly different migration patterns or family structures in the Amhara region.
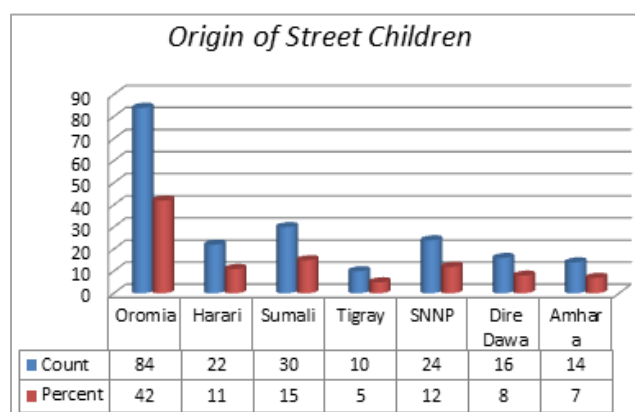

Figure 1. *Origin of Street Children.*

Overall, the findings underscore the complexity of the street child phenomenon in Dire Dawa, influenced by various factors such as regional disparities, economic conditions, and socio-political contexts that drive families to migrate. These insights call for targeted interventions that consider the diverse backgrounds and origins of street children to effectively address their needs and circumstances.

4.3. Place of Residence

A survey conducted to gather insights on the locations where street children in Dire Dawa City are concentrated revealed significant clustering in key urban areas. Specifically, 62 respondents (31%) reported being based in the Keffira Market/Coka-Dil Chora area, 44 children (22%) in Dechatu/Megala, 38 respondents (19%) in Sabian Seido, and 22 respondents (11%) in Jerba Sefer. These findings highlight the spatial distribution of street children, a pattern that is consistent with urban geography theories that examine the relationship between marginalized populations and specific urban

spaces.

The concentration of street children in these areas aligns with the "spatial mismatch theory," which suggests that marginalized populations, such as street children, tend to reside in areas where access to employment, social services, and informal economies are more accessible [26]. These urban zones often become hubs for street children seeking economic opportunities such as begging or informal work, as well as access to resources like food and temporary shelter.

A study by Aptekar on street children in urban settings supports this observation, finding that street children often congregate in areas where informal economies thrive, such as markets and transport hubs, due to the availability of livelihood opportunities and the relative anonymity these spaces provide [4]. In Dire Dawa, areas like Keffira Market and Coka-Dil Chora likely serve as economic and social magnets for street children, offering both the means for survival and a sense of community.

4.4. Causes for Coming out to the Street

The survey results regarding the causes of streetism among children in Dire Dawa city reveal several key factors contributing to this issue. The data indicates that *poverty and economic instability* is the most significant cause, affecting 30% of the respondents (60 out of 200 children). This finding is consistent with numerous studies that highlight poverty as a primary driver of streetism. According to the United Nations Habitat report, many children in developing countries become street children due to their families' inability to provide for basic needs such as food and shelter [51]. The prevalence of extreme poverty creates a cycle that forces children onto the streets, limiting their access to education and social support systems.
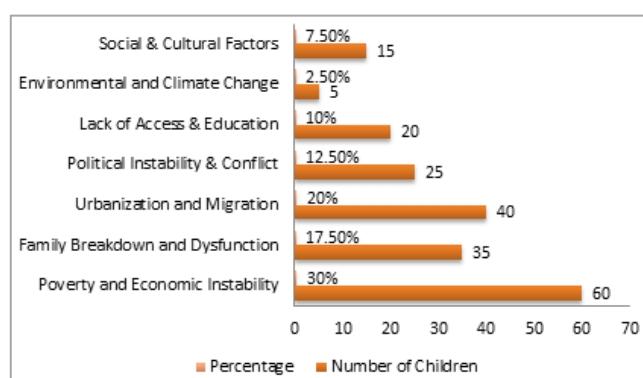

Figure 2. Causes for Coming Out to the Streets.

Family breakdown and dysfunction ranks as the second leading cause, reported by 17.5% of respondents (35 children). This reflects a growing body of literature suggesting that unstable family dynamics—such as divorce, abuse, or neglect—can significantly impact children's lives, pushing them

towards street life [20]. Family disintegration is often linked to socio-economic stressors, leading to children seeking refuge or autonomy outside of their homes.

The factor of *urbanization and migration* accounts for 20% (40 children) of the responses. Urban migration, especially from rural to urban areas, is a phenomenon observed in various developing nations, where families relocate in search of better economic opportunities but end up in precarious living situations [58]. The influx of families into urban centers often leads to increased competition for resources, exacerbating poverty and contributing to the streetism crisis.

Political instability and conflict are indicated as causes by 12.5% of the respondents (25 children). Political turmoil often displaces families and disrupts community cohesion, resulting in increased vulnerability among children. This is especially true in regions where ongoing conflicts hinder government efforts to provide social services and protections for at-risk populations [33].

Lack of access to education is noted by 10% of the children (20 responses), highlighting another critical barrier that forces children to the streets. Research suggests that inadequate educational opportunities can have long-term implications, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting future employment prospects [1].

Environmental and climate change was cited by only 2.5% of the respondents (5 children). Although it is the least significant factor in this survey, environmental degradation and climate-related events can lead to displacement and increased poverty, impacting children's lives in subtle yet profound ways [45].

Lastly, *social and cultural factors* were identified by 7.5% of respondents (15 children). These factors may include societal stigma, cultural norms that marginalize certain groups, or the influence of peer pressure, which can all lead children toward street life. Research suggests that cultural contexts significantly shape the experiences of street children, influencing both their decisions to leave home and their survival strategies on the streets [7].

In summary, the findings from the survey highlight the complex interplay of various factors contributing to streetism among children in Dire Dawa city. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including economic support, family stabilization initiatives, educational access, and community engagement to foster resilience among vulnerable children.

Livelihood of Parents

Q. What is/was your family's economic status?

The economic status of street children and their families, as revealed by survey results, highlights the overwhelming prevalence of poverty among these children. A significant portion of the respondents, 65%, or 130 out of 200 children, come from families that identify as "very poor." This statistic underscores the substantial socio-economic challenges faced by street children and their families. Many of these children originate from extreme poverty, leading to limited access to

basic necessities such as food, shelter, and education. Numerous studies indicate that poverty is one of the major causes of streetism. For instance, a UN Habitat report notes that children in developing countries often end up on the streets due to their families' inability to meet basic needs [51].

Furthermore, 30% of the respondents, representing 60 children, come from families identifying as "poor." While these families may not be at the extreme end of the poverty spectrum, they still struggle to fulfill their daily needs. Economic instability in lower-income households can push children to engage in street work or, in some cases, live on the streets. UNICEF has highlighted that a majority of street children are driven into these environments by poverty and a lack of financial resources [54].

A smaller fraction of the surveyed population, 4%, or 8 children, comes from families that describe themselves as "middle class." This suggests that while these children may not experience severe poverty, they still encounter socio-economic pressures that could lead them toward the streets. This situation might also reflect social factors beyond economic status, such as family breakdown or migration.

Notably, only 1% of the respondents, representing 2 children, come from wealthy families. This data point serves as an outlier, indicating that even in families with economic means, other factors, such as family conflicts or personal circumstances, can lead children to the streets.
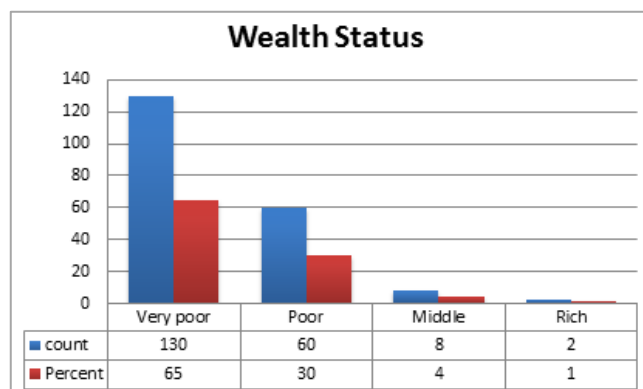

Figure 3. Livelihood of Parents.

In conclusion, the data clearly demonstrates that poverty is the most significant factor influencing the population of street children, with 95% of them coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The socio-economic vulnerability of these children creates a cycle in which poverty perpetuates the conditions that force them to survive on the streets. This finding aligns with broader research emphasizing poverty as a primary driver of streetism.

4.5. Children's Means of Living

The survey results offer valuable insights into the types of activities street children in Dire Dawa engage in to sustain themselves. These activities can be broadly categorized as begging, selling goods, providing different services, and engaging in petty theft, reflecting a range of survival strategies shaped by economic necessity, social marginalization, and lack of opportunity. The following table shows the survey result.

Begging (60 children, 40%).

The largest proportion of street children (40%) in the survey is engaged in begging. This is one of the most common activities among street children globally, as it requires no financial capital or specialized skills. Begging as a livelihood strategy can be linked to extreme poverty and the absence of social safety nets. According to a study by Aptekar, street children often turn to begging because they lack access to formal or informal employment opportunities, particularly in cities where job competition is high and discrimination against children is rampant [4].

The "livelihoods approach" theory, as discussed by Chambers and Conway, helps explain how street children use begging as a strategy for survival in environments where formal economic structures do not accommodate their needs [12]. Begging, though stigmatized, can provide a steady, if minimal, source of income. For children lacking familial support, education, or resources, begging offers a quick and accessible means of subsistence.

Selling Goods (37 children, 25%).

A quarter of the surveyed street children (25%) are engaged in selling goods, such as snacks and drinks. This form of informal economic activity is a step above begging in terms of requiring some level of capital investment, albeit minimal. Selling goods in the streets is a common livelihood strategy in many developing countries, as it allows children to participate in the informal economy where barriers to entry are low.
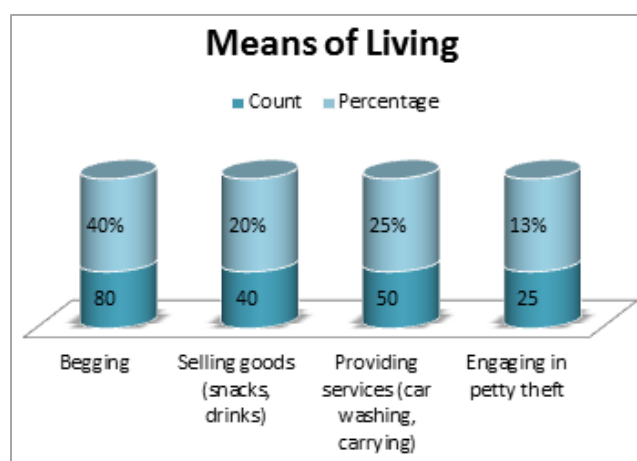

Figure 4. Children's Means of Living.

The informal sector is often characterized by its ability to absorb large numbers of unskilled laborers, including children. according to research by Volpi, street children who engage in such entrepreneurial activities are often seen as more re-

sourceful and independent compared to those who beg [57]. These children may have some access to micro-financing through peer networks or family members, which enables them to purchase small goods to sell. This aligns with the "informal economy theory", which highlights how individuals in developing countries often turn to informal work when formal employment opportunities are lacking [22].

Providing Services (30 children, 20%).

About 20% of the street children in the survey reported, providing services such as car washing or carrying goods. These activities, while more labor-intensive, often provide a more stable income than begging or selling goods. Service provision is an important part of the urban informal economy, where street children take advantage of city life's demands for cheap, flexible labor. According to research by Conticini and Hulme, many street children provide services to meet daily needs, such as buying food, clothing, or saving for future emergencies [14].

The "survival strategy theory" posits that children who engage in service provision adopt strategies that offer short-term survival but do not necessarily guarantee long-term security [35]. In the context of streetism, providing services like car washing or carrying goods reflects a degree of skill and physical effort, suggesting that these children might have a more structured daily routine compared to those engaged in begging or theft.

Engaging in Petty Theft (23 children, 15%).

Approximately 15% of the surveyed children reported engaging in petty theft. Theft, though illegal, is often a last-resort survival strategy for street children who have limited or no access to other forms of income. According to Beazley, street children may engage in petty theft due to desperation, lack of opportunity, or as part of a broader street economy where stolen goods can be easily traded or sold [7].

This behavior aligns with the "strain theory", which explains how individuals, particularly those in disadvantaged or marginalized social groups, may resort to criminal activities when they are unable to achieve socially accepted goals through legitimate means [34]. For street children, who often lack access to education and formal employment, theft may be one of the few viable options for meeting basic needs such as food and shelter. Furthermore, criminal behavior among street children is often influenced by peer pressure and the need to conform to the street subculture, which may normalize petty theft as a survival tactic [21].

4.6. Number of Times Street Children's Eat Per Day

Q. How many times do you eat per day?

The survey results on the number of meals street children eat per day provide insight into their access to food, which is a critical aspect of their overall well-being. The distribution is as follows: 28 children reported eating only once per day, accounting for 14% of the sample. This is a clear indicator of

food insecurity, as many street children often lack regular access to meals. Eating only once per day can lead to malnutrition, stunted growth, and other health complications. Studies have consistently found that street children are among the most food-insecure populations. According to the WFP, children living in extreme poverty, particularly street children, often survive on less than one meal a day, which directly affects their physical and cognitive development [59].

The majority of street children (117, or 58.5%) reported eating twice per day. While this is slightly better than the one-time group, it still suggests insufficient access to nutrition. The quality of these meals is likely inadequate, lacking in essential nutrients, as many street children depend on low-cost, often unhealthy food options. Research by the FAO notes that street children frequently rely on irregular and inadequate meals, often scavenged or purchased from street vendors, which contributes to poor health outcomes [17].
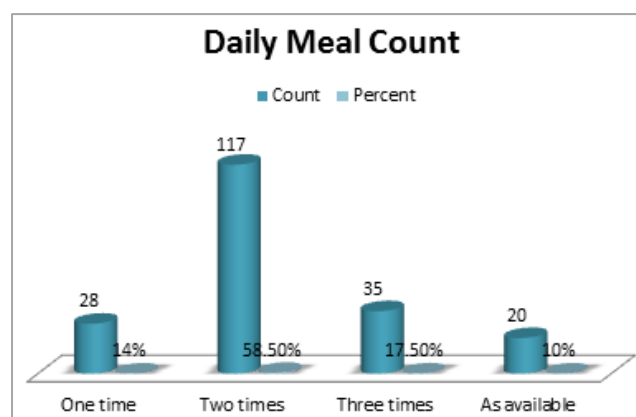
Figure 5. Daily Meal Count.

Only 35 children (17.5%) reported eating three times per day, which is considered a basic standard for a healthy diet. However, even this group may not be consuming nutritionally balanced meals, as street children often have limited access to clean and safe food. The consistency of these meals is also questionable, as street children may face challenges such as fluctuating income or availability of food. A study by the ILO highlighted that even when street children manage to eat three meals per day, these meals are often lacking in protein, vitamins, and other vital nutrients [25].

Whereas 20 children (10%) reported eating "as available," indicating extreme uncertainty regarding food access. This group may go for long periods without food, relying on donations, scavenging, or purchasing food when they manage to get money. Their eating patterns are unpredictable, making it difficult to maintain a healthy diet. According to a study by UNICE, many street children depend on sporadic sources of food, such as charity groups, food waste, or small earnings from street activities [52]. This group is particularly vulnerable to severe malnutrition and related health problems.

4.7. Sources of Food

The survey results on the *sources of food* for street children indicate significant reliance on varied sources, reflecting the diverse and often precarious ways in which these children obtain food.

The sources of food for street children reveal significant challenges and vulnerabilities in their daily lives. Only a small percentage, specifically 6% of the surveyed children, reported receiving food from their parents. This translates to just 12 children, indicating that the majority are disconnected from consistent parental care or support. Such disconnection is often linked to family breakdown, a common factor that drives children into street life. A study by UNICEF, highlights that many children living and working on the streets come from dysfunctional families characterized by parental neglect, poverty, or abuse, forcing these children to fend for themselves outside the home [55]. When parental support is available, it is usually minimal and sporadic due to the family's limited financial resources.
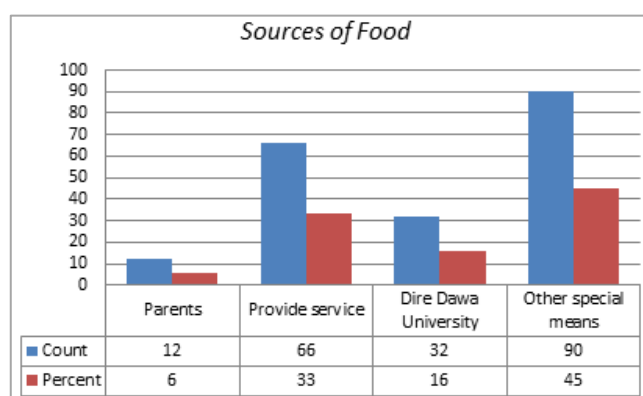

Figure 6. *Sources of food.*

In contrast, a significant portion of the children, 33%, reported obtaining food in exchange for providing various services to the community, amounting to 66 children. These children engage in informal labor, such as cleaning, carrying goods, or running errands, as a means to meet their basic needs. This finding reflects the reliance of street children on labor to secure food, aligning with research conducted by the Consortium for Street Children, which emphasizes how street children often provide small-scale services in urban areas as a survival strategy [13]. While these informal exchanges help mitigate hunger, they also expose children to potential exploitation and unsafe working conditions.

Additionally, about 16% of the surveyed children (32 children) indicated that they received food from Dire Dawa University, suggesting the institution's involvement in community outreach or charity programs aimed at assisting local street children. Many universities engage in social responsibility initiatives that include feeding programs or collaborations with local NGOs to support marginalized populations. A

report by UNESCO indicated that educational institutions in various countries are increasingly involved in addressing food security and child welfare through such initiatives [50].

The largest group, representing 45% of the children (90 children) relied on "other special means" to obtain food. This category likely encompasses irregular or informal sources, such as begging, scavenging, or receiving food from sympathetic individuals or street vendors. Children may find food in less structured environments by collecting food scraps or scavenging from waste bins. Studies by Human Rights Watch have documented that many street children resort to scavenging for food left over from restaurants or begging in marketplaces. This unpredictable and often unsafe access to food underscores the daily struggles street children face in securing nourishment.

4.8. Major Consequences Faced by Street Children

The challenges faced by street children are often more pronounced in specific regions, particularly in cities like *Dire Dawa*, Ethiopia, where economic hardship, social instability, and limited governmental resources exacerbate the situation. *Dire Dawa*, a major urban center with a growing population, has seen an increase in street children due to several factors, including poverty, family disintegration, and migration from rural areas and other regions of Ethiopia. The consequences outlined in the following discussion manifest with even greater severity in this context, as the city's resources and infrastructure struggle to cope with the needs of its most vulnerable populations. Below is a detailed discussion on how the general consequences of being street children are amplified within Dire Dawa based on the responses of the participants.

Physical Health Issues

Street children in Dire Dawa face extreme physical health challenges due to the lack of proper sanitation, poor access to healthcare, and malnutrition. According to a study by Save the Children Ethiopia, malnutrition rates among street children in Dire Dawa are alarmingly high, with many surviving on irregular and inadequate meals [44]. The city's limited healthcare infrastructure and overcrowded living conditions further contribute to the spread of diseases, including respiratory infections, waterborne diseases, and skin conditions.

Additionally, due to the high levels of poverty in the city, food scarcity is a major issue. Children living on the streets often resort to scavenging or performing small tasks for food, leading to malnutrition and other health-related problems. UNICEF also reported that street children in Dire Dawa rarely have access to proper medical treatment, making them vulnerable to untreated illnesses and infections [53].

Lack of Education in Dire Dawa

In Dire Dawa, access to education for street children is severely limited, as many children are forced to work or beg to survive. While the city has educational institutions, street

children often remain excluded due to the necessity of earning money for food or being unable to meet the requirements for school enrollment, such as uniforms or materials. A report by UNESCO indicated that in urban centers like Dire Dawa, street children frequently drop out of school or never attend due to their daily struggle for survival [49]. This has long-term implications for their future, as the lack of education perpetuates the cycle of poverty, rendering them unable to secure stable employment in adulthood.

Human Capital Theory suggests that education is critical for improving economic prospects, yet in Dire Dawa, the limited access to education severely hampers street children's ability to improve their future outcomes. The situation is compounded by the fact that many of these children migrate from rural areas, where they may have never attended school, leaving them illiterate and with few skills to survive.

Psychological and Emotional Trauma

The psychological and emotional toll on street children in Dire Dawa is profound, given the harsh realities of life on the streets. Many of these children have experienced family breakdowns, often due to extreme poverty, domestic violence, or the death of parents from diseases such as HIV/AIDS. The Human Rights Watch highlighted that street children in cities like Dire Dawa often suffer from emotional trauma resulting from abuse, exploitation, and constant exposure to violence [24].

Children in Dire Dawa are frequently subjected to mistreatment by local authorities or gangs, leading to increased anxiety, depression, and distrust of adults. The *Attachment Theory* by John Bowlby underscores the importance of a stable, nurturing environment for a child's emotional development [10]. Street children in Dire Dawa, however, are deprived of such stability, resulting in attachment issues, low self-esteem, and difficulties in forming trusting relationships.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is a significant issue among street children in Dire Dawa. As seen in many urban centers, children often turn to substances such as alcohol, glue, or khat (a stimulant widely used in Ethiopia) as a coping mechanism to deal with hunger, stress, and emotional trauma. A study conducted by Forum on Street Children Ethiopia found that substance abuse was prevalent among Dire Dawa's street children, particularly glue-sniffing, as it provides a temporary escape from the harsh realities of street life [18].

The *Self-Medication Theory* supports this behavior, as children use substances to dull their psychological pain [28]. Unfortunately, this leads to addiction and worsens their overall health, making it even harder for them to escape the cycle of street life. Substance abuse also increases the likelihood of risky behaviors, such as crime or unsafe sexual practices, further endangering the children's well-being.

Vulnerability to Exploitation and Abuse

Street children in Dire Dawa are at a high risk of exploitation and abuse. According to ECPAT International, street children in Ethiopian cities, including Dire Dawa, are often trafficked or forced into child labor due to their vulnerable status [15]. Many street children, lacking family support or legal documentation, are coerced into working in exploitative conditions or engaged in begging rings controlled by adults. Sexual exploitation is also a significant concern, with many girls being forced into prostitution as a means of survival.

Ecological Systems Theory explains how the lack of protective environments around street children makes them highly susceptible to such exploitation [11]. In Dire Dawa, where support systems are often stretched thin, these children remain on the margins, exposed to constant threats from traffickers, gangs, and exploitative employers.

Social Exclusion

In Dire Dawa, street children face social stigma and exclusion, being viewed as outcasts by mainstream society. A report by Save the Children found that the local community often perceives street children as criminals or nuisances, further isolating them from potential support networks [43]. This stigmatization prevents them from accessing essential services like healthcare or education, which are often biased against them.

The *Labeling Theory* posits that the labels imposed by society shape how individuals view themselves and behave. In Dire Dawa, street children internalize the negative labels attached to them, which diminishes their self-worth and perpetuates their exclusion from opportunities that could aid their reintegration into society.

Legal Issues and Criminalization

Street children in Dire Dawa frequently face criminalization for their survival activities, such as begging or petty theft. Law enforcement agencies often target these children, subjecting them to harassment or arrest. Amnesty International reported cases of street children being arbitrarily detained in Ethiopian cities, including Dire Dawa, without access to legal representation or rehabilitation programs [3]. This criminalization exacerbates their marginalization, as they are treated as criminals rather than victims of social neglect.

Strain Theory also highlighted how individuals, when deprived of legitimate means to achieve societal goals, may resort to deviant behavior [34]. In Dire Dawa, street children, facing overwhelming poverty and lack of support, are often forced into illegal activities to survive, resulting in a vicious cycle of criminalization and further exclusion.

Loss of Identity and Family Bonds

Many street children in Dire Dawa have lost contact with their families, either through abandonment, migration, or death. According to Plan International, a significant number of street children lack legal documentation, such as birth certificates, making it difficult for them to access public services or reconnect with their families. In the absence of identity papers, street children are left in a legal limbo, unable to prove their existence or claim their rights [39].

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory emphasizes the importance of identity formation during childhood and adolescence [16]. Street children in Dire Dawa, disconnected

from their families and lacking legal recognition, struggle with a sense of belonging and identity, making it difficult for them to envision a future beyond the streets.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study "From Home to the Streets: Identifying Factors Influencing Children's Vulnerability in Dire Dawa City Administration" highlights the critical challenges faced by street children in Dire Dawa. The findings show that a significant portion of these children are between 11-14 years of age, with a striking 80% being male. Education levels are concerning, with most children having only limited schooling. The origin of street children is diverse, with a large number coming from Oromia (42%), followed by Somali and Harari regions, indicating a mix of socio-economic, migration, and regional disparities driving the street child phenomenon.

In terms of residence, children are predominantly clustered in urban economic hubs, aligning with theories of marginalized populations seeking survival in areas with better access to resources and informal employment. The key causes of streetism include poverty, urbanization, family breakdown, and political instability, reinforcing the need for comprehensive interventions that address these root issues.

The children's means of living often involve precarious, informal activities such as begging and small-scale services, reflecting their exclusion from formal economic systems. Additionally, food insecurity is a major concern, with most children struggling to access regular meals, leading to heightened vulnerability.

The study concludes that addressing streetism in Dire Dawa requires a holistic approach, focusing on poverty alleviation, family support, education access, and targeted policies to combat the socio-economic conditions driving children to the streets. The complex interplay of these factors underscores the urgency of comprehensive and sustainable interventions to improve the lives of street children in the region.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations aim to provide actionable and sustainable solutions to address the challenges faced by street children in Dire Dawa City Administration:

1. *Expand Access to Education Programs*: Create inclusive and flexible education programs tailored for street children. These programs should focus on providing basic literacy, vocational training, and life skills. Special attention should be given to children aged 11-14, who represent a critical group for intervention. Collaboration with local schools, NGOs, and community organizations can help to integrate street children back into formal education and reduce their vulnerability.

2. *Strengthen Family Support Systems*: Addressing family breakdown and dysfunction is crucial to preventing children from ending up on the streets. Establish family counseling and support centers that provide services such as conflict resolution, financial management training, and access to social welfare programs. These centers should be designed to empower families, offering parental support to ensure children remain in stable homes.

3. *Implement Economic Empowerment Programs*: Poverty and economic instability are primary drivers of streetism. Introduce community-based income-generating projects that offer sustainable livelihoods for the families of street children. Programs like microfinance, skills training, and entrepreneurship development can help alleviate poverty and reduce the economic pressure that forces children to live and work on the streets.

4. *Improve Food Security Initiatives*: Street children experience severe food insecurity. Establish consistent and reliable feeding programs through partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, and charities. Dire Dawa University and other community stakeholders can play a central role by coordinating meal distributions and ensuring street children have access to nutritious food on a regular basis.

5. *Create Safe Spaces and Shelter Programs*: To protect street children from exploitation, abuse, and other dangers, the government and NGOs should develop safe spaces and temporary shelters. These shelters should not only provide safety and basic needs but also offer psychological support, healthcare services, and opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

6. *Enhance Social Protection and Legal Support*: Develop and strengthen legal frameworks that protect street children from abuse, trafficking, and criminalization. Street children should be recognized as a vulnerable group requiring protection and advocacy. Legal aid, child protection services, and law enforcement agencies need to work together to ensure street children's rights are respected and upheld.

7. *Facilitate Urban Planning and Inclusive Development*: Urbanization and migration patterns suggest that street children are concentrated in areas with informal economies. To better integrate marginalized populations into the urban environment, local authorities should adopt inclusive urban planning strategies that create economic opportunities and social services in areas like Keffira Market, Coka & Dil Chora areas, and other hubs. Urban planning should prioritize affordable housing, health services, and employment opportunities for low-income families.

8. *Promote Gender-Sensitive Interventions*: Given the gender imbalance, with 80% of street children being male, there is a need for gender-specific interventions. Programs should address the unique needs of boys on

the streets, while also being inclusive of girls, who may face different forms of exploitation or vulnerability. Gender-sensitive counseling, education, and social services can help bridge this gap.

9. *Address Migration and Regional Disparities*: The large number of street children originating from Oromia, Somali, and Harari regions suggests the need for regional interventions that address socio-economic and political instability. Strengthen collaboration with these regions to implement prevention strategies, including poverty reduction, conflict resolution, and rural development initiatives to reduce the flow of children migrating to urban areas like Dire Dawa.

10. *Monitor and Evaluate Interventions*: Establish a system for continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs aimed at supporting street children. Regular assessments will help measure the impact of interventions and allow for adjustments to ensure long-term success. Collaborating with research institutions and local communities can ensure that interventions are data-driven and responsive to changing needs.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders in Dire Dawa can work toward breaking the cycle of streetism and providing street children with the support and opportunities they need to build a brighter future.

Abbreviations

ECPAT	End Child Prostitution and Trafficking
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
LSAAoDDCA	Labor and Social Affairs Agency of Dire Dawa city Administration
MoLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
SNNP	Southern Nations and Nationality People
SCUK	Save the Children United Kingdom

Author Contributions

Tatek Hailu is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Research Field

Tatek Hailu: Urban Sociology and Community Dynamics, Housing Stability and Homelessness Solutions, Urban Design and Public Space Usage, Economic Mobility and Housing Affordability, Social Networks and Support Systems, Environmental Impact of Urban Living, Mental Health in Urban Settings, Transportation Access and Urban Development, Public Policy and Housing Initiatives, Refugee Integration in Urban Environments.