

Hurdles of Street Children: Drug Abuse a major challenge.

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There are many children living in the streets of urban areas. Most of them are aged between 5 to 17 years and. deprived of family care and protection. However, some of these children are engaged in begging and vending as an economic contribution to their family welfare and go home at the end of each day. Some may even attend school. Most street children in Kenya sniff glue and use other drugs and are also engaged in other high risk behaviours.

According to World Health Organization Report (1993), reasons that prompt children towards the streets include family breakdown, armed conflicts, poverty, natural and man-made disasters, famine, abuse (both physical &sexual), disinheritance, abandonment, orphan hood and mistreatment. Peer pressure and curiosity also contribute to the problem. Many opt for permanent street life as the only way of escaping the reality of their backgrounds.

While on the streets, street children are subject to many challenges including lack of basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing; and abuse, exploitation, and even murder. This sees majority of them spend their nights in the parks, on street pavements, others in abandoned buildings or cardboard boxes, tunnels and caves.

In addition to the challenges they encounter in their day to day lives, our society tends to discriminate against street children. Those affected usually start stigmatizing themselves when they see people rejecting or excluding them. Even their struggle to seek better living free of drugs is compromised. They opt to maintain the 'bad boy/girls' image.

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Owing to the stigma, street children see drugs as a coping mechanism. They see it as the only way out of their lonely world. It is their oasis of hope to their hardships. However, taking hard drugs results into drug dependency; health disorders such as permanent brain damage;; increased risk of heart attack; thought disorders; and violence. Many street children start taking glue and are gradually sucked into use of other stronger drugs such as cocaine, LSD and heroin.

It is very difficult for somebody to be weaned off taking these drugs once they get hooked. There are terrible withdrawal symptoms which ensure that one has to keep on taking the drugs .We need to know we are our brother's keeper and support the rehabilitation and empowerment of these children so that can become more useful members of society.

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