



**Assessing Street Connected Children Reunification Programs: The Case of  
Three Selected Organizations in Addis Ababa**

**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa  
University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of  
Science in Social Work**

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**May 2025**

## Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis entitled “**Assessing Street Connected Children Reunification Programs: The Case of Three Selected Organizations in Addis Ababa**” is my own original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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**Statement of Certificate**

This is to certify that Silas Samuel has completed his thesis entitled “**Assessing Street Connected Children Reunification Programs: The Case of Three Selected Organizations in Addis Ababa**” is his original work and is submitted for examination with my approval as a thesis.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled, “**Assessing Street Connected Children Reunification Programs: The Case of Three Selected Organizations in Addis Ababa**” was carried out by Silas Samuel under the supervision of Comdr. Demelash Kassaye, (Ph. D) submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work complies with the regulations of the University.

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## **Abstract**

*The need to find a better solution for supporting children on the street is a very demanding situation in the world. Street life has been a very challenging situation for Ethiopia and many other countries for the past many years. This assessment of the program (reunification) was done to shed light on the gaps of the program and look for a better solution for the best interest of a child. In the meantime, to prompt and encourage all the best parts of the program. In order to do that the three selected organisations provided all the needed gaps and advantages of the program. Which could be helpful to find a better solution for combating street life. By involving in depth interviews, key informant interviews and other data collecting methods, the assessment did its best to identify numerous issues, such as experiences and understandings of professionals, children and families using the program. In addition to that, all gaps and needs in the program are evaluated. The program provides different service that could help children be in a better life, the provided services are really good for the children but the problem is that the services does not continue once the children left the transition centre. Which causes the gaps of the program, children live a better/safe life for three months and go back to their "normal life". The program never addressed the cause for children to leave home, when the causes are not addressed children lose their interest to go back to their homes and families. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing root causes and ensuring post-reunification support for sustainable outcomes. This assessment contributes valuable insight into the effectiveness of reunification programs and underscores the need for long-term, child-centred strategies to end the cycle of street life of children.*

**Keywords:** street connected children, reunification, program assessment, organizations intervention, Addis Ababa

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## **Acronyms**

BSRDA:	Bright Star Relief and Development Association
CSC:	Consortium for Street Children
CEDAG:	Child and Environmental Development Association, The Gambia
ICCU:	Initiative for Community Concern, Uganda
SASCU:	Save Street Children, Uganda
S.A.L.V.E.	Support And Love Via Education International, Uganda
IDI:	In-depth Interview
KII:	Key Informant Interview
MYM:	Make Your Mark
MOWSA:	Ministry of Women and Social Affairs
NGOS:	Non-Government Organizations

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Street connected children are children who migrate from their origin or leave their home to live on the street because of different reasons. This reasons maybe extreme poverty, domestic abuse, torture, rape, and abandonment... etc. In recent years, an alarming percentage of children live in or have experienced conditions which are worldwide recognized as per - disposing factors to street life involvement. (R Calam, 2020).

Street connected children face a lot of problems while living on the street. Some of the most pressing challenges street connected children face include difficulties in maintaining basic health and accessing health services, violence and abuse, access for clean and health food and dangerous working conditions. (Tyler, 2018)

Today, tens of millions of children are living or working on the world's streets (Jeanette, 2016). Their numbers keep growing due to population growth, intensifying urbanisation and migration, particularly in the developing world, amongst others. (Montgomery, 2017). Although it had been said a lot about street connected children, it is really hard to describe their typical nature due to their uniqueness. Some of these children spend most of their day time on the street and went back home at night to their families and the others live on the street full time (Newman et al, 2015).

The phenomena of street connected children for Ethiopia is not new as well, since Ethiopia is considered as one of the developing countries, its urban areas are becoming destinations for street connected children. Their flow to the cities of Ethiopia could be caused

as a result of various reasons, which include poverty, rural urban migration, parental neglect, conflict, different forms of abuse (problems at home) and peer pressure (Poluha, 2005).

In order to provide solution for this social problem, the government of Ethiopia took an initiative of launching a program called reunification in collaboration with non- profit private organizations. Based on this call many NGOs started to include reunification as part of their programs, in agreement that all NGOs would conduct reunification following the procedures of the alternative child care directive which is designed by the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWA, 2009).

Street connected children reunification is an intervention program designed to rehabilitate and reunite orphans or other vulnerable children separated from their biological families or relatives. It aimed to bring back children who are living on the streets into a safe and stable family settings. In addition to that street connected children reunification aimed to address any underlying issues that led to the child's street life, such as poverty, domestic violence and conflict (Nilsson, 2013).

Studies show that intervention programs like street connected children reunification are very important to solve social problems, in the meantime most literatures also agree that it is crucial to assess their effectiveness in achieving successful outcomes. Even though street connected children reunification has been implemented throughout the country for a while, currently little is known about the effectiveness of street connected children reunification (Garrette, Phelps, & Sibony, 2018). So, this study assessed the effectiveness of street connected children reunification within three selected organizations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Internationally, mostly in countries considered as developed, a large number of studies have been done on different aspects of street connected children's situations. Out of this studies Sarfraz Ahmed (2018) conducted a study on street connected children and its impact. In this study the author discussed the numerous risks street connected child face while living on the street and its physical, economic and social impacts on society (Sarfraz, 2018).

Research conducted by Amanda Friberg and Viktoria Martinsson (2017) on problems and solutions when dealing with street children: argue that there are a lot of pull factors that attract children for street life. This study discusses that children are attracted to street life assuming that they will get a lot of money out of begging, a lot of freedom on the street and great life in a pretty city. The study also recommended a solution on helping street connected children by focusing on family based work and preventive interventions (Friberg, A., & Martinsson, V., 2017).

Similarly, another research was done by CEDAG, CSC, ICCU, SASCU and S.A.L.V.E (2017) on family reunification and the rights of street connected children in Uganda. On this study the authors argue that family reunification is often the most preferred option but it's not the best interest of every child to be reunited to their family. It continues its argument by saying government, non-profit organizations and other stakeholders should not perform 'blanket' family reunification for every street connected children (CSC, 2017).

In Ethiopia, Dinaol Urgessa and Getachew Abeshu (2023) conducted a study on the well-being and resilience among street connected children of south-western Ethiopia. This study examined street connected children state of survival, wellbeing and resilience. The

result of the study concluded that street connected children have a weak psychosocial well-being and a bad resilience that compromised them for anxiety (Urgessa Gita, D., & Abeshu Dissasa, G, 2023).

Birhanu Bogale (2015) conducted research on exploring policy framework for street connected children's interventions. This study emphasizes that child streetism has been recognized as a social problem in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia since 1974. The study argues that even though a lot of non-government organization planned different interventions to solve this social problem, the government of Ethiopia was not full expected to provide all the needed services to solve child streetism. Rather, the government was more involved in making sure the services/interventions are accessible and delivered as per the government standards. The study concluded its argument by saying, even though the role of the government created a favourable situation on the implementation of the interventions, there is insufficient policy regarding street connected children (Birhanu, B. 2015).

Other than the research's mentioned above, there are a lot more researches done on different topics of street connected children but there is only one research done related or closer to the topic of this research in Ethiopia. This research is done by Kasim Aman (2021) on the challenges and opportunities to reunify street connected children with their families: in the case of Asella love for children organization. The finding on this study showed the numerous challenges in the reunification process of street connected children. The study indicated that most challenges of street connected children reunification occurred while trying to reunify children in broken families (Tola, K. A., Doja, H., & Fufa, B. 2021).

On the contrary, the study indicated that there are also opportunities in street connected children reunification. The finding showed that the existence of alive, welcoming

and committed families who are able to provide all the needed support after the return of a child was the biggest opportunity in street connected children reunification (Tola, K. A., Doja, H., & Fufa, B. 2021).

Thought all the above studies and many more made their debates regarding street connected children, the central point of this studies was on identifying the cause and the different impacts of children streetism. Few studies regarding street connected children reunification was done in different part of the world but this study does not represent the context of street connected children reunification in Ethiopia. In Ethiopian there was only two studies conducted on street connected children reunification. These studies focused on the challenges and opportunities of street connected children reunification (Tola, K. A., Doja, H., & Fufa, B. 2021). There was no study that focused on assessing the effectiveness of street connected children reunification in the context of Ethiopia. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of street connected children reunification in three selected organizations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

### **1.3 Objectives**

#### **1.3.1 General Objective**

To assess the program of street connected children reintegration and its sustainability around three selected organisations that work on reintegration.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objective**

The specific objectives of the study are to;

- a. Explore the experiences of implementers in conducting street connected children reunification

- b. Assess the experiences of street connected children's families in receiving the reunification service.
- c. Assess the experiences of street connected children in receiving the reunification service.
- d. Assess the sustainability of street connected children reunification.

#### **1.4 Research Question**

- a. What are the experiences of implementers in conducting street connected children reunification?
- b. What are the experiences of street connected children's families in receiving the reunification service?
- c. What are the experiences of street connected children in receiving the reunification service?
- d. How sustainable is street connected children reunification?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

As the aim of the study is to assess the effectiveness of street connected children in three selected organizations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This study will provide significant insight for concerning parties like: NGOs, governments bodies, communities, and families to see if street connected children reunification is bringing any difference in the lives of street connected children and their families.

Based on the results of the study, the study will help the organizations running street connected children reunification to adjust the reunification program according to the findings and the recommendations of the study.

## 1.6 Scope of the Study

Geographically, the study was limited to three selected organization located in Addis Ababa. The three organizations involved in the study are Make Your Mark, Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre and Bright Star and Development Association. The study focused on exploring street connected children's families, implementers and street connected children experiences of male street connected children reunification.

## 1.7 Operational definitions

**Street connected children:** “refers to children who depend on the streets to live and/or work, whether alone, with peers or with family” (CSC, 2020). For the purpose of this study, street connected children is defined as male children who left home because of different reason and lived their life on the street permanently.

**Street connected children reunification:** “refers to the process of reuniting children who are living or working on the streets with their families or a suitable alternative caregiver” (Schulz, R. 2016). For the purpose of this study, street connected children reunification is defined as a rehabilitative intervention of reuniting street-connected children with their families or other appropriate caregivers so that they grow-up in a safe and stable environment.

## 1.8 Limitation of the study

The researcher was only limited to conduct the study in three organization because of time and budget constraints, which might cause the findings to be inconclusive. In addition to this, language barriers made communication hard for the researcher. Since Amharic was not the first language for some of the in-depth- interviews respondents.

## **1.9 Organization of the study**

This research is organised into five chapters. The first chapter is the introductory part which traces the background of the study, statement of the problem, research question, objectives, significance of the study, scope of the study, operational definition, limitation of the study and organization of the study. Chapter two presents a review of related literature. Chapter three, research methodology and design. Chapter four, presentation and analysis of the collected empirical information generated from study participants were presented and finally, chapter five presents discussion, conclusion and recommendation of the study.

## Chapter Two: Review of Related Literatures

### 2.1 Street connected children reality

Finding children living on the street is becoming common. In order to fulfil their needs, children tend to engage in different activities. These children engage in different activities to make their living but some of these activities are good and some are not. They use the money they got from different activities to buy food but most children on the street are also witnessed sniffing glue, smoking, and gambling. (Adewale Adegoke, 2013).

These children on the street show the significant concern of the generation's complex that urban reality brought all over the world. (Wright, 2018). This day's street connected children are all over the world practically in the cities and towns of every country. In some places the occurrence of children on the street might be a daily routine. (Dabir, 2014)

Street connected children age range from 7 to 18 years old are witnessed as they have lost meaningful contact with reality and have serious drug or alcohol dependency that involves criminality and a way of life that centres on the urban street culture (Juddy, 2018). For an unknown number of street connected children, streets become their home while street life becomes their culture and society. The exact number of street connected children in the world is not known because of difficulties in tracking their number due to the inconsistent definitions and categorizations of these children (Magazine, 2016).

There are several causes for children to live on the street, many children end up on the streets due to unstable or abusive family environments, where issues like substance abuse, neglect, or domestic violence are prevalent. Some children may run away from home to escape

these challenging circumstances. Similarly, economic hardship force children to live on the street due to lack of access to education, healthcare, and shelter (CSC, 2020)

## **2.2 Interventions to Address Streetism**

Intervention, particularly in social work refers to the actions and strategies employed by social workers or other stakeholders to address and alleviate social problems and facilitate positive change in individuals, families, groups, and communities. It involves identifying and assessing the needs and strengths of individuals and systems, and subsequently implementing targeted and evidence-based interventions to address those needs and strengths. These interventions may include counselling, therapy, advocacy, case management, community development, policy analysis, and various forms of direct assistance or support. The ultimate goal of intervention in social work is to enhance the well-being and functioning of individuals, families, and communities, while also promoting social justice and addressing systemic issues that contribute to social problems (Jeremy Sutton, 2024).

In regard to addressing the problems of street connected children, different intervention programs have been implemented all over the world. Particularly, the government of Ethiopia, NGOs and different concerned stakeholders tried to put a lot of effort to solve the problems of street connected children. According to a study conducted by Selamawit Tesfaye (2024) when a child is separated/deprived from his/her family because of different reasons, the government entitled a child to receive special protection and assistance through alternative care from organizations that made the first contact with the child. (Tefaye, S, 2024). According to the alternative child care directive (2023), it is possible to help children in need by using the alternative child care strategies. These alternative child care strategies

are reunification, reintegration, community-based child care, foster care, adoption and institutional care (MoWSA, 2023).

### **2.3 Definition of Street Connected Children Reunification**

Street-connected children reunification could be given a different definition in different contexts but simple and in relation to this research topic, street connected children reunification refers to rehabilitative intervention of bringing together street-connected children with their families or other appropriate caregivers from whom they have become separated. It involves locating and identifying the children's families or caregivers, assessing their capacity to provide for the children's needs and ensure their safety, and facilitating the necessary steps to reunite them (Hannah Owens, L., & Amy Marschall, P, 2024).

Reunification aims to provide street-connected children with a stable and supportive environment, ensuring their well-being and reducing their vulnerability to the risks associated with living on the streets. It provides the possibility of long-term stability by addressing the root causes that led to their homelessness, such as poverty, addiction, or domestic issues. In addition to this, street connected children can regain their place within their family and community. This allows them to develop social connections, build relationships, and learn appropriate social behaviours (MoWSA, 2023).

### **2.4 Policy and legal frame work for street connected children**

#### **2.4.1 Worldwide Policies and guidelines**

Several international treaties and conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provide a legal foundation for protecting street connected children's rights. National policies vary widely, with some countries implementing integrated

child welfare systems, while others may focus primarily on law enforcement approaches (CRC, 1989).

Children who are abandoned and separated from their families or care givers are given the right to be protected by the international human right law. Children in this situation need an immediate protection and assistance because they are at risk of sexual exploitation, trafficking, abuse, rape and many others (UNICEF, 2022). According to Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 20 (2) children that has been separated from their families temporarily or permanently have the rights of getting alternative care. As defined by CRC Article20(3) alternative care is a provision of finding children a foster family, adoptive families or placement of children in institutional care until they get a permanent solution (CRC, 1989).

According to Ennew (1994) to improve the lives of street children, policymakers have considered enhancing collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations to create a comprehensive support network. Based on this policymaker developed awareness campaigns to educate the public on the challenges street connected children faced and promoted a culture of acceptance and support. Even though creating awareness was very important, allocate resources for research and data collection have a huge advantage in understand the demographics and needs of street connected children, facilitating more targeted interventions as well (Ennew, J, 1994).

#### **2.4.2 National policies**

In Ethiopia, there is no child law which is compiled as a form of Child Act or proclamation. However, there are few specific policies that was made to address the different issues of children in Ethiopia. The first-of-its-kind policy document that Ethiopia lunched

was the Ethiopian National Plan of Action for Children and Women, which was put in place in 1995 and the policy implantation period started on 1996 and ended on 2000 (Tola, K. A., Doja, H., & Fufa, B. 2021).

In the year between 2000 to 2002 the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs conducted an assessment on the Ethiopian National Plan of Action for Children and Women, the findings of the assessment indicated a lot of drawbacks on the plan action. Which cause the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs to developed another plan action called the Ethiopian National Plan of Action for Children. This action plan gave its full attention for children, in excluding women from the action plan (MoWCY, 2003).

In 2003, this plan of action started its implantation with focusing on four thematic areas. These thematic areas came to use based on the agreement set on by the United Nation special session on children, which was held on May 2002. These thematic areas are: Combating HIV/AIDS, providing quality education, promoting healthy living, exploitation and violence, and protecting children against abuse (MoWCY, 2003).

The National plan action (NPA) developed strategies that mainly focus on combating problems that come as the result of HIV/AIDS, the strategy also works towards preventing HIV/AIDS by awareness creation and in supporting faith-based organizations, NGOs, schools and CBOs to facilitate education on HIV/AIDS. Even though the NPA addressed a lot of social problems back then, its strategies are very limited to address the current problems of street connected children/orphans (NPA, 2020).

In 1996 the government of Ethiopia lunched the developmental and social welfare policy. This policy aimed to address the right of children. This policy focused on addressing

family issues, as best family arrangement is very crucial for right upbringings of a child. This policy was also determined to empower communities to get access to personal and institutional services to solve social problems of communities (Bogale, B, 2015).

National guide on five alternative childcare was developed by the Child, Family and Affairs in August, 2001. These five alternative childcares focused on Child reunification, foster family, adoption, community-based programs and institutional care. The guideline was made according to the five programs that was designed by CRC to support orphans. The five CRC program gave its full focus on providing support for abandoned children, orphans and children in difficult circumstances. Other than all of the national policies motioned above, the family law and the 1995 FDRE constitution contain the different situations of children (Ethiopian Constitution, 1995). Since Ethiopia also ratified Article 36 (5) of the UN Convention on the Rights of children, it forces the state to provide special protection to children in need. In addition to this, Article (225,226, and 228) of the revised family code of Ethiopia included the right of children that states, children must be cared and grow-up in a safe and stable family settings unless the child biological parents are not able to provide care for the child properly. When parents are not able to provide care for the children or if parents are deceased, the family code give priority for relatives to provide care for the child.

Recently, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs developed a revised guideline for the alternative child care. This guideline was designed based on the standards and principles of the CRC. This guideline was developed in 2023 and started its implementation in the middle year of 2024 (MoWSA, 2023).

## **2.5 Steps in Reunification**

Reunification is an intervention program that requires a lot of steps to implement. Commonly, the process involves pre-reunification, reunification and post reunification phases for the successful placement of street connected children. According to Tolfree (2004) there are five stages of reunification. He listed the stages with their purposes, stage one was about locating children who has lost/get separated from their families. The second stage is about interviewing the child about the cause of separation and identifying their need based on their future aspiration. On the third stage, case workers start to trace or locate a potential family or relative that could provide care for the child. Stage four is placement and finally stage five is about monitoring the success of the reunification (Tolfree, D, 2004).

According to the Alternative Child Care Directive (2023) street connected children reunification is very a complicated support system that requires very high human and financial resource for the best outcomes of the program (MoWSA, 2023).

### **Pre-reunification phase**

Reunifying street connected children with their families is a multifaceted process that requires careful planning and execution. The pre-phase effort in reunifications is crucial, as it lays the groundwork for successful reunification. This stage, requires various stakeholders to conduct adequate assessment on the needs of the children, understand their circumstances, and build trust within the community to facilitate a smoother transition back to family life (Coble A, 2024).

Understanding the unique needs and circumstances of each child is essential for effective reunification. This assessment process includes: psychological evaluations to identify trauma, mental health issues, or educational gaps and evaluating the child's

immediate needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education, as well as long-term needs are fulfilled for stability and support (Lovering N, 2024).

### **Reunification Phase**

This phase is often part of a broader strategy to support street children, providing them with the opportunity to rebuild their lives in a secure and nurturing environment. It is very crucial to keep the interest of both the child and families for the successful outcomes of the reunification. It might be simply easy to take a child to their families but sometime children or families refuse to accept the reunification. There might be different reasons for the refusal of the reunification, these reasons might include: financial situation or family conflicts (Trust, S. B, 2023).

So, during the reunification, community support plays a significant role in the reunification process. Community awareness and involvement on the reunification program can help reduce stigma associated with street connected children. Community-based initiatives can also provide additional resources and support networks that facilitate smoother transitions for reunited families (Embleton, L., Shah, P., Amin Gayapersad, A., Kiptui, R., Ayuku, D., & Braitstein, P, 2020).

### **Post reunification phase (Follow-up)**

This phase is very important because, this phase not only focuses on physical reunification but also emphasizes emotional, psychological, and social support to ensure long-term stability and well-being for street connected children. Monitoring the well-Being of street connected children after reunification helps the case worker to understand if child's living environment is safe and supportive or not. Regular check-ins can helps to assess their mental and physical health status and their ability to resettle with family or caregivers (Bellamy, J. L, 2008).

The post reunification phase/ follow-up also includes provision of resources and training for families to better understand and support the unique needs of their children. This can include counseling services, parenting workshops, and educating families about trauma-informed care. The reunification follow-up phase for street connected children is essential for fostering a sustainable transition back into society. By prioritizing their emotional and psychological needs, providing educational opportunities, and creating strong support systems (Hannah Owens, L., & Amy Marschall, P, 2024).

## **2.6 Challenges of reunification**

According to research conducted by Kasim (2021), after a child is reunified, financial needs go up as one additional member has joined a household. Usually, at first care givers/parents seems to be doing fine financially. However, as time goes by, parents start to face a lot of challenges in providing the basic needs of children. Reunified children parent shared that due to low quality and content of reunification preparation by reunification providing organizations, families had a really hard time adjusting to the new change of receiving a child that disappeared while ago. Similarly, in some families the cause for children to leave home initially was poverty. Families indicated that, they have received children without addressing the initial cause for the child disappearance (Tola, K. A., Doja, H., & Fufa, B. 2021).

According to research conducted by ISS/IRC Ethiopia (2008) indicated that, one of the biggest challenges of reunification is the gap in monitoring system and process of the program. The monitoring system does not have any measures to support and empower the family's socio-economical needs after the reunification of children, which became a cause for failure of the program (ISS/IRC Ethiopia, 2008).

Findings from research conducted by Mahderehiwot (2014) indicated that exposure to street life by itself has an adverse effect on the success of street connected children reunification. The experiences children go through on the street affect the outcomes of the reunification. The research also indicated that addiction by itself caused children to go back to the street after reunification (Gita, D. U., Disassa, G. A., & Worku, B. N, 2014).

## **2.7 Opportunities for successful reunification**

According to Kasim (2021) the fact that are NGOs implementing reunification should be considered as an opportunity. Facilitating and supporting the needs of street connected children by reunifying them to their parents is an asset for beneficiaries who are in need. On the other hand, the existence of government body that involved in supporting street connected is also considered as an opportunity for a successful reunification (Tola, K. A., Doja, H., & Fufa, B. 2021).

The role of families also has a significant impact on the opportunities for the successful reunification. When families take the role of supporting their children to reintegrate within the community, school, and their home easily, that helps the children to stay in their home forever. In the meantime, the families of children who were exposed to street life should look after their child and follow-up for the best outcomes of the reunification (Teixeira, D. N., Narciso, I., & Henriques, M. R, 2022).

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Design**

### **3.1 Research Methodology**

According to the nature of the study, descriptive qualitative approach is found to be preferable and believed to be helpful for the better achievement of the research. According to Kaiszk (2021) this technique can help the researcher bring perception beyond understanding, response, explanation and bring the freedom to detect, record, and clarify crucial points. (Kaiszk, 2021, 14).

In the meantime, qualitative research allows respondents to impart their knowledge and opinion without any limitations (Tenny, S, 2022). This method used In-depth interview, key informant interview and discussion as primary data collection. In addition, secondary data were collected from the organization's relevant documents and sources such as organisational reports and assessments. This data helped to triangulate.

### **3.2 Organization Selection**

This research was conducted in three different organizations. As this research work is about assessing the effectiveness of street connected children reunification the researcher believed that these organizations will be the best place for conducting this research. This organizations have more than ten years of experience in reunifying children with their families and they are considered as one of the active organizations on conducting reunification at the moment.

The selected sites for the assessment are as follows; Make your Mark, Brightstar and Kolfe Orphanage. Make you Mark and Brightstar was chosen for this study because of their willingness to open their organization for the study as soon as the request was made and due

to their relevance to the research topic, accessibility to key participants, and the presence of active programs related to street-connected children, which allowed for the collection of rich and meaningful data. Kolfe Orphanage was chosen because it's the only government organization that does reunification for male street connected children in Addis Ababa.

All of the organizations are located in Addis Ababa. Two of the organizations are non-government organizations and one of the organizations is a government owned organization. These three organizations may have different programs but for the purpose of this research, the researcher will only discuss the reunification program, which is relevant with this research work (Topic).

### **3.3 Method of data collection and data collection tools**

The primary data was collected from in-depth interviews from street connected children's families, the key informant interview was conducted with organization workers and discussion was conducted with street connected children found in Brightstar temporary shelter. The data from document review was collected from internal document that supported triangulating data. This included internal reports of the organization.

The researcher believed that useful data can be collected from interview (IDI and KII), discussion and document review. The interview used unstructured interview questions for IDI and semi structured for KII; this interview style helped the researcher to establish rapport and comfort with participants and it was also extremely helpful when discussing sensitive topics.

### **3.3.1 Interviews**

In total, the researcher conducted 61 interviews with street connected children's families and key informants from the three selected organizations (MYM, BSRDA, and Kolfe Orphanage).

The researcher was able to prepare two interview guides. The first one was a guide for unstructured in-depth interviews with families who have experienced the reunification program. The second one is a guide for semi-structured key informant interviews with the three selected organizations professional workers. The professionals who were involved in the interviews are; Social workers, program managers and directors.

The interview was conducted in different locations. Some of the interviews were conducted through a phone call, since some of the respondents lived far in the countryside. Interviews with a phone call took 25-35 minutes and physical interviews took 35-40 minutes. After the interviews was done, I organized and summarized the data collected to be transcribed and translated to English.

### **3.3.2. In-depth interview with Street Connected Children Families**

Fifty-two in-depth interviews were conducted. From the fifty-two in-depth interviews, ten of them were single parents (3 male and 7 women) and forty-two were married couples (22 female and 20 male). Two of the families were supportive of polygamy marriage. So, in two cases (families) there were two wives present. In total 29 female and 23 males were part of the in-depth interview.

The in-depth interview was conducted as a joint interview for the married couples. The researcher decided this because, the researcher believed that complete data will be

produced as interviewees fill in each other's gaps and memory lapses. According to Edgell (1980) joint interview helps to “disclose different kind of knowledge held by each person” (Edgell, 1980).

In addition to that, the researcher in his previous work was able to observed lack of comfort in married women while conducting interviews. Similarly, few husbands were not really happy for their wives to be interviewed by a man, especially in Muslim communities.

Therefore, to keep the freedom of respondents and the quality of the research, The researcher chose to conduct joint interview, where everybody was happy and comfortable. Using this technique helped to collect data equally, since both of their experiences were very crucial for the best outcomes of the research.

Louisa Polak and Judith Green argue that joint interviews are widely used in research question with phenomenon that is empirically a shared one, like responding to experience of reunification and also used to help explicate what is often tacit knowledge (Story telling). (Polak, L., & Green, J., 2016). Which almost all respondent did.

***Participants demographic representation:*** The following table explains the demographic status of street connected children’s families.

Characteristics	Categories	Number	Percent
Age	25-30	18	35%
	31-35	12	23%
	36-40	3	6%
	41-45	3	6%
	46-50	2	4%
	51-55	5	9%
	56-60	3	6%

	61-65	5	9%
	66-70	1	2%
Gender	Male	23	44%
	Female	29	56%
Educational status	None	22	42%
	Basic	6	11%
	Grade1	10	19%
	Grade-6	7	14%
	Grade-7	4	8%
	Grade-9 Grade-11 Grade 12 Above	3	6%
Ethnicity	Amhara	10	19%
	Afar	4	8%
	Guraghie	8	15%
	Oromo	8	15%
	Sidama	2	4%
	Tigrie	4	8%
	Wolita	16	31%
Religion	Ortodox	16	31%
	Muslim	22	42%
	Protestant	14	27%
Marital Status	Divorced	10	19%
	Married	42	81%
Employment	Employed	12	23%
	Unemployed	27	52%
	Precarious employment/unstable employment	13	25%

**Table 1 Demographic Representation of In-depth Interview Respondents**

*Street connected children location of reunification:* The table below explains the areas of where street connected children were reunified.

Location of reunification	Number of Children	Form of Interview
Addis Ababa	3	In person
Awash Arba	1	Phone call
Ambo	4	In person
Bekoji	1	Phone call
Debre Sina	3	Phone call
Jimma Zone, Omo Nada	2	In person
Negele, Wadera town, Near Tofiq Mosque	2	Phone call
Weliso	4	In person
Welkite	2	In person
Welita Sodo/Kindo/Bedesa	4	Phone call
Shashemene/ Aje and Bura	2	In person
Ziway/ Near Prison Center	2	In person

**Table 2 Reunification location of children**

### 3.3.3 Key Informant interviews with Make Your Mark, Brightstar and Kolfe orphanage

The key informant interview was conducted with the three selected organization professional workers. These professionals were chosen because they have unique knowledge on the design and implementation of the street connected children reunification. So, the respondents for the key informant interview are social workers, program managers and directors of the organization.

The social workers are responsible for implementing the reunification program, the program managers are responsible for the design of the program and directors are responsible in the supervision of the program. Based on their experience and deep knowledge of the reunification program, the researcher believed that this people would be the ideal respondents to collect a good data. Three social workers, three program managers and three directors were

involved in the key informant interview from each organization. In total, nine key informant interview was conducted.

No	Sex	Position	Organization	Experience on reunification	Level of qualification	Code
1	M	Social worker	BSRDA	5 Years	BA in Social Work	KI1
2	F	Social Worker	MYM	7 Years	BA in Social Work	KI2
3	M	Social Worker	Kolfe Orphanage	3 Years	BA in Sociology	KI3
4	M	Program Manager	BS-RDA	8 Years	MBA	KI4
5	M	Program Manager	MYM	10 Years	PhD Candidate	KI5
6	M	Program Manager	Kolfe Orphanage	8 Years	BA in Management	KI6
7	M	Director	MYM	13 Years	MA in Human Resource Management	KI7
8	M	Director	BS-RDA	16 Years	MA in Program Management	KI8
9	M	Director	Kolfe Orphanage	10 years	BA in Management	KI9

**Table 3 Demographic Representation of Key Informants**

### 3.3.4 Discussion with street connected children in Brightstar

Group discussion was conducted with street connected children who are stationed in Brightstar shelter. The children who were picked for the discussion are believed to add a great value in the topic of the discussion.

The children were chosen based on their background, specifically children who had the experience of the reunification program. The chosen children had been reunified to their families by Brightstar but they came back to the street after the reunification. After their

return the organization, put them in their shelter until they get another alternative care that could solve their situation.

According to the social worker of Brightstar, it is impossible to conclude that the others who were not chosen for the discussion were never been reunified before. Usually, most street connected children hide this information because they assume that they would be disqualified from the reunification program if they disclose that they had been reunified before.

The social workers were able to shortlist 12 children who had been reunified with families before coming back to the street and who were also willing to participate in the discussion. Even though the reunification was done by other organizations, they had an experience of the reunification program which could be an amazing input for the discussion portion of the study. After the selection was done, the researcher prepared a discussion question that could be used for generating a relevant finding to the study.

### **3.3.7 Document Review**

Available documents and program reports at all sites were reviewed. Reports that describe the reunification process and all of the challenges were evaluated. The document review provided a preview of the program from the beginning to termination of beneficiaries, which helped to identify the gaps that were shared by the respondent. The document review was one of the best ways to triangulate the whole information that was collected.

### **3.4 Sampling/Sample Size / Selection of the respondents**

The researcher used a sampling procedure known as non-probability sampling procedure and specifically a technique called purposeful sampling. According to Crossman

(2018) this is where the samples are selected based on characteristics of the objective from the study also from the population. It is where the researcher purposely chooses subjects who, in his opinion, are relevant to this project. According to Creswell (2012) this sampling is helpful to find individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, J. W, 2012).

Initially, the three selected organizations helped the researcher to connect with 74 street connected children's families who had received the service based on their availability (families who are still in contact with the organizations). After the researcher connect with 74 potential candidates, the study used two selection criteria according to the purpose of the study: (1) Children/families that receive the service within six month's timeframes and (2) Children who completed the whole program

The first criteria was needed because, recent data is believed to generate accurate and reliable information for studies. In addition to that recent data is believed to show the current situation/context of street connected children reunification. The second criteria was needed because, in conducting a study on assessment of street connected children reunification, the researcher believe that a full picture of the reunification program should be presented. In order to do that, the research had to use children who stayed in the program fully. Which helped to see the whole aspects of the reunification program.

From the 74 candidates, 14 didn't meet both of the criteria that was put on by the study. 6 candidates from the 74 were never interested to be part of the study. Finally, 54 were selected as a respondent for the study but 2 of the respondents stopped answering to a phone call that was made by the researcher. Which made the researcher finalize the study with 52 respondents.

Respondents for KII were the social workers, program managers and director of the organization. According to Patton (2002) this sampling is helpful for finding and picking information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. The chosen professionals have depth knowledge of the street connected children reunification.

### **3.5 Methods of data analysis**

As the approach of the research is qualitative, the researcher believed that this research would be productive using a qualitative method of data analysis. As suggested by John Mongan, Kindler, Noah Suojanen & Eric Giguère (2018) the data obtained through interviews was analysed by thematic content analysis that involves getting familiar with the data, coding the whole text, searching for themes with broader patterns of meaning, defining, and naming and creating a coherent narrative quote from the interview (Mongan, J., Mongan, J. K., Mongan, J., Giguere, J. M. S. K., & John Mongan, N. S. K, 2018).

So, the collected data was analysed by putting together the collected data into a meaningful patterns and themes. Data was arranged in the similarity of stories and in their nature of relevance to the theme and to the research questions of the study.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

As ethical issues are moral principles or beliefs about what is wrong and what is right, this thesis work was fully guided by the ethical values while dealing with the respondents as there is no pressure on any respondents to grant the information. This study strictly adhered to all the ethical guidelines that should be followed in research with children, viewing them as a vulnerable group that should be treated with special caution. Prior to data collection, there was ethical clearance from all the concerned bodies to ensure the research design met

national and international standards.

Informed consent was also obtained from the parent or legal guardian (Social workers) of every participant. The assent of the children themselves was also obtained in language and style that is fitting to their levels of understanding. Any participation was voluntary, and children involved in the discussion and IDI informants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence.

The study was designed to carry minimum risk, and due care was exercised in ensuring the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of participants. All research processes and tools were suited to the age and culturally appropriate. Participants' confidentiality and privacy were strictly ensured; personal details were anonymized and placed in secure custody to ensure no unauthorized access.

Every effort was made to communicate clearly to child participants and respect their autonomy in accordance with their increasing capacities. The Researcher was sensitive and ethical in working with children, being supportive and respectful during the research.

## **Chapter Four- Finding**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section of the research presents the findings of the study. The study in this section starts its presentation with the general information of each organization selected for the study. It also delivers the findings of the study with its qualitative domains. These qualitative data was categorized into four main themes using different data analysis styles. The main four themes are (1) Implementers experiences of street connected children reunification (2) Street connected children families experiences of the reunification program (3) Street connected children experiences of the reunification program and (4) Sustainability of street connected children reunification

### **4.2 General Information of the Three Selected Organizations**

- **Make Your Mark**

Make Your Mark is a non-profit organisation established in 2011. The founders of MYM saw a great need in Ethiopia and decided to start this organisation. MYM works with children who are working and living on the streets of Addis Ababa. The organization's main project is to reunify street connected children to their biological parents or relatives. This organisation has been active for the past 13 years, reunifying children that have left their home because of different reasons.

The programs of MYM are focused on three thematic areas. These thematic areas are intervention, prevention and mobilization. MYM work in three locations, the organization have a community centre, transition centre for street connected children and empowering and rehabilitation centre for women above 18 years old living on the streets of Addis Ababa.

The street connected children reunification program of MYM happens in three rounds every year. The whole program takes four months, the first month is where social work go out on the street of Addis Ababa to recruit street connected children who could fit in the reunification program. In the other three months, the organization provides different services like: rehabilitation, counselling, life skill trainings, bible studies and reunification. In every round the organization have the capacity of providing service for 25 street connected children.

Currently MYM has 15 children in their reunification program but throughout its existence, MYM was able to reunify around 390 street connected children (estimation). The organization only work with male street connected child from age 8-15 on its street connected children reunification program.

- **Bright Star and Development Association**

Bright Star and Development Association (BS-RDA) is a non-profit organization founded by Ethiopians in 1991. This organisation aimed to tackle socio-economic problems. The organization runs a lot of programs but above all programs, this organization gave a high place in supporting street connected children.

The organization works on three thematic areas in Addis Ababa. These thematic areas are prevention, transformation and health. In addition to their projects in Addis Ababa, they have other projects in Chench and Hawassa. In Addis, the organization have projects like capacity building for mothers, children sponsorship, home for destitute females, schooling and education projects.

Regarding street connected children, the organization have a shelter for children who left home and live on the street. They also have transition home for children with the potential of reunification. Children with out families or children who are not candidates for reunification usually join their shelter.

In their reunification program, they provide different services to support the physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual needs of the children. Once it's confirmed that their holistic needs are covered, the organization proceed to process their reunification. The organization does not have any specific time frame to conduct reunification rather they wait on the children to be ready for reunification. Currently, the organization have 42 children under its care and throughout its existence, BS-RDA was able to reunify 450 street connected children (estimation). The organization only work with male street connected child from age 8-15 on its street connected children reunification program.

- **Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre**

Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre was founded in 1972 by the government of Ethiopia. Currently, this institution provides care for about 123 orphaned, abandoned and children at risk. The number of children in the organization might change every day since children comes in or leaves the organization every day.

This organization gives different services for orphaned, abandoned and street connected children in the age range of 8-18 years old. The organization receive children either from police or Kibebetsehay (a government organization that provides care for children below the age of 8 years old) with a direct supervision and decision of the Addis Ababa City Administration Bureau of Women, Children and Social Affair.

Children that join this institution are candidates either for reunification, reintegration or the permanent home. As part of the three projects, this organization provides food, shelter and cloth services to fulfil some of the basic needs of the children. The organization works on one location, where it provides care for all children with different situations.

Regarding the reunification program, once families of street connected children are located, the organization start its reunification process immediately. Sometimes families from different part of Ethiopia comes to the organization to take their children back to their home or social worker from the institution will be assigned to reunify children to their families based on the need. All the project in Kolfe Orphanage is designed for male children.

### **4.3 Implementers Experience of the Program**

Key informants from the three selected organization shared their perception and experience of street connected children reunification on this part of the study. Based on the respondent reflection, the outputs are described in four categories. These categories are:

#### **4.3.1 Implementers Definition of ‘Successful’ Reunification**

Participants from all three organizations had different understanding and definitions on the signs of what a successful reunification is. Participants put the signs of successful reunification in two distinct perceptions. The first perception is that: successful street connected children reunification is a comprehensive and collaborative effort that requires the commitment of families, social services, and the wider community to create a sustainable and supportive environment for these vulnerable children.

On the other hand, participants argue that successful street connected children reunification takes more than the effort of committed families, social workers and

community, it is the outcome of collaborative effort of government and social service providers creating a safe and stable environment and addressing the initial causes for streetism. In addition to that, successful reunification also requires street connected children to be committed in receiving the rehabilitation services properly, strongly and patiently.

Lastly, the definition of successful reunification is related with the amount of time that a child stays at home after the reunification. If a child stays at home long after the reunification, that would be considered as a successful reunification.

#### **4.3.2 Social Workers Best Practice of Reunification**

Even though social workers from the three selected organizations have different experience on the reunification program, they also have common best practices in implementing the program.

According to BS-RDA social worker, despite the myriad challenges, they have developed several effective strategies to facilitate successful reunifications. These practices include building strong relationships with children while they are in their shelter. Understanding the unique circumstances of each case allows social workers to tailor their approach, ensuring that interventions are culturally and contextually appropriate.

Social worker from MYM mentioned that the organization also tried its best to collaborate with local organizations and community resources. By fostering partnerships with non-profit organizations, shelters, and educational institutions, this social worker tried to create a supportive network that assists in the transition process. Training programs for families about parenting skills and available resources was provided few times with the intention of enhancing the likelihood of a sustainable reunification.

Additionally, all social workers from the three selected organization has experienced the benefits of continuous follow-up with family's post-reunification. Social workers emphasize the importance of monitoring the well-being of both the children and their families, providing ongoing support and intervention as necessary to prevent potential disruptions in the reunification process, even though there are a lot of security problems in traveling to conduct follow-up, social workers were able to witness the significant effects of follow-up on the sustainability of the reunification program.

#### **4.3.3 Needs of Street Connected Children in the Reunification Program**

In general, program managers from the three selected organization experience indicate that street connected children needs a holistic service in order to rehabilitate and help street connected children stay at home after reunification. These holistic services are:

- **Food and nutrition**

According to the program managers from both MYM and BS-RDA, children who joined the program are provided with three meals per-day. The meal is prepared considering its nutritional value. Since one of the services is rehabilitation, quality of food has a significant role in making their recovery faster.

According to the program manager at Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre, even though children are served three meals a day, the organization have a big gap in providing meal with most important nutrients, this is because of resource and finance limitations.

- **Shelter**

The program manager of BS-RDA shared that the program design in their organization provides transitional shelter for street connected children. The transitional centre is very helpful as it forces children to be there until the end of the program. The main reason of stationing children in the transition shelter is for rehabilitation purpose. Children with different addiction comes to get the service, having the shelter was found very helpful for service providers/ case workers to practice different form of therapies without any distractions.

Similarly, program managers from MYM and Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre shared their experience on the benefits of temporary shelter, they mentioned that their shelters provide a stable environment that significantly enhances the safety and security of street children. Living in public spaces exposes these children to various risks, including violence, exploitation, and trafficking but their shelter mitigates such vulnerabilities by offering a protected space where children are less likely to encounter dangerous situations.

- **Psychosocial Support**

According to key informant interview conducted with MYM social worker, psychosocial support helped children to acknowledge their strengths and inherent value. Through skill-building activities, mentorship, and positive reinforcement, these children were witnessed to develop a more favourable self-image. Their improved self-esteem helped them in their personal development and encouraged them to envision a future beyond street life.

Social worker from Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre observed how psychosocial support helped children to improve their academical and vocational knowledge. By addressing the psychological barriers that hinder the learning capacity of street connected

children, PSS was witnessed to empower children to pursue their education and skills development.

Similarly, social worker witnessed a positive outcome of psychosocial support. Almost all children that come to receive service have experienced multiple traumas and face various challenges in their lives. These children have experienced traumatic events such as abuse, violence, or neglect. Psychological support assisted them in processing and recovering from these traumas. Therapeutic techniques like trauma-focused cognitive-behavioural therapy or eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) are usually used to help them heal and move forward. At the same time, psychosocial support helps children to modify behavioural challenges caused as a result of their circumstances. Psychosocial support can help children develop social and emotional skills, impulse control, and problem-solving abilities.

#### **4.3.4 Committed Parents in the Reunification Process**

Effective reunification appears when families are highly engaged in the reunification process. Social worker from MYM that when street connected children families provide love, care, and support, and create a safe and stable environment for their children after reunification, the reunification program showed the best outcomes.

Social worker from BS-RDA stated that the emotional readiness of families to accept and support their children upon return is crucial. Many families may have experienced trauma or loss, which can lead to complex feelings about reuniting. It is incumbent upon social workers and child welfare professionals to facilitate open communication and mutual understanding between children and family members. Engaged families in the reunification

process not only fosters a supportive environment but also encourages personal accountability and emotional resilience among all parties involved.

The reunification program doesn't engage either families or community because the program implementation plan doesn't allow social workers to facilitate that. According to the program manager of Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre, reunification always happen so fast, the process did not give social workers the opportunity/space for preparing and educating how the power of families and community engagement help for the best outcomes of the program. This happens because the organization have limited caseworkers on the reunification program. Social worker has a lot of caseloads, spending time to help families to engage in the reunification program is not their priority, everything is done with rush.

According to the director of Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre, they have reported this concern to the Addis Ababa City Administration Bureau of Women, Children and Social Affair, which is the direct supervisor of this organization but they have never got any response regarding this issue.

#### **4.4 Challenges of Reunification**

Generally, all three selected organizations faced different challenges in conducting reunification. Their challenges are described based on their experience.

##### **4.4.1 Service Quality**

According to the key informants from MYM, service quality is very important in the sustainability of the program. In the program design, the program has its own case management steps which helps provide quality service but because of different reasons these steps are not kept most of the time.

Especially the last step, which is follow-up. Since the organizations that provide these services are located in Addis Ababa, conducting a follow-up once a child is reunified becomes really hard. The reasons that made the follow-up very hard are listed below:

### **1. Insecurity**

Social worker from MYM mentioned that, based on the program, physical follow-up was supposed to be conducted at least once every three months until the termination of the case but because of unstable security, it became really hard to travel to any rural areas. The program did not consider safety concerns, which made the program to not succeed.

### **2. Communication**

The social worker from MYM stated that they always take contact information after reuniting a child with family but usually their phones doesn't work properly and sometimes the families does not have cell phones so they give numbers of their relatives that lives really far from them, which some of the relatives are not willing to travel to help social workers to have that call or sometime they provide inaccurate information.

The social worker also mentioned that they also take phone numbers of people that worked in the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth in the area of reunification but most of them are not willing to check the status of a child if they are not paid what they demanded. The program manger tried to report these incidents to the head of the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth in the area but there was no response. According to the program manager, dealing the situation with distance was not effective. Because of these follow-ups and contact with street connected children's families were compromised.

#### 4.4.2 Misaligned Goals

The program manager from Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre, experienced the big mis-understanding between the organization reunification service and the needs of street connected children.

The program in this organization provides the basic needs of children that helps them to be in better situation relative to street life, this reunification service is only limited to provide shelter to street connected children until families are found. Once, families are found, the only provision that the organization provides is reunification. Because of lack in capacity and huge numbers of children reunification, the organization doesn't have a strong follow-up system and a holistic service, this whole process made program ineffective.

The social worker shared that:

*“The program just focuses on the service provided while the children are at the shelter, which does not align with the needs of the children. Even though children come seeking some of the services provided in the centre, that is not their ultimate need/goal. Children come to the centre with a hope that these organizations will support them in greater purpose. This child wants to have a stable life without think if they are going to eat tomorrow, go to school, have a place to stay without being abuse, have clothes to wear and be safe from any conflict/war” (K11)*

#### 4.4.3 Unrealistic Services

According to BS-RDA program manager, some of the services provided in the shelter are out of reality considering the fact that street connected children never had that lifestyle when they were at their homes. Most of street connected are not used to the lifestyle lived in the shelter, which created a confusion. This confusion made most children to assume that they will have lifestyle similar to the one they had in the shelter after their reunification.

Similarly, social worker from MYM stated that the comfortable life in the shelter made some of the street connected children weak. Most of the service that they got at the shelter made them dependent, which will make life hard for them because most these children have a lot of responsibilities waiting for them after their reunification, in some cases these kids are the providers of their house. Getting used to urban life and full shelter care became one of the reasons for children to come back to street life. What the organizations provide and what they go back to doesn't match, the social worker really believe that all children deserve care, love and comfort but when the program is not able to change what's waiting for them at home, it is not going to bring any kids of change in their life rather it compromises their survival mechanism.

#### **4.4.4 Support After Reunification**

According to the program managers from both MYM and BS-RDA, both organisations provide financial support after reunification. The financial support is aimed to support families and children who are facing financial problems. With the financial support, families and children are encouraged to use the money for income generating activity (IGA). The financial support is given twice, the first one is given right after reunification and the second one is given after three months of reunification but the second-round support is given if the child or the family proves that the business is successful and was able to save some amount of money in the bank.

According to MYM and BS-RDA social workers, the amount of money given is not enough to start a business. The social workers experience indicate that this support did not consider the market inflation, which made things hard for beneficiaries to even start the business at the first place. The social workers have shared their concern but because of financial limitation,

no adjustment was made. They also mentioned that, most children who started a business did not succeed because of two reasons:

- The money support was not enough, the first IGA support was 2500 birr and the second round was 2500 birr in total they were only given 5000 birr.

According to both MYM and BS-RDA social workers, usually children take the first round of support and use it on their basic needs which is food, because that is all it can buy and sometimes, they just give it to their parents and never ask for the second-round support.

- There was no training given on how to start a business and saving.

Children don't have any idea on how to start a business and how to manage it. They are only provided with money which by itself is becoming one of the pull factors for street life.

According to the program manager at Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre, children are given 1000 birr, this given money is for some of their costs while they are on the road to their homes

#### **4.4.5 Unaddressed Issues**

Even though the program provides a lot of good service, it is missing the main components, according to the social workers from the three selected organization, the reunification program is not addressing the main cause for children to leave home before reuniting them with their families. The social workers mentioned that children leave home because of different reasons. These reasons include:

- **Domestic Abuse**

According to the social worker from MYM mentioned that children pass through a lot of abuse from their own family. The respondent mentioned that children reported abuse from their mother, father, step father, and so on.

Based on the physical evidence found, the social workers said that, she has taken care of children with physical abuses like: rape, biting, burning (burning plastic bag on their skin), and restraining. (Tying them with rope and locking them in a room).

- **Neglect/abandonment**

According to MYM social worker, most children in the reunification program faced emotional and psychological neglect. The emotional well-being of street connected children is often overlooked. These children frequently experience trauma, anxiety, and depression due to their living conditions and the stigma associated with being on the street. Street connected children frequently lack access to adequate food, shelter, clean water, and sanitation facilities while they were at home. According to social worker from BS-RDA, the program doesn't address all of the challenges families and children went through. Because of limitations like: fiancé, lack of strong follow-up and distance.

Social workers experience of reunifying a child who was neglected by his family:

*"I once reintegrated a child with a family that has neglected him, the program and the child care directive from women and children affairs doesn't have any flexibility, even though there was neglect in the child house the program and the directive does not consider neglect as a significant type of abuse. So, since neglect was not considered as a cause for children to leave home, I was forced to return him back to his home and the child did not last at home for*

*a week. When I found the child on the street I ask him why he left home, he said, when I was with the organization, everyone there loved me, talked with me, encouraged me that I would be someone one day, build my confidence and gave me hope but when I got home my parents were happy on the first day of my return after that day no one really talk to me, appreciate me, or gave me hope rather they always say discouraging words like am worthless and us they don't expect any good thing from me.” (KI2)*

According all social workers from the three selected organization, children give meaning to every little word that comes out of their parent’s mouth. Parents are the ones who have the power to support their child to success but usually in the rural area that's not the case. Since parents in the rural area lack knowledge and awareness on parenting, they make their children leave home.

Social worker from Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre mentioned that families abandoned their children from their house and these children end up in the government orphanages. Most parents abandon their child because of marriage conflict or other different reasons. Parents who intentionally abandoned their child usually doesn't want their child to be back to their houses but because these orphanages are very crowded with a lot of children, to support children who has no parents, we are forced to reunite children who are abandoned but have families knowing that their parents might kick them out or children will leave home by their choice. Lack of resources sometimes make us decide irrationally. Social workers experience of abandonment:

*“We had a child in our centre who was abandoned by his family. His stepfather was the one who kicked him out the house. When we ask him why they kick him out. He said that his step father never liked him. He always tries to find some reason to fight with me.” (KI3)*

- **Conflicts in Different Parts of Ethiopia**

According to all key interview respondents, recently one of the reasons that is making children leave home is a security issue. They have received a lot of children because of conflict, specially from the northern parts of Ethiopia. These children left home because their parents/guardians were killed or got lost from their parents during conflicts occurred.

Some children left because they were scared of what was happening in their town, for some it created a lot of traumas after witnessing a lot of things that happened on the conflict location. These children witnessed things like:

- Seeing their mother and sisters being raped
- Saw their father die
- Saw their friends die
- Saw their house burning while people they know inside

They have witnessed a lot that caused them to evacuate from their home, for a child to see this kind of stuff is beyond sad and they really had a tangible reason for leaving that kind of environment for a better one (relative to their situation).

Social worker from MYM shared unaddressed issues that caused children leave their home after reunification:

*“Usually, we are asked to reunify children to their families knowing that their parents might be a risk for the child. We have reintegrated children with their abusive parents, whenever we ask to resolve the reported incidents before reintegration, we get an answer that’s say: that’s not our project, we didn’t have a project agreement with the government with these specific issues, we can’t do what is not in our project. Plus, we don’t have the space to keep these children because we are going to receive another group of children once this round is*

*done. This orders usually comes from the management team. We witnessed a lot of children coming back to the street because of these issues, some of them don't even last two days after reintegration, some of them get back to street life before we get back to Addis.” (KI2)*

*“Some children beg us to not send them back to their parents but since we don't have a permanent shelter for them or a referral system, we send them back to their parents or relatives anyways. Most of these children has a reason for not going back, they have been abused, some of them were raped but doesn't have a prove, sometimes we are forced to send them back knowing that they're at risk but we don't have any tangible evidence even though we believe them, it's really hard to prove that they were raped or abused without tangible evidence. These children usually don't stay at home for long.” (KI2)*

According to KI2, they just do what their told to keep their job, also mentioned that how hard it is to get a job these days, she mentioned that she also have children and families to take care off.

#### **4.4.6 Pull factor services**

According to KI4, KI5 and KI6, they believe that the program is designed for good intentions but some of the services provided for street connected children is becoming a pull factor. Children leave home just to receive different services that the organizations provide. The key informants mentioned that children with loving and caring families were found on the street because of what the organizations provide excite them.

“Luxury goods and money attract children in the urban area,” (KI5). Whether children are in need or not, they are attracted to bright elements.

According to the key informants, after the three-month service children will be given different material for school purposes and some amount of money. These provisions made children living there wish to leave home for just getting those materials and one time given money. Also, neighbours who have witnessed those provisions, send their children to the street, so that they also collect those provisions.

*“I once reintegrated a child with his birth family. His family lives in an area called Nada, which is located a few kilometres before Jimma. When we got there, we got surrounded by children from every direction. These children don't see cars very often and we thought that was the reason for them to surround us but it was not just that. When we got to the house we stopped and opened the door for the kid and we started to hear a voice that said why did you come back to this life, you look really good and you gained a lot of weight. Some kids even started to ask us if we come to Addis will you be giving us nice clothes like his, some even said take us with you right now. After that we went inside the house to talk with his family but we were really curious about what the kids were saying outside so we asked. Then they told us that everyone here believes that there is a better life in Addis, everyone hears stories like: there are a lot of organisations in Addis that take good care of children in need, that provide lot things for them and give money to them so that they can buy cattle's and start work and they said we also believe that. We were very shocked to hear that. That's when we identified the down side of the program.” (K11)*

#### **4.4.7 Work-dissatisfaction**

According to the social workers from all three organization, the program has become discouraged for them. Even though caseworkers try their best to make a difference in this children's life, it is not happening because of the gaps in the program.

*“I have been doing this for almost four years now but it is really getting harder year by year. I reintegrated a lot of children to their families but i see most of them on the street. I don't regret the time I spent with them while they were in the shelter but seeing all of my investment in them goes down, it hurts me so bad. We spent a lot of time teaching them, providing counselling sessions, and sharing our life with them but after three months of investment, they will be back on the street. This started to cause work dissatisfaction in most of our staff and make me feel like I am not living my purpose.” (KI3)*

#### **4.4.8 False hope**

According to the discussion held with street connected children, they shared that this program gave both the children and their families false hope. The program never directly communicated the purpose of the program, which leads beneficiaries to think and expect beyond what the program could possibly provide.

According to the discussion, the communication gap gave the beneficiaries false hope, since they are desperately in need, they were forced to think beyond the capacity of the program and some provisions that were promised for families were never delivered.

## 4.5 Families Experiences of the Reunification Program

This section of the study used all of the in-depth interview data from families of street connected children that have received this service.

According to these families, they have never heard about this program until their child left home and was contacted by people that work in the organisations or a child living next door left home and came back with people that provided the service. Because no one tells them the exact/detailed information about the program, these families come up with their own assumption of the program and expect results based on their assumptions.

Their understanding of the program is listed as follow:

### 4.5.1 Economical support/stability

These families expect financial support from the program. The families think all organizations are the same, they think that every one of them provides financial support. Almost every family that was interviewed expect financial support, they mentioned that their expectations came from the service that their close family members or neighbours receive from organizations that are located in their area.

The other expectation came from the needs. According to the respondent, they generally assumed that since they don't have money and believe that money can solve their problem, the organizations will just help them out with finance.

Families' experience of the reunification program. The families mentioned the following”

*One day we got a call from an unknown number and they said that they work for an organization (Derejet). They told us that they have found our son on the street and that he is living with them. They said that when he is ready, they will bring him to us and they will support and talk with us so that we will be able to keep our child at home. When I heard that, I got really excited to see my son and keep him with us.*

*Our main problem that led my child to leave home was finance. Me as a father was not able to feed my children because I don't have a stable job so when I heard that they are going to support us, I was really happy. One day they brought my son home and the whole family was really happy, I just want to thank Allah for them. But once my child came home, they once gave us 2500 birr and told us to start a business. We all didn't know what to start with that money so we used the money to buy something to eat and it lasted for a few days. After that we have never heard from them, my understanding was that they would support us until my children finish school at least, like the other organizations. Now it's almost been three months since my child left home again and my other child is living on the street here in our town.” (IDI Welia Sodo)*

#### **4.5.2 Permanent provision**

According to the in-depth interview, few families mentioned that even though they were happy to hear that their child was found, they wanted their child to stay with the organization and get permanent service until he finished school and support them. They mentioned that their child has bad behaviour and they don't know how to shape him while having four other children that they have to care for.

*“We have four children other than our child Ababa; he has always been the hardest to raise. He has friends that led him to street life, even though we tried to provide basic needs for him, he was never satisfied. He was arrested two times for stealing and when we asked him why he stole, he said he needed money to eat from the hotel, buy fancy shoes and buy fancy clothes.*

*So, when we found out he had joined an organization that could help him improve his behaviour and at the same time provide the basic needs as he wanted, we were happy.*

*We assumed that they would keep him for at least a few years but they brought him back within three months of his stay at the organization. Three months didn't bring any change in his life, now he is back to his old habits and behaviour.” (IDI Bekoji)*

According to some families, they believed that their children would stay with the organization for more than three months. Most families mentioned that three months of service is not enough to change someone's lifestyle.

#### **4.5.3 Employment opportunity**

According to the in-depth interview, families were expecting a work opportunity from the organization. These families said that, we have heard organizations providing money for IGA (income generating activities) but the organizations only provided a little amount of money for the child's use only.

One of the families from the interview said that:

*“I am a very strong person, I am able to do anything, I have a lot of skills that will help me make money for my family but one thing that I don't have is money to start up. When we got in contact with the organization, I told them that I am unemployed and that is one of the reasons that made my child leave home. I told them that I can make good wood products but I don't have the money to buy the wood and the material used to produce wood products. They said they only provide some money for the child after reintegration but what we need is a job that will help us sustain our family and our child's life throughout the day and throughout the years ahead of us. They didn't want to listen to us, they just left after dropping our child home.” (IDI Zeway)*

*“We thought the organization was going to solve all of our problems, even though we are grateful that they brought our child to us, we don't have anything to feed him good food.*

*Which is going to lead him to go back to the street and it's sad we can't do anything about it.*

*(IDI Weliso)*

*We are a very big family. I, as a husband, provide for families. I have nine kids from two wives and it's hard to provide for everyone, he is the oldest child from my first wife so at least he has the energy to find his way of feeding himself. Plus, he doesn't like the food we provide him, he is picky.” (IDI Jimma, Omo Nada)*

## **4.6 Street Connected Children Experience of Reunification**

### **4.6.1 Challenges of Reunification from the Children’s Perspective**

Based on the discussion held with street connect children at Bright Star the research was able to come up with three categories:

#### **4.6.2 Peer Pressure**

Children on the discussion mentioned that, how hard it is to be separated from their peer groups. Children build a mutual support system and friendship while they were on the street. Children mentioned that they did not want to leave the community they build on the street. So, after reunification they miss their friends and the support system that they build, which leads them back to the street life. According to the discussion, after reunification, the desire to reconnect with peers from their previous experiences expose children to environments where substance use is normalized. Peer pressure plays a significant role in the adoption of addictive behaviours.

The social structure among street children is often hierarchical and fluid, characterized by alliances and rivalries. This fluidity made them vulnerable to various forms of peer influence. The need for acceptance and protection in an often hostile environment drives many street children to conform to group norms, even when those norms conflict with their personal values or safety.

#### 4.6.3 Different Forms of Addictions

The discussion indicated that addiction among street connected children caused significant challenges to their reunification with families and the integration into society. The psychological impacts of addiction alienated them from family and community support systems. According to the children in the discussion, some of the impacts of addiction were erratic behaviours, decreased motivation, and impaired judgment. These behaviours were not really helpful for them to stay at home after reunification. Additionally, most of their families perceived an addicted child as a source of shame or embarrassment, leading to stigmatization that inhibit the reunification process.

Conversely, children also developed a feeling of resentment towards their family due to past traumas and perceived failures in parental support, that perpetuated a cycle of disconnection and mistrust. Which the effects of addiction created barriers to reconciliation and reunify into the family unit.

#### 4.6.4 Economic Instability and Family Dynamics

According to the discussion held with participants, they have a lot of economic needs living in rural areas. Their parents do not have consistent income that could possibly support their families. Which led children to go out to the street and beg for food or money. Similarly, data obtained from the in-depth interview with the child family also justify the discussion held with street connected children:

*“Both me and my wife are not employed. However, we have six children living with us. We cannot provide the basic needs for them, sometimes we provide basic needs for one child who really needs it and leave the other four with nothing. Sometimes I work as a labourer but this doesn't happen often and sometimes, we ask churches for support and other times we beg*

*from neighbours. We don't have a stable lifestyle, sometimes we eat and sometimes we don't eat. Sometimes our kids go to school and sometimes they don't because they have to look for a job to support us. Sometimes they miss school because they don't have clothes and shoes to wear or sometimes, they get sick and we don't have money for their treatment, so they have to stay at home until they recover, if they recover.*

*We have lost a child because we were not able to take him to the hospital and provide him with the needed treatment.”*

According to the discussion, children claim that their families couldn't support because they don't have any permanent work that could help their family to have a stable life. They have that their parents don't have permanent jobs that ensure their stability. Which cause children to go back to the street and make money for their survival and avoid being a burden to their families.

#### **4.7 Sustainability of Street Connected Children Reunification**

According to the in-depth interview respondents(families). 83 % of children left their home after one month of reunification. Only 3 children stayed at home with their families and they are going to school. The other 2 children live in their town of home but follow the same street life style, according to their families, they sometimes go to their homes but often stay on the street begging, sniffing benzene and working or stealing.

According to this data sustainability was compromised because almost every child left their home within two months of reunification.

Table 4: The current situations of children after reunification

Current living status	Number	Percent
Children at home	3	10%
Children back to the street	25	83%
Children at home but still in their street life style	2	7%

#### 4.7.1 Non-participatory Reunification

According to the program managers of the three selected organization, the program did not sustain because it was not a community-based approach that involved children, families and community in most steps of reintegration planning and programming. Respondents mentioned that if the program had participated all of the stakeholders in the design of the program it would have been crucial for the successfulness of the program.

According to the in-depth interviews, if the program assessed the needs of the community before coming up with their own understanding of the community needs, it would have got a different result. The fact that the program doesn't use community assets made it impossible to reach its goals in changing children and their families' lives.

#### 4.7.2 Unresponsive to local reality

According to social workers from the three selected organization, even though the program provided good things for all the beneficiaries it was not good enough to keep children in their home. This happened because the service provided in the organization did not consider the lifestyle to the local reality.

Children got the best service that they could ever wish for but that service did not follow them to their homes. Respondents mentioned that children easily adapt to new things and when they lose those things it will hardly affect them.

Once children get used to organisational standards of living and urban life, it becomes really hard for them to go backwards. This made them leave their home again and look for an organization that could provide them the things that they were missing in their local areas. The services that were provided in the organizations compromised their stay with their families.

#### **4.7.3 Geography**

According to the social workers from all organization, since a lot of children on the street came from a rural area, what they see in the urban area makes them excited and then they decide to stay back or sometimes go back to their origin and find it boring. so, they choose to live on the street choosing the ‘fancy and attractive parts of urban life’.

According to the social workers, children that came to Addis Ababa from a near distance from Addis tends to be ok with staying in their homes for a longer period of time because they know the city is very near to them if they ever want to see urban life. It is observed that sustainability is compromised when the distance of children origin is far but for children living around Addis relatively better.

#### **4.7.4 Time spent outside of family unit**

According to social workers of MYM and BS-RDA, sustainability is compromised when children live on the street for a long time. When children live on the street for a long time, they will be exposed to a lot of things that would make them stay on the street forever. The longer on the street, the chances of them staying at home after reintegration is very low.

#### **4.7.5 Policy gaps**

According to the program managers from all three organization, the organizations have a policy that forces caseworkers to not accept children in the program, if they once get the service (reintegration). Even if a child leaves home again with legit reasons like: abuse, loss, economic problems, war and many other reasons, the organization will not provide any kinds of service for the second time.

Program managers shared policies should be flexible, if a child has a legit reason, it means that the program failed them by not providing the right support and conducting proper pre-assessment before reintegrating them. So, considering that the program failed them, the program should have been open for children with legit reasons.

Accepting them for the second time might help the program to perform a better intervention, learning from its past mistakes and making the program sustainable.

#### **4.7.6 Dis-organised follow-up support**

According to MYM and Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre shared, the program doesn't have a long-term follow-up system that connects families, children and community with the caseworkers to closely discuss the needs of the family as well as the needs of the child.

The follow-up system doesn't work with partner organizations which are located in the reintegration sites. Since follow-up is being done from Addis Ababa, finding accurate information about the needs of the child is very difficult.

Sustainability relies on the close follow-up of the caseworker, if caseworkers are not connected with beneficiaries, the chance of identifying the needs after reintegration is very low. Respondents also added that improper case management has its own effects on the sustainability of the program.

Sometimes beneficiaries' files are not kept properly, which makes it hard for conducting a follow-up when there is no or little history about beneficiaries. As a country we don't have an organised database or case management.

According to the program managers from all the three organizations, because of security concerns, mostly these three organizations are not taking children to their area rather they are asking the families to come to Addis Ababa to take them back home. This caused a lot of gaps in conducting follow-up and sustainability of the program because:

- Families don't bring their ID with them
- It's hard to identify their address
- Impossible to do pre-assessment (Children are reintegrated blindly)
- Some of them does not have cell phones
- Make it hard to have detailed information about the family.

#### **4.7.7 Lack of monitoring and evaluation**

According to the directors from MYM and Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre, organization monitoring and evaluation have not been conducted for a while.

Monitoring is very important to support the program even before the implementation of the program and monitoring of the program should be developed before the implementation of the program. Since this is not happening it actually affects the sustainability of the program. If the program is not evaluated, how can an organization be ready to change a few things to make the program work.

#### **4.7.8 Limited service**

This limited service compromises the sustainability of the program, when children are not able to get their basic needs met, it will lead them to flee from their home. In the discussion it was mentioned that, other than the basic needs of children, there should be some kinds of training given for both families and children to address their root cause of street life and help them find alternative sense of self and economic opportunity. Unless this service becomes holistic, the chance of the program becoming sustainable is very low.

## **Chapter Five- Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Discussion**

The chapter gives a critical analysis of the study findings in relation to the literature. It reports on the best practices, challenges, and sustainability of the reunification of street-connected children based on social workers' experiences in BS-RDA, MYM, and Kolfe Youth Care and Rehabilitation Centre. The discussion is organized in a thematic structure to highlight both converging and diverging perspectives between empirical evidence and academic discourse.

### **5.2 Best Practices for Reunification of Street-Connected Children**

The evidence shows that effective reunification depends heavily on some basic best practices. These are multi-stakeholder collaboration, individualized case interventions, and follow-up monitoring after reunification.

#### **5.2.1 Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration**

Collaboration with local actors—such as NGOs, churches, schools, and local community organizations—was always seen as a key factor in successful reunification. Social workers in the selected organizations identified the importance of implementing a common strategy that involves all the stake actors in the reunification setting of the child. This is in agreement with Coble (2024), who argues that collaborative systems provide long-term support systems that address not only the physical but also emotional and educational needs of street-connected children. Coble's findings also underscore that such partnerships provide assurance and stability, which increases the chances of long-term reintegration.

### **5.2.2 Individualized and Child-Centered Interventions**

Social workers stressed the necessity of individualized reunification planning based on the specific needs of the child. Individualized case planning and emotional engagement during shelter care were seen as central components. Williamson and Greenberg (2010) stress this as well, noting that child-centered reunification practices significantly reduce the risk of reintegration and allow children to integrate more harmoniously into family environments.

### **5.2.3 Post-Reunification Monitoring**

Systematic and frequent follow-up was another best practice widely acknowledged. The study indicated that children receiving follow-up visits at reunification had better emotional stability and integration outcomes. The findings support the argument brought forward by CSC (2017), citing the importance of monitoring after reunification in identifying upsurging problems, re-establishing relationships within the family, and encouraging lasting reintegration. Save the Children (2009) also concluded that consistent assistance reduces the threat of re-separation and supports family cohesion.

## **5.3 Reunification Challenges**

Despite best practices, several regular challenges undermine the efficacy of reunification programs.

### **5.3.1 Failure to Address Reasons for Separation**

Among the basic challenges brought to light was reunification of children without addressing the underlying causes of their initial separation poverty, neglect, and domestic violence. Social workers reported that children reunited with unsolved home environments found themselves once again on the streets. UNICEF (2020) and Kasim (2021) affirm the

same, both of which concluded that unrelenting underlying causes lead to re-separation and impact successful reintegration.

### **5.3.2 Unrealistic and Misaligned Services**

Participants showed that the structured and resource-consuming environments provided in shelters were not being replicated to children's home environments. This resulted in disillusionment and unrealistic expectations. The findings concur with Wedge (2013), who noted that transitional care programs must reflect actual family realities to avoid causing emotional or psychological regression during reintegration.

### **5.3.3 Economic Vulnerability and Limited Support**

An additional challenge is the inadequacy of economic support to reunited families. Social workers reported that economic support often up to just 5,000 birr was not sufficient and did not include sustainable livelihood training or access. Roelen & Sabates-Wheeler (2012) emphasized that cash transfers alone are not successful without capacity-building mechanisms enabling families to generate an income.

### **5.3.4 Shelter Services' Pull Factors**

Interestingly, the provision of abundant shelter services was quoted as a pull factor. Occasionally, children liked dwelling in shelters since they benefited from regular food, medication, and alms. The same was indicated in Kebede (2015) and Mangesha (2011), which asserts that assistance with an imbalanced withdrawal strategy has a tendency to actually lure children back into the streets.

### **5.3.5 Addiction and Peer Influence**

Drug addiction and organized peer groups established on the street also caused difficulties in reintegration in the long term. Embleton et al. (2015) depicted that such peer groups serve as emotional anchors for the children, and without adequate substitution (e.g., psychosocial support), children are prone to relapse to street life.

### **5.3.6 Systemic Gaps in Program Communication and Capacity**

The research validated that unclear program communication often led to misinformation among beneficiaries, which in turn resulted in disappointment and mistrust. CSO Forum (2016) validates this by confirming that inaccurate communication between service providers and families serves as a barrier to reintegration outcomes. Poor infrastructure, lack of coordination with the government, and social worker burnout also helped in generating further inefficiencies of the program, as documented in Maslach & Leiter (2016).

## **5.4 Support of the Reunification Program**

One of the themes that emerge from the research is the meager support of reunification since there is minimal community involvement and weak program design.

The program managers and social workers underscored that exclusion in the community both at planning and implementation levels severely limited support uptake and continuity for reunified children. The statement concurs with ASPE (2021), which emphasizes the reality that ownership and community involvement are the main factors that result in reintegration success. Without community involvement, stigmatization and the absence of follow-up services persist, resulting in post-unification gaps in the environment of the child.

Furthermore, the absence of combined economic empowerment programs and psychosocial interventions disincentivizes long-term program sustainability. Stakeholder coordination is also weak, leading to fragmented service delivery and poor monitoring.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The program "Reunification" is a very complex program that pick-up children from the street, rehabilitates them and reunify them from transitional rehabilitation centres into families. The purpose of the study was to assess the effectiveness of reunification based on the experiences of professionals, children and their families who have passed through and are currently involved in the program. Through professionals, children's and families' experience of the program, the study was able to show their experiences of the program. The aim was to obtain an understanding of the stakeholders' experiences in categories of understanding of the program, goals of the program, the need to join the program, services provided, sustainability of the program and overall outcomes of the program. Therefore, all of the respondents' experiences are analysed and discussed to evaluate the effectiveness as well as the ineffectiveness of the program.

Generally, all respondents reported the gap between the program and the needs of the beneficiaries. Even Though the program has good service for the children, it doesn't match their mandatory needs after being reintegrated. In addition to that the program was not able to meet its general and specific objectives, which are making sure children reunite with their families and stay with their families until they are old enough to make their own decisions.

Firstly, families' understanding of the program and what the program provides is not on the same page, which causes misunderstanding between families and organizations running this program. This misunderstanding led to a lot of gaps in the sustainability of the

program. When there is a misaligned goal, it causes unwanted results. The fact that the program did not involve any one from the community on the design and development of the program to really understand the needs of the community and to also give awareness on the program caused the program not to reach its fullest potential.

Secondly, social workers reported that even though there was a lot of good investment in the children's life while they were in the transition house, the outcome at the end of the day was very discouraging for them. It is reported that the gaps in quality service, goals, support after reintegration and unaddressed issues caused the program to fall and make it unable to be sustainable. Social workers reported that service that was provided in the shelter made children to expect that kind of provision after reintegration but the reality is that the organizations were not able to match the service provided in the shelter with the reality. The program failed to prepare the children to be resilient in their context and in their lifestyle. Similarly, a substandard follow-up system made the sustainability of the program very poor.

In summary, the social worker performed their duty fairly but the program gap caused them to be dissatisfied in their work, current security issues caused them to not properly perform follow-up and market inflation became a big concern because the given IGA did not consider the inflation, which ultimately affected the suitability of the program. In general, the results of the program showed a lot of disadvantages, the number of children staying at home after reintegration are very low and it became one of the huge causes for children to come to the street. The program doesn't just have gaps but it also became one of the huge causes for children to leave home and live on the street.

Finally, children's experience of the program speaks a lot regarding the gaps between the services of the program and the needs of the children. Children leave home because of

genuine reasons, but the service provided didn't do a great job addressing the reasons that made children leave home. Children needed protection, food, education, emotional care, love and economic stability. Unfortunately, the program was not able to fulfil this need. Even though the program provided these services while the children were at the shelter, these services were very needed post-reintegration. Overall, the delivered services were neither sustainable nor improved the life of children or their families.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are given:

- **Enhance Pre-Reunification Assessments**

MYM needs to upgrade its assessment process pre-reunification to include psychological, social, and economic dimensions of the child and his/her family. This will assist in the development of customized reunification plans that address root causes and are resilient to re-separation.

- **Community Integration in Program Design**

In light of MYM's successful model of community involvement, the organization should expand its participatory approach by involving local schools, churches, and community leaders in program design and implementation. This will buttress ownership and ensure sustainable reintegration.

- **Structured Follow-Up Systems**

MYM should utilize its networks to establish a structured follow-up system in collaboration with local women and children affairs offices for periodic monitoring and immediate support to reunified children.

- **Shift from Material to Skill-Based Aid**

BS-RDA must emphasize equipping children and families with vocational skills

and life skills rather than providing monetary aid that is one-time in nature. Creation of sustainable livelihood will deter dependency and promote economic resilience.

- **Address Street-Entry Causes Ahead of Time**

BS-RDA needs to include preventive interventions such as counselling, economic support to vulnerable families, and conflict resolution interventions before reunification to minimize the risk of relapse into street life.

- **Community Sensitization in Rural Areas**

Sensitization activities need to be taken to rural communities where there are misconceptions about reunification programs. BS-RDA needs to clarify that the programs are not inducements for children to leave home but interventions to respond to existing vulnerabilities.

- **Comprehensive Case Management**

Kolfe Centre must implement a case management system with mental health services, risk assessment, and ongoing psychosocial care for children and families during and after reunification.

- **Partnership with Local Institutions**

The Centre must strengthen collaboration with churches, local government offices, and health institutions to facilitate community-based care and service delivery.

- **Prevention and Early Intervention Focus**

Kolfe should also expand its services upstream to include prevention-focused interventions, such as sensitization in schools, to reduce the number of children falling into street life in the first place.

- **Promote Evidence-Based Program Design**

Researchers should involve to support such organizations by conducting longitudinal studies that investigate the long-term outcomes of reunification efforts.

This evidence can inform more effective programmatic decision-making and policy advocacy.

- **Document Best Practices and Contextual Gaps**

There needs to be research that document context-specific lessons learned, both challenges and best practices. This documentation will scale up successful approaches and refine existing models.

- **Promote Policy Inclusion**

Researchers should engage in policy conversations and offer data-informed commentary that pushes for more inclusive, government-supported reunification systems at the national and local levels.

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## Appendix 1 – Questions for families

### Instruments

Instrument 1: Unstructured questionnaire to interview respondent (IDI)

This questionnaire will have a paramount contribution to the success of this research. The objective of the questionnaire is to explore the respondents'(families) experience of family reintegration and its sustainability.

#### A. Demographic information

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Code \_\_\_\_\_

1. Sex                      Male                      Female

2. Age \_\_\_\_\_

3. Religion \_\_\_\_\_

4. ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

5. Educational Status \_\_\_\_\_

6. work position \_\_\_\_\_

7. Where did you come from? (Location and Region) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_

9. No of children \_\_\_\_\_

10. Birth place \_\_\_\_\_

1. What was the reason that made your child leave home?
2. Is your child at home right now? If not, for how long did he stay at home after reintegration?
3. How is/was the child doing after reunification?
4. What is your understanding of the program?
5. What is your experience of the program
6. Do you think family reintegration helped your child stay home? Explain how the program helped your child?
7. Do you think the reasons that made him/her leave home were addressed by the program (reintegration)? If yes or no explain why?
8. What were the provisions that were provided by the NGO?
9. Do you think those provisions were enough to help your child stay home?
10. What was your overall experience of the program (Reintegration).

## Appendix 2 – Questions for key informants

Instrument 2: Semi-structured questionnaire to interview respondents (KII)

This questionnaire will have a paramount contribution to the success of this research. The objective of the questionnaire is to explore the respondents'(Social Workers) experience of family reunification and its sustainability.

1. What is the main purpose of family reunification?
2. Do you think the program is meeting its main purpose?
3. Do you think family reintegration addresses the cause that made children leave home?  
If yes, in what capacity?
4. What is the goal of the program?
5. What is your experience of the program?
6. What are the services provided as part of the program
7. Do you think children can stay at home without solving the cause that made them  
leave home?
8. What makes children stay home after reunification based on your provision?
9. What makes children leave home after reunification?
10. Do you think the program is sustainable after six months of reintegration?
11. Does reunification provide the needs of the children or the program assumptions of  
children need?
12. What are the positive and negative outcomes of the program?

**Appendix-3- Discussion questions for street connected children in Bright star**

- 1) Why did you decide to join the program?
- 2) What is your understanding of the program reunification?
- 3) What do you expect from the program?

**Appendix –4- Consent form****A consent form****Prepared for families in different parts of Ethiopia**

I, who put my signature below fully, agree to be part of the research of Silas Samuel by giving information through an interview. I agreed to participate in this interview with all my will and promise to provide honest information.

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....