Lewis Aptekar · Daniel Stoecklin

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A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Chapter 1
Introduction: A New Vision of Street Children and Homeless and Runaway Youth

We approach this work in five parts. The first chapter orients our readers to street children who live in the developing world, and homeless youth who are from the developed world who, when we refer to both, we call children in street situations (CSS).

We use this expression because we want to show the problem is not just with the children, it is also with the situations they face. The child "in a street situation" is a social actor, actively adapting his/her behaviour to the social context, by making use of what we call instrumental resources (activities, time, space) as well as symbolic ones (norms and values, relations, image of self, motivation, gender).

In Chapter 2 we discuss the homes children in street situations leave and why and how they cope once on the street. We talk about their families of origin and the careers they develop from leaving home to being fully engaged in street life, and we discuss what happens to them when they get older. We look at their mental health and examine comparative studies to see how they fare in comparisons with other poor and abused youth. By way of example, we offer a full view of two types of street children found in Latin America, *gamines* and *chupagruesos.*

We discuss the problems associated with their published demographics, particularly the numbers of children in street situations. These figures can be dubious because of mixing different categories of children: "children of the street", "children on the street", "homeless children", "abandoned children", "children in conflict with the law", "children in especially difficult circumstances", "exploitive child labour" and other categories that might be in included or excluded from the counting of children in street situations. Also, the numbers can be exaggerated to increase the feeling of insecurity and justify "cleaning-up the streets"; or underestimated to preserve the image of a humane country.

We ask why only a very small percentage of poor children go to live on the street. We also ask why the majority of abused children do not go to the streets. While we cannot offer a clear answer to these questions, we put forth evidence that suggests poverty is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for street children and abuse is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for homeless youth. We show the

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importance of gender differences in the explanation for the origins of street children and homeless youth.

In Chapter 3 we talk about the social lives of children in street situations, both within their important peer groups and in their interactions with their societies. Within their groups, we stress the importance of peer relations and gender differences and we talk about sexual abuse and drug use with reference to group function. We define their groups as a particular urban sub-culture and show how they are unlike gangs.

We also use cultural and historical information to see how different epochs and cultures define and interact with children in street situations. We found that social reactions fluctuate between violence, indifference and assistance. Ambivalent reactions are common. On the one hand, the civil politic pities “street child” and “homeless youth” as being deprived of family and childhood. But on the other hand, they fear their alleged delinquency. But these children and youth are not only victims or objects of pity; they are also actors trying to surmount their difficulties by creating a world that helps them survive.

We look at the construction of public opinion and show that in far too many places reactions have become so violent that the children are victims of murder and mayhem. One example is the 1993 murder in Rio de Janeiro where children were killed in front of the La Candelaria Church by death squads hired to “clean up the streets”. (It is not especially surprising that the people the children fear most are the police.) We put forward a child-centred approach, emphasising the quality of the interactions between these children and the people that surround them.

What are the reasons for their violent and repressive reactions to street children and homeless youth, who are labelled a huge public nuisance yet mostly commit petty crimes? Is this because it is far easier (and cheaper) than addressing the larger economic and social problems such as poverty and abuse, or because the problem is intrinsic to definitions of target-groups by power brokers, or because the image of uncontrolled children in the street produces too much fear or guilt?

In the fourth chapter we turn our attention to research. We look into the unique problems of doing research with this group, including problems of validity, and we make suggestions on which methods to avoid and which to use in collecting data.

We talk about how the problems of definition have led to difficulties in determining the target population. We discuss the problems of sampling and show how random sampling can be used.

We show that the research paradigm can include children’s rights, including a look into Participatory Action Research (PAR). We lament the lack of longitudinal studies and go over some of the common ethical considerations.

In Chapter 5 we discuss programs and policies. We demonstrate that the child is not just a “target” of intervention, but a participant: a social actor, a subject of rights. In the contexts where this approach has been developed, the intervention strategies tend to include the children themselves in the definition of the programme, from objective identification to intervention modalities.

Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and control mechanisms should progressively help overcome the institutional limits mostly bound to the classical top-down approach. We found that the UNCRC is a key international instrument that bestows important yet difficult to administer human rights for children.

We also examine a variety of programs that serve these children, pointing out why we think some are better than others. We discuss the differences between the needs–based and human rights programs. We also discuss different programmatic models and show how a human rights approach can be used by classifying different levels of interventions. We critique several examples, offering suggestions including how to implement preventive approaches.

Finally, in the concluding chapter we tie together our point of view and offer recommendations about programs, policies and research. We show that funding must be oriented not just towards direct aid to the children but to the more systematic problems of poverty and abuse, particularly for prevention. To do this, we devise a public mental health model for children in street situations that combines primary, secondary and tertiary care.

There are hardships of working with children in street situations. We offer solace and methods for preventing burnout. This includes making a judgment about differences in child rearing that respects culture and individuality, but does not take away children's human rights. We also suggest giving a role to children in street situations so they can participate in the programs that serve them and the research that is done on them.

The book comes from our diverse and long experiences. A bit more than 25 years ago, Aptekar (1988) was on the streets with street children in Cali, Colombia. Since then his work has taken him to 4 continents and some 30 countries. Along the way, he has conducted ethnographic research with several groups of urban youth who are, as UNICEF says, "children of particularly difficult circumstances". These include children with psychosocial reactions to disasters (Aptekar 1994; Aptekar and Boore 1990), children traumatized by war (Aptekar and Abebe 2004; Aptekar and Giel 2002) and disabled children living in low income countries (Aptekar 1988). While hopefully there is more to come, Aptekar offers to readers of this book what he has learned about street children and homeless youth, programs, policies and research from a perspective of time and culture.

Stoecklin's (2000a) research on street children in China looked into the "out-of-plan" children, so-called "black babies". He asked if they would eventually end up marginalised in the streets and if, on the other hand, children living in the street are likely to labeled with the "out-of-plan" status. This appeared to be true for the majority of small children, mostly girls, who were begging in the streets of Shanghai.

Bringing to bear his sociological training, he explains that when specific social problems (poverty, abuse) are defined by special groups (children in street situations), there is a good chance that the definition will be tainted with some self-interest by the definers. He found that causes associated with poverty and leading to street life include family break-up and domestic violence, but also poor knowledge of one's rights, and a lack of access to the public space (inadequate political representation). Having no voice, slum children are mostly only taken into account once they have become street children, a public and visible issue, depicted as a public nuisance. This is how these children in special need are labelled children "in conflict with the law" (Stoecklin 2007).

His research confirms some important dimensions of street life: the time spent on the street, the child's age, the child's use of space (city center or periphery), and the child's social networks, norms and values, activities, image of self, motivation, and opportunities according to gender. From here, Stoecklin (2000b) developed six different individual profiles of children in street situations. Finally, he introduces a new method favoring the respect of the child's right to be heard (art. 12 UNCRC), that may inspire work with children in street situations (Stoecklin 2013).

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Chapter 2
Children in Street Situations: Street Children and Homeless Youth

The Value of Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Regardless of wealth, political ideology, government decree or religious affiliation, there is no place in the globe that has succeeded in eliminating homelessness. This is extraordinary when you consider that homelessness, particularly among children, is distinguished as a grave ethical failure. Among international instruments to protect homeless children, provide them with adequate services and let them participate in the solutions to street life or homelessness, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is of primary importance. It is the most widespread international instrument, as it has been ratified by literally all of the States in the world with the notable exceptions of the USA, Somalia and South Sudan.

Yet non-domiciled children and youth still live in full public view without permission, even in the wealthiest nations in Europe, North America and Scandinavia. They are at once terrifying to the civil politic and, deprived of any capacity to join society, while at the same time considered too potentially hazardous to leave unattended. There are countless stories about non-domiciled youth belonging to delinquent gangs are involved in organized crime, pawns of drug cartels and war lords, and abducted into sexual slavery.

The persistence efforts to curb homelessness over time and place, have been immense but with very little result. This indicates that there are several things about these efforts that we do not yet know. For example, why do only a fraction of abused children leave home, and why are only a small percentage of the poor on the streets? And why, in any given household, do only some siblings become homeless? We plan to provide as many answers as possible, which we will do in a unique way, by looking at studies of non-domiciled children in a variety of cultures.

Looking from the perspectives of cultural differences and similarities can lead to many areas of information. We can learn how the safety net which is almost always wider and stronger in the developed world than it is in the developing world, and more protective in strong policies (coherent) than strong governments (dictatorships)

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or laissez faire States (uncaring), has a bearing on those who finally make the choice to leave home as well as those who continue on the street.

The cross-cultural view can also explain the value a State gives to children's welfare. We know from cross-cultural comparisons that the issue is not only financial. Cuba for example, has little money but the State does not allow non-domiciled children and youth to be without care (Lutjens 2000). Culture can tell us if leaving home has the same meaning to potential homeless youths. For instance, an American youth who is being abused at home, knows that if he or she leaves, there is a state agency that provides housing and shelter, as well as food and medical care. In contrast, a child from the Democratic Republic of Congo knows that leaving could lead to starvation. The problem is not only scientific but political (de Benitez 2011), and often heartbreaking.[1]

The number of AIDS related orphans is not going up in developed countries where there are few parentless children so the community and the State can find homes for them. In communities where there are many AIDS related orphans, the traditional kinship system of fostering by relatives or care by the State can no longer support all of them. Being an AIDS orphan presents different outcomes depending on the financial and social context of one's culture.

In some countries, the State actively refuses to support children in street situations, even if they could find the resources. Take the example of displaced people of the civil war living in camps in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Aptekar 2010). Many of the children living in these camps are war orphans, but the State has actively avoided helping them because these children are looked upon by the State as prior or potential combatants. Most of these children have families, but become street children not because they have lost everything and everyone, but because of political reasons.[2]

We can learn by cultural comparison that in the developing world as many as 90% of street children are not stateless and are not parentless or homeless. They are working children, who begin work at an age when children from higher social classes are in school. At the end of the day, rather than showing their parents their school papers, they show them the money they earned. They are in essence supporting a family, but one that is too poor to send their children to public school (Fig. 2.1).

Most of these children work because there is not enough food at home. Among these children, some stop living at home and become street children. Some poor children come from abusive families, but more often they do not. Cross-cultural comparisons tell us it would be a mistake to assume that abuse is more likely in lower than in higher income families (Aptekar 1994, 2004).

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[1] See Table 4.1 (page 122) for one list of estimated numbers of street children worldwide.

[2] Their parents worked for several generations in what was Ethiopia, but became Eritrea when the war ended. They were forced by the international humanitarian effort back into their country of citizenship (Ethiopia). The new Ethiopian government accused them of fighting for Eritrean independence. Thus, they found themselves living in camps in Ethiopia amongst the enemy whose citizenship they shared.

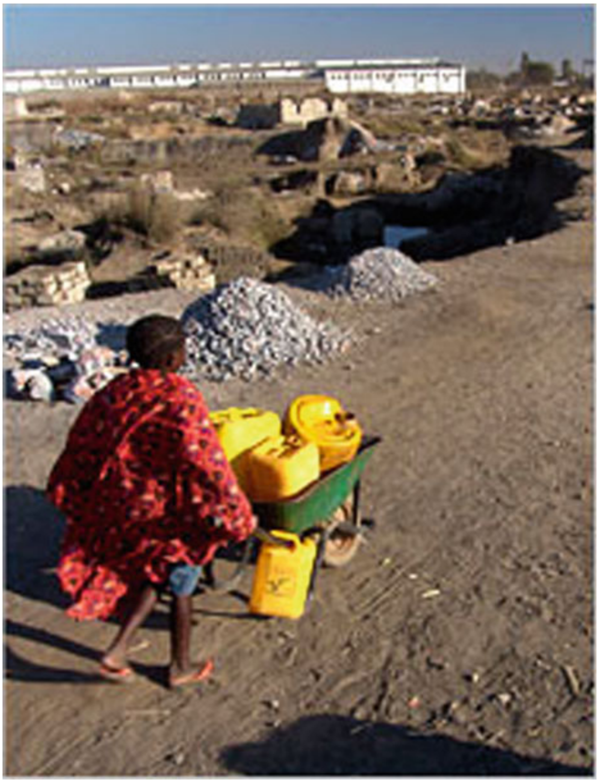

Fig. 2.1 Working child with wheel barrow

In the current epoch of global economic crisis, there is a wider separation between wealthy and poor leading to a reduction of social support networks for the poor. This had led to an increase in violence among gangs who occupy the vacuum left by the withdrawal of law enforcement and has resulted in a general trend of the State being more punitive toward its marginalized (Hagedorn 2006). Children who do not have a place to live are, across cultures, among the most marginalized. While gangs get stronger, children in street situations become further associated by the public and the press with violence. They receive more pejorative comments and more violent acts are committed against them.[3]

Finally, the cultural examination we bring to this work has taught that there are some children in street situations that seek the lure of street friendships and the freedom from a boring family life at home. In the cultural context, we must ask whether or not there are predisposing factors to homelessness.

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[3] The strong identification of gang members with a cultural identity that replaces the loss of their former advantage, such as the "skin heads" of Great Britain, has led in some cases to more gangs becoming internationalized (the drug cartels, the sex trade).

Street Children

We use the term children in street situations to refer to homeless youth in the developed world **and** street children in the developing world. When we are talking about one and not the other we refer to their particular names.

Thus, when we are talking about street children we refer to children who live in the developing world and when we speak about homeless youth we assume they are living in the developed world. The term street child was first introduced by UNICEF following the UN International Year of the Child in 1979 (Veale et al. 2000). It was intended to deal with what UNICEF saw, mostly in Latin America at the time, but eventually throughout the developing world, as a newly emerging group of children working in the streets. Soon afterward, UNICEF (1986) and other international organizations claimed, without empirical evidence, that these "street children" were parentless and therefore in need of supervision and direction. Those working for international organizations also assumed street children came from the rural poor who had recently migrated to the capital, and could not cope with city life. To survive, they begged and stole and became drug "addicts".[4] The next assumption (again without empirical evidence) was that street children came from abused or neglectful homes and were therefore forced to survive on the streets.

After a time, UNICEF and other international organizations recognized that all of the children on the streets in the developing world who were working did not have the same family circumstances and hence developed new terms. Street children were "**of** the streets" meaning they did not go home at night. While working children who returned home at night to give what they earned to their families were called "children **on** the streets" (Fig. 2.2).

If you leave it up to the children to define street children, as Veale and Dona (2003) did in Rwanda, they would say that they are *mayibobo*, which refers to unaccompanied children working or living in the streets who do not have an adult to take care of them, no place to live, and who sleep where they want.

New situations are bringing children to the streets. Some are war orphans; others are stateless, because they are the children of illegal immigrants. Many of these children have simply disappeared from view, and therefore have lost access to their legal rights of protection. Having a child's identity officially acknowledged and registered is a fundamental human right, as stipulated by Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Registration enables a child to obtain a birth certificate, which is the most visible evidence of a government's legal recognition of the child as a member of society. A birth certificate is proof of the child's fundamental relationship with his or her parents and also determines nationality (UNICEF 2006).

Several additional factors appear central to increasing the risk of children becoming invisible: the lack or loss of formal identification; inadequate State protection

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[4] Even today this is difficult to ascertain as non-empirical studies suggest that drug use among street children is between 20% and 90% (See Sherman and Plitt 2005).

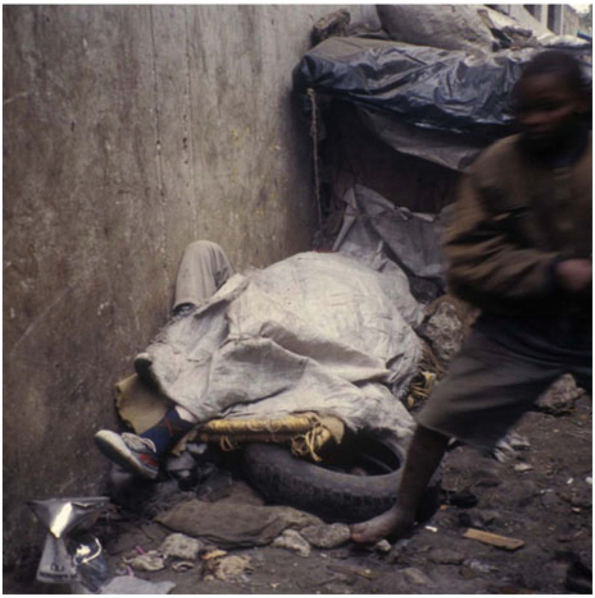

Fig. 2.2 Sleeping rough

for children without parental care; the exploitation of children through trafficking and forced labor; and premature entry of children into adult roles such as marriage, hazardous labor and combat. Children affected by these factors include those not registered at birth, refugees and displaced children, orphans, children in detention, children in early marriages, hazardous labor or combat, and trafficked and indentured children.

According to the latest UNICEF (2006) estimates, on average over 50% of births in the developing world (excluding China) each year go unregistered, a proportion that rises to 62% in sub-Saharan Africa. In South Asia, the share is higher still, at 70% of the total number of people displaced within their own countries by conflict or human rights violations, which amounts to roughly 25 million.

At the end of the millennium, there were an estimated 143 million orphans under the age of 18 in 93 developing countries. More than 16 million children were orphaned in 1 year alone. A major contributing factor to these alarming figures is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, without which the global number of orphans would be expected to decline.

Poverty is another factor underpinning early marriage. Marriage can be seen as a survival strategy for a girl – particularly if she marries an older and wealthier husband. In West Africa, for example, a UNICEF (2006) study showed a correlation between economic hardship and a rise in early marriage, even among some population groups that do not normally practice it.

A third of children between 5 and 17 years of age are engaged in child labor. Of these, nearly 70%, or 171 million children, were working in hazardous situations or conditions, such as in mines (Fig. 2.3), with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture

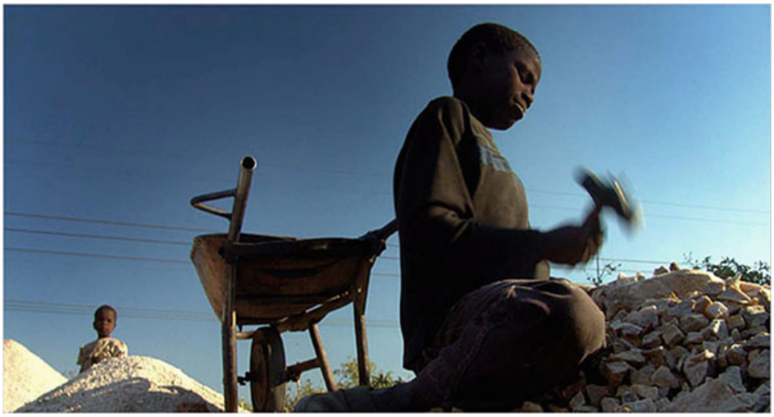

Fig. 2.3 Working child breaking up rocks with hammer

or with dangerous machinery. Some 73 million of them are less than 10 years old (UNICEF 2006).[5]

In Haiti, for example, 15-year-old domestic workers were found to be on average 4 cm shorter and 40 lb lighter than 15-year-olds not in domestic service in the same area (Giannini 2011). Rapid assessment research in El Salvador found that 66% of girls in domestic service reported having been physically (many of them sexually) or psychologically abused, and that the threat of sexual advances from employers was ever present (UNICEF 2006).

Because of AIDS related deaths, over 75 million children lost one parent, and 25 million have become “double” orphans (UNAIDS 2002). What percentage of them become street children?

In Turkey, the term street children refers to both those working and/or living in the streets (Ataov and Haider 2006). Children working on the street can be classified into two groups. The first group of children works on the street during the day, sometimes during the evening and night, but they go home to stay with their families. The second group of children, coming mainly from disintegrated families, work and live in the streets. The majority of children working in the streets in Turkey belong to the first group and are involved in selling small items, for example: napkins, chewing gum, water, nuts, ballpoint pens and others. The children in the second group, working and living in the streets, are involved in scavenging recyclable litter from containers in the streets and garbage dumps and then selling these things.

The origin of the street children phenomenon in Turkey is linked to wider issues. Internal migration and poverty alone cannot explain the street children phenomenon. Internal migration has an impact on the structure and function of families in many ways, but family problems are another contributing reason. Besides migration and poverty, there are multiple causes behind the emergence of street children. Poor and dysfunctional families with problems such as alcoholism, physical or sexual child abuse or child neglect force children to leave home to live and/or to work in the streets.

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[5] All numbers without clear empirical evidence should be suspect. They either come from NGOs or International Organizations who might use them to fight for a piece of the pie, or academics who might try to increase numbers to make their work seem more important.

Homeless Youth

There are two types of homeless youth; one is youth who are part of homeless families, which according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1999) are some 630,000 homeless between 6 and 16 years of age who live with their homeless families. The problem is considerable. Homeless families with children comprise 38% of the homeless population in the U.S. and homeless youth is the largest group of the homeless population (Menke 2000). Due to topic, time, and space limitations, we cannot deal with that group here. Instead we focus on those homeless youth who are living in the developed world without adults.

Homeless youth living without families are defined by the US Stewart and McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 as lacking a regular adequate nighttime residence, or as living in a shelter, institutional facility or a place not ordinarily used for sleeping such as on the floor in a friend's house (Smollar 1999; Stonge 2000). They have experienced at least one episode of a lack of housing for at least a week in the last month, and have no prospect of housing in the next month (Goering et al. 2002). There are between 1 and 1.5 million adolescents in the US who run away from home each year, which is about 2% of all American adolescents. In any given year, 3% of all families will have an adolescent who runs away and about an eighth of all Americans will run away at some point during their adolescent years (Shaffner 1999).[6]

The U.S. Department of Justice has four categories for non-domiciled youth. The greatest percent are (1) runaways (their choice, almost always has some push and pull factors). About 4% are forced out and are referred to as (2) throwaways, push-outs or castaways (National Runaway Switchboard 2001). There is even a smaller group of (3) lost, injured, or missing youth. There is also the (4) youth of illegal immigrants or who are illegal immigrants themselves, and who live on the streets because there is no housing for them.

In Canada, homeless youth are divided into "runners", who live on the street for a long period of time, and "in and outers", who use the streets intermittingly and only when necessary (Kufeldt and Nimmo 1987).[7]

Being homeless is against the law in most developed countries, as is running away from home in all states in the United States (US). In the U.S., running away is part of what is called a status offence, largely defined by the fact that the adolescents have not yet reached the age of majority, which is somewhere between 16 and 21 years of age depending on the individual state statute. In addition to running away, status offenses include such acts as being out late at night, drinking alcohol, having sex, and being truant from school. Status offenders are picked up by state authorities and generally placed in a foster home or a state institution. Then they become foster youth, and not runaway youth, which means they will live under the direction of the government and will be taken out of the care of their families of origin (a response very unlikely in the developing world).

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[6] The National Runaway Switchboard (2001) estimates a smaller number, about one million runaways each year.

[7] A study in Vancouver, Canada found that there were street gangs and "wannabe" groups, the latter much like the homeless youth of our discussion (Gordon 2004).

Homeless youth may be without shelter (sleeping on the streets, in parks, construction sites, rooftops, etc.) or in emergency shelters. They may also, as is the case of the "hidden homeless", be temporarily staying with another family, with friends, or with occasional acquaintances (Gaetz 2004a).

Comparisons Between Homeless Youth and Street Children

In the developing world, poverty is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a child to become a street child. Nearly 100% of street children come from poor families. In the developed world, poverty is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition of homelessness.

While we say there are no street children in the developed world, it might be worthwhile to use our terms to explain what we do see on the streets in the developed world. In the developed world there are few poor runaways, at least according to Aptekar's observations of urban youth in downtown Portland, Oregon. The teenagers he saw were older and they come from the middle class rather than from the poverty found among street children in the developing world. The adolescent runaways in Portland hang out on the lawn of the main square in the city, dressing down in dirty clothes that are a far cry from the rags on street children in the developing world. They are not barefoot; in fact they are often shod in proper mountain gear. They seem to have plenty of cigarettes, and most have at least one electronic device. Street children in the developing world don't have the money to smoke many cigarettes, their hair is more likely to be shaved to avoid lice than be worn long and stylishly multicolored, and any electronic device would soon be fenced for something closer to the basics of existence.

Furthermore half the runaways in Portland are female, several times the 10–20% figure found among street children in developing world. This example, among many others, shows that homeless youth and street children have to face different realities, although the causes of their different situations might to some extent be similar. The main reason for the runaways to be on the street often has to do with parental abuse, and in many cases parents rejecting the homosexual orientation of their children.

As much as for any middle class adolescent, the appearance of the runaways is a carefully orchestrated dress, which is designed to anger or embarrass their parents, in short to get back at them for being rejected in the first place. This is what makes them so different from the children of homeless parents who either live under a bridge or in a homeless center.

There are homeless youth who come from middle class families and many poor youth who do not runaway (Goering et al. 2002). Shaffner (1999) reports that as few as 10% of homeless youth in the US come from families on public assistance or families having unemployment problems. Up to one half of all families with runaway youth are from the middle or upper classes. Given the current economy in the developed world alone, these figures might no longer be valid, (but the point is not to assume that poor families have more psychopathology or are more abusive than middle or upper class families).[8]

According to another study of American runaway youth, "*most youth come from difficult backgrounds, those difficulties* ***cannot*** *(emphasis by authors) be assumed to include poverty or economic disadvantage*" (Cauce et al. 2000: 234).

Children in the U.S. living in a single parent female headed household are 50% more likely to be living in poverty (Menke 2000). Yet about two thirds of homeless youth in the U.S. are living in female headed families, about half of which have unmarried men in them (Hyde 2005). What the research suggests in the developing world is that leaving home is more related to poverty than abuse, whereas abuse/neglect is the major reason youth leave home in the developed world. This difference, as we will see, has significant implications for mental health for the two groups, particularly when gender is considered later in this chapter (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998; Aptekar and Ciano 1999).

Another way to distinguish homeless youth from street children is to apply an analytical reconstruction of experience from the Weberian perspective of the fictive "ideal-type". This can be accomplished by looking at how each child experiences the street. From this we can obtain a composite by accentuating one or several of his or her "points of view". This ideal-type (Weber 1922, 1968) reconstruction of experience enables us to identify typical ways of experiencing the street or typical street situations. When we do this, we show that while homeless youth and street children are both in street situations, these situations are not necessarily experienced in the same way. The incorporation of the actors' subjective sense of reality explains why the distinctions between homeless youth and street children cannot always be clear, and why, as a consequence, the term "children in street situations" is more inclusive as it allows them to participate in the definition of these situations.

Children in Street Situations

When the two groups, homeless youth and street children, share common characteristics, we will refer to them in the aggregate as children in street situations. The most obvious commonality is that both groups share the fact of the street being a significant part of their physical and psychosocial environment (Stoecklin 2008).

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[8] At the turn of the 21st century, approximately 13 to 14 million children in the US were growing up in families below the poverty line. This is about one in five children under the age of 18 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1999).

Personality and environment interact in such a way that what should be the focus of analysis is the relationship between a specific child and the street environment. Lucchini (1993) uses the perspective of the street career to highlight the progressive attachment to the street environment. This point of view casts light on the interactions which each child in the streets has with other social actors and gives importance to the children's subjective reconstruction of experience.[9]

In the same work, Lucchini (1993) makes a distinction between two types of competencies found with children in street situations, namely instrumental and symbolic competencies. Instrumental competencies are visible abilities: concrete know-how and performances. Children in street situations display such capacities in their multiple activities in generating income (from legitimate work to stealing and begging).

Symbolic capacities are invisible. They include long-term survival strategies which include inventive relationships in the street, the capacity for association and solidarity with friends, and a critical mind that evaluates the environment and creates opportunities by influencing the reactions of others. Symbolic capacities might be the reason why many studies show that street children are resilient, because they can be seen to have the ability to overcome adverse circumstances. For example, in most cases, children in street situations acquire autonomy not because they have been encouraged to do so, but because they find themselves in circumstances where only inventive ways of behaving can enable them to escape from abuse or poverty.

While resilience is linked to the children's symbolic capacities and to external resources in the environment (Rapin 2001; Cyrulnik 2002), there is a general tendency for the public to focus on the instrumental capacities, ignoring the competencies of children in street situations. This blindness is due to the fact that people only consider visible abilities, especially if they are shocking and deviant, and not the symbolic skills the child is using to cope. If these symbolic skills are exerted in deviant activities, it may well be because spaces to display them in socially acceptable ones are simply lacking.

Street situations are also evolving through the interplay between the individual's appraisal of him or herself in specific contexts, which helps to understand the different ways of experiencing street life. The essential stereotype of the "street child" should therefore be replaced in consideration of the several types of relationships to the street world that any child, as a social actor, may experience at some stage. This way we can get a picture of major profiles, derived from case histories, regarding the actor's choices and strategies related to personal and social dimensions.

For instance, Stoecklin (2000b) working in Bangladesh provides a six part description of street children's personality clusters; the hero, the hard worker, the ambivalent, the survivor, the isolated and the dependent abused. Each profile has specific characteristics, described mainly in key-words:

1. The "*Hero*": altruistic; virtuous; great sense of justice; good self-image; fights to defend others. These children see themselves as heroes because they have

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[9] Another expression, children "*out of place*", is conveying the same idea: "*The emphasis should shift away from attempts to define street children towards analysis of their relationship with street environments*" (Ennew and Connolly 1996: 131).

acquired the ability to defend themselves, to develop work skills and to work in coordinated ways to save money, help others and develop solidarity despite adverse conditions in the street and a personal history of family violence.

2. The "*Hardworker*": strong willpower; important sense of solidarity; negotiation skills; under high pressure from adult competitors working in the same trade. These children see themselves as honest and loyal contributors to family income and would just like to live a normal life as street workers. They have a mixed image of themselves: as good and honest boys, but helpless, deprived and stigmatized as "*Tokai*" (street children). They tend to count on their own capacities to be recognized and want to achieve a position through their own efforts.
3. The "*Ambivalent*": neither positive nor negative image of self; often hides the truth and changes presentation of self; cannot make sense of the double-sided experience of street life; quite contrasted motivations. These children could as well become heroes, strong and proud, or isolated, abused and depressed. They have less control over things and depend almost completely on circumstances and external push and pull factors. They search for an identity. Deception and abuse have rendered them especially cautious when presenting themselves to unknown people.
4. The "*Survivor*": lost at least one parent; not happy to be on the street; marginal integration in peer group; working/earning on their own. These children feel sad and ambivalent, not satisfied with current activities imposed by fate or by violent relatives. The necessity to survive on a daily basis and a weak group integration prevent them from acquiring more elaborate social competencies; weak negotiation skills.
5. The "*Isolated*": absolutely no group insertion; usually newcomers with no or quite weak work skills; abandoned by parents or tortured and exploited by in-laws or elder siblings; usually fear and hide from officials (police); experience a very high degree of suffering. These isolated children are highly abused and assaulted by organized crime, the police and the general public. They feel apart from society; socially non-existent, rejected, neglected, a "nobody". They also want to become worthy citizens and respected workers (garment factory, teacher), but for now they see themselves as victims of society.

There are different types of abandonment; by family, community, State, and by any combination of these. There can be abandonment of one's self by losing hope (Veale et al. 2000). For example, in one study Montgomery (2000) shows how the State abandons the child prostitutes in Thailand. They are given no State support, but the children are not completely abandoned because they have good relationships with their families. Their parents do not see that allowing their children to be prostitutes is bad for their children or they see it as the only way to make enough money to survive. The importance of family looking after each other is the stronger value.

The children tell themselves, as part of their Buddhist tradition, that they were making "merit" for their parents, which will work toward negating any bad effects of prostitution in the next life.

But because the State does not provide any other means for them to earn an income, they could be considered abandoned by the State. Neither the State nor the free market offers them an alternative. This is getting to be more and more of a problem as the structural adjustments of the International Monetary Fund and other financial organization insist on austerity, which in effect takes away whatever safety net there might have been to help these children.

6. The "*Dependent Abused*": abused by relatives, including sexually; trauma and feeling of guilt/helplessness; highly dependent. The death of their biological fathers and poverty push these children to the street in order to survive and create a greater dependence towards their mothers. Street life is seen as absolutely negative, violent and destructive, while defence skills are limited. Cautiousness and fear, and absence of group insertion and protection prevent these children from acquiring work skills and the capacity for negotiation.

Thus, considering situations typical of street life instead of a stereotyped street "child" means that the term "street children" refers to members of a population described by reference to street situations, rather than by appealing to common characteristics of a collective group of youngsters (Cosgrove 1990). It is the "street" that is common to a diversity of children. The same applies to homeless youth. This raises a question: what amount of time spent in the street is required to be considered a "street child" or a "homeless youth"?

UNICEF uses a classification based on the contact between a child and its family. However, "contact with the family" is not as clear as it might appear. Does it mean the frequency or the quality of the contact? A child may have numerous contacts but of poor quality, and these contacts with the family may even be negative or abusive. If the regularity of the "contact with the family" is a criterion to define a normal childhood, children who spend more time on the streets would be seen as deviant simply on the basis of definition. This ignores the subjective meaning the child attaches to the quality of the contact with the family. Meanwhile, it is this subjective attachment, linked to affective and material expectations, which is more important for the protection and autonomy of the child. The family responses that are given to the child are subjectively perceived by the child who may consider, at some point, that the street offers better responses to his needs.

Many children in street situations suffer from a lack of affective and material response, but their identification to the family or to another group, for instance the peer-group in the street, will vary according to their own subjective evaluation of the situation. Poverty alone is therefore not the explanatory factor, even for street children (Fig. 2.4).

Children in street situations are not affected with the same intensity by similar events (poverty) or situations (homeless) because there are important differences between children, their environment and culture. This is why children with similar life conditions at home do not all take to the street. Otherwise many cities in the developing world would be literally invaded by children. From a psycho-sociological point of view, children in street situations represent a heterogeneous category (Lucchini 1993).

Fig. 2.4 Why do some go to the streets but not others?

Lucchini's (1993) perspective of the street career overcomes the static definition of street children or homeless youth. The choice to leave or stay home depends on numerous factors. These factors have not yet been isolated nor studied in a comparative and systematic way.

Yet, there are still many institutions (NGOs and government agencies) working with "children at risk" who make a distinction based on two criteria; the amount of time the child has spent on the street and the relations with parents or other responsible adults. "Children **on** the street" would be those who regularly return home and spend less time on the street, while "children **of** the street" would conversely stay mostly in the street and have few contacts with the family.

Lucchini (2007) criticizes the static notion of a single 'responsible adult' rather than dividing this responsibility among various people who do not necessarily live in the same place. At times, there is only a temporary responsible adult as when the child circulates from one domestic unit to another going back home daily without necessarily maintaining a relationship with a single adult. The on/off distinction of UNICEF (Taçon 1985) became widespread but according to Lucchini (2007) not operational, as between these two categories "children on the street" and "children of the street", made up of only two dimensions (spatial and social) there are a series of intermediary situations which raise important problems of a bifocal classification.