

COMMUNITY RECREATED: THE ITUMELENG ASSESSMENT  
CENTRE STREET CHILDREN

by

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## ABSTACT

The purpose of this study was to find out reasons why some children are on the streets. It sought to have them describe their lives on the streets. And how the help they receive in the children centre changes their lifestyles.

Through an intensive investigation conducted through observation and interviews, qualitative data about street children was gathered. From the data collected, it became evident that the apartheid system played a big role in disintegrating the black communities. Many blacks find themselves suffering from poverty, as they earn below a living wage. The education system of the past, which was in no way related to the needs of black communities, also had a negative impact on black children. All these led to social problems such as unemployment, alcoholism and child abuse. The findings reveal that children take to the street because their families have experienced, or are experiencing these extreme social crises. Contrary to what the children expected, life on the street is even more unbearable, as they have to get involved in income generating activities in order to survive.

The interviews and observations conducted at the Itumeleng Assessment Centre (IAC), revealed that children feel at home in the centre as they receive love and care. Like other growing children, they enjoy helping with household chores and taking time to play. The findings revealed that the lives of the children in IAC have changed dramatically, as they are now able to identify themselves within the smaller community they have created.

The conclusion reached is that, street children are an indication of a malfunctioning and disintegrating community. Communities need to re-integrate, unite, and help one another with the spirit of *ubuntu*. Street children are a problem which every member of the community has to be aware of, and try to assist where possible.

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To my friends, Tebogo and Angela, this friendship proved to be fruitful. There are so many things that I learned from you, but most of all, I learned that I can always count on you. May our friendship grow. I am grateful to every one of 1997/98 M.Ed. CommEd group for the support you have shown through this learning experience. Above all, I would like to thank God, the Almighty, for having used me to make a contribution to the field of Community Education.

DEDICATION

TO MY SON



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## SECTION ONE

### ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In this section a background to the problem will be sketched. I will explain my research interest, and the motivation for conducting research on the role that educational and cultural activities can play in transforming street children. The aims of the study, methods of data collection and analysis, and theoretical assumptions underlying it, are also discussed.

A social profile of street children emerges from two main themes, which pervade the present study. There are many reasons why some children are on the streets. The role of educational and cultural activities in changing the lives of street children, as a means to get them off the street, have to be determined. Reasons for children being on the streets are crucial in that they explain what causes other children in communities to become street children.

The second theme is the role that educational and cultural activities can play in transforming street children. It describes different activities, which the street children are engaged in within the centres. As these activities are quite different from those which they were carrying out in the streets, it is assumed that they have an impact on the children's lifestyles. This research will focus on one centre which accommodates street children, namely, the Itumeleng Assessment centre, which is located in Sunnyside, Pretoria.

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The street of South African town and cities are filled with children who have made it their home. The growth of the business sector in the cities gives rise to the alarming growing number of street children. In our everyday lives we pass young children on the streets begging for money or food to eat. Research has proved that there are over 900 street children countrywide (Barrette, 1995). Most street children are males. According to Blunt (D'Oyley et al., 1994), the reason may be that parents and relatives tend to keep girls at home to care for infants and perform household duties, while their brothers and nephews seek work on



the streets. Research has also indicated that the vast majority of these children are black children, whose community has lost touch with humanity (ubuntu). It could also be because communities have lost the feeling of unity. The black community is disintegrating, there are no bonding structures such as shared values and ideas, which make community members interdependent (Sergiovanni, 1994). This could be because everyone cares for their own wellbeing, and not about that of other people. This indicates that there is a deep embedded problem within black communities. There are quite a number of factors which might have contributed to this problem, such factors are highlighted and explored in section two of this study. Street children are the direct consequences of these factors which contributed towards the disintegration of Black communities.

## 1.2 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

This study is delimited to the street children of Sunnyside Pretoria. Some of the street children are housed at the Itumeleng Assessment Centre (IAC) in Sunnyside. The data of the study will be collected by interviewing the IAC children, and observing the programme, in order to explicate any ambiguities that may arise. The limitations of this study is that the findings may not be generalised to all street children in the country.

## 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will guide the data collection process:

1. What are the reasons that children give for becoming street children?
2. How do these children describe their lives on the street?
3. How do activities in the centre affect their lifestyles?

## 1.4 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study's purpose is to investigate the reasons which led some children to be on the streets. The home background information of the street children will be investigated, so as to find out what the grassroot problems in the families and communities are. What children do on the streets in order to survive will also be

investigated. The study will attempt to investigate the activities which the children are engaged with in the Itumeleng Assessment Centre, and how these activities affect the children's lifestyles.

The activities carried out in the centres are very important, as they play a large role in transforming street children into acceptable members of the community. Barrette (1995:156) believes that the goals of the activities which children are engaged in during their transition, should be: "to help them gain self-confidence, self-respect and human dignity, to strengthen their trust relationship with each other and those trying to help them and eventually with the adults at large".

### 1.5 THE AIMS TO RESEARCH

The aim the study is to find out the reasons why some children leave their families and communities and become street children. Secondly, it is to find out how children survive on the streets, and how the activities they are engaged in at the centre bring a sense of community back to them. With regard to the statement of the problem, the general aims of the research are to:

1. Investigate the reasons why some children are on the street.
2. Investigate how street children survive on the streets.
3. Investigate the views of children and tutors who are in the centre, on the effectiveness of the programme.
4. Investigate how the centre brings a sense of community back to the children.

### 1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I have decided to use qualitative methods in this study. The reason for this decision is that the data, which I need to gather, should be provided by the subjects of the study.

In order to overcome the weaknesses or biases of one method, I will use both the in-depth interview, and direct observation. In triangulating these two methods, I will be strengthening the data collected. Denzin argues that the use of multiple methods in an investigation helps to overcome the weakness or biases of a single method (Denzin, 1978). Henning in her article, believes that the qualitative

method, if use correctly, can outweigh any weakness or biases. She believe so strongly in the validity of qualitative approach that she concludes that “soft option stigma attached to qualitative research, is often applied by those who have not seen rigorous qualitative research in action and who are dependent on evidence gained via naive’ empiricism for formulation of their viewpoints” (Henning, 1997: 7).

In-depth interviews will be conducted with a sample of the children in the centre. The children will be selected randomly. A social worker, who works full-time in the centre will also be interviewed. She will serve as a key informant to the study. Two tutors will also be interviewed in order to verify the information given by the social worker. As Patton (1987) puts it, the data from an in-depth interview will consist of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge. The data gathered from the observation will consist of detailed description of programme activities, participants’ behaviour, staff actions, and a full range of human interactions (Patton, 1987).

## 1.7 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

### Street children



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Street children refers to any child who has left his or her home and who regards the street as his home (D’Oyley et al, 1994). There are two types of street children. These are runaways, and pushouts or throwaways.

### Runaways

Runaways refer to children who deliberately decide to leave their homes to escape what they believe to be intolerable situation. (Chetty, 1997).

### Pushouts or Throwaways

Pushouts or Throwaways are children who have been asked to leave their homes by their parents who have abandoned them, or have been subjected to high levels of abuse and neglect. (Chetty, 1997).

## Community

Community refers to an organised group of individuals who live in particular geographical locality and share common interests. (Le Roux, 1994). Sergiovanni (1994) regards communities as defined by their centre of values, sentiments, and beliefs, that provide the needed conditions for creating the sense of the “we” from “I”. He also regards community as socially organised around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them. These social structure bonds people together in unity, and binds them to an ideal structure.

## 1.8 SUMMARY OF THE NEXT SECTIONS

### Section two

This section puts the study into perspective through the examination of relevant literature on reasons for street children taking to the streets, legislation on childcare, and state intervention on street children. This section also examines the way the community responds to street children.

### Section Three

Section three deals with the research methodology used in this study to gather data. Data will be gathered using qualitative methods. Observation of the programme will be carried out. In-depth interviews will also be conducted with a tape recorder as a research tool.

### Section four

This section will concentrate on the processing of the data. Findings of the study based on the collected data will be made on how to improve the situation.

## 1.9 THE RESEARCHER' PROFILE

I was born on Schaffhuize farm, 90 km west of Pietersburg. I grew up on the farm as my grand parents were farmers. I attended my primary school at Ambergate which is situated in a nearby village. I went to the boarding school at the age of 11 (eleven), at Makgoka High School. Going to a boarding school at such a tender age helped me to learn how to be independent, and how to interact with

children from different backgrounds. I completed my matric at the age of sixteen, and was admitted at the University of the North. I studied for a Bachelor of Arts Degree and A Higher Education Diploma.

In 1994 I came to Pretoria to start my teaching career. I had just turned twenty-one and wanted to be financially independent. I started working at St. Patrick's College in February 1994 until January 1995. I was employed at CAUSE (SACTE- South African College for Teacher Education), from February 1995 to December 1997. I was employed on a temporary basis at Dr. W.F. Nkomo High School from March to December 1998. I joined Pretoria College as a lecturer where I got a permanent post from January 1999 till present.

Ever since I came to Pretoria in 1994, I have been staying in a flat in Sunnyside. Sunnyside is a rapidly growing business area with lot of flats, restaurants, clothing shops, and other types of businesses. There are many exciting things in Sunnyside, such as Flea markets and a beautiful shopping mall with a variety of shops. One could shop for the whole day and still not be satisfied. On the negative side, one will always pass young children on the streets, begging for money or food to eat. During the day these children carry out different activities such as showing the motorists the parking bays, watching and washing cars, helping to carry groceries for shoppers, and selling newspapers, flowers or fruits. During the night one will pass these poor children sleeping on street corners, or underneath staircases of flats. They cover themselves with cardboard boxes and tattered blankets. It seemed obvious to me that these children did not have homes, and needed help. I asked myself what the future of these children was. I could see that if they did not receive some kind of help, they have no future at all.

As the days and months passed by, I realised that the number of street children was decreasing. I asked the few that I saw on the street, and they told me that they have been taken to a centre called the Itumeleng Assessment Centre in Sunnyside. On my arrival, I was not even sure if it was the right place, as it was quiet. I was welcomed by a friendly woman. I told her I was interested in what was going on in the centre, The woman whom they call "gogo", took me to the social worker who was very kind to me. She explained to me everything I needed to know. She even introduced me to some of the children who were in the class attending their lessons. Some of them had gone to Atteridgeville to attend a

formal school. I offered my voluntary service to help on Wednesdays with English lessons, and give children moral support.

#### 1.10 CONCLUSION

The problem of street children is a fast growing issue in the cities. It is imperative that feasible measures be taken to reduce this problem. It is acknowledged that every member of the community has a responsibility in helping these children. This study will therefore wishes to establish what caused these children to be on the streets. It is important to establish the reasons why children are on the streets so that these problems may be dealt with.



## SECTION TWO

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2. INTRODUCTION

This section will focus on the establishment of a conceptual and theoretical framework for the study. It examines literature dealing with reasons for street children taking the streets, legislation on childcare, and state intervention on street children. The victimization the street children experience on the streets, and the way the community responds to them, will also be examined.

#### 2.1 THE REASONS WHY CHILDREN ARE ON THE STREETS

Research shows that there are various reasons why some children become street children. The reasons vary from individual to individual. The main cause seems to be community disintegration. Communities are moving from *gemeinschaft* toward *gesellschaft* (Sergiovanni 1994). *Gemeinschaft* is translated to community, and *gesellschaft* is translated to society.

Sergiovanni (1994) argues that in *gemeinschaft* we care about each other, we help each other to learn, and to lead more productive lives. He further argues that in *gesellschaft*, community values are replaced by contractual ones. By this Sergiovanni means that the community of today has changed, people are more self-centred, and do not care about other people around them. People interact for personal gain, not to benefit others. People no longer help each other like they used to. Tonnies (in Sergiovanni 1994; 15) states that "in *gemeinschaft* people remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in *gesellschaft* they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors".

Reasons why communities are moving away from *gemeinschaft*, towards *gesellschaft* vary. This section will examine some of the reasons which are believed to have played a role in the disintegration of communities and families as well. It is believed that the reason there are street children, is because of the present community and family lifestyle. Discussing the issues of what causes

communities and families to disintegrate, leads to, among other things, the street children phenomenon. This is because the child does not exist in isolation; people around him, for instance, his family and his community, influence him.

Le Roux (1993) divides the factors which may contribute towards family and community disintegration into two categories, namely: family factors, and other factors.

Blunt (D'Oyley et al, 1994) maintains that street children are the direct consequence of family crises and breakdown. He argues that the crises are caused mostly by economic and social disruption. Le Roux (1993) mentions family factors such as: family break-ups; poor family relationships; lack of parental control; clashing of values of parents and children; unemployment; financial problems and poverty; illiteracy; the abuse of alcohol and drugs; physical and sexual abuse of children; children rendered orphans due to the imprisonment of parents; parents who leave the home; collapse of family structures due to resettlement of families in other residential areas; family violence; and the collapse of the traditional family unit.

By other factors Le Roux (1993) refers to factors such as unrest in black residential areas; lack of employment; political factors; unequal distribution of resources (housing, poor schooling conditions); high cost of living; lack of recreational facilities for the youth; lack of compulsory education; and poor community support systems.

## 2.2 THE FAMILY AND STREET CHILDREN

Family problems are the main contributing factors to most children leaving their homes. Blunt (D'Oyley et al, 1994) maintains that children are on the streets because their families have experienced or are experiencing, extreme crises. Basically, most black families are faced with a problem of poverty. According to Heyneman (Le Roux, 1994), poverty is one of the greatest problems South Africa is faced with. They maintain that about 25% of the black population in South Africa live below the breadline. Various reasons are cited for this situation. Capel (in Le Roux 1994:36-37) postulates that



It is the legacy of white privilege and black social deprivation, a history of Bantu Education, underdeveloped black townships, long term retardation of economic growth, deepening recession and mass unemployment, political domination and violent repression.

According to Wolfe (1987), poverty may lead to problems such as depression, anti-social behaviour, child conduct problems, alcoholism, and child abuse (including maltreatment, emotional maltreatment, and sexual abuse). All of which are related in some degree to negative development outcomes. Blunt (D'Oyley, 1994) maintains that the emotional abuse and neglect results in street children developing a lack of self-esteem and a high level of social alienation. He further maintains that street children may become adults who demonstrate high levels of anti-social behaviour, and poor adaptive social skills. This implies that when these children become adults, they may find it difficult to function well in their communities and families as a result of the experiences they had as street children.

Children who come from such family backgrounds often try to escape the situation by taking to the streets. Some of these children abandon their families permanently and live as 'children of the streets'. Some of them may not abandon their families; they work on the streets during the day and go home in the evening. They became 'children on the streets'. It is circumstances such as these that force young children to leave schools and their friends to work, and help their families survive.

### 2.3 RACE, APARTHEID AND STREET CHILDREN

Other factors which contribute to the proliferation of street children, are resultant of the political history of this country. The past apartheid system of South Africa left little to be desired, it has caused considerable damage to the black community through its apartheid laws. Black communities have always been disadvantaged. One example of the Acts, which affected blacks tremendously, is the Group Areas Act. According to Peacock (Le Roux 1994), the Group Areas Act implied that parents who worked and lived in white areas were not allowed to live with their children in those places. This resulted in many parents having to be away from their families for long periods, leaving children with one parent, or

extended families. Children of such families grew up without the support and care of their parents. Loss of parental care often predisposes the child to a street life (Le Roux 1994).

Another related aspect which might have led to the street child phenomenon, is the education system of the past. The Bantu education system of the past was designed specifically for blacks. This system did not address the problems of the people; it was also oppressive in its nature, as the curriculum was determined by a system that sought to suppress black people's progress.

Schools operated in isolation from the communities. There was no link between what the children experienced in their environment, and what the child learnt in the school. Townsend (1994) states that schools bring little influence to bear on the child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context. Allen *et al* (1987:1) argues that:

We need to renegotiate and reconstruct the ways in which education system relates to its constituent's communities. children failed to find meaning in attending schools and as a result resort to dropping out. Because black communities lack recreational facilities and support systems, some children go to the cities where they hope to find a better life.

## 2.4 LEGISLATION ON CHILDCARE

### 2.4.1 The Child Amendment Bill

Schurink (1996) argues that before 1994 the treatment of children, including street children was regulated by the Childcare Act, the Children Care Amendment Act, the Correctional Services Act, and the Probation Services Act. He argues that none of these acts, which are still in force today, included any definition of street children. The amendment to the Child Care Act, the Correctional Services Act, and the Basic Condition of Employment Act has been implemented since 1994.

Children's rights are stipulated in section 28 of chapter two of the Bill of rights, and the constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996. It stipulates

*inter alia* that: every child has the right to the following:

- (a) to name and nationality from birth;
- (b) to a family care, parental care when removed from the family environment;
- (c) to basic nutrition, shelter. Basic health care services, and social services;
- (d) to be protected from exploitative labour practices;
- (e) not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that:
  - (i) are inappropriate for a person of that child's age; or
  - (ii) place at risk the child's well-being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual moral or development, etc (Prinsloo 1997:116).

Prinsloo (1997) argues against 28(1) (d) and (e). He argues that these laws are non-derogable. By non-derogable he means that no laws or declaration of a state of emergency may limit any of these rights. He argues that certain street practices actually benefit the child in terms of resourcefulness, adaptability, coping mechanisms, freedom and autonomy. Donald and Swart-Kruger (Prinsloo 1997) on the other hand, maintain that, peer support and bonding, while they may contain positive elements, become redundant as the child should not have been placed in such circumstances in the first place. The child should always be protected from abuse and neglect, and should ideally never be the subject of sexual and labour exploitation, or undignified practices.

Prinsloo (1997) is of the opinion that these laws do not allow children to be free. Instead, he views them as oppressive, and not able to provide children with the freedom they deserve. He argues that these laws deprive the children of their right to autonomy, and the right to participate in decisions concerning their own future. He poses a question as to whether it should be the child's right to choose the alternative of a street life. He also enquires about the long term effects and prospects for a person raised on the streets, both for themselves, and for society. He continues by responding that, " the principle of autonomy holds that, person should be free to act as they choose provided their actions do not harm or limit the freedom of others or do the same" (Prinsloo, 1997:119).

What Prinsloo is trying to put forward is that, street children should not be restricted from finding jobs on the streets, as long as those jobs will enable them to acquire basic necessities such as food and clothing. Child labour, which is

forbidden here in South Africa, according to his argument, has to be reconsidered if the dignity of street children is to be regained.

## 2.5 THE STATE AND STREET CHILDREN

The question many people may be asking at this point is: "What does the new government say with regards to street children? Has provision been made for street children in the new democratic South Africa?"

In his first state of the nation address on 24th of May 1994, President Nelson Mandela accepted, in principle, the first call for children. President Nelson Mandela stated that street children must not be overlooked in the proposed Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). On the 16th of June 1994, in commemorating the Sharpsville massacre, he reiterated his concern that their problems should be addressed constructively. He exhibited his concern in a very personal way, by founding a presidential trust fund to assist street children and children in prison. A year later, he ratified the convention on the rights of the child and on the 1st of June 1996, he launched a national programme of action to improve the welfare of South African children (Schurink, 1996).

The above indicates that the state president is concerned about the welfare of all the children, including the street children. To add to the promises made, a new bill of rights was adopted on the 27th of April 1994. According to Schurink (1996), it included a justifiable rights. However, he argues that even though the rights within the bill are justifiable, children feel that on a daily basis, their lives are much the same as they were before. He further maintains that although people believed that things would change dramatically after the democratic elections, this hope has so far, proved unfounded.

## 2.6 THE EXPERIENCES OF STREET CHILDREN ON THE STREETS

When children leave their families and communities for the cities, it is apparent that they are hoping to find a better life. Konanc (Le Roux, 1993), distinguishes between two groups of street children:

The first group is called children of the streets. These are children who have

abandoned their families permanently. They spend twenty four hours a day on the streets. They usually form peer groups or gangs who serve as their family, or their community. Reasons for children becoming children of the streets according to Konanc (Le Roux 1993), may be poverty, maltreatment at home, alcoholic parents, single parent households, or an escape from an anti-child home or environmental situation. The second group is called children on the streets. This group of children spend much time on the street but return home every night. These children have not abandoned their families. They assist their families by means of the little money, which they earn on the streets. The inquiry will have as its research population, the first group.

Street children usually survive on the streets by means of the little money they receive from community members. They perform minor jobs such as selling newspapers, helping shoppers carry their parcels, appointing parking bays, or washing cars. Le Roux (1994) argues that these children work in order to become self-supportive, or to support their families. He further argues that many of these children become vulnerable to abuse and exploitation as a result of street life, since their work is not always of a legitimate nature.

Street children are exposed to many risks. For example, they may be raped and forced into survival sex. They are exposed to drugs and glue sniffing, and also to health hazards due to lack of medical services. Their risk of catching AIDS is very high (Levenstein, 1996:45). Glue sniffing has become a norm to most, if not all street children world-wide (Jasen *et al*, 1990). They take ordinary glue used in repairing shoes, pour it into empty containers such as juice containers, and inhale it. Jasen (1990:153) maintains that:

boys sniff glue as part of subculture of the street. The effect of glue served primarily as a means of starving off hunger, pain and freezing weather.

Community members have distanced themselves from the problem of street children. This is shown by the way in which the community relate to them when they beg for money. Some are kicked, beaten and even sworn at. Swart (1998) argues that, street children suffer most at the hands of police officers who arrest them. He maintains that street children are arrested for begging, loitering, petty

theft, and house breaking. A child protection unit, called the South Africa Police Service Child Protection Unit (SAPS CPU), was formed to work towards protecting children, not abusing them. This was in response to the abuse of street children.

The need to establish a unit within the South Africa Police Service(SAPS), to prevent and combat crimes against children, was identified in 1986. The primary task of the Child Protection Unit (CPU) is to pro-actively and re-actively police crime against children, and ensure that a sensitive service is rendered to the child victim. Since its inception, the CPU has already dealt with 140 thousand cases of crime against children (Schurink 1996). The SAPS CPU protects street children from being abused by older members of the community, and based on their track record, they seem to be making a difference.

## 2.7 COMMUNITY INITIATIVES TO ASSIST STREET CHILDREN

Street-Wise is one of the many programmes, which were initiated by communities to assist street children. Its principles proceed from the premise that the street child is normal, good but deprived. For Street-Wise, the 'right-spirit' entails the provision of a therapeutic milieu, that believes that by being accepted and empathetically heard, the children are better able to come to terms with their problems (Swart, 1998:36-37).

Street-Wise educational programs have been internationally acclaimed and acknowledged (Le Roux, 1994:76). By means of relevant education, the vicious circle in the lives of these children is broken. There are four main focal points:

1. Remedial programmes concentrate on numeracy and literacy, as well as on the general educational rehabilitation.
2. Formal education follows remedial action. It works towards preventing loss of vital time in the child's educational development.
3. Life-skill training is undertaken by volunteers and includes religious instruction, health and hygiene education, sex education, drug and solvent abuse counselling, art therapy, drama therapy, and numerous other short courses

throughout the whole year.

4. Job-skill training, helps to instil a work ethos, and develops concentration span in the children. For older people these children's training programs offer a measure of preparation for eventual employment (Le Roux, 1994:76-77).

South Africa still lacks enough facilities to cater for street children. Ross (Le Roux, 1994:69), argues that the community and the state have adequately provided for white children in need of care in South Africa. Black children in need of social care have been sorely neglected.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

A culture of poverty in black communities is deeply rooted. Poverty has a long history in South Africa. The causes of poverty can be traced to the past apartheid system of the country. The oppressive nature of the system led to black people losing their power of control over their lives. The irrelevant education system led black communities absolutely nowhere in the economic world. These types of problems led to the disintegration of the families and communities. The disintegration of communities has many consequences for the development of children. Children growing up without solid family structures, end up taking to the streets. They escape the difficult situations in their homes, communities and schools. The implications the disintegration of the family lives have on these individual lives, can be devastating to South Africa's development.

## SECTION THREE

### THE DATA OF THE STUDY

#### 3. INTRODUCTION

Itumeleng is an assessment centre for street children. It was established in 1993 after a need assessment was done in Sunnyside with regards to street children. Pretoria child and family Care Society carried this out. The results showed that there was a need for an assessment centre in Sunnyside where there is a high number of street children. The purpose of this study is to find out the reasons why some of the children become street children, their experiences on the streets, and the role of educational and cultural activities in transforming their lives.

#### 3.1 METHODOLOGY

The data for the study was collected through observation and interviews. The program for street children was observed, and participants in the programme were interviewed. Individual interviews were conducted with the participants. I have chosen to interview them individually on the recommendation of the tutors who said that, they could be upset during the course of the interview, as most of them have experienced serious problems in their families and on the streets. I also chose this format because I anticipated in a group interview situation, children may feel ashamed to relate their experiences in the presence of others. The interviews were conducted in the evening while the children were relaxed, and were finished with their daily programme. I have chosen to interview them in the evening so that I did not interfere with their daily program. I could use the whole day to observe their activities and allow them to get used to me. The interviews were conducted in Setswana, as it was the most widely spoken and understandable language in the centre. It was therefore easy for the children to express themselves during interviews. I used an interview guide as my framework against which to check if the entire question I needed to ask were explored (Patton,1987). The social worker at the centre served as my key informant. The two tutors who work in the centre verified the information she gave me.



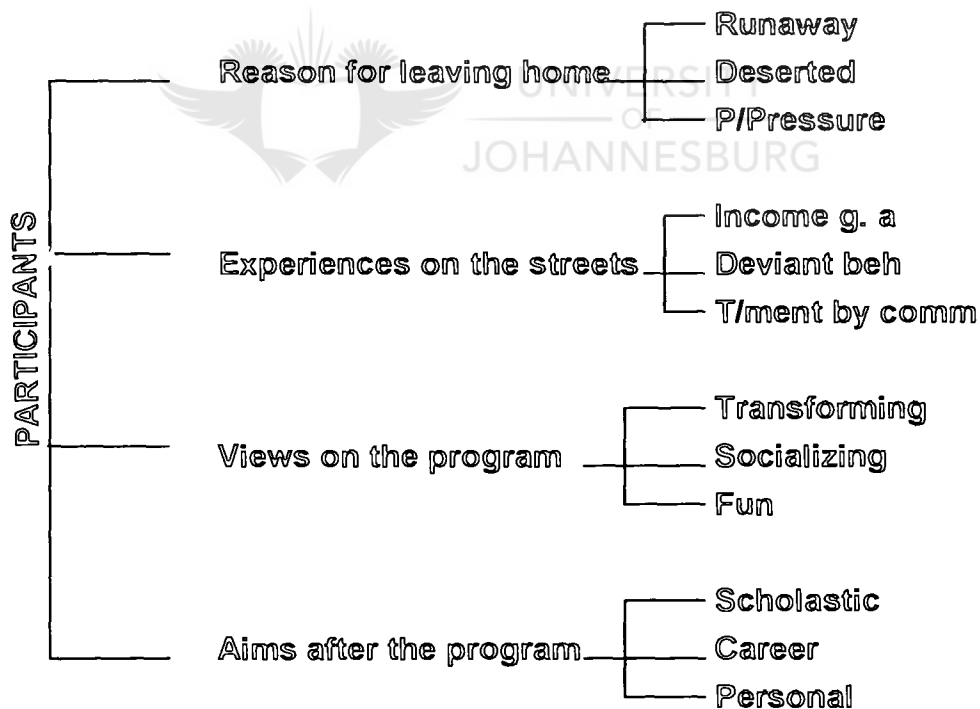
### 3.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Patton (1987:60) states that “when data collection has ended.... it is time to begin the formal analysis, “. After I completed gathering data for this study, I started coding. I looked for statements and quotations that go together, and those that answered my research questions. These were:

1. Reasons for leaving home (Red)
2. Lifestyle on the street (Black)
3. Own views on the program (Blue)
4. Changed behaviour (green)

During coding I used the left margins to code information in the paragraphs using coloured pens to distinguish between differing themes.

The following is a conceptual framework for the data analysis:



Codes: P/Pressure = Peer pressure, Income g.a. = income generating activities, T'ment by comm = treatment by the community.

After the broad areas were identified, I started with the open coding of each

section, which is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising data. At the same time, I did axial coding, which is the putting together of this same data in a new way, and making connections between categories.

### 3.3 PARTICIPANTS

Itumeleng Assessment Centre is a home for children who were living on the streets. The centre can accommodate 36 children, but presently is accommodating 28. All of these children are boys. The tutor told me that it is rare to find a girl on the street because girls normally work as prostitutes and are housed. He said that it would be difficult if they were to work with girls as well. All participants, regardless of their age, scholastic achievement and experiences, are placed in one class and are offered the same syllabus. This group of 28 children differs in many aspects, as table one illustrates.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Group	Participants
Number	28
Area of origin	Mozambique, Venda, North West, Witbank, Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, Soshanguve, Tembisa
Languages	Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Zulu, Ndebele
Ages	11 to 16
Scholastic Achievements	Grade 1 to Grade 8

#### Characteristics of a sample group

I selected six children for my sample group from the 28 participants in the programme. The average age of the children is 15. These children come from different areas of the country. Most of them have been in the programme for more than two years.

Table 2: Demographic data on the sample group

Subject	Home	Age	Time in IAC	Grade passed
Tsakane	Mamelodi	14	48 months	Grade 5
Colin	Mamelodi	15	12 months	Grade 5
Laurance	Soshanguve	14	1 month	Grade 5
Bonginkosi	Tembisa	15	1 month	Grade 8
Khomotso	North West	14	5 months	Grade 3
Sipho	North West	15	2 months	Grade 4

Codes: I.A.C = Itumeleng Assessment Centre.

### 3.3 2 Family background of these children

These children come from different backgrounds. Some of them lived with both their parents, while others lived with single mothers, or with relatives in cases where both their parents were absent. Most of the children have siblings who may be younger or older than them.

Table 3a: Family structure

Subject	Parent/Guardian	No. of children in the family	Subject born
A	Mom & Dad	4 boys; 3 girls	1 <sup>st</sup> born
B	Mom & Dad	2 boys	1 <sup>st</sup> born
C	Mom & Dad	2 boys	2 <sup>nd</sup> born
D	Brother	7 boys, 3 girls	Last born
E	Mom & Dad	1 boy, 3 girls	1 <sup>st</sup> born
F	Aunt & Grandma	2 boys	1 <sup>st</sup> born

The following codes are used in places of names of the subjects:

Tsakane = A; Collin = B; Laurence = C; Bonginkosi = D; Khomotso = E;

Sipho = F

From the data gathered on their background, social problems within the family structure emerged. The critical problem which their families were faced with was

unemployment. In most case parents were unemployed, and did not have any means of generating income. This problem in my view, led parents to loose hope and turn to alcohol as a means of forgetting their problems. Parents who were unemployed were alcoholics and were abusive. The next table illustrates types of problems at home that the child experienced while living at home. It also illustrates employment of parents or guardians, as well as the type of employment. This includes other types of income generating activities.

Table 3b: Employment

Subject	Parent/guardian employed	Type of employment	Problems to the child
A	Both unemployed	None	H/hold chores
B	Both unemployed	None	Parents fight & phy abuse
C	Dad only	Don't know	Mom – phy abuse
D	Brother and wife	B – Bricklayer W – Carpenter	Brother – phy abuse
E	Dad only	Builder	Mom – phy abuse
F	Mother only	Dom. worker	Aunt – phy abuse

Codes: H/hold = household; B = brother; W = wife (sister-in-law); phy = physical  
Dom. worker = domestic worker

From the above table it is clear that while the children were living at their homes, most of their parents were unemployed. Those who were employed, earned little income as illustrated by types of employment they were holding. If one studies table 3a, it is clear that these are big families that need a good income to sustain them. As indicated in table 3b, parents tend to be very abusive to their children. Children complain that they had to take over household chores such as cleaning, cooking and washing clothes for the whole family. Others complained that they were beaten harshly by their parents or guardians on regular basis.

Table 3c: Home environment

Subject	House	shack	Rooms	Electrical Appliances	Electricity Water
A		X	2	-	-
B		X	1	-	-
C		X	1	Refrigerator	-
D	X		4	Radio, TV, Refrigerator	Water
E		X	2	-	-
F	X		4	Radio	Water

Table 3c illustrates the home environment of the children. If one looks at information on their physical home environment, one finds that four of the six grew up in informal housing (shacks), and did not have access to electrical appliances in their homes. One child said, "If I wanted to watch television I was supposed to go to the shop in our area". They did not even have water or electricity. "We had to fetch water from a windmill on the outskirts of our village". Water was a scarce commodity for most children. Accommodation was a problem, and they said that their living conditions were uncomfortable and crowded.

#### Reasons for children leaving home

Table 4a illustrates the reasons why these children left their homes. They either ran away, were deserted, or were influenced by friends to leave their homes. It also indicates the kind of transport they used to reach their destinations.

Table 4a: Reasons for children leaving home

Subject	Method of leaving Home	Means of leaving home	Destination
A	PP	1 & 2	Sunnyside
B	R	2	Hatfield
C	D	1 & 2	Bosman
D	R	2 & 3	Sunnyside
E	R	2 & 3	Sunnyside
F	R	2	Tramshed

Codes: R = runaway, D = deserted; PP = peer pressure

1 = foot; 2 = train; 3 = taxi

Areas of destination mentioned above are all found in Pretoria. Sunnyside is the area with the highest number of street children. It is also clear according table 4a that most children were not deserted, but ran away from their homes. It is also clear from their responses that they ran away to places where they know other street communities were in existence.

### 3.4 CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES ON THE STREETS

I also investigated what the children's experiences were on the streets. I tried to find out how long they had stayed on the streets. I also investigated about the type of deviant behaviours they were involved in while on the streets. I also tried to find out what type of money generating activities they were involved in.

Table 4b: Experience on the street

Subject	Length stayed	SFC	SFPP	SG	PC	WC	B
A	1 month	-	-	-	X	X	X
B	24 months	-	-	X	X	X	X
C	2 months	-	X	X	X	X	X
D	1 month	-	-	X	X	X	X
E	1 month	-	-	-	-	-	-
F	2 months	X	-	X	X	X	X

Codes: Deviant behaviour: SFC = stealing from cars, SFPP = stealing from public phones, SG = sniffing glue.

Money generating activities: PC = parking cars, WC = washing cars, B = begging.

Table 4b illustrates the different types of behaviour which street children are engaged in on the streets. It is evident that most of them survive by appointing parking bays to drivers, washing cars, and begging. Few of them are engaged in

stealing as a means of survival. The money that these children receive, is used to buy food and clothes. It was also used to play games. This shows that street children, just like any other children, enjoy playing. They get some kind of fulfilment through play. Some, however, also sniff glue. When asked why they sniff glue, some said it helped them to tolerate coldness and hunger. They claim that sniffing glue kept them warm, and allowed them not to feel the hunger.

### 3.5 STREET CHILDREN AND THE COMMUNITY

Table 5 illustrates the way in which community members treat street children. According to the children some of the community members were kind to them, while others were harsh. They said that they were kind in that they gave them money and food when they were begging. However, those who were cruel would beat and kick them if they suspected that they might have stolen from them. Table 5 also indicates some activities which police officers carried out in harassing street children.

Table 5: Street children and the community

Subject	Treat by comm	Har by police	Reasons
A	Pos	N	None
B	Pos	Y	LOS
C	Neg	Y	SPP
D	Pos	N	None
E	Pos	N	None
F	Neg	N	None

Codes: Treat by comm = Treatment by community members: Pos = positive, Neg = Negative Harassment by police officers: Y = yes, N = no  
Reasons for arrest: LOS = living on the street, SPP = stealing from public phones.

### VIEWS OF STREET CHILDREN ON BEING IN THE SHELTER

The inquiry also sought to record how the children experience the shelter. Itumeleng Assessment Centre is the centre in Sunnyside, which accommodates

street children. Volunteers and the tutor who work full time in the centre recruit children to the centre. In the centre they are introduced to a programme which they follow on a daily basis. They are counselled by a professional social worker. They also attend informal classes during the day where they are taught how to write and read. Children are involved in different sports, and cultural activities.

Table 6a illustrates the different activities which children are engaged in, in the centre. When asked what they enjoy doing, children responded in different ways to indicate the activities they enjoy most, and which makes them enjoy being in the centre. All children said that they enjoy playing. This indicates that just like any other child, these children like to be engaged in play. They also enjoy the good food offered, clothes, watching TV, and studying.

Table 6a: Activities children enjoy

Subject	Food	TV	Clothes	Church	Play	Trips	Study
A	X	X			X		
B		X			X	X	
C	X		X		X		X
D							
E	X			X	X		
F					X		X

Table 6b illustrates how the children view the programme. From the interviews conducted it is clear that children are aware of the dramatic changes the programme brings to their lives. They all affirmed that their behaviour has changed. They seem to enjoy getting good food, clothes, and playing, going out on trips, and studying. The general feeling I got was that they are happy to be in the centre. Some of them, who are sent to their homes, even come back to the centre.



Table 6b: Views of the children

Subject	P/behaviour	Changed Beh
A	F	Pos
B	SG	Pos
C	SFPP, SG	Pos
D	SG	Pos
E	None	None
F	SFC, SG	Pos

Codes: Responses: Previous devious behaviour ( P/ dev behaviour): SFC, SFPP, SG (codes as in table 4a)

F = Fights, Changed behaviour: Pos = Positive, Neg = Negative

### 3.7 STREET CHILDREN AND ITUMELENG AS A HOME

From the interviews conducted, and from the information given by the key informant, Itumeleng Assessment Centre offers a bridging program through which after the assessment period, children are placed in other schools. In these other schools they receive proper education, and are well cared for. Some are sent to trade schools where they are trained on skills for specific jobs, such as woodwork, electrical maintenance, bricklaying, and so forth. The schools mentioned above are for children who cannot reunite with their families due to certain unresolvable problems. Those children, whose family circumstances allow them to be reintegrated, are sent home. After-care services are rendered to these children to make sure that they are well cared for in their homes.

### 3.8 CONCLUSION

The interviews conducted illustrated that the programmes offered have had a great impact on the lives of children. The children who are in this programme in the centre come from broken families. They come from disintegrating communities where they did not fit in. The centre has provided a home for them. They now regard the centre as their home. They receive the love and support, which every child needs. This is proved by the fact that some of these children when sent home, chose to come back. In the interviews most children

complained that they hated helping with household chores. However, in the centre, as part of their daily activities, they clean their rooms, wash dishes and clothes, and are happy about that. According to the information provided by the social worker and tutors, the minimum length of stay in the centre is one year. Contrary to this, there are children who have been in the centre for two or more years. This shows that the children have found a safe environment. They have created their own community, and now have a sense of belonging, which they did not have before. They have been given an opportunity to be carefree children. They mentioned that they enjoy playing, watching television and having good meals. This shows that their families and communities have denied these children their rights. They have created their own new community in the centre.



## SECTION 4

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

#### 4. INTRODUCTION

The data collected was first coded. During coding, data information, which seemed to be related to each other, was given the same code. After coding, the codes were grouped into clusters, which were also linked together, and grouped into four main categories. The categories were: participants' reasons for leaving home; their experiences on the streets; their views on the programme; and their aims after leaving the programme. I then found out what linked these four categories to each other. They all indicate the life experiences of the street child. These experiences start from his background at home, his survival on the street, and his experiences of life in the centre, as compared to his life at home or on the street. Finally, to find out the impact the programme had on the child, the last category addresses what the child feels about himself at present. For instance, whether his self-concept has improved.

#### 4.1 DISCUSSION OF DATA

Itumeleng Assessment Centre in Pretoria, Sunnyside was selected as the setting for this study, as it accommodated street children and offered programmes to such children. Of the 28 children who are accommodated in the centre, six were selected to be interviewed. The social worker and two tutors were also interviewed. The social worker served as a key informant. The programme was observed, and this helped to verify the data obtained from the interviews.

##### 4.1.1 CHILDREN'S REASONS FOR LEAVING HOME

###### Family background

The children are from families in which both parents were unemployed. The parents spend their day in the beer-hall drinking *umxombothi* (traditional beer). In some cases, the father was employed but the mother was not. Some of the

children reported that their parents were divorced or separated, and that they lived with an abusive step-parent. Child-care helpers reported that the main problem is the lack of care from parents, especially when step parents are involved. The biological mother often has to choose between her child and a new partner. She will rather be with a new partner at the expense of her own child. Many children blame their parents or guardians for a severe lack of care. Children reported that they lived in shacks. In most cases the whole family had to share the same room. Where there is no bed, parents sleep on the mattress and children on the floor. Most children have reported that they come from big families, with up to ten members in the family. They do not have basic things such as electricity, running water, television, radios, stoves or refrigerators in their homes.

The children in the study complain that they were usually punished for actual or accused misbehaviour. They also complained that they disliked helping with household chores. They said that helping with household chores deprived them of the opportunity of playing with their friends. Other children said that they left home in order to look for work. Others were not sure of the reason because as they say, they were influenced by friends. The tutors said that children often leave their home to seek adventure.

Most of these children experience school problems such as failure, excessive punishment by teachers, the inability of parents to afford school uniforms, books, and school fees. As a result, most of them are unable to write or read. Their poor performance at school can be related back to home environments that were lacking in guidance, as well as in facilities.

#### 4.1.2 CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES ON THE STREETS

The respondents reported that their experiences on the streets were bad. They lived on the money they received from people after helping with appointing parking bays and minding cars. They said that they slept in the doorways of shops and flats, on cardboard boxes and blankets.

When asked whether they abused drugs, only a few reported that they never used drugs while they were on streets. Most of them said they sniffed glue in

order to keep their bodies warm, and to prevent feeling hungry.

The children reported that they were never involved in any crime. Contrary to this statement, some reported that they stole money from public phones or broke into cars to steal car radios. If found, they were severely beaten.

#### 4.2 CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON THE PROGRAMME

These children seemed to be very happy to have found the centre which they regard as their home. They are excited about things, which they did not have at their homes. They were appreciative of having their own bed, and having hot water to shower with. Access to television, being able to watch video cassettes, listening to the radio, doing household chores such as making beds, cleaning the rooms, washing clothes and ironing were also part of their lives at the centre. This is the direct opposite attitude to their responses when asked to do household chores in their own homes.

The children were excited about having been given the opportunity to learn again. They find fulfilment in taking part in sport, drama and excursions. As the tutor reported, children enjoy having people around to rely upon, they enjoy the company of other children. They seek out adults, namely the social workers, tutors, and care-givers, for comfort and support.

The Itumeleng community function as *gemeinschaft* rather than as *gesellschaft* (Sergiovanni, 1994). They stick together, irrespective of the separating factors, which may be present. The children have had bad experiences within their families and on the streets. Now these children are willing to change their behaviour, and want to enjoy being like any other child.

Even so, some of respondents expressed the wish to be reunited with their families. Some of the children said that they do not wish to go back to their families. Instead, they would like to go to school and learn, be educated and get employment. Other children said that they would like to go back to school, and reunite with their families.

### 4.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

From the research conducted, I learned firstly that, many black communities have indeed disintegrated. The community of black people used to live in close unity. They used to share the same values, and lived in harmony. It was not easy for a child to be rebellious, or to do as they wished. It used to be the responsibility of the whole community to look after families and help those who were poor. This was real *gemeinschaft*. In modern society, as Sergiovanni (1994) stated, communities are moving away from *gemeinschaft* towards *gesellschaft*. This *gesellschaft* life is too individualistic. People cannot function in isolation, and as a result, many resort to anti-social behaviour such as alcoholism or drug abuse. Problems such as depression and maltreatment of children also result. All these factors are found to have contributed to the street children that I interviewed, leaving their families for the streets.

It was found that street life is not as easy as some of the children might have thought. The freedom they were yearning for couldn't be achieved on the streets. Some of the children were fortunate enough to be accommodated in the Itumeleng Assessment Centre (IAC).

The children in the centre who were respondents in the inquiries, seem to be very happy and regard the centre as their new home. Fifty percent of them wish to reunite with their families and go back to school, while the other fifty percent wish to go to vocation training schools such as Boys Hood.

These children left their homes because of various reasons, but are now in another home in which they are happy. The children have created their own community in the centre. Cohen (1995) talks about the symbolic construction of community through systems of values, norms, and moral codes, which provide a sense of identity within a bounded whole. I found that what makes these children accept the centre as their home, is that they have created their own value systems, and share a common identity. The other reason is the dedication shown by the social workers, tutors, and care givers at the centre. The children regard them as their parents. Children are now experiencing freedom, which they did not have at home. Such freedom includes the freedom to learn, freedom to play, to watch television and even the freedom to own a bed. Children are generally

happy, because they now have people to identify with. They have created a new community in the centre, for themselves.

#### 4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The community as a whole needs to be aware of the plight of the street children, and need to know that they too are responsible for the well-being of the child on the street. It should not be the responsibility of the government alone, but everyone must lend a helping hand. The black communities should support one another, especially the malfunctioning families. Support systems need to be established. This will help to address the cause of the problem, rather than concentrating only on the problem.

#### 4.5 CONCLUSION

The poor social and economic background of black families puts family life under stress. It is evident that poverty is the main problem in this regard. Families start to malfunction as a result of poverty. This brings about social problems such as alcoholism, maltreatment of children, child abuse, and divorce. Street children are the consequences of the malfunctioning families.

Every child needs to be loved, accepted and cared for. Children leave their families because such needs are not met. They take to the streets in order to belong to a community where they will be accepted. However life on the streets is not always what they hoped for. Many children suffer tremendously from the harshness of street life. In the centre, where they are accommodated, loved, and cared for, they are more at home. They feel accepted and respected. They can identify with others around them in the centre. The centre becomes the first well functioning home for most of these children. However, centres should be the last resort.

Disintegration of communities is another problem, which has been found to have an impact on the lives of today's children. Communities are losing *ubuntu*. They no longer support one another. Every one in the community minds her/his own business. The concept of 'oneness' within communities is lost. If communities could become one, most social problems could be dealt with.

When one looks on the streets of Sunnyside, one still find that the number of street children is still increasing, despite the centre, which is established. This shows that a lot of help is still required from every member of the community. The centre on its own cannot solve this problem. What the centre is offering is highly appreciated, but is just a drop in the ocean.





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## INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about yourself; (who are you, how old are you, where do you come from)
2. Tell me about your family; (number of children in the family, parents/guardians, their type of employment)
3. What is it that made you leave home?
4. Tell me about your school background; (when did you start school, highest standard passed)
5. What made you leave home?
6. How did you leave home?
7. What was your destination after leaving home?
8. Tell me about your life experiences of the street.
9. How did you get the centre?
10. What is your view about the program offered in the centre?
11. What is it that you enjoy most about the centre?
12. What is it in the centre that you do not get at home?
13. Whom do you regard as your family; (friends in the centre or people at your home)
14. What is your sense of "community"?
15. What are your aims for the future?