

**STREET CHILDREN**

**STUDIES ON SCHOOL-AGE STREET CHILDREN IN ACCRA**

**BY**

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## Summary

This study looked at children of school going age found loitering about at the 31<sup>st</sup> December market, situated at Okaishie in the Ashiedu keteke District of the Greater Accra Region. Fifty children between the ages of 7-15 years made up of 26 girls and 24 boys were interviewed. Only 20% of the children come from the greater Accra Region. Although 87% of both parents were alive, 90% of this number were living apart. Over 60% of the children come from very large families. Only 44% of the children were still in school during the time of the study. The rest had stopped going to school. Their main occupation was trading which involved carrying of loads for a fee, selling polyethylene bags, provisions, water etc. Since the children made money, they fed themselves mainly on street foods of their choice. They looked very healthy although 30% complained of headaches. They also had plans for their future. Thirty seven percent (37%) of the boys wanted to be mechanics while 53% of the girls wanted to be seamstresses. They however picked up bad habits at the market from their friends. They learnt how to smoke cigarettes or Indian hemp and play truant at home and at school. The girls learnt to quarrel, fight and steal. The children complained about customers who cheated and abused them. They would however welcome any type of help in order to achieve something in life.

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## STREET CHILDREN

### PRELIMINARY STUDIES OF CHILDREN OF SCHOOL GOING AGE AT THE 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER MARKET

#### 1.0 Introduction

In Ghanaian societies, the involvement of children in work roles is not by any means a new phenomenon. Traditionally, children have been actively involved in domestic chores, farming activities and local industries as part of the usual social arrangement. For those in the rural areas, they either help on the farm, beach or in the particular trade of the parents. In the urban areas, children from low income families engage in petty trading before they go to school, after school, on weekends, and during vacations so that their education is not sacrificed for monetary gains.

However, in recent times, there has been an influx of children of school going age on the streets of the major cities and towns in Ghana, especially in Accra, during school hours. A large concentration of such children can be found around the markets in these urban areas. They live adrift on the margins of adult society scavenging, stealing, doing transient jobs, selling small items, shining shoes, washing and guarding cars. They are around as early as dawn and can still be found around late at night. Some of them have no real homes and actually spend their nights sleeping at bus stations, market places, cinema halls and in front of shops. In fact some have been away from their homes for such long periods of time that they find it more comfortable to be on their own and fend for themselves than to be under any parental control.

Since these children will grow into adults and take their place in the society one day, it is very important to study why children are turning to the streets instead of being in school and at home. It is also necessary to study the effect of the street life on their health, nutrition and development. Such information will be useful for policy makers, NGOs, social and extension workers involved in planning programmes and rehabilitating street children.

There are organisations such as Child Hope in Guatemala, Boy's Society of Sierra Leone The District Institute of the Protection of Youth and Childhood in Colombia The ATD Fourth World Movements and many others who are all trying to ensure that under-privileged children enjoy basic human rights. In the light of the above the GNCC requested the author of this paper to plan and execute studies on these children in Accra.

## **2.0 Research Design and Methodology**

### ***Survey Area and Sample***

The study was conducted at the 31<sup>st</sup> December Market in Accra. This market is situated at Okaishie in the Ashiedu Keteke District of the Greater Accra Region.

All children of school going age operating at the market were interviewed. The market officials helped with the selection of the children. In all 50 children, 26 girls and 24 boys, were interviewed.

### **2.1 Development of Questionnaire**

A structured questionnaire with both open ended and close ended questions was developed and used to collect information on socio-cultural circumstances, health, and nutritional status of the children. The questionnaire was pretested on ten children who did not form part of the study.

A face to face interviewing method was used. The questions were interpreted into the local languages and responses were recorded.

Ethel A. Martin's Nutritional Appraisals was used to determine the physical and nutritional state of the children.

## 2.2 Data Analysis

The results were presented in frequency and percentages. Data that could not be quantified were described.

## 3.0 Presentation and Analysis of Results

The age and sex distribution of the children were as follows:-

**Table 1: Age Distribution**

Age Distribution		
Age (Years)	Frequency	%
7-8	1	1
9-10	10	20
11-12	14	28
13-14	13	26
15	12	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Although the markets are dominated by women traders, the proportion of boys to girls is about the same in the market place. On conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the boys move into other fields as they grow up and most of them leave the markets for other jobs.

It was very important to know whether the children had living parents. It was equally important to know whether the children were roaming about in the market because they were orphans or because of other reasons.

**Table 2: Mortality of Parents**

	Males		Females	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Both Parents Alive	21	87.50	24	92.3
Both Parents Dead	1	4.17	0	0
Mother Dead	2	8.33	0	0
Father Dead	0	0	2	7.69
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The children were asked whether their parents were living together or not. This was an important question because if the parents were living together, it would have contributed to the stability of the child at home.

The results obtained are shown below:-

**Table 3:**

Father and Mother	Frequency	%
Living together	5	11.11
Living apart	40	88.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100.00</b>



About 90% of the children have their parents living apart. In many cases, when parents live apart, either the mother or the father expects the other parent to keep an eye on the children. If this is not done, the children do exactly what they please outside of parental control.

**Table 4: Education of Parents**

Level of Education	Father	%	Mother	%
No education	2	4.26	20	42.55
Some education	6	12.77	20	42.55
Middle School Certificate	39	82.98	7	14.89
Secondary School	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.0</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>47.0</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Most of the children did not know the levels of education of their parents. From the results above (Table 4), Middle School Leaving Certificate is the highest level attained. Nearly half of the mothers (43%) have had no schooling while the others had some type of schooling. This low level of education of parents can affect the children in several ways. It qualifies the parents for low status economic position, and therefore low incomes. The children are adversely affected as they are not encouraged to be ambitious. They do not cultivate higher aspirations as there is no one in the family to look up to for encouragement.

### 3.1 Religion

All the children claimed to be Christians except three who were Moslems.

### 3.2 Family Size

The children were asked the number of brothers and sisters that they have. This is very important because the higher their numbers the more difficult it would be for the parents to clothe, house and feed them.

**Table 5: Siblings Distribution**

<b>No. of Siblings</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
1	3	6
2	5	10
3	5	10
4	4	8
5	11	22
6	11	22
7	5	10
8	1	2
9	1	2
10	2	4
Don't know	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table 5 above, over 60% of the children belong to a family of five or more children. Since the parents are already in the low socio-economic group and the children are also many, there is the tendency on the side of the parents to encourage the children to earn some income to help in the home. Conversely the children might decide to help themselves by working in order to earn some money and acquire some personal effects.

### 3.3 Home Town

The children at the time of the study live in Accra with their parents or guardians. Their hometowns however are in different regions all over the country. Twelve (24%) of the children come from the Eastern region, followed by 11 (22%) from the Volta Region. Next is Greater Accra Region with 20%, Central region with 12%; Northern Region 4% and 16% from Togo.

**Table 6: Who Takes Care of the Children**

	<b>Boys</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>%</b>
Parents	8	33.3	5	19.2
Mother alone	3	12.5	7	26.9
Father alone	-	-	-	-
Grandmother	3	12.5	4	15.4
Guardian	-	-	-	-
Uncle	1	4.2	2	7.7
Aunt	1	4.2	4	15.4
Self	8	33.3	2	7.7
Acquaintance	-	100	2	7.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100</b>

The children were asked to talk about their guardians. It was interesting to note that 20% of the children look after themselves. Mother alone looks after 20% of the children while father alone does not take care of any child. Twenty-six percent (26%) of the children are cared for by their parents. The grandmothers also help as 14% of the children are looked after by them. Most of the girls have someone caring for them while the boys fend for themselves. The two girls fending for themselves live with someone who provides only shelter.

### 3.4 Education of the Children

Some of the children have stopped going to school at different stages of their education. Forty-six percent (46%) no longer go to school. Out of this number 40% stopped at the primary level and the rest at the middle level. About 34% of the children are still in the primary school and 10% in the middle school. Four girls (10%) never had any schooling as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: Education of the Children**

School	Boys	Girls	Total	%
No schooling	-	4	4	8
Stopped in Primary	14	8	22	44
Stopped in Middle	2	-	2	4
Still in Primary	4	13	17	34
Still in Middle	4	1	5	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

The children did not appear to have missed school. They enjoy the work they do and they look very satisfied.

### 3.5 Jobs Performed by the Children

Jobs of various types are performed by the children at the market. They trade in all commodities – provisions, textiles, fruits and vegetables, fats and oils, cereals, roots and tubers, plantains, powdered milk, sugar and sweets and also vended cooked foods. Some sell polyethylene bags and other plastic or metal containers, iced water and soft drinks. There are those who sweep the stalls and collect refuse. They are called "Kaya Boilers" There are girls who carry loads for traders and customers and they are called "Kaya Yoo". There are girls as well as boys "Kaya boiler"

Those who go to school claim that they work and attend school as well, but those who have stopped schooling work full time.

They work individually in order to make maximum money. The services of “Kaya Boiler” are needed before the commencement of trading – that is, very early in the morning and during closing time in the evening. Table 8 describes the job distribution among the children.

**Table 8: Job Description and Distribution**

Job Description	Boys	Girls	Total	%
Kaya Boiler	19	2	21	42
Kaya Yoo	-	9	9	18
Polyethene Bag Sellers	2	1	3	6
Iced Water Sellers	1	4	5	10
Toffee Sellers	1	-	1	2
Foodstuffs Sellers	-	2	2	4
Cooked Food Sellers	1	2	3	6
Fruits & Vegetables	-	5	5	10
Pito	-	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.6 “Kaya Boiler”

This group of workers is quite well organised. Some of the children have their special customers whose stalls they sweep and clean daily and get paid for their work. One child may have about five to six customers. There are others who go round from stall to stall with brooms and baskets looking for work. After sweeping, they carry the rubbish to the rubbish dump.

### 3.7 Iced Water Sellers

These groups of children are many. They can be found everywhere in the market because selling iced water is very profitable. They usually have two buckets with cups or one bucket, a gallon and the cups.

Some of them hire the buckets, gallons and cups for a small fee daily while others buy their own from their profits. They purchase the water and ice blocks that they sell.

Some of the children have started trading on their own. Others sell items or commodities on commission basis. Some of them sell for their parents or guardians who in turn take care of their personal needs. While some of them hawk their wares, others are stationary behind theirs.

### 3.8 Money Earned Daily

The daily earnings of the children ranged from ₦60.00 to ₦600.00 for the boys and from ₦80.00 to ₦700.00 for the girls. The average for the boys is ₦200.00 whilst that for the girls is ₦250.00.

### 3.9 What Money Is Spent On

The money earned is saved in a kind of credit club called 'Susu'. Thirty-eight of the children take part in 'Susu'. Several men and women are in the 'Susu' business. The customer (the child) is supposed to pay some fixed amount daily to the 'collector'. The customers can collect their money any time but the collector is entitled to a day's contribution once every month. Therefore it is in the interest of the "Susu" organisers to get as many customers as possible and to have a good reputation. Some children contribute as much as ₦400.00 daily but the average amount is ₦50.00.

About 20 (40%) of the children give the money they earn to their parents or guardians while the remaining 30 (60%) purchase personal effects like clothing with the money. The children purchase mainly second-hand clothing which is in abundance in and around the market. They also purchase some food with some of the money. A couple of boys are saving their money in order to start their own trading business while six others enjoy watching video with their money.

### 3.10 Nutrition

The foods the children eat are varied. They all looked healthy, strong and happy. Table 9 presents data on the number of meals eaten per day.

**Table 9: Number of Meals Eaten a Day**

Meals	No.	%
Once	-	-
Twice	2	4
Three times	45	90
Four times	3	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

The children take various foods for breakfast. All their food is purchased and the following are the popular breakfast foods:-

- Boiled rice and stew
- Kenkey, fried fish and hot pepper
- Koko and bread
- Banku and stew
- Rice and beans (Waatse)

Food for lunch is also purchased and again the foods are of various types. The most popular dish is fried fish and kenkey followed by boiled rice and stew. Other dishes purchased for lunch are fufu and soup, gari and beans, and banku and stew. Those children who are staying with guardians go home for dinner, which is mainly fufu and soup. Those left on their own purchase kenkey and fried fish.

The amount of money spent on food varies from child to child. Thirty-four (34%) of the children spend around ₦60.00 on food daily. Thirty percent (30%) spend more than ₦60.00 while 16% spend less than ₦60.00. The rest are fed by their parents or guardians. The children purchase the food in or around the market. Snacks are rarely eaten. The little that is taken is in the form of sweets.

### 3.11 Health

The children were asked if they had been ill in the past two weeks. The main complaints were headaches by 36% and 8% had diarrhoea and stomach ache. The rest of the children did not suffer any ill health.

During the course of the study almost all the children looked healthy, cheerful and very bright.

### 3.12 Future Plans

All the children interviewed have plans for their future. They confessed that they will not like to be in the market doing the same things forever. The future plans of the children are captured below in Table 10.



**Table 10: Future Plans of the Children**

Boys			Girls		
Job	No.	%	Job	No.	%
Mechanic	9	37.5	Nurse	2	7.70
Tailoring	1	4.2	Trading	3	11.54
Doctor	1	4.2	Seamstress	14	53.58
Carpentry	4	16.0	Airhostess	1	3.88
Electrician	1	4.2	Bank Girls	2	7.70
Driver	1	4.2	Doctor	1	3.85
Government Work	1	4.2	Hair Dressing	2	7.70
Trading	3	12.5	Don't know	1	3.85
Mason	3	12.5			
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100.01</b>		<b>26</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 10 above shows the aspirations of the children interviewed. Most of the boys want to train as mechanics and the girls want to be dressmakers. Two children want to be doctors. It is encouraging that they have not lost hope and will like to do something better with their lives.

### 3.13 Habits Formed at the Market

The children gave some information on some of the bad habits that they pick up at the market during the course of their work. They learn to smoke cigarettes or Indian hemp. They learn to quarrel, steal and fight. They also play truant at home and at school. None of the boys would encourage or advise other boys to join their ranks because it is not an easy life. The girls also learn to quarrel, fight and steal. They think that it is an interesting life and other girls can join them.

The children complained bitterly about some of their customers. Some customers abuse them and others short change them. Other customers refuse to pay the agreed rate of charge altogether.

They will however welcome any type of help to achieve something in life.

The following are case histories of 4 of the children. They are Akwei, Osei Kofi, Nyanyo Tetteh and Ebo.

### 3.14. Case Histories

#### **Akwei**

He is a nine years old boy. His parents are both alive. His home is in Palladium in Accra but he sleeps with other boys at the beach. He looks after himself by being a "Kaya Boiler" at the market.

He was apprehended for stealing some onions and pants after he had swept the stalls belonging to the traders. He will like to be a carpenter in future. He claims he was a wizard. He was made a wizard through the consumption of "Koko". He together with others went out in groups at night in the form of snakes. He had so far participated in the eating of 7 people. Human flesh to him is very tasty. Akwei was dirty and his hair full of lice. He also has a few sores on his legs.

### **Osei Kofi**

Osei Kofi comes from Akorduhu, Kwahu in the Eastern Region. He sleeps at the railway station. He is eleven years old and looks after himself. His parents, 9 brothers and 4 sisters all live in the village. His friends introduced him to Indian hemp and cigarette smoking. He would like to be a mason when he grows up.

### **Nyanyo Tetteh**

Nyanyo is a ten year old healthy looking boy. He hails from Labadi. He lives in Ashiaman but sometimes sleeps at the beach. He collects refuse at the market and gets paid for it. He begs for money sometimes. His father is alive but his mother is dead. His grandmother looks after him.

He has a "Master" who lives around Royal Cinema at Korle Wokon in Accra. The "Master" smokes Indian Hemp and has taught him how to smoke it too. The "Master" likes Nyanyo very much and gives him money from time to time. The grandmother sells second hand clothing and so he has no problems with what to wear. Nyanyo will like to be an auto-mechanic when he grows up.

### **Ebo**

Ebo is aged 13 years and hails from Elmina in the Central Region. He lives at Official town. He collects refuse at the market for a fee. He sleeps at the beach and fends for himself. He was driven out of his own house because he was a wizard, which he claimed was transferred to him by his grandmother. (He could turn himself into a bat) A friend however took him to Nyamekye, an exorcist who placed some herbs and sticks on his head and delivered him. His mother was a trader at Kaneshie Market. The mother died a year before the boy got to know about it. He will like to continue with his schooling and in future be a carpenter.

## **4.0 Discussion**

Legislation in Ghana, dating back from 1948 prohibits the employment of persons "under the apparent age of 15 years" except where such employment is with the

child's own family, and involves light work of an agricultural or domestic character only. The difficulty has been in providing regular inspectors to see that the laws are observed. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1967). Once the children themselves see the economic benefits of working, they drop out of school to go and work. Some of the children at the 31<sup>st</sup> December Market have done exactly that. This state of affairs is encouraged by poverty and a difficult farming environment. Some children are lured to the streets by friends or peers while other children just want to be free, independent and adventurous.

In Ghana, the street has always played a prominent role in the lives of young people. In every town and village street children are nothing more than part of the landscape. Society pays them little attention and generally feels under no obligation to help them. They earn a living for themselves and sometimes for their families. The street also allows them to meet youngsters of similar condition, to compensate for emotional and other forms of deprivation, to have variety of experiences and sometimes to get away from home.

In a forum on 'Street children' in Abidjan in 1985, it came out that such children mature too quickly for their age, in emotional level and vision of the working world. They are also exposed to all sorts of undesirable influences. (Inter-NGO 1985).

A study carried out at Nsawam by Mends and Ohene Konadu (1986) on the nature and problems of child labour presented similar findings. Many children in both studies were combining schooling and labour. Working students, all the world over, are known to attend classes less regularly, play truant more frequently and wish to leave school at an earlier age than those who do not work at all (Smolowe et. al. 1983).

Francios (1986) also noticed that children are weaker than adults and so get tired more easily although they forget themselves and tend to work as adults. Some children are forced into vagrancy, crimes or to a life of begging. The girls stand the risk of being sexually assaulted. Leisure and recreation are almost unknown to the children who suffer psychologically from these deprivations later on in life. The study at the market could not establish that the children were involved in organised crime but many other things were discovered from the study.

Many of the children had come to Accra from other regions to live and to work. Some are living on their own with or without the knowledge of their parents, while others are with parents or guardians.

The critical ages from the study fall between 9 and 15 years, and children at those ages must be followed closely at school and in the home. There are more children from other regions in the market than those from Accra. This migratory trends could also compound the problem already existing. Some fathers were observed to be irresponsible as they have left their responsibility to the mothers or other relatives.

In all the activities by the children, one thing is clear. They should either be in school studying or relaxing and playing with other pupils at home instead of working for others or for themselves in order to earn some money. Once they start earning money, school becomes less attractive and less interesting and their school mates suddenly appear childish and inexperienced. Some parents and guardians also appreciate the help given by the children so much so that some believe schooling is no longer necessary and discourage the children from going to school. Some of the children complained that they dropped out of school because they could not find anybody to look after them. Those who go to school work after school or during the weekends. Some of the children earn a lot

of money – as much as ₵700 in a day. This state of affairs will not in anyway help the child. This however is comparable to studies by Mends and Ohene Konadu at Nsawam.

### **Nutrition and Health**

They all looked fit and well. The children purchased and ate the type of food they loved and enjoyed and it is interesting to note that their choices were mostly cooked foods. Sweets and other junk foods did not feature much in their diet neither did fruits. In Ghana, some researchers have related nutritional status of families to such factors as food habits, and socio-economic factors (Davey, 1962, Dako et. al. 1972, Commey and Annang 1974, Lokko, 1984). They all come out to support the fact that there is a close link between adequate nutrition and physical and mental development of the child (Nsarko et.al. 1986).

### **5.0 Conclusion**

Children of all ages are a common sight in market places in cities, towns and villages in Ghana. Their presence can be felt especially on market days. Some of them are there with either their parents, guardians, friends or on their own. Some are there to earn some money while others are there to help their parents or guardians. Some of them have homes to go to, while others have no rooms in which to sleep either by choice, design or compulsion. Some feed themselves, clothe themselves and look after themselves. Once the children see the economic benefits of working, school is no longer attractive.

The children also pick up bad habits like stealing, quarrelling, fighting, smoking and other habits at the market from other friends and acquaintances.

This study has brought out the fact that there is a growing problem involving these children in this country and something drastic should be done to save these children from a possible future life of crime

## 6-0 Recommendations,

1. The study should continue in other markets in the city and in all the regions to find the extent of the problem and its gravity.
2. Other countries in Africa and elsewhere also have problems. It will be helpful to study how they manage or deal with the problem of street children.
3. In the meantime, greater effort should be made to intensify the training of children in first cycle schools in crafts and vocational subjects.
4. There should be plans for mobile workshop and libraries to cater for the needs of these children found in the market.
5. There should be recreational centres with game facilities for these children. Some form of education can also take place at these centres.
6. Community participation is vital for the success of the above recommendations. The children should therefore be followed closely and those who have come alone from other regions should be taken back and resettled.

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