



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
CENTER FOR GENDER STUDIES

**THE SEXUAL ABUSE EXPERIENCE OF FEMALE STREET
CHILDREN IN AKAKAI KALITY SUB CITY, ADDIS ABABA**

BY
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CHILDREN IN AKAKAI KALITY SUB CITY, ADDIS ABABA**

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Statement of Declaration

I would like to declare that this proposal studying on “*The Experience and Coping Strategies of Sexually Abused Female Street Children In Akakai Kaliti sub city, Addis Ababa*” is my original work. I also want to express that the proposal also complies with the rules and regulations of the University and hopefully meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Declared by:

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Name of Student

Signature

Date

Confirmed by Advisor:

Gudina Abashula (PhD)

Advisor Name

signature

Date

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Acronyms

AIDS- Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

FGD- Focus Group Discussion

FSCE- Forum on Street Children- Ethiopia

HIV- Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HRW- Human Right Watch

MOLS- Ministry of Labor and Skills

UNICEF- United Nation Children's Fund

STI- Sexually Transmitted Infection

UN- United Nations

WHO- World Health Organizations

Abstract

The study explores the experience and coping strategies of sexually abused female street children in Akaki Kaliti Sub City, Addis Ababa. The research aims to explore the risks faced by female street children on the street, and to describe the coping strategies they employ to manage the risks. The research aims to explore the risks faced by female street children on the street, and to describe the coping strategies they employ to manage the risks. The research addressed the following research questions: what are the sexual abuse experiences of female street children? Why do they become target of sexual abuse? what coping strategies do they employ to deal with the challenges they face? In order to answer these questions, a qualitative data collection method was used, including in-depth interviews with eleven female street children, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews. The findings reveal that female street children face numerous challenges due to their existence on the street. They face physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and are denied access to education, shelter and food. Additionally, they are subjected to harsh weather conditions, health problems, drug abuse, and social discrimination. The major types of sexual abuse are found to be rape, group rape, inappropriate touching, forced kissing, sexual harassment and verbal abuse. These horrible situations expose them to various problems, including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancies, and abortions. The findings further reveal that female street children experience profound and long-lasting psychological effects due to their challenging circumstances. In order to cope up with the inherent street stress the majority of female street children resorted to using illicit drugs, chewing “chat”, drinking alcohol, or even attempting suicide, as a way to escape their harsh realities. In addition, to deal with the difficulties of street life, they also employ various adaptive strategies, including shifting locations and rotating sites, spirituality, practicing avoidance to manage stress, forming supportive alliances and friendships for mutual aid, engaging in low-income activities to sustain themselves.

Keywords: *Child Sexual abuse, Street children, Coping Strategies*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

The plight of street children has emerged as a significant global concern, with UNICEF (2012) reporting tens of millions of children residing on the streets of cities worldwide. Due to their existence on the street they faced numerous human rights violations (UNICEF, 2007). Various factors contribute to the vulnerability of these children, including the absence parental care, poverty, internal migration, and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. De Oliveria (2000) highlights these circumstances render street children susceptible to various forms of abuse, lack of educational opportunities, access to shelter and healthcare as pivotal factors that make street children vulnerable to abuse. Consequently, compared to children in family settings, street children face high risk and experience various forms of abuse (Abrha, 2016; Biset, 2022).

The number of street children in Ethiopia cities is on the rise due to varies socio economic and environmental factors (Shimeles, 2015). Nevertheless, similar to other developing countries, Ethiopia lacks comprehensive statistical data on street children, making it difficult to fully understand the magnitude of this problem. Estimates suggest that the number of children who have experienced street life in Ethiopia ranges from 150,000 to 600,000 (Abebaw et al.,2014; Kaleb, 2016).

Several studies have pointed out that, in Ethiopia, factors contributing to children joining street life include the loss of one or both parents, poverty, rapid population growth and frequent displacement due to drought and famine. These children are at high risk of physical, psychological, economical, health and social risks (Ennew, 2003; Shimeles, 2015). Additionally, abuse, maltreatment, and neglect by caregivers also play a significant role in driving children onto the streets (Shimles, 2015; UNICEF, 2007).

Female street children are the most marginalized and ignored segment of the population who are prone to a range of issues such as physical harm, psychological distress, sexual exploitation and social isolation (Abrha, 2016). They also face increased risk of aggression, hopelessness, substance abuse, and engaging in informal sex work (Chimdessa and Cheire, 2016).

Living on the streets fundamentally increases the vulnerability of female children to various risks. Studies on female street children in Ethiopia show that sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, abortion and child birth are among the physical risks related with sexual abuse. Besides, the perpetrators do not use condoms during the abuse female street children and the situation is further exacerbated due to instances of repeated rape and the children's lack of access to reproductive health services (Abebaw et al., 2014).

Hence, exploring the magnitude of sexual abuse among female street children is crucial to addressing their needs by mitigating the consequences of the rising number of street population. Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of sexual abuse among female street children and to explore the coping mechanisms they employ to navigate these challenges.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Child sexual abuse is a serious global problem that violets children's rights and harms their physical, psychological and social wellbeing (Pagare et al., 2005). It is the act of involving a child in sexual activity that they don't fully understand, are unable to give consent, or that violates societal laws and taboos (WHO, 2002).

Female Street children also face numerous psychological difficulties in addition to the challenges of daily survival and lack of basic amenities. Stigma and negative public perceptions are the main contributing factors to their marginalization and social exclusion, which leads to a total failure in the quality of their life (Kaleb, 2016). Similarly, compared to their non- street peers, street children more likely are subject to social isolation, physical and mental illnesses (Chimdessa and Cheire, 2016).

They are disproportionately affected by harassment, illicit drug use, bad weather conditions, poor hygiene and sanitation. They are more likely experience emotional distress and suicidal attempts than their non- street peers and this made serious implications on psychological well-being of these children (Taglo, 2018).

In order to protect themselves from exploitation, frustrations and marginalization of living and working on the streets, they employ different coping mechanisms such as by forming groups to minimize and withstand the negative consequences of these challenges (Kaleb, 2016).

These groupings also help the female street children feel less isolated and to defend themselves from various attacks from different perpetrators. Additionally, they use illicit drugs in order to cope with the psychological trauma, feelings of hunger and cold weather conditions on the street. Shifting their site and hiding themselves is also another form of adaptation strategy used by street children as a response to physical and sexual abuses (Abrha, 2016).

Empirical studies have highlighted the sexual exploitation and health problems faced by street children (Chimdessa & Cheire, 2016). However, there has been limited focus on female street children specifically on the lived experiences of sexually abused female street children in Ethiopia. In particular, no comprehensive research has been conducted on coping strategies employed by sexually abused female street children in Addis Ababa, Akaki kality sub city.

Thus, this study aims to address these gaps by providing in- depth qualitative insights into the experiences and coping mechanisms of sexually abused female street children by focusing on their unique challenge, and seeks to enhance a deeper understanding of their realities, inform targeted support systems and contribute to fill these knowledge gap by exploring the lived experiences and coping strategies of these vulnerable groups.

1.3 Research Questions

This study attempts to answers to the following main research questions

1. What are the experiences of sexually abused female street children in Akaki Kality Sub city, Addis Ababa?
2. Why do female street children become vulnerable to sexual abuse?
3. What coping strategies do female street children employ to deal with the challenges of sexual abuse they face on the street?

1.4 Objective of the Study

1.4.1. General objective

The general objective of the study is to explore the sexual abuse experience and the coping mechanisms of female street children in Addis Ababa, Akaki Kality, sub-city. The study also seeks to explore the physical and social exploitation they face to provide a holistic view of the challenges.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study are: -

- ✓ To explore the factors that lead female children to join the street.
- ✓ To find out the challenges encountered by female street children on the street with their experiences of sexual abuse.
- ✓ To describe the coping strategies employed by the female street children to manage their sexual abuse experiences.

1.5. Significance of the study

Children represent hope and future in every society; therefore, solving the problems of children in general and the street children in particular can serve as an input for sustainable development. Moreover, the situation of street children need to be well addressed to the different stakeholders working in the field of sexual abuse and female street children such as government organizations, non-governmental organizations, researchers, advocates, service providers and the community at large. As these children are tomorrow's youngsters who are contributing to the nation's development.

Consequently, it will enable them to be aware and better understand the phenomenon of sexual abuse and to develop appropriate and effective polices, programs and services so as to combat sexual abuse of female street children.

Hence, this research study is important

- To explore the sexual abuse experiences of female street children living and working on the streets, and to identify the gaps in knowledge, and examine the coping strategies they employ to overcome challenges arising from such abuse.
- On the other hand, it will contribute as a baseline for those who are interested to conduct further investigation about this issue.

The findings of this study are also valuable for several purposes, including providing insights for governmental and non-governmental organizations in developing strategies, projects, programs, and policies aimed at rehabilitating sexually abused female street children and preventing the spread of the problem in the future. Furthermore, this research seeks to contribute to the existing literature on gender studies by contributing valuable awareness to the broader academic discourse on gender studies.

1.6 Definitions of concepts and terms

Child: - a person under the age of 18 years (MLOS, 2002).

Coping: the process of using various adjustments strategies, whether adaptive or maladaptive, in order to manage risks (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Sexual abuse: refers to any sexual activity that is committed against a child, whether or not the child has consented (WHO, 2002).

Rape: - refers to penetration of vagina, anus or mouth with a body part or object, carried out without consent, achieved through force, threat of force, coercion or taking advantage of a person unable to consent (WHO, 2002).

Street children: Children of either sex falling under the age 18, who depend on the streets for their survival, often engaging in informal work and lacking consistent parental care, supervision, or support. They are highly vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, including sexual abuse, due to their exposure to unsafe environments, inadequate protection, and social exclusion. (UNICEF, 2005; consortium for street Children, 2014).

Gender Socialization: - refers to the learning of behavior and attitudes considered appropriate for a given sex. This “learning” happens by way of many different agents of socialization such as family, education, media and peer groups. It shapes how individuals perceive their gender identity and guides their behaviors and interactions in society, often reinforcing gender-specific expectations and societal roles (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Patriarchy: - is a system of interrelated social structures which allow men to exploit women. It provides legitimacy to the operation and exploitation of women by men, including violence against women and children (Connell, 2005).

1.7. Organization of the paper

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the general background of the study, including the statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, significance of the study, and definitions of key terms. Chapter two provides a comprehensive review of related literature. Chapter three outlines the study's design, the study area, data sources, data collection instruments, the process of engaging with research participants, and challenges encountered during the research process. Chapter four presents and analyzes the study's findings. Finally, chapter five discusses findings of the data gathered and wraps up the study by summarizing the key findings of the study and provides conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concept of street children

The meaning of the term street children has been widely debated and it is difficult to find a typical definition for it (Ennew, 2003). Researchers attempted to divide street children into subgroups even though there are many ways that classify street children, based on street – life involvement street children categorized into two, that is children ‘of the street’ who are homeless, work and sleep or live most of the time on the street without family support whereas ‘children on the street’ are those who are mainly engaged in the street for economic activities but have relations with their families (UNICEF, 2006).

As stated in above children on the street refer to those engaged in the street but with regular contacts with their families whereas children of the street denote those who live, work and sleep in the street (Bayissa, 2021). The great majority of street children from the developing world are not homeless that is many street children, approximately ninety percent work in the street but live at home (Bayissa, 2021).

A recent research conducted by UNICEF, revealed that worldwide, around 28 million children live in the street, while in Ethiopia’s recent report by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the number of homeless people in Addis Ababa was around 24,000 in 2018; approximately 10,500 street children and 13,500 homeless adults (UNICEF, 2019). Similar evidence showed that in Ethiopia, over four million children are anticipated to live under particularly difficult circumstances. They are at high risk of sexual and physical exploitation besides, 15.6% of the street children are practicing risky sexual activity, and 61.6% of the street children face health problems. (Degu et.al, 2022)

According to Kibrom (2008), children in Oromia constituted 46% of the total population where 11.6% of them are homeless children. Of the total homeless children in the region, about 66% lived in urban Oromia while remaining 34% lived in rural Oromia. Moreover, Shashemene town as a commercial center has recently attracted many migrants particularly from the densely populated South Ethiopia Regional State and Central Ethiopia Regional State in search of work and for a better life. There has been a growth in the number of children on the streets, with the

continued growth of the town. Many of whom are attracted to the town with the hope for good income generating possibilities (Issa, 2019).

Furthermore, Working or/and living on street exposes children to various problems and challenges which they have to shoulder or confront by their own. Children living on the streets are denied their basic human rights as they have no access to food, shelter, education and health care and are exposed to many forms of discrimination and abuse. (Zerihun, 2018).

Among the most complex challenges that street children face are physical abuse, sexual abuse, mental and emotional abuse, health problem, child labour, juvenile delinquency and child trafficking (Issa, 2019).

According to the findings of Degu et al. (2022), it was found that children spending time on the streets are exposed to various risks, encompassing both health and social challenges. Additionally, children may exhibit unusual behaviors such as aggression and sense of hopelessness.

The significant portion of street children are consistently mistreated by adults. The children are badly treated, tortured, and even killed. Street children are frequently misperceived as antisocial, robbers, and crime makers, in which all of such maltreatment acts may put a long lasting effect in the normal development of the children and many of them turn to be street survivors to escape from such adult harassments (Abrha, 2016).

Similar to many developing countries, children in Ethiopia confront a multitude of multifaceted challenges. Many children live in challenging conditions, and confront various forms of abuse and exploitation. Among these challenges, sexual abuse is a prominent issue within this context among street children. Due to gender based violence and exploitation. Female street children face increased vulnerability compared to their male counter parts (Genet, 2007).

Female Street children are usually involved in sexual behavior at a very young age, and often exposed to risky activities associated with premature sexual exposure (Issa, 2019). Besides, among the above mentioned problems, sexual abuse is one of the most brutal form of violence against female children and present enormous challenges and risks. Female street children are exposed to physical, psychological and social problems and face life threatening risks like HIV/AIDS (SC UK, 2012).

2.2. Factors contributing for the streetism of the children

The motives for children leaving their homes have been well recognized by various authors (Issa, 2019). There are different reasons why children resort in street facing various challenges arising from their living environment. Living on the streets presents multiple difficulties for these children, primary among the factors that lead children to street life is family poverty, which is they don't have the capacity to accommodate their children's basic needs (foods, clothes, shelters) and these children may be pushed onto the streets due to parental alcoholism, which often involves physical abuse and loss of family members at early age, family breakdown or divorce , peer pressure are the major factors that expose children to street life (Mahderehiwot, 2014).

The origins of street children are multifaceted, involving factors that are experienced universally as well as those that are specific to particular cultures (Addisu, 2008).

The motives for children leaving their homes have been well documented by various authors such as, a study conducted by Abrha (2016) showed that on pushing forces associating with economic problems, family discord disturbance, death of parents and displacement of families, separation or divorce, remarriage, parental neglect and violence, lack of educational opportunities, urban life attractions forced children living in the streets of the country (Abrha, 2016). The most common reasons forced street children to live in the street were escaping abusive parental punishment, poverty, and parental alcoholic behavior (Bayissa, 2019). Hence, the problem of street children has been fallen one of the urban problems which call for the attention of the global community.

Though the circumstances leading each child to the streets differ, the lack of educational sustainability that is parents own limited education they may lack awareness about the importance of education. This situation encourages children to drop out of school and join the streets in some cases the families are the main factors that drives children from school (Issa, 2019).

2.3 Child sexual abuse

The definition of sexual abuse is ambiguous, and among scholars, the term has been conceptualized differently. The discussion often occurs in the context of childhood and child protection, where it is conceptualized as a disruption of expected role relationships and behaviors. For example, Carl (1993) indicated that there are multiple interpretations of what constitutes child abuse, with definitions varying significantly across state laws and penal codes. According to Carl, child sexual abuse is the exploitation of a child under the age of eighteen by adults or order children for the sexual gratification of the exploiter. The WHO defines child sexual abuse as “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not understand, that he or she cannot give informed consent to, or for which he or she is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates state laws (WHO, 1999).

Child sexual abuse is defined in various ways, ranging from concise to more elaborate explanations. In all diversity, two elements always appear as common denominators through all writing: engaging in sexual activities with a child and the fact that such contact takes place in conditions of abuse, that is, either coercion has taken place, or the age variance in co-participants differs so drastically that consent is not an issue. The common elements of the range of sexual activities incorporated in the various definitions often have sexual gratification to the offender, and activities of a contact nature, such as actual physical touching or interaction between the child and abuser (Dawes et al., 2004).

It is universally acknowledged that sexuality can be source of pleasure for individuals who are biologically mature, psychologically ready, and socio-economically equipped to handle its consequences in due time (Byer, 1999). Sexual activities, including penetrative acts such as penile or object penetration of vagina, mouth, or anus, and non- penetrative acts like touching, exhibitionism, involving a child in the creation or consumption of pornographic material, or encouraging two children to engage in sexual activities together, fall under the definition of sexual abuse (Howe, 2005 cited in Binega et al.,2014).

Researchers have highlighted its prevalence as a serious concern in many countries. The risks and consequences, such as HIV infection, unwanted pregnancies, and psychological and physical trauma, have drawn international attention to this silent crisis. The dangerous myth that sex with a virgin including babies, can cure HIV/AIDS has significantly exacerbated the problem.

Consequently, data from various studies show that child sexual abuse affects girls more frequently than boys (WHO, 2004).

Child sexual abuse is a public health and human rights issue that demands urgent attention. In general, female children who are living and working on the street are vulnerable and victims of sexual abuses. They face the danger of getting into accidents and violence. As stated in reviewed literatures, sexual abuse is prevalent among female street children in Ethiopia in general and Addis Ababa in particular. Therefore, there is a need to explore the various forms of sexual abuse of female children along with their pressing economic and social plight such as poverty, lack of shelter, food insecurity, denial of education, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

2.4. Coping mechanisms of female street children towards sexual abuse

In tackling their day to day challenges, street children employ various coping strategies to overcome the difficulties they face (Shimeles,2015). Coping mechanisms victims use categorized into folds that is” positive and negative “. Positive copings are useful and adaptive that it includes reading, self-help literatures, seeking spiritual guidance/ support and physical exercise. Whereas, negative coping skills dangerous to the child and others, such as alcohol/ drug abuse, aggressive behavior, compulsive sexual behavior and spending more time on work and other time – consuming activities (Jibril, 2007).

In the challenging environment of street life, experiences such as hunger, sexual exploitation illness, and death become a daily reality for children. These hardships, in turn, subject them to constant fear and feelings of depression. Consequently, as means of escaping these difficulties, some children resorted to suicide. This aligns with the conclusion drawn by Abebaw et al. (2014), who reported a significant proportion of children attempting suicide based on their research findings.

Research conducted by Taglo (2018) revealed that street children use various adaptive coping strategies to alleviate the psychological stress and frustration associated with the challenges of living on the streets. For these children, the use of illicit drugs and alcohol served as primary mechanisms for escaping the difficulties of street life, providing a sense of dizziness and helping them fall asleep more easily.

A study conducted by Mahder (2014) pointed out that the multifaceted nature of coping strategies employed by street children. A significant portion of these children use illicit drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms to address the stress associated with street life. Moreover, the study highlighted the importance of forming supportive alliances and friendships for street children. These bonds are essential for their emotional well-being and physical protection.

2.5 Theoretical framework

2.5.1 Structuration theory

Structuration theory is utilized to shape the theoretical foundation of this study. Theories provide specific perspectives on the world and are crucial for defining research problems by establishing credible relationships among concepts. They offer both a framework for critically understanding phenomena and a basis for organizing known information (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, I utilized structuration theory to explore the power dynamics, actions, social systems, institutions, and agency that influence female street children. This theory helps to understand the various forces that drive these children into urban centers and street life, highlighting how they adapt to and respond to their challenging circumstances.

In Giddens' theoretical framework, a fundamental aspect is the distinction between structure, structuration, and social systems. This conceptual differentiation provides a lens through which to analyze the dynamics of social life. Structure refers to the rules and resources that underpin the organization of society, encompassing norms, laws, and institutional frameworks. Structuration on the other hand, pertains to the processes through which social structures are reproduced or transformed over time as individuals and groups engage in everyday practices. Social systems encompass the patterns of interaction and relationships that emerge among individuals and groups within a given societal context. Together, these concepts offer insights into how societal arrangements shape human behavior and how individuals' actions reciprocally impact broader social structures (Giddens 1979, 1984).

In summary, Giddens' theoretical framework helps to comprehend the lives of sexually abused female street children by exploring the structural forces that shape their experiences, the social systems within which they operate, and the ongoing process of structuration that allows them to

navigate and possibly transform their difficult circumstances. This approach highlights their agency in managing societal constraints and working toward positive change in their lives.

Structural forces shaping the sexual abuse experience of female street children

1. Political and economic structures: Poverty

Extreme poverty is a major structural force driving children onto the streets. Studies indicate that Ethiopia has one of the highest poverty rates in sub-Saharan Africa, with many families unable to provide basic necessities (Chimdessa and Cheire, 2016.) Giddens argues that economic policies and governance structures shape individual life choices. In this context, limited social welfare systems, inadequate child protection laws, and weak enforcement mechanisms leave female street children vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

2. Social structures: marginalization

Female street children face systemic exclusion from education, healthcare, and legal protection. Research shows that these children are often criminalized rather than rehabilitated, experiencing harassment by police and rejection from shelters due to social stigma (UNICEF, 2019). Giddens' concept of social systems explains how societal norms and legal frameworks reinforce exclusion. Rather than integrating street children into protective structures, law enforcement and social institutions often perpetuate their marginalization, leaving them more vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

Thus, by applying Giddens' structuration theory, this study demonstrates how poverty, weak governance, social exclusion, and gender based discrimination push female children onto the streets and expose them to further vulnerabilities.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

The justification for this study is that qualitative research methods are best suited to explore a phenomenon that has not been studied extensively (Creswell, 2007). Very little is known about the experiences and coping strategies of sexually abused female street in Ethiopia in general and in Addis Ababa in particular. Moreover, sexually abused female street children in Addis Ababa are the most under researched and underrepresented group in the existing scientific literature. As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) explain qualitative research tends to be interpretive and seeks to understand a phenomenon in its context in greater depth. Exploratory study in qualitative method is advantageous in giving opportunity for participants to respond in their own words. Hence the study uses an exploratory qualitative approach, substantial data will be collected, analyzed and interpreted in relation to the research question objectives. The qualitative nature of the study also helped the researcher to engage in the process and tried to gather quality data through probing method.

3.2 The study Area

The study was conducted in Addis Ababa, Akakai Kality sub city. Akaki Kality is one of the sub-cities or districts in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. Akaki Kality is situated in the south eastern part of Addis Ababa. The sub-city is home to a diverse population, and the demographic makeup may include people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

As mentioned, this research seeks to explore the multifaceted problems faced by female street children. The study area was chosen because the researcher is familiar with it, having lived and worked there for more than two decades. This personal and professional connection enables the researcher to engage with the subject matter at a deeper level. Therefore, this research builds upon prior knowledge while addressing a critical gap in understanding, providing new insights to guide and inform meaningful solutions for this vulnerable population.

Hence, female street children who are living and working in the study area of the street are exposed to maltreatment including sexual abuse would provide a useful context for the generation of data.

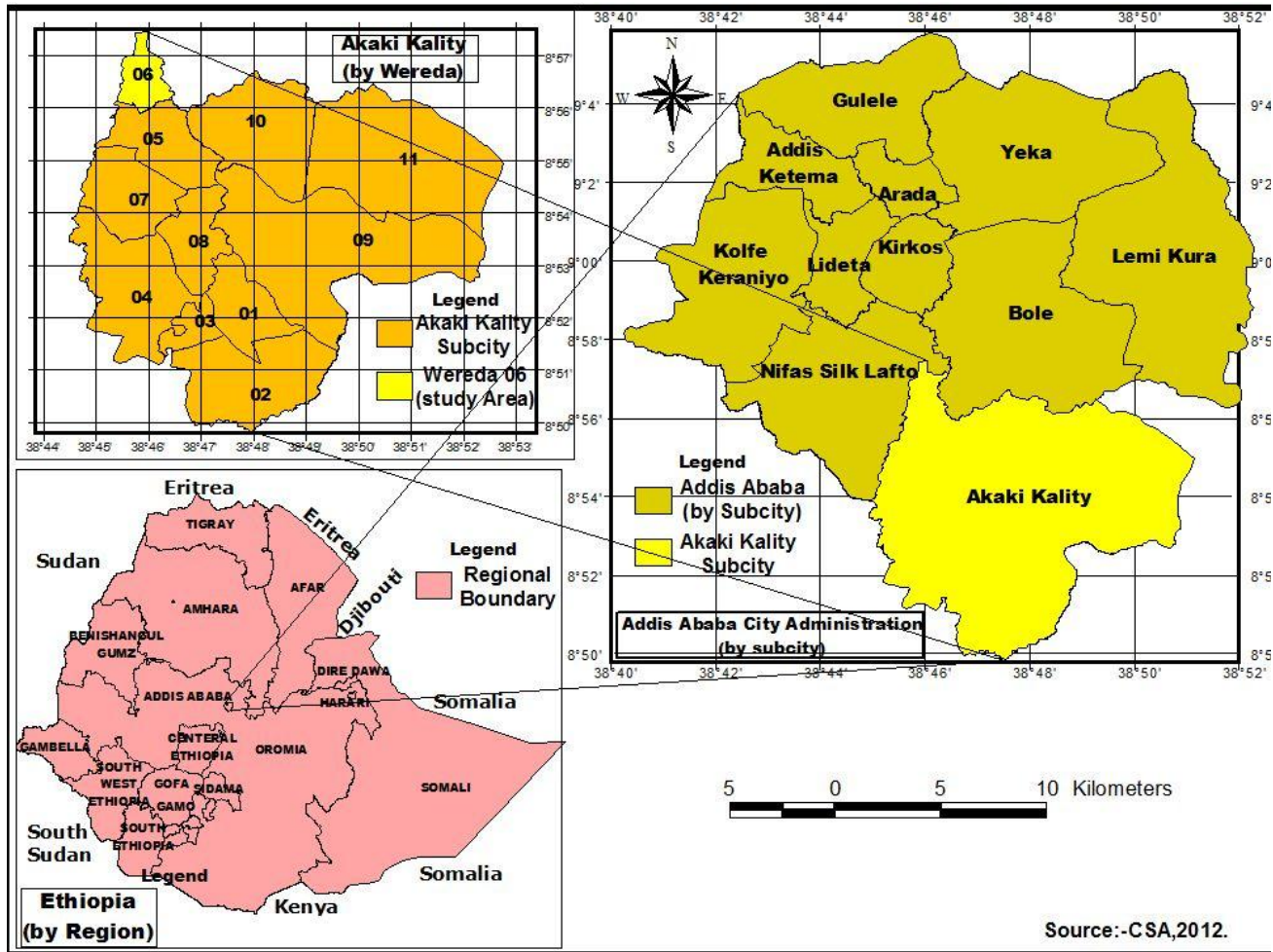


Figure 3.1 Study area map

3.3 Sources of Data

This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources so as to gather the necessary information and to address the research questions. Primary data collection was achieved through in - depth interviews and focus group discussions(FGDs) with female street children, interviews with key informants who have knowledge about the issue under study and observations around the study area. Secondary data included after a thorough review of various studies, reports, publications, government and non- governmental organizations, as well as books and online documents.

3.4 Selection of interview participants

Qualitative methods are resource intensive, smaller samples must be used to obtain rich qualitative data (Blaikie,2000), consequently 11 female street children for an in-depth interview and 7 female street children for FGD were selected to participate in this research. The researcher employed purposive sampling to select study participants, aiming to investigate a specific phenomenon by selecting information-rich cases. This approach facilitates gaining insight and a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is particularly useful for selecting participants that are challenging to reach (Patton, 1990). Among various types of purposive sampling techniques, a combination of criterion and snowball sampling methods were utilized to select a homogeneous group of participants.

Criterion sampling involves setting predetermined criteria to select participants based on their relevance to the study (Patton, 2002). Additionally, snowball sampling was used for hard-to-reach groups, since members of these groups are interconnected, participants of a study use their social networks to refer to the researcher to other potential participants who could meet the purpose of a study.

The researcher developed specific criteria for selecting participants for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to align with the study's objectives. The participants were adolescent females, aged 14 to 17, who were engaged in various livelihood activities. To ensure the participants had substantial experience relevant to the study, only those who had lived on the streets for more than a year were included. These criteria were designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In this study, I employed the principle of data saturation to determine the number of participants, rather than pre-determining the number in advance. As explained by Guest et al. (2006), Data saturation is achieved when the researcher gathers rich, high-quality, and detailed data, answers the research questions comprehensively, and reaches a point where further coding is no longer necessary in the analysis process.

3.5 Method of data collection

3.5.1. In-depth interview (IDI)

To gather more qualitative data, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with female street children who agreed to discuss their life situations and the daily difficulties they encounter, particularly regarding sexual abuse. As previously mentioned interviews were held with eleven female street children who are working and living on the street. interviews are the most commonly used method of data collection in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007).

Among the different types of interviews, I employed semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences and coping strategies of sexually abused female street children. Semi-structured interviews enable researchers and participants to engage in a dialogue, allowing for a detailed description and interpretation of a specific phenomenon through follow up questions and probes. Additionally, this approach ensures that the interview yields data relevant to the study's research questions. Researchers can also guide participants to discuss the issues in their own way, addressing the topics the researcher needs to understand (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Interview guides and the FGD guide were translated into Amharic to facilitate effective communication and understanding between the informants and the researcher. All interviews were conducted by the researcher herself. Thus, IDIs were conducted with eleven female street children who live and work on the streets.

3.5.2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus groups discussions (FGDs) are designed to cultivate a comfortable environment that encourages open sharing of ideas, experiences, and attitudes on a specific topic that brings together a small, homogeneous group, typically consisting of six to twelve individuals, to discuss topics related to the study agenda. Participants usually share common characteristics such as age, sex, and socioeconomic status, which define them as members who meets the inclusion criteria (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Once informants were chosen, the researcher arranged in-depth interviews and focus group discussions(FGDs) with participants. This was facilitated by briefing them on the study's purpose and significance. Thus, FGDs were conducted with a small group of female street children (6-12 participants) sharing similar characteristics.

3.5.3 Key Informants Interview(KII)

For this research the researcher has interviewed two key informants who are knowledgeable individuals on the subject and specifically linked to the study purpose. KII participants were a female psychosocial support officer from I care for the Nations NGO and a male children's rights and safety officer from Akaki Kaliti Sub-City.

3.5.4 Observation

Observation is the foundation of all scientific research (Patton, 2014). Direct observation focuses on observing and recording actual behavior rather than reported or recalled actions. Observations may focus on an individual, a location or event (Patton, 2014).

During the data collection phase, the researcher observed that the daily activities and interactions of female street children, their living and working conditions on the streets and their non-verbal communication and emotional responses during interviews and FGDs.

The observations were conducted on the streets of Saris, where the children live and work. The observations took place throughout the data collection period that is before, during, and after the interviews and FGDs. Additionally, informal observations were also occurred on different days and at various times (morning, afternoon, and evening) to capture the variations in experience.

3.5.5 Method of Data Analysis

Kruger and Newman (2003) explained the concept formation is an integral part of data analysis and begins during data collection. Conceptualization allows qualitative researchers to organize and make sense of data by categorizing it based on themes, concepts, or similar features. This study employed thematic analysis. Note-taking and audio recording techniques were used to gather data from key informants and in-depth interview participants. The data collected through audio recording was transcribed into written notes and the data collected by note-taking was organized into manageable notes. In order to extract the findings from the data, the researcher organized it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts, or similar features. Interviews were conducted in Amharic, with responses recorded and transcribed verbatim.

To ensure accuracy, the transcriptions were carefully reviewed before being translated into English. Observational data, including non-verbal cues and contextual details, was documented in field notes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data. To become familiar with the details, the researcher first read and re-read the transcribed texts before coding thematically. The codes were then grouped into broader themes to identify patterns and insights relevant to the research questions.

3.5.6 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted according to the research ethics guidelines, obtaining ethical clearance from the University Review Board and a cooperation letter from the Gender Studies Department. Before participation, all respondents received a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Written informed consent was obtained from adult participants, while parental consent and child assent were secured for minors under 18. Participants were assured of their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any stage, and the use of pseudonyms to protect their identities. Given the sensitive nature of the study, participants had the option to pause or stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable, with referrals to professional support services available if needed. Interviews with minors were conducted in a child-friendly manner, ensuring their comfort and understanding.

To encourage cooperation, the researcher prioritized creating a supportive and engaging environment rather than offering external incentives. The primary motivation for participation was ensuring that children understood the purpose of the research and felt that their contributions were valuable. The interview process was designed to be enjoyable and interactive while respecting the children's autonomy and personal choice to participate. In line with ethical guidelines, no incentives were used to influence participation, as offering rewards or monetary compensation could potentially pressure or influence the children's decisions. However, small tokens of appreciation, like non-monetary items, were given to participants after the interviews. These were presented as tokens of appreciation for the participants' time and effort, ensuring that cooperation was entirely voluntary and based on their willingness and comfort.

All identifying information was removed from transcripts, and data was securely stored to maintain confidentiality. These measures ensured that the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants were upheld throughout the research process.

3.5.7 Limitations of the study

The study is not generalizable to sexually abused female street children who live in other parts of the city. The findings of the study, instead can be considered transferable to individuals within this specific group who share similar socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the study participants. Moreover, I did not have the opportunity to visit rehabilitation centers and to observe the types of services provided and to understand how these services contribute to enhancing the coping strategies of these children and fostering their ability to become self-reliant citizens in the or the future.

3.5.8 Problems encountered during the research process

During the data collection process, I encountered several challenges, particularly in the participant selection phase. Given the large number of street children in the target area, I faced difficulties ensuring that participants met the study's inclusion criteria. Many street children and young women expressed interest in participating, assuming I was working with an NGO. To clarify my role, I had to present an official letter of support from the Center for Gender Studies, explaining that the study was solely for academic purposes. I also provided a brief overview of the study's objectives and inclusion criteria to ensure participants understood the scope of the research.

Another significant challenge was finding a quiet and suitable location for conducting in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Additionally, as a woman, listening to the painful stories of sexual abuse shared by these children was emotionally distressing. These stories deeply affected me, causing significant psychological distress that persisted for some time.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

The primary objective of this study was to explore the sexual abuse experiences of female street children in Akakai Kality Sub-City. To achieve this, I conducted in- depth interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observations with participants. The themes in this study were identified through a thematic analysis, ensuring they accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences and aligned with the research objectives.

The process of developing the themes began with carefully reviewing the collected data to gain a deep understanding of the participant's narratives. I then categorized recurring ideas and patterns into initial codes, which were further grouped into broader themes. These themes were refined and validated by cross-referencing them with the study's objectives and ensuring they authentically represented the data.

Through this process, three key themes emerged: the factors that push female children onto the streets, the challenges they face while living on the streets, and the coping strategies they use to navigate their experiences. These themes provided a clear framework for analyzing and understanding the complex realities of the participants' lives.

4.2 Profile of the street children

This section presents background information of the study participants. The first section describes the participant's demographic characteristics specifically, place of origin, their age, the circumstances surrounding their interaction to street life, educational status, family background and details of their present life circumstances.

Table1. Demographic information of the study participants

Pseudonyms For participant	Age	Educational level	Parental background		Place of origin	Reasons to join street life	No. of years spent on the street	Current means of survival
			Mother	Father				
Tigist	15	4 th grade	Alive	Alive	Welita Sodo	Family disintegration	1 year	Begging
Abebech	17	8 th Grade	Dead	Alive	Welita Sodo	Disagreement with mother	4 years	Begging
Belaynesh	14	2 nd Grade	Dead	Dead	Welita Sodo	Death of parents	3 years	selling used water plastic
Meseret	16	4 Grade	Alive	Alive	Gonder (Dabat)	Early marriage	2 years	Begging
Mekdes	16	5 th Grade	Alive	Alive	Bahirdar	Peer pressure	3 years	Begging and sex work
Hanna	15	7 th Grade	Alive	Alive	Addis Ababa	Economic (parents inability to afford school)	2yrs	Sex work and Begging
Frehiwot	17	5 th Grade	Alive	Dead	Addis Ababa	Economic (parents inability to afford school)	3 years	Sex work
Betty	16	5 th Grade	Dead	Dead	Tigray (Alamata)	Death of parents	2 years	Selling used water plastics
Adanech	15	3 rd Grade	Dead	Dead	Oromia (Holeta)	Death of parents	2 years	Begging
Selam	14	2 nd Grade	Dead	Dead	Welita Sodo	Death of parents	1 year	Begging and sex work
Kalkidan	15	7 th Grade	Alive	Dead	Hawassa	Disagreement with mother	2 years	Begging

The participants age ranged from 14 to 17. Participants namely Belaynesh and Selam joined the street at the age of 14. Tigist, Hanna, Adanech and Kalkidan joined the street at the age of 15. Whereas the remaining participants such as Meseret, Mekdes, and Betty joined the street at the age of 16. While Abebech and Frehiwot joined the street at the age of 17.

All of the participants dropped out of school at the primary level education. Regarding their places of origin, most of the participant's migrated from rural parts of the country. The majority of the participants namely Tigist, Abebech, Belaynesh, and Selam migrated from Welita Sodo, Adanech migrated from Oromia region, Mekdes and Meseret migrated from Amhara region whereas Betty from Tigray (Alamata) and Hanna and Frehiwot from Addis Ababa and Kalkidan from Hawassa.

With regard to their parental background, all of the participants came from low-income families. Most of them were single orphans whereas four participants namely Selam, Betty, Adanech and Belaynesh were double orphans. All the participants are migrant and take a considerable proportion.

4.2.1. Factors contributing for the streetism of the children

Female street children in this study area resorted to street life due to various interrelated push-and-pull factors that led children to leave their homes and families. Available literatures on street children in Ethiopia in general postulates that street children are migrated to urban areas from rural areas (Shimeles, 2015). The response obtained from research participants revealed that no single factor influenced the decision of the female street children to resort to the street way of life; rather there was interplay of various factors. Among the main reasons parental death, family conflicts (domestic violence) and abuse, early marriage, economic attraction of cities, peer pressure and lack of proper supervision by parents and guardians. The following were reported by research participants that drive them onto the streets.

Economic attractions of cities

Cities are often viewed by rural populations as locations where improved employment prospects and educational opportunities are accessible. The in-depth interview participants also reported that they migrated to the capital city because they expected better employment opportunities, such as working in restaurants as waitresses, working in construction activities as daily laborers, shoe shining, and at the same time to pursue their education in evening classes. Other contributing factors were also mentioned by research participants that are rendering on the street an attractive option,

One of the contributing factors that was identified during the in-depth interview and focus group discussions which led female street children to resort to the street is the condition of growing up in persistent poverty. In this case, Hanna indicated her street life experience as follows:

My name is Hanna. I am 15 years old. I live in Addis Ababa. I am the 2nd girl in the family. I have three brothers and three sisters my parents can not afford to feed the family and to send us to school. I do not have enough clothes and exercise books for my education. For this reason, I joined street life.... Sometimes I go home on holidays and give my mother some money which I get from begging and sex work.

During the interview and focus group discussion sessions, street children affirmed that they predominantly originated from economically disadvantaged family settings. They emphasized that their migration to the streets was mainly due to the absence of adequate support and care from both parents and family members.

Peer pressure

In this study certain children articulated their engagement in the street life is due to the fact that the children are attracted to streets either to socialize with peers or for recreational activities. Mekdes, 16 years old street child who migrated from Bahirdar, narrated her street life experience as follows:

My parents lived in Bahirdar. I have four brothers and two sisters. My father is merchant and my mother was public servant. I had everything in my home, I left my hometown due to my friend's influence. My friends told me that Addis was good for living. I ventured onto the streets in search of freedom. Unfortunately, the reality in Addis was far from what I had expected and heard from my friends. Instead of the promised prosperity and freedom, I faced hardships.

Kalkidan, another child respondent narrated her experience in the following way:

My name is kalikidan, I am 15 years old. I went out to the street because I was pregnant as I was 7th grade with the influence of my friend. My father was an army member of the "Derg" regime, he passed away when I was little and my mother raised me and my sister by begging on the streets. The day my mother knew about my pregnancy she expelled me, and eventually the streets of Hawassa became my home.... Later I came to Addis Ababa after I gave birth to my baby girl. People told me Addis Ababa is good but nowadays Addis is not a good option for begging; there are a lot of beggars or "Yene bites" ...plus due to the cost of leaving is very high now, the people do not give us money.

Therefore, the study pointed out that some female street children opted to join street life either to survive, or to gain their freedom influenced by their peers who had already joined street life.

Parental death

Death of parents made children to face various risks and vulnerability that can affect their development. Orphan children leave their homes to join the street searching for better life and escaping from the harsh environment. Research participants reported that parents' death put them at high risk of physical, emotional and psychological risks upon resorting to street life. Among the orphaned children in this study, Betty who lost both of her parents narrated her experience as:

My name is Betty. I am 16 years old and was born in Tigray, specifically in Alamata. My parents passed away, leaving me with 2 brothers and 1 sister. After the death of my parents' things, were not the same for me as it was when they were alive. My elder brother was the one who was taking care of the family. He did not allow me to go out of home and to meet my friends. He used to abuse me physically and psychologically and I was very tired of his acts I didn't have any freedom and got tired of his beatings . Due to this I lost interest in my education. I was very bored to go to school.... then, I left my home to my friends near Alamata. I already knew a girl who was on the street near the neighborhood and later come to Addis together.

Family violence

The other apparent reason why female street children resort to the street is due to different disagreements and disputes with guardians or parents. Research respondents indicated that one of the reasons that forced them to be on the street is violence in the family. Tigist explained her experience as:

My name is Tigist. I am 15 years old. I was born in Welaita sodo. I have 2 brothers and 2 sisters. My parents live in Welita sodo. There is no peace in the family. My parents always fight to each other. I grew up watching violence between my parents for many years. My father was so cruel he repeatedly abused me physically and verbally because he thinks I supported my mother ... I faced trauma and hopelessness and felt deep hatred towards my parents.... This makes me sick and I suffered various psychological risks which in turn lead me to dropped out of school at 4th grade. Finally, I left my home town and came to Addis in order to search a better life.

Hence, the aforementioned narrative explains that family violence is a significant cause for female street children to end up to street life. Moreover, these instances highlighted problems in the parenting styles notably showing repressive.

Early Marriage

The Ethiopian government has adopted international and national conventions and established policy frameworks in order to protect children from early marriage and other forms of gender-based violence, with a focus on protecting children. For decades, early marriage has been prevalent in rural parts of Ethiopia. It is still prevalent and recently, it has been acknowledged as a harmful traditional practice that violates children's rights and has a negative effect on their well- being (Mikiyas et al.,2020). Meseret, age 16, research participant who migrated from Gondar narrated her experience as follows:

While I was living in Dabat I had a good life. As much as they could my parents were helping me to finish school. I am the 5th daughter in the family and I have four sisters. All of my sisters did not get married. when I was 14 years old, my parents forced me to marry.... Since, I had an ambition to pursue my education I didn't have any interest to get married....My parents had to give their consent to give me because they didn't have male child. Hence, I made this difficult decision to leave home without informing any one including my mother.... Finally, I escaped from this marriage with the money I had stolen from my father, and I went to my aunt who lives in Addis Ababa but I couldn't find her.

Chronic poverty

Chronic poverty emerges as a significant factor for perpetuating children's exposure to street life, as evidenced by the participants during interviews. In-depth interview participants revealed that the incapacity of parents to provide food and to cover school fees frequently contributes to their decision to resort to the streets. According to Frehiwot:

I have been on the street for the last 3 years. I am working on the street to help my mother, who has been a house wife and took responsibilities to support our family following my father's passing. My mother is broken and was not able to raise four children alone finally, I decided to quit my education when I was 6th grade and started working on the street.

In addition, in the absence of parental guidance and nurturing, it becomes evident that girls are particularly vulnerable to experiencing violence and being drawn into street life for an array of reasons. These may include assisting other family members or securing basic needs such as food, shelter, and educational expenses. Thus, one reason for female children commonly resort to living on the streets could be in order to earn money after losing their parents.

Another participant, Abebech, age 17, explained her reasons in the following way:

I used to live with my stepmother and my father. She hates me for no reason. I used to be outstanding in education amongst the rest of my four brothers and two sisters; I was the only daughter of my biological mother. My step mother gradually developed antipathy and abused me verbally She failed to give the necessary support and care given to her own children. She didn't give me enough food, clothes and educational materials; this situation affected me negatively and forced me to quit my education at 8th grade and made me to leave the house.

4.2.3 Challenges faced by female street children on the street

The daily lives of female street children are usually marked by hardships and survival strategies. They wake up early morning in unsafe shelters, such as under bridges, in abandoned buildings,

or on the streets. Their first concern is finding food and water which may involve begging, engage in low income activities including commercial sex work as a means of survival.

Due to sexual abuse and exploitation, street girls are subjected to various challenges, such as HIV/AIDS, STDs, and unwanted pregnancies (UNICEF, 2007). Female children living on the streets are more vulnerable compared to their male counterparts because they are more exposed to gender- based violence and exploitation. In this study, most of these children were highly exposed to rape. Accordingly, Tigist, age 15 research respondent narrated her experience on the street as follows:

I thought everything would be easy once I stepped out into the streets. The situation was different and beyond my expectation. The male street children often attack the female street children with cruelty. When I was just 15 years old.... I was raped heinously for the first time. This bad experience resulted in numerous physical and psychological problems. One day, as I was walking on the street around Saris Addis Sefer, a street boy came to me and put a knife on my neck. He cut my body and beat me badly finally he harshly raped me street life was so hard for me.

It was also reported from in-depth interviews and FGD participants that the major perpetrators of sexual abuse were street leaders who had lived on the street for a long time and were involved in survival activities that include theft, garbage-collection and carrying goods. They are also the ones who set the rules that direct the children who work and sleep on the street. They are also violent and use forceful acts including verbal and physical abuse as a means of controlling female street children to the extent to stay on the area or to leave the area. The narration from FGD discussant mentioned as follows:

I know a 14- year old street girl who leaves on the street by begging. The act of being a street girl puts every girl at high risk of being raped.... The girls became pregnant as a result of rape and unsafe sexual intercourse. I was terribly sorry for her because the one who abused her left her alone, and when she got to know that she was pregnant, she suffered a lot. Finally, she gave birth to a male child, but after some time she left the baby in around Saries Abo church. A lady in the neighborhood picked him up and started raising him since then.... she was later shifted from that area.

On the other hand, girls on the streets either become pregnant as a result of rape, have one or more child. Moreover, in this study female street children make use of new born children as a means of earning money. Abebech another research participant described her experience as follows:

I was raped when I was sleeping in the plastic shelter. As I joined the street our leader, who has lived on the streets for many years, forced me to sleep with him. He is a very cruel person he beat me several time...for this reason I sleep with him whenever he wants to ... and I got pregnant twice, and now I have two boys from him.... he never cared about me and my children, you know these days' food is very expensive. I feed myself and my children by begging, whereas some good people give me clothes, food, and money for raising my children... Street leaders show no intimacy for us they only get sexual and financial benefit from us that all kept quiet for some time (Crying).... men are so cruel in general.

Kalkidan, who migrated from Hawassa also narrated her street life experience as follows:

Once upon a time, my friend took me to a hotel on our way back from school. I almost got unconscious after a drink, which I took from a table; later I found out they had added something that made me unconscious... One of the boys from the group took me to a room and raped me. The next morning, I found myself in the hotel room. I had extreme stomach pain and passed a lot of blood but I didn't want to tell anyone including my mother. After three month I knew that I was pregnant, I was trying to abort it, but in my condition it was impossible.... Being pregnant and living on the street is a very difficult situation. My mother didn't allow me to her house as she knew I was pregnant so I was forced to deliver my baby on the street in Hawassa. After my baby was 6 months old I came to Addis Ababa but it is very difficult to beg on the street and to raise a child.

The Other serious problems faced by street children is the use of substance abuse, such as chewing chat, sniffing glue (mastish) and ganja. These practices sometimes lead to overdose, which risks, violence, physical abuse and to the extent of rape. In general, they use substances to cope with cold climatic weather and psychological problems. In the case of this research, the issue of rape mainly arises when the perpetrators are intoxicated, Belaynesh a research respondent further explained:

When I was 14 years old, I got raped in the street by 3 intoxicated street boys. As I was passing by Saries Abo on my way to collecting used water plastic bottles, they came in a group and raped me after making me sniff a glue.... Then after, I hardly remember what they did to me. They made the intercourse in the group they call it 'Yedama'. For this reason, I passed through a lot of serious physical injury and psychological problems. I suffer from womb infection and I was also pregnant then I was forced to induce an abortion.

Another FGD discussant also narrate her experience as follows

Life on the street is very harsh. I used to get beaten by police without any reason. In addition, older street boys beat us to snatch our money and clothes. They usually threaten us with razor blade for no reason. There is no one who protect us our life is always in danger.

Hence, in this study it is clear that the perpetrators often use different strategies to sexually abused female street children that is they mainly use physical power to control these vulnerable segments of the societies. Research participants revealed that were threatened and abused by street boys against their will. To witness this Selam said that, "...Street boys usually threaten us by showing razor blade and they tear our body and face to take our money which we get from begging and we are sexually abused forcefully many of us has the scar on our body and our face....as you can see mine, I got this scar from the street life."

All of the unwanted pregnancies due to rape or unsafe sexual intercourse end up either through abortion or giving birth which makes them a higher number of street mothers. Most of the time the abortions were practiced in unsafe and traditional way this exposed these vulnerable children for various complicated health problems. One of the FGD participant further stated that:

Many of the female street children become pregnant at least once. Moreover, most of the girls don't have awareness of pregnancy risks. Hence, they often resort to abort it. I know one 15-year-old child who suffered after taking traditional medicine, she had serious health complications and infections.... She smelled very bad and she almost died due to heavy blood flow finally, she survived after getting treatment at the hospitalthis is how bad street life is."

Therefore, in this study it was identified that street men and street leaders were among sexual abusers of female street children. The researcher also observed that street children both boys and girls often seen gathered and move from place to place together for begging, eating, sharing clothes, gambling and doing daily activities around the streets. Kalkidan, one of research participants in this study affirmed that:

Street boys make sex with street girls whether we like it or not as long as we are on the street. Physical abuse is a common practice among street children. Since we don't have equal power street life is very hard for us Street boys and street leaders have the ultimate power to dominate and abuse any girl on the street. The street life challenge is very harsh for girls. Food is not our major problem we get left over foods from restaurants and sometimes we buy bread. I believe that God will never forsake those He has created.

In addition, Betty 16 years old study participant also narrated from her street life experience as follows:

I usually sleep together with boys... I am always sleeping with fear because the boys may force me to have sexual intercourse with them and as a result I may be exposed to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. They often forcefully try to kiss and touch my breast I get raped by member of our group

sleeping with me and my friends. This is common and the street boys often think that it is their right to abuse street girls sexually.

Thus, based on the above narratives, it can be argued that the perpetrators of the sexual abuse of female street children are often street boys who, shaped by a male-dominated patriarchal society, perceive their abusive behaviors as part of culturally accepted male rights. Patriarchal norms influence and shape gender dynamics and can contribute to abusive behaviors and fostering a sense of dominance and entitlement over women, which may explain why young street boys and adult men sexually exploit female street children. Additionally, the study revealed another negative consequence of sexual abuse among female street children: the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Particularly, those who have experienced rape or engage in commercial sex work are more vulnerable to such infections.

In addition to this, the situation worsens due to lack of timely medical treatment and the recovery from STIs took a long time due to repetitive sexual abuse. The following testimony by Frehiwot revealed:

Life on the street is very bad.... I get raped without condom several times while I do business. I slept with men to earn money. When we engage in sex work, abusers insult us using bad words like “Shelle” or “Shermuta” Some sex customers want to have sex in the anus; they forced me to do whatever they like to some of them don’t want to make sex in the vagina they wanted to make sex by showing sex movies. when I refused they beat me harshly.... I also get raped in the anus due to this I was in constant pain in my anus for long time... For me leaving on the street is like hell.

Moreover, another research respondent Adanech who was raped by an intoxicated street boy narrated her experience in the following way:

I was raped by intoxicated street boy while I joined the street. It was my first time to make sex. I was raped harshly without condom. Due to this I had serious health complications, I had abnormal discharge from my vagina, I was feeling itching in my private area, I also had a burning feeling and pain during urine.... When I went to the nearest government owned health center which provides free medical treatment, I was diagnosed I had womb infection but I didn’t get cured quickly after taking the medicine because I went to the health center after suffering for three weeks.

This study reveals that the problem of female street child sexual abuse is worse in the target area. Due to different factors related to victims most cases left unreported to Akaki Kality sub city

Wereda 06 children's rights and safety unit. During the interview sessions, research participants revealed that the victims do not report to the unit or legal bodies because the victims don't want to tell to anyone about their abuse except with in their peer groups in some cases.

Thus, the study reveals that as to the extent of the magnitude of the problem in the target area is very high, still there is so much work has to be done to fill the knowledge gap with regard to the availability of services provided to the female street children with this regard to sexual and Reproductive Health services. The key informant from the I care for the nations NGO affirmed that

Female street children are the most vulnerable section of the society. Exposure to sexual assault, rape, unwanted pregnancy, STIs and HIV infection are some of the risks they faced while living and working on the street. Moreover, there is dearth of information on the availability of the services and accessibility of health centers with regard to services about sexual and reproductive health services (SRH). There is lack of awareness about the STIs, they don't even know what to do when they get pregnant, they are not aware of the health center provides free medical services.... they suffer from STI diseases due to infection for this reason they have bad smell ...they think the smell come from due to their poor sanitation.... Therefore, these vulnerable groups need more attention in order to change their situation.

Another key informant from Akaki Kalitity sub city Wereda 06 officer on children's rights and safety officer also added

We are working with the community and the Sub city in coalition there is a new rehabilitation center in the sub city when there are children who are most vulnerable such as street mothers who need to get the priority to join the rehabilitation center they will be transferred to the center after getting the approval from the Akaki Kalitity Sub city. Moreover, we donate clothes by collecting from the community and the sub city.... there are also NGO's who support female street children who engage in the sex work in the target area such as to clean their clothes, their body and to cook their food.... Since our mandate is limited to Wereda level and due to shortage of budget we were unable to meet our aim as to the severity and the extent of the problem.

The other problem street children face while leaving and working on the street is the social stigma and discrimination that is imposed by the society. During the interview and focus group discussion research participants indicated that the attitude of the society towards them is negative. The majority of the street children affirmed that the general public including the police perceives them as worthless, dirty and they are labeled as thieves. Kalikidan indicated that:

When people see us on the street with our children, they assume that we are there due to our choice, our carelessness or we want to engage in sex work. But in reality many of us brought them in this world because we were raped.... It is very difficult to raise a child in this situation... however, their perception is different from our reality.

Regarding this case, some of the research participants such as Abebech noted that

There are still some good people who have positive attitude towards us, whenever there is holiday they give us money, clothes for our children and food. Sometimes they give us oil and flour.... As you can see this is my first born child, he has a swelling on his head, he has suffered a lot. A good woman who lives in the area helps me and takes my child to Alert hospital repeatedly to get medical treatment now he gets better but this kind of people are very few.

In general, the study participants revealed that since their survival options are limited especially female street children who engage in sex work experience stigma and discrimination and they feel disrespected and moreover, they are subject to verbal abuse expressions like “Shelle” or “Shermuta”. All the participants affirmed that they are so fearful of the police, and they consider themselves as thrown – away children. Thus, the isolation of street children results from societal attitudes that do not reflect their reality. Rather, it stems from ignorance, and lack of empathy.

4.2.4 Coping mechanisms of female street children with sexual abuse

The sexually abused female street children who live and work on the streets employ different coping mechanisms to avert their challenging environments. Their survival strategies primarily revolve around labour resources, begging and social networks. These children engage in low-income activities such as carrying goods, begging and commercial sex work. Data gathered from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions indicate that these coping mechanisms can be categorized into two groups: positive and negative coping mechanisms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Positive coping mechanisms:

Engagement in low- income activities is one of the positive coping mechanism for female street children in this study. For instance, Selam said,

With the money I get from begging, I can buy food and pay for sleeping place.” Another research participant Abebech, also said,

“With the money I get from begging, I feed myself and my two children since no one is helping me including their father who is a street leader”

Spirituality

In the study the sexually abused female street girls mentioned their attachment to God, for instance Meseret stated:

“I regularly go to church to share God all my problems and asking him to keep me safe, healthy and to cover my daily needs, I believe that everything is accomplished through his will”

Kalidan also stated her spiritual connection as follows:

I have strong connection with God, I am orthodox Christian I always pray, I attend fasting seasons and sometimes go to church ... he is the one who feed me and my child on the street. I have faith this situation will not be the end ...I want to do business like “Jebilo” after saving some money and want to continue my education ...I want to be also a good mother for my child she is my blessing, I live for her in this world.

Social networks

Forming social network is the most common coping mechanism in the street sub-culture. According to the research participants, forming an alliance with the group help them to protect themselves from the different kind of attack from the possible perpetrators. In this regard one of the research participant Selam said:

We cope up those street life difficulties by begging and carrying goods during day time and save money for our sleeping place.... If one of us didn't get that amount of money, then we all go outside the street and sleep together where there are security guards to protect us...

Another research respondent Betty stated:

When we live on the street we help each other We share food, clothes and sleeping places and we usually move from place to place together both day time and night time in order to protect ourselves from any attack... when one of us get sick we take care of each other.

Avoidance

Street children use some positive strategies such as avoidance to overcome street challenges such as social exclusion and stigma and fear. A research participant Abebech said:

As I mentioned earlier, while there are many cruel people who treat us poorly, there are also a few great individuals who support us and treat us with humanity. I am always grateful for these people. I focus on the positive aspects rather than the negative ones. I believe that one day our lives will improve. I hope to send my kids to school and see them become self-reliant individuals.

Moving from place to place (shifting)

Research participants revealed that shifting street stations is another form of coping mechanism they used to alleviate the enormous street life difficulties such as physical and sexual abuse. For instance, Kalkidan shared her experience in the following way: "... First I was at 'Atobis tera' which is called '32' there I was beaten by policemen and street boys several times for no reason ... then in order to escape from the physical and sexual abuse I shifted to Saries"

Negative coping mechanisms

Substance abuse is found to be a negative coping mechanism for the participants dealing with challenges of street life. In this study female street children who leave and work on the street engage in negative coping mechanisms due to the endangered street life. They feel insecure due to lack of food, proper shelter, cold weather conditions and to the extent of sexual assault. For instance, research participant Selam, indicated that

"Living in the street is very harsh, due to the cold weather conditions at night, rain and hunger I sniff glue (mastish) and chewing chat with my friends it helps me to forget all my worries."

Another research participant Hanna also said "I am always scared about my life while I do business some sex customers forcefully make sex without condom for this reason I am worried about my health due to HIV/AIDS. When I feel hopeless about life and to forget about all my worries I usually chew 'Chat' and drink alcohol".

Suicidal thoughts

In this study most of the participants highlighted that they had low confidence in themselves and declining self-esteem due to the different harassment they encounter while leaving and working on the street. Most of the female street children who were subject to sexual abuse wished to commit suicide. For instance, Belaynesh said:

"I always feel ashamed and feel very bad after I was raped by 3 intoxicated people I blamed myself several times why I end up on the street ... I said to myself I don't have to suffer anymore and wished to commit suicide."

Mekedes also narrated as follows:

When I think of myself right now I hate myself for who I am. I would have a good life in Bahirdar, if I weren't come here with my friend's influence. Several times I think am suffering here because my parents cursed me.... I always regret for being here. I should not deserve to live.... I want to die several times.... though, I was not raped and didn't have sexual relation with any one street boys try to kiss me and touch my breast forcefully.... When I think of what happened to my friends I always live in fear that one day that will be my fate. When I get new street joiners I advise them to get back to their families or where they live Being on the street should not be an option.

Adanech, another research participant also said:

“I wish I could die when an intoxicated street boy raped me harshly without condom when I joined the street ... besides, I went through serious health complications. From that day on I didn't move alone.”

Hence, the majority of the research participants indicate that they chew “chat” and drink alcohol to deal with stress, hunger, and bad weather conditions, when positive coping mechanisms unable to ease the hardships of street life.

Therefore, during the in-depth interview and focus group discussions research participants indicated that street life is very harsh and they don't encourage new street joiners to resort to the street. The researcher also observed despite the enormous challenges they face, most of the participants remain optimistic about the future.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the sexual abuse experiences and coping mechanisms of female street children in Addis Ababa, Akaki kality sub city. The participants shared with me the stories of the reasons behind the initiation of street life, their experiences of sexual abuse while living on the street and the coping strategies they utilize to manage the consequences of sexual abuse.

5.1 Factors leading to children on the streets

Previous studies consistently indicated that family poverty is the primary factor pushing female children to the streets. This study also revealed that female street children come from poor and chaotic families and family breakdown due to divorce and death of one or both biological parents were the leading reasons that led female street children to the streets. (FSCE, 2003; UNICEF, 2007).

Children who grew up in witnessing violence between their parents end up on the streets in search of a better life. In line with these circumstances of conflicts parents may physically, mentally, and sexually abuse their children gradually which is a significant factor that drives street children to adopt a street lifestyle. This finding is consistent with the previous studies (Kopooka, 2000; Kaleb, 2016; Shimles, 2015).

According to the findings of this study the basic factors that push children onto the street are a set of multidimensional factors that are involved for leaving their home are, family poverty, followed by conflict with biological parents. They also indicated that they are migrated to the capital city due to their high expectation of better employment opportunities such as to work in restaurants as waitress to work as daily laborers and to pursue their education in evening class. All the migrated children in this study did not get support or consent from their families, the migrated to the city by their own. Therefore, economic and social factors appeared to be primary in pushing children onto the streets. This finding is also consistent with the research findings of Mahderehiowt (2014).

Early marriage which was a common harmful traditional practice in rural parts of Ethiopia, that violates children's rights and which has a negative effect on their well-being, the female street

children in this study revealed that this harmful traditional practice is still practiced. In addition, the effects of this harmful traditional practice compel girls to leave their families and the place of origin, increasing their risk of ending up on the streets. The aforementioned findings are also consistent with the study results of other scholars such as (UNICEF, 2016; Yilma, 2007, Addisalem, 2020).

The research participants in this study indicated that the working and living conditions on the street did not match as to their expectations which is they were misinformed or told that they would find jobs like waitress or domestic workers. However, they are mainly engaged in bagging and sex work in order to meet their daily needs. For this reason, these children forced to encounter major additional risks which is sexual abuse.

5.2 Challenges faced by female street children on the street

Female street children face numerous challenges in their daily lives. They face physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and denied access to education, shelter and food. Additionally, they are subjected to harsh weather conditions, health problems, drug abuse, and social discrimination. They were also exposed to various types of sexual abuse, including group rape, attempt to rape, inappropriate touching, forced kissing, sexual harassment and insulting. Furthermore, the research participants revealed that they are highly exposed to rape and they also resort to commercial sex work when other means of survival are unavailable. This terrible situation exposes them to various problems, including sexually transmitted diseases(STDs), unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and HIV/AIDS infections. This is consistent with the finding studies of Solomon et al., 2002; Yonas, 2014; Leggese et.al., 2021.

The research findings indicated that street leaders and men were the main perpetrators of sexual abuse against female street children. Furthermore, the study highlighted that these girls not only sexually abused but also they were exploited financially. Additionally, in order to survive these children were forced to abide by their rules and the acceptance and normalization of forced sexual relationships with street men and street leaders were common experiences among these children.

Physical harassment of street children by police officers, street men and street leaders had become deep rooted in the street subculture. Moreover, the sexual exploitation of street children was on the rise annually (Yonas, 2014). These challenges not only made street life exceedingly

difficult for the children but also forced them into unstable and insecure existences. The study participants discussed the challenges and anxieties related to their physical vulnerability, which left them unable to defend themselves against powerful street groups.

It was also pointed out that new comers are among the most vulnerable group of street children to sexual exploitation, due to their lack of knowledge about street life, they fail to take necessary precautions when they first begin living on the streets. Additionally, almost every child could not escape from police beatings, these challenges not only prevent street children from leading a stable life, but also subject to other psycho-social issues such as hostility, fear of society and unruliness (Shimles, 2015; Abrha, 2016).

The study show that abusers employ diverse strategies for various forms of sexual abuse, predominantly using their physical, or hierarchical power to control and threaten the female street children. The street children do not share equal power dynamics that is boy's dominance and controlling behavior over girls, stemming from societal definitions of masculinity that are associated with dominance. Thus, the gender socialization patterns that promote male dominance and power over women and children lead young boys, adult and police officers to sexually abuse female street children in the target area. This finding is also in agreement with the research result of Misganaew and Worku (2013).

Early and unwanted pregnancy is another common and major challenge, particularly emphasized by the research participants. Female street children identified pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing as their most challenging life experiences. They shared unique stories of facing numerous hardships and dangers during pregnancy, including a lack of food, shelter, clean water, and adequate healthcare, all of which are essential for pregnant women. The study revealed that female street children became pregnant due to rape while living on the street. This finding aligns with the previous studies conducted by Legesse et.al (2021).

Sexual abuse affects street children in various ways, the vulnerability of STDs, and risk of HIV/AIDS, identified as consequences of the sexual abuse of street children. The study identified several physical symptoms resulting from sexual abuse, including burning and pain during urination, abnormal discharge from the genital area, prolonged itching and bleeding, and delayed treatment for STDs. Additionally, sexual intercourse under the influence of substances

like sniffing glue “mastish”, drugs, and alcohol, coupled with unprotected sex, considerably raise the risk of contracting STIs and HIV/AIDS among these children (UNICEF, 2007).

5.3 Coping mechanisms of female street children towards sexual abuse

Female street children who live and work on the streets employ diverse coping mechanisms to navigate their challenging environments. One of the coping mechanisms for female street children in this study is engagement in low – income activities. Majority of the children primarily engaged in menial activities such as begging and sex work. Their life style does not allow them to follow strict and structured hours of work. According to (ILO, 2002), the work of street children is part of the informal economy which is irregular and poorly paid.

Research participants employed distinct coping strategies to mitigate the psychological risks they faced encountered on the street. Major strategies included seeking emotional support from close members of their social networks, engaging in religious practices, ignoring and avoiding negative attitudes from the society, shifting locations and rotating sites as a means to escape danger and physical harm. These strategies helped the female street children enhance their relationships and social support, increase self-confidence, and maintaining a strong sense of a positive future (Bayissa, 2021; Abrha, 2016).

In this study, it is evident that female street children have undergone intense psychological effects resulting from diverse forms of sexual abuse. These effects encompass feelings of suicidal thoughts, fear of HIV/AIDS, hopelessness, low self-worth, depression, self-blame, anxiety and hate or fear of opposite sex were experienced by these children. To mitigate the psychological stress and frustration associated with street life, they use illicit drug and alcohol as a primary means to escape their hardships, inducing dizziness and aiding in sleep. This finding is also in alignment with the research findings of Mahder (2014). Informants further revealed that due to sexual exploitation and the hardships of street life, they experience fear and depression. To escape these harsh realities some have attempted suicide. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Abebaw et.al. (2014).

5.4. Conclusion

In concluding my study, I shall briefly look at the themes that this study intended to explore, that is the factors that led female street children to street way of life, sexual abuse experiences of street children, the reasons for the female street children to become target of sexual abuse and the coping strategies utilized by the female street children to manage sexual abuse.

Several factors play the role of pushing and pulling children into the streets. The study findings indicated that poverty is one of the major factor that is limiting families' ability to meet their children's needs and forcing them onto the streets. Besides, violence and abuse at home, the death of one or both parents, peer pressure, the pursuit of freedom, and family disagreement with in the family, rural urban migration, were identified as contributing factors that result in children ending up on the streets.

Being on the streets, make female children vulnerable to many risks particularly to various forms of sexual abuse. They were exposed to various types of sexual abuse, including group rape, attempt to rape, sex work, unwanted kissing and breast touching, sexual harassment and insulting. Street children, young male street people, the police and unknown individuals were found to be the main perpetrators of the street children.

The study also revealed that female street children who live and work on the streets are susceptible to various forms of sexual abuse due to their presence on the streets. In a patriarchal society that encourages boys and men to be strong, aggressive, and dominant, these dynamics contributes to the abuse against women and children.

It is found in this study that female street children engage in commercial sex work as one of their activities on the streets to earn money and support their families when other survival options are limited. The lack of support and adequate protection from their families and society at large makes girls vulnerable to and victims of sexual abuse.

Informants who were victims of various forms of sexual abuse in this study reported that they suffer from burning and pain during urine, abnormal discharge from sex organs, itching and prolonged bleeding due to untreated STIs. Additionally, many became pregnant and underwent induced abortions. They also faced physical and verbal abuse, which resulted in both short and long term psychological consequences. In addition, to cope with street related stress, the majority of female street children resorted to using illicit drugs and alcohol. Interviews revealed that due

to sexual exploitation and the harsh realities of street life, these informants suffered from fear and depression, and some even attempted suicide as a means of escape.

To deal with the challenges of street life, the informants used strategies such as shifting locations and site rotation in order to avoid physical harm and reduce the risk of being raped by powerful street and non-street individuals. Spirituality, giving less attention and avoidance to negative attitude by members of the society, and forming supportive alliances and friendships to defend themselves from various attacks are valuable strategies in managing the challenges of street life.

Street children are an important and productive segment of the general population. Various contributing factors for the sexual abuse of street children have been identified, economic factors are the significant factors. The absence of income on the street forced female street children to engage in sex work. Female street children live without support from concerned bodies. One of the primary reason for street children to end up on the streets is due to families' economic reasons.

5.5 Recommendations

1. Policy development and Implementation:

Governments must develop and implement comprehensive policies addressing the needs and rights of female street children, particularly focusing on protection from sexual abuse.

Addressing Economic Challenges: One of the primary reason for street children to end up on the streets is due to families' economic reasons. Therefore, addressing the issue of sexual abuse must involve tackling the underlying economic problems within the children 's families.

2. Partnerships and Collaboration:

Stakeholders should take the responsibility to develop formal training programs to educate the society about the bias against street children which can lead to discrimination, mistreatment and marginalization of the street children in general and female street children in particular.

Both governmental and non-governmental organizations should play a critical role in shaping mainstream society's perception of street children by advocating for their rights and highlighting their potential, these organizations can help shift societal attitudes and create a more supportive environment. A shift in societal attitudes can empower street children to realize their potential

and build self-esteem. Providing them with enriching experiences and opportunities can contribute to fostering a culture of impartiality, empathy, and humanity.

Furthermore, stakeholders must establish multidisciplinary teams to provide holistic support to sexually abused children, including medical, psychological, legal, and social services. Academic institutions must use research findings to advocate for evidence-based policies and interventions at the local, national, and international levels.

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Annex I

Addis Ababa university

College of Development Studies, Center for Gender Studies

In-depth interview guides for female street children

This in – depth interview guides were prepared with the general objective of the study that is to explore the sexual abuse experience and coping mechanisms of female street children in Addis Ababa, Kality, sub-city. All the research participants selected and participated in ethical manner.

A. Background information

- Tell me about yourself?
- How old are you?
- For how long have you been on the street?
- What is the level of your formal education?
- What is your religion?
- Where is your place of Birth?
- Why did you join the street?

B. Experiences and challenges of street children

- Why did you join the street?
- What did you do for living?
- What challenges did you face while working and living on the street?
- Have you ever experienced sexual abuse?
- Would you tell me how it affected you physically, socially, and psychologically?
- In what way do you think that sexual abuse and exploitation affect girl’s day to day life on the street?

C. Why do female street children exposed to sexual abuse?

- Could you tell me about conditions that you think out you at risk of sexual abuse?
- Tell me about the contexts in which the incident of sexual abuse occurred?
- Do you know other female street children who are sexually abused/ exploited?

D. What are the coping mechanisms used by the female street children to manage their experience of sexual abuse?

- Would you tell me how you managed risks faced as a result of sexual abuse?
- How did you cope with the physical risks (STIs, Pregnancy, Child delivery)?
- How do you cope with economic and social challenges you faced on the street?
- How did you cope with psychological problems you faced as a result of sexual abuse?
- What you would like to become in the future?
- What are you doing to achieve your future goals?

II. Questioners for Focus Group Discussions(FGD)

- Discuss some of the impacts of sexual abuse.
- Who are the perpetrators of sexual abusers of female street children?
- Why are female street children become target of sexual abuse?
- Would you describe your experiences of protecting yourself from sexual abuse?
- What strategies did you use? Which strategies were effective?
- What sources of support did you receive from other street individuals?

Addis Ababa University

College of Development Studies, Center for Gender Studies

Guides/ Checklist for Focus Group Discussions

This in – depth interview guides were prepared with the general objective of the study that is to explore the sexual abuse experience and coping mechanisms of female street children in Addis Ababa, Kality, sub-city. All the research participants selected and participated in ethical manner.

- What are the problems of female street children while living and working on the street?
- Discuss some of the impacts of sexual abuse.
- How do female street children protect themselves from sexual abuse?
- What strategies do female street children use to avoid challenges on the street? Which strategies were effective?
- What sources of support did street children get from other street individuals and other supporting institutions?

Addis Ababa university

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Key informant interview guides for key informant in Relevant government/non-government organizations working on the street children

Part I: Basic information

1. Interviewee code-----
2. Age-----
3. Sex-----
4. Name of your organization -----
5. Your position in the organization ----
6. For how long you served in the organization—
7. For what purpose/mission was the organization established----

Part II: Information Related to the sexual abuse experiences, challenges and coping strategies of sexually abused female street children.

- Are there sexually abused female street children in the area.
- What are the supports/ services your organization provide for sexually abused female street children in the area?
- What strategies are given by your organization in order to protect female street children from sexual abuse.
- What challenges have you faced in supporting female street children?
- What do you think should be done to minimize the problem of sexually abused of female street children?

Annex II

Consent Form

My name is Mahderehiwot Abebe. I am a third year post graduate student at Addis Ababa University, college of development studies center for Gender Studies. I am undertaking a research to get my master's degree. The main objective of my research is to explore the sexual abuse experience and coping mechanisms of female street children in Akaki Kaliti sub-city, Addis Ababa. You are selected to participate in this research because your life/work experience is directly related to the research process is found to be crucial to attain the research objectives. I would like to assure you that all the information that you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for academic purpose.

Therefore, I would like to genuinely ask you to put your signature so as to make sure that you agreed to participate in the research process and provide information that would be necessary for the completeness of the study. If you decide to participate in the study, you have a right to terminate yourself from research at any time and that will not harm you by any means. I may ask some personal information that some people find difficult to answer. I am not going to talk to anyone about what you tell me. Your answers are completely confidential. Your name will not be written on this form and will never be used in connection with any of the information to tell me. You do not have to answer any question that you don't want to answer, and you may end this interview at any time you want. However, your honest answer, to these questions will help me to better understand the current situation of sexually abused female street children and their coping mechanisms in Addis Ababa Akaki Kaliti sub city. I would greatly appreciate your help in responding to this study. The interview will take about an hour and therefore I ask your patience for the time I will take to finish my questions. Would you be willing to participate?
Signature of the interviewer Date (Respondents gave their informed consent verbally)

Signature of the interviewer..... Date.....
(Respondents gave their informed consent verbally)