

Apathy of Street Children of Dhaka City towards Rehabilitation: An Assessment

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Abstract

The present study has investigated the reasons responsible for the lack of engagement of street children of Dhaka city with rehabilitation initiatives. For identifying the reasons of apathy of street children towards rehabilitation, data has been gathered using a purposive sampling method from eighteen (18) children across Dhaka city. Through interviews and open-ended questionnaires, it was found that most street children do not find the benefits of rehabilitation as they have developed a certain level of adaptability on the streets. This research has portrayed the entire concept as push factors and pull factors. Push factors are those elements that bring those children on the street. The push factors are poverty, parental separation, sexual or mental abuse, lack of basic necessities, child labor, exploitation, and lack of love and empathy. They are the core problems of society and the absence of implementation of children's rights in our society. Similarly, the study has found some pull factors as responsible elements that make the children unwilling for rehabilitation and pull them back onto the streets. Peer influence, drug addiction, desire to regain self-independence, financial freedom, bullying and abusive environment in rehabilitation centers are some of the factors that pull them back on the streets and create an apathy towards rehabilitation initiatives. Considering the data and addressing the needs and expectation of the street children towards rehabilitation, the study, finally proposes some policy recommendations for developing the rehabilitation initiatives.

Keywords

Street Children, Rehabilitation, Push and Pull Factors, Street Life, Development

1. Introduction

When a minor, in Bangladesh a person under 18 years, is lost, stolen, disappeared

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or robbed and consequently street becomes his home, he is then generally known as street children. Children living on the streets and deprived of fundamental rights are street children (Hai, 2014). In simpler words, street children are individuals who are under 18, living on the streets without experiencing basic facilities for living a sound life. A renowned term for these deprived street children is “*Tokai*” (trash collector) or “*Potho Shishu*” (Bromfield et al., 2023).

Rehabilitation for street children refers to the process of reintegrating them back into society and providing them with the necessary support and resources. It aims to address their physical, emotional, and social needs. This may involve access to education, healthcare, shelter, counseling, vocational training, and other services to facilitate their recovery and help them build a better future. The goal of rehabilitation is to help street children break the cycle of poverty and homelessness and lead productive and fulfilling lives. Rehabilitation initiatives can vary depending upon what kinds of help are being offered. These initiatives can be for providing basic needs, formal education, non-formal education, recreational activities, health care or adoption. These rehabilitations can come from governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations or personal fundings. NGOs with significant support of donors conduct their rehabilitation initiatives in an extensive manner. They focus on family tracing and reunification, outreach programs, welfare meetings, reintegration efforts, and day out programs (Niboye, 2013).

This is an astonishing part that no particular legislation is formed to protect or rehabilitate these children on the street. However, there exist supporting laws and regulations of child rights that prohibit crimes caused by street children. *Sromo Ain*, 2006 (Labor Act 2006) prohibited work by children under 14 years old, and any hazardous work by children under 18 years old. Prohibition of Unethical Trading Act, 1936 restricted prostitution by women under 18 years old. Also, National Child Policy, 2011 protects children from discrimination and abuse (Mia et al., 2022). In addition, Bangladesh is a signatory of the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child and in 2013 has enacted a comprehensive Children’s Act. As per law, all children of Bangladesh are legally bound to own 12 basic rights: education, balanced diet, health and nutrition, protection, participation, recreation, safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (Mohajan, 2014). In Bangladesh, there are 25 laws and regulations for child protection. However, none of them comprehensively focus on street children, which is necessary to resolve the issues of them quickly and more effectively.

Bangladesh has been struggling with the cycle of poverty since the early days of birth. Even in this era of digitalization, this curse of poverty is still one of the biggest obstacles to development. Street children living without all the basic rights are one of the victims of this vicious cycle of poverty. It is a harsh reality that our children, the future of the country, are homeless and struggling to survive. It is not only a threat to their lives but also to the country’s development. After all, we cannot develop while ignoring an entire portion of society (Rahman, 2023).

Rehabilitation of street children is a major issue that Bangladesh has been working on for years and yet street children are seen all over Bangladesh. Common factors that drag children onto the streets are poverty, family dysfunction and abuse, urbanization, lack of access to education, involvement with criminal activities, mental health issues, social and domestic violence or substance abuse and sexual orientation (Consortium for Street Children, 2020). In addition, rapid urbanization often results in overcrowded slums and inadequate housing, leaving poorer families with limited options and leading to street life (Wazed, 2010).

There are many families living on the streets for a lifetime and prefer begging for living. They are victims of vicious cycle of poverty and think themselves like bugs. They do not have any motivation to work and get a better life. They are illiterate and wait for people to provide them with food and clothes out of sympathy. Their children usually are seen to beg and earn money for their families. They are mostly victims of intergenerational poverty. Incidents like natural disasters and migration also make them homeless. Other relational issues like violence, abuse, mental and sexual harassment sometimes influence children to run from their houses and end up living on the streets. Another reason is the absence of empathy in the family. If a family has an unhealthy ambiance for the child and holds issues like divorce, separation, parental death, accident, or deprived inheritance; children seem to run away from the house. Once they get out of that unwanted environment, individual factors like adventure, supporting peers, and substance abuse influence them to end up living on the street (UNICEF, 2024).

The authors find the availability of street children almost everywhere in the Dhaka city. They are seen to be deprived of basic facilities of life. Poverty is dominant in their appearance and so they roam around for food and shelter. They are trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty and instability. Consequently, for survival, most of them have to choose to commit crimes and immoral acts such as prostitution, stealing, mugging, picketing, drug peddling, scamming and human trafficking (Rahman, 2023). Also, underage children end up involving themselves with robbing, eve teasing, bombing, hijacking, rapping, violence, watching porn, committing suicide, and other non-mentionable activities (Obaidullah). These crimes that affect the city life and make it unsafe for the citizens are planned by some syndicates run by adults who are also from the streets (Obaidullah, 2016). Since street children are not socially accepted, have less amenities of life, faced many challenges like poverty and become the victims of abuse by the pedestrians, they suffer from many diseases such as skin diseases, abdominal disorders, respiratory diseases and eye and ear related problems (Chowdhury et al., 2017). Because of lack of nutrition and proper health support, they suffer from deadly diseases but cannot get medications due to lack of money (Chowdhury et al., 2017).

Bangladesh government and NGOs are constantly working on rehabilitation programs. The *Restless Beings Rehab Centre* in Mohammadpur, Dhaka, rehabilitates hundreds of children. In the last nine years, this organization alone raised \$3891 from 84 donors as funds. The Rehab Centre concentrates on providing

accommodation, medical care, and educational facilities, which might leave a long-term impact on the children and the country's future (*Street Children in Dhaka, n.d.*). Children residing at the state-run street children rehabilitation center in *Kamlapur* of the capital are provided with meals. Another rehabilitation center, Karwan Bazar of the capital, also provides meals to these street children. These shelters have been under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs since 2016, and they run specific programs that provide food for street children (*Hossain, 2022*). The government has launched the Child Sensitive Social Protection in Bangladesh Project and the Sheikh Russell Child Training and Rehabilitation Center Project. Also, NGOs like Caritas Bangladesh's *Alokito Shishu* Project set up drop-in centers and night shelters for street children. These facilities offer accommodation, food, education, and vocational training. However, more efforts are needed to support many street children in need (*Dhaka Tribune, 2024*). A comprehensive rehabilitation program that strives to address the needs of street children may work to give them a chance towards making a brighter future. By providing them with the necessary support, education, and life skills, it may break the cycle of poverty and help the children reintegrate into society as productive citizens (*Sultana et al., 2024*).

Not only the organizations and government but also responsible citizens of the country are contributing to the rehabilitation of these children. They aim to give these children a better life by giving them primary education, helping them financially, and even adopting them. Still, most of these children do not prefer accepting help for a long time. After a certain time, they return to the streets and wander around begging or selling services. That is why a lot of children are seen on the streets passionately working or selling things. Push factors that bring children on the street include lack of love and empathy in the family, absence of basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing, education, and healthcare), mental or physical abuse, abandonment, parental death or remarriage, and mostly poverty. Once they accept street life, they hardly seem to have any interest in going back to regular lives. Also, pull factors are those motivations that demotivate the street children from staying in rehabilitation and attract them back to the streets. These pull factors are financial freedom, urbanization, peer group influence, desire to regain self-independence.

In the name of rehabilitation street children also experience violence, human trafficking, child labor, exploitation, and discrimination from society. Their traumatic experiences make them distrustful of authorities and hesitant to seek help or accept any rehabilitation. Also, street life gives them an opportunity to regain financial freedom. Because of urbanization, cities tend to get bigger and more populated. Children run from villages, take shelter under lampposts, and find exploring city life the most adventurous thing to do. Such factors push these children from rehabilitation and create an apathy towards getting a regular life. Children who accept rehabilitation have a strong belief in their ability to overcome challenges and are committed to making the necessary changes to regain

a socially accepted life. They understand the value of rehabilitation and are willing to work hard to achieve their goals. It is necessary that they do not lose the hope of regaining a healthy and safe life. Exploring their lifestyle, motivations, and interests and restructuring the rehabilitation plans can bring practical changes soon.

The present study aims to explore why the street children particularly of Dhaka city are not interested to avail rehabilitation. Despite numerous efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate street children into mainstream society, there is a prevailing sense of apathy among these children toward accepting help and rehabilitation programs. In order to bring true development, it is necessary to know why they are not interested in rehabilitation. The insights gained from this study may contribute to the development of the country. It may bring responsive interventions that support street children in breaking the cycles of homelessness and poverty, and enable them to build a brighter and more promising future. Also, it sheds light on the barriers and obstacles faced by street children in accessing and engaging with rehabilitation services. Understanding these barriers is significant for preparing the national strategic guidelines for developing effective interventions to find out the root causes of this apathy and facilitate the successful rehabilitation of street children. Furthermore, in the present research, the expectation of street children regarding rehabilitation has also been taken into consideration with a view to formulating recommendations for proper, effective and comprehensive rehabilitation programs.

2. Research Objectives

The research aims to explore the reasons, circumstances and life experiences of street children on building an unwillingness towards rehabilitation. Even after an adequate number of rehabilitations are being offered, they mostly seem to have a negative perception on those initiatives. This study aims to find a way of establishing impactful rehabilitation initiatives addressing the need and expectation of the street children.

3. Research Questions

Despite the provision of ample support, street children often show a reluctance to embrace rehabilitation, appearing more at ease with their street life. This raises the primary research question: What are the main factors that prevent street children from accepting rehabilitation?

The research will explore the entire concept and present the results from two perspectives: push factors that drive children to the streets, and pull factors related to rehabilitation initiatives that draw children back to street life. The key question is: What are the specific push and pull factors responsible for this situation?

4. Literature Reviews

In 2012, a study was done on *Rajshahi* city's street children by Dr. Md. Sekender

Ali, Md. Tawhidul Islam and Md. Abdul Momin. The study emphasized their socio-economic background. It showed how miserable their lives were and their need for help. It was mentioned that although some street children are getting educational opportunities, more is needed. They need more opportunities to be a good citizen of Bangladesh (Ali et al., 2012).

In 2020, The Daily Star published an article that mentioned glue-sniffing as drug addiction is a common sight for the street children of Dhaka city. It demonstrated that street children live on rail lines, though the rehabilitation center is a five-minute walk. Many street children are involved in drug business. Even though Bangladeshi law is zero tolerance towards drugs, these little fellows are never caught. Addicted children influence others to get addicted. Even counseling does not work for addicted children. Managing them is mentioned as a risky job, and lack of responsible staff to maintain them is a concern. Some rehabilitation centers are even shutting down because of funding gaps (The Daily Star, 2020).

Conticini and Hulme (2006) have investigated why Bangladeshi children migrate to the streets. It was found that these children are mostly abandoned by their families. They also migrate because of their household's incapability to meet basic needs, ignorance, and avoidance. Most of them are closely associated with violence and abuse.

Farid and Mustari (2015) attempted a study on the lives and livelihoods of street children in Bangladesh. It mentioned there is a rising number of street children who are undergoing serious physical and psychological problems. The study was done on 63 street children and their lifestyles. Most of them were *coolies*, *Tokai*, hawkers, beggars, or *van/rickshaw* pullers. They are not only victims of child labor but also living human rights violated lives.

In 2023, Dhaka Tribune published an article where it demonstrated street children falling into the “*Dandy Trap*”, more specifically, getting addicted to drugs. It mentioned how these addicted children are easily being morally disrupted and destroying themselves. The article emphasized an urgent need for rehabilitation and support (Amin, 2023).

Bithi (2019) carried out a study regarding a rehabilitation center in *Konabari, Jaipur*. It aimed to arrange a sufficient training system and manpower. It brought out the needs and requirements of a child. Here, apart from food, shelter, and education, sanitation is considered an important part. It enlightens the importance of rehabilitation of their mental health. It mentions that rehabilitating them would mean that their psychological condition can be improved with the care in the community.

Similar research by UNICEF has explained the lives of these children on the street. It found out the family dynamics that make these children end up choosing street life. It was found that factors like intergenerational poverty, violence, hostile stepfamily, migration and land-related issues, parental death, and loss of job make them live on the street. Also, there are individual factors that influence them to

explore street life. These are curious minds, being lost, school challenges, family support, and lack of empathy ambiance in families. For survival, they do both illegal and informal jobs. It also mentioned their survival activities on the street, risk factors, and coping mechanisms (UNICEF, 2024).

Another study by Lund University explored public perception of street children in Cairo. The study found that a faction of Cairo has complex perceptions of street children. The study explored street children's lifestyles around Egypt. Three major influences according to the study that drag children on the streets are parents, education, and poverty. The study also emphasized on criminal behavior of these street children from the perspective of Egyptian laws. It remarked on a few actors to point out solutions as government, NGOs, rehabilitation, society, and others (Göthe, 2016).

Niboye (2013) explored the effectiveness of Nongovernmental organization in rehabilitation of street children. It has been shown how the number of street children extensively grew with the increasing rate of poverty in Tanzania. It mentioned lack of governmental support led to this intensifying rate of street children's growth. The study found out the probable accurate methods through which NGOs can apparently bring pragmatic and deep-rooted solutions. It has emphasized interview observation, counseling, guidance, medical help, family tracing, NGO funding, accountability, stigmatization, and a better working environment for social workers.

Karlsson (2015) carried out a study on rehabilitation centers assisting street children in leaving street life. This study has taken up push and pull factors to define if rehabilitation centers are functioning towards their goal. In Kenya, street children see the rehabilitation centers as a vacation. They visit those centers for a certain time aiming to get free food, clothes, and a refreshment of regular street life. Either because of the fear of restrictions and schooling or because of traumatic experiences, they mostly run away from centers. The solution it found was providing them a better lifestyle in centers than streets, treating them with love and empathy, providing counseling, and ultimately preparing them for the change.

Another study in 2020, explored the causes, challenges, and opportunities of street children. The result has indicated that peer influence, lack of security at home, and economic issues in families are responsible for bringing children on the streets. Street life is neither comfortable nor secure. They are exploited and abused in the street. Many of them end up being victims of rape, diseases, gang rivalry, and drugs. Even community members seem to have a negative attitude towards these victims. Because of ungoverned and unauthorized rehabilitation centers, it gets tougher to rescue street children (Doja, 2020).

In 2021, a research paper was published focusing on the depreciation of street children with recommendations for improving their current lives. It has highlighted the neglected lives and harsh circumstances they grow up in. It also explored that the reason that makes the children inclusive on streets is predictable,

multi-faceted, and personal. Their lifestyle is basically dealing with poverty every day and ultimately getting spoiled or used in illegal activities. Although there are certain sophisticated legal instruments internationally, the nation has no special attention to improve the situation till now. Although there are specific legal regulations for children in general, the executives of those regulations are not paying attention to street children (Mia & Islam, 2021).

Ovi (2021) explored that Bangladeshi street children are even associated with contract killing, gangsterism, and other serious crimes. Although the state laws and regulations are favoring children's rights, they have boundaries to focus on the street lives. Dedicated legislation and governmental associations have been suggested to resolve the issue and include them in societal development.

An article published in *Prothom Alo* has explored that street children's rehabilitation programs are mingled with corruption. The rehabilitation centers dedicated to the deprived children serve malnutritional food with poor quality every day. But at the end of the month these centers submit bills of handsome amounts mentioning restaurants which are absolutely fake. Although the centers are operated by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, due to unregulated supervision, corruption exists in every corner. Financial discrepancies exist with every festival and event. Even the children living here are ill-treated by the staff and forced to do chores at the centers where they are instructed to treat them with empathy (Hossain, 2022).

A Study published in 2023, evaluated the Impact and performances of Non-profit organizations and the donor's role in saving street children in Bangladesh. The findings of the study evolved from evaluation and interviews of NPO (non-profit Organizations) workers, donors, and general people. NPOs aim to provide basic necessities to children who sleep or work on the street. Small-scale NPOs assist the children to live better lives while experiencing major problems. As NPOs lightly expand upon donors, the paper has also explored their motive and intention behind contributing to finances. The major issues that small-scale NPOs experience are lack of credibility, familiarity among donors, limited reach of public concern, and insufficient support online. It has suggested how promoting the inclination of technological use among NPOs can build stronger connections among all. To make the initiatives for street children effective, one must concentrate on reducing donation challenges (Adnin et al., 2023).

All these studies and articles are concentrated on highlighting street children's lives and livelihoods; mostly their general problems. They are leading one of the most miserable lives, deprived of all basic needs and human rights. Some studies have also mentioned the necessity of rehabilitation and their unwillingness towards those shelters. Few studies also concentrated on finding out effective NGO and centers' initiatives to rehabilitate these children, However, they did not discuss the factors that are making Dhaka's street children unwilling to undergo rehabilitation. The present study stands here. Exploring their idea of living on the street, their lifestyle and reason responsible behind denying any help of rehabilitation would help better in finding out effective initiatives.

5. Methodology

This is a qualitative study that involves gathering and analyzing data through in-depth analyses of the condition of street children. The aim is to understand the factors contributing to the apathy of street children of Dhaka city towards rehabilitation programs and to explore potential solutions to address this issue. This study has adopted a phenomenological research design that works on understanding the experiences of street children and the social factors influencing their attitudes towards rehabilitation. Phenomenology allows researchers to explore the subjective perspectives of individuals and gain insights into their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The data for this research paper was collected from 18 children from four different slum areas and streets in Dhaka city. In choosing the participants the purposive sampling method was adopted and participants have been picked based upon their relevance to the research topic. The data was collected through face-to-face interviews and discussions. An open-ended questionnaire was structurally prepared, targeting their poor living condition and their motive for living on the streets. It also included serious issues with rehabilitation centers and children's experiences regarding rehabilitation. In addition to the primary sources i.e., interviews and questionnaires, data was also collected from secondary sources from journals, reports, literature, and so on according to the study's purpose.

6. Limitations

The purposive sampling method allowed the selection of a diverse group of street children having different experiences. However, the selection fraction may not be representative of all street-connected children of the Dhaka city, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Despite efforts to achieve data saturation, there may be diverse narratives that were not captured in this study. Furthermore, the younger age of some participants posed challenges in discussing topics related to family and street life in depth. Therefore, although efforts were made to exclude unreliable data, verifying all information proved to be difficult. Also, not all of them were ready to provide their personal information because of shame and fear of legal action. Mostly it happened in terms of getting information related to drugs. There is a possibility that children have lied about not taking drugs as it seems they are actively taking such substances. Some of the abandoned children did not really explain why they were abandoned by their families. In addition, their accusation of illegal actions of rehabilitation centers could not be verified. It is merely their statements that were analyzed.

7. Data Analysis, Discussion and Results

7.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The data for this research paper was collected from 18 children from four different slum areas and streets i.e., slum areas of *Shorail*, *Kamrangirchar*, *Rayerbag* and

Taltala in Dhaka city. Among these children, ten were male, and eight were female. 5 males and 5 females reside near slum areas and work or beg as street children. While 5 males and 3 females do not have a home and live on the streets.

Table 1 shows 55.6% of street children live in slums, where they are often seen working or begging around cities all day before returning to their homes at night. The remaining 44.4% do not have a permanent house and instead live on foot-paths, in parks, or at stations. For those who have their own homes or live in slums, they may still face challenges such as poverty, lack of access to basic necessities, and inadequate living conditions. However, they have a certain level of stability and security that comes with having a place to call home.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents			
Gender	Area of Living		Age Range
	Slums (<i>Shorail, Kamrangirchar, Rayerbag and Taltala</i>)	Streets	
Male	5	5	
Female	5	3	5 - 17
Total	10	8	
Percentage	55.6	44.4	

7.2. Causes that Bring Children on Street

The participants in this interview come from varied backgrounds, with some having their own homes or living in slums, while others have been abandoned by their families and forced to live on the streets. There are children who have been abandoned by their families and are left with no choice but to live on the streets. Other children are left without proper care due to their parents being separated or deceased. Often, it is the lack of financial stability within their families that leads these children to beg and survive on the streets. Additionally, many of these children come from families where their parents work as rickshaw pullers, day laborers, or domestic workers. These children often spend their days collecting money to support their families.

Figure 1 shows the major three reasons that bring these children on the street. These are parental death, abandonment and an abusive family environment. Parental death refers to the loss of one or both parents, which may lead children to end up on the streets either due to lack of emotional support or financial resources to meet their basic needs. Abandonment occurs when parents or guardians leave their children without providing for their care, often leading to children fending for themselves on the streets. An abusive family environment refers to physical, emotional, or sexual abuse within the family, causing children to escape to the streets to seek safety and protection.

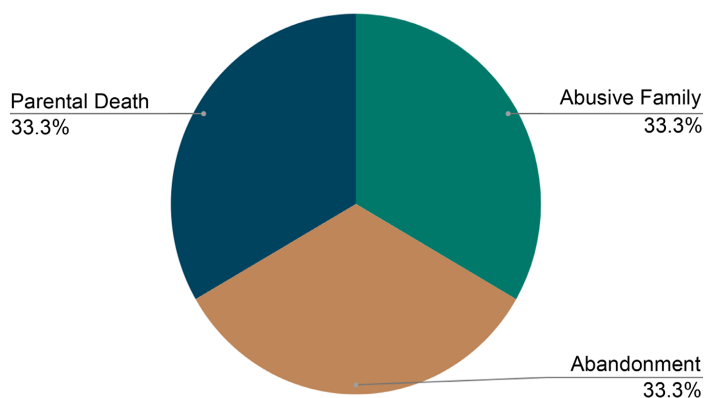


Figure 1. Reasons bringing children on streets.

Some families even use their children to collect money, taking advantage of the sympathy they receive from strangers. This practice is often referred to as “beg-packing,” where parents encourage their children to beg for money from tourists and passersby in order to make a profit. This exploitation of children is unethical and harmful, as it teaches them to rely on others for money rather than promoting self-sufficiency and independence.

“My parents do nothing and sleep on the street; I do not like begging as people around the street say bad words. But I need to beg to feed my father, mother and little brother” (Sumaiya, 12 years old girl of TSC)

Case Study 1: Lamiya, a 17-year-old girl living in TSC shared her story of growing up on the streets despite having a father who was an *Uber* driver. His father used to earn a good amount of salary every month. Her mother was a street child in her past life. She and her nine children continued to choose street life even after marriage. At 17, Lamiya is now a mother herself, battling breast cancer and selling flowers on the streets to survive. Her husband, a *fuchka* (kind of street food) seller, struggles to provide for their family and they are unable to afford adequate housing and food. Following in her mother’s footsteps, she has found street life to be a convenient option for earning money.

Case Study 2: A 12-year-old boy Mithu Started living on the streets after being accused of stealing 500 BDT by his mother. He ran away from his home “*Tongi*” and now resides around “*Taltola*”. The boy expressed that he is drawn to street life and does not want to return home. However, Mithu occasionally visits his village whenever he feels like. His parents searched for him for a few years and took him back home several times. Still, Mithu could not stay away from the fun and adventure of street life.

He stated, “Even God cannot take me away from the streets if I do not want to” (Mithu, 12-year-old boy at Taltola street)

Both the pull factors and push factors are responsible for bringing children on the street. The prior adverse life experiences such as mental or physical abuse by families, poverty, parental death or remarriage, abandonment push the children on the street. Even after accepting rehabilitation, other pull factors like urbanization, peer

group influence, unhealthy rehabilitation environment, abuse and restrictions again bring them on the street.

7.3. Lifestyle of Street Children

Living on the streets, these children have created a makeshift community where they strive to survive by earning money from passersby. Despite their difficult circumstances, they have formed a close-knit bond with each other. They fiercely defend one another, standing together against any threat or danger that may come their way. Their solidarity is not just limited to their own group. They also often extend their support to other marginalized communities, such as elderly homeless individuals or disabled beggars. Through their actions and unity, the street children demonstrate the power of compassion, empathy, and cooperation in the face of adversity.

Figure 2 shows, each day most street children earn around 100 BDT to 200 BDT by begging, while those who sell items like flowers, water, or collect plastics can earn 300 BDT and more.

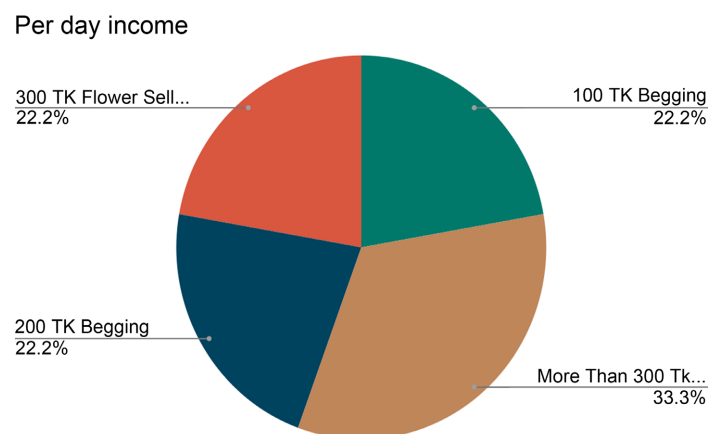


Figure 2. Per day income of street children.

With their earnings, most street children are able to have at least two meals a day while wandering the streets. They are not begging solely for food. Their entertainment purposes are depicted on **Figure 3**. Few of these children save their money to go to gaming centers. At these centers, they pay around 30 taka for 30 minutes to play video games and even make TikTok videos. Those who smoke cigarettes or use dandy (a type of tobacco) tend to spend a majority of their income on these substances.

Children on the roads usually experiment drugs and smoke cigarettes out of curiosity, often starting with dandy as a cheap and accessible drug. In areas like Dhaka's *Kamalapur* railway station, *Shanir Akhra* foot-over bridge, and *Suhrawardi Uddan*, groups of children were seen openly using drugs and sleeping in public spaces. **Figure 4** shows that around 30% street children confessed they take drugs in different forms. On the other hand, more than 70% children stated

that they are not involved with drug addiction although while interviewing we felt many of them are apparently drug addicted.

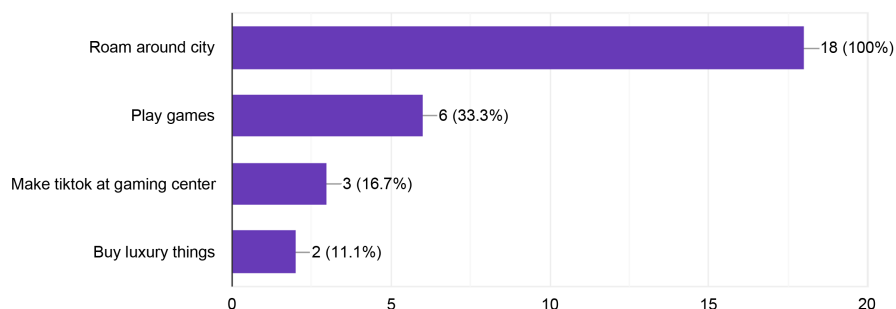


Figure 3. Things street children do on streets.

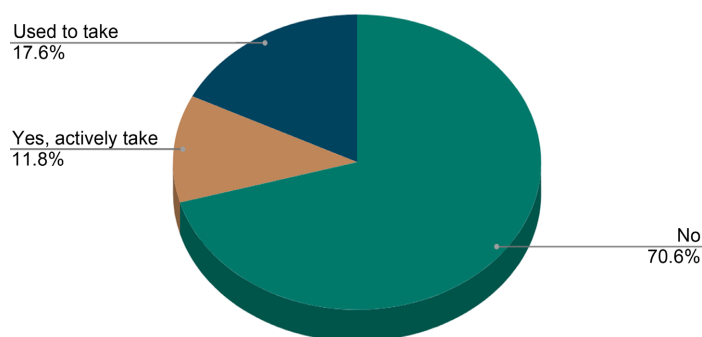


Figure 4. Involvement with drugs and other substances.

The children who congregate around *Kamalapur* railway station often engage in illegal activities, such as traveling on the roofs of trains. Despite the risks involved, they find train travel exhilarating, even though they may be arrested by the police for doing so. Their poor nutrition and risky behavior while playing often lead to accidents. Sleeping on the streets in unsanitary conditions also makes them susceptible to illnesses like fever, dengue, typhoid, and diarrhea. They mainly seek medical help at pharmacies and government hospitals, though obtaining medication can be difficult even there. They can barely have access to medical help from pharmacies and government hospitals. Lack of care and medicine can turn minor illness into deadly ones for them.

“Last year, I fell down from the train while playing with my friends. Some of the people around the station took me to the Dhaka medical area. But they did not directly take me to the hospital. They lied to me on the street and asked for money for help. I can guess they had almost 500 BDT in an hour. Those people gave me 15 BDT and left me on the floor of Dhaka medical hospital afterwards” (Rana, a 12-year-old boy, Taltola)

7.4. Status of Rehabilitation Approaches to Street Children

Street children are often received offer for rehabilitation either from rehabilitation centers or from philanthropist citizens. **Figure 5** shows around 89% of street

children have been offered rehabilitation either by NGOs, government agencies or individuals. The rehabilitation generally promises to provide opportunities for education, work, and shelter.

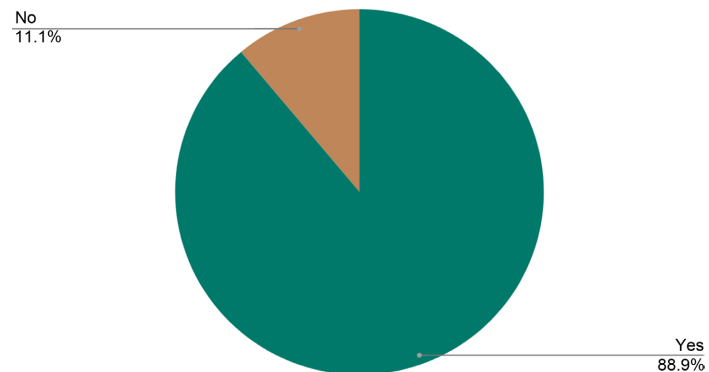


Figure 5. Status of rehabilitation offer.

While interviewing, some respondents confirmed us that some street children attend NGO run schools like “*Mojar School*”, “*Shopno Pathshala*”, and “*Brikkho Mela*” where they receive primary education and meals. They find the teachers at these schools to be warm and welcoming. Generally, university going students teach there voluntarily and street children attend the schools with fun and excitement. During festivals such as *Eid* and *Pohela Boishakh*, these schools provide them with food and clothing as festival gifts. Such generous activities influence children to go and receive primary education. Also, Government-run rehabilitation centers also offer street children food, shelter, and education. Children who attend these centers receive religious, moral and primary education. These centers seem to have a positive influence on the children. They get to know about moral values and it helps them to differentiate between right and wrong.

“I stopped taking drugs as some brother of rehab in Mugda told me that taking these bad things are sin and unforgivable.” (Masum, 11 years old boy, Kamalapur railway station)

7.5. Factors Creating Apathy towards Rehabilitation

There are numerous factors that serve as deterrents for street children for not accepting rehabilitation. More than one-third of respondents expressed that they are reluctant to accept rehabilitation because their families do not support the idea. These children along with their family beg or work on the street for living. As shown in **Figure 6**, almost 12% children actually do not realize the significance of rehabilitation and their life ahead. Also, almost 18% children expressed that they have gone through prior bad experiences at rehabilitation which stops them from accepting any approaches further. As a result, they resist the idea of leaving street life behind. Peer influence, self-dependence, enjoying street life, addiction to drugs and want of proper schooling are other reasons because of which the street children are not willing to accept rehabilitation.

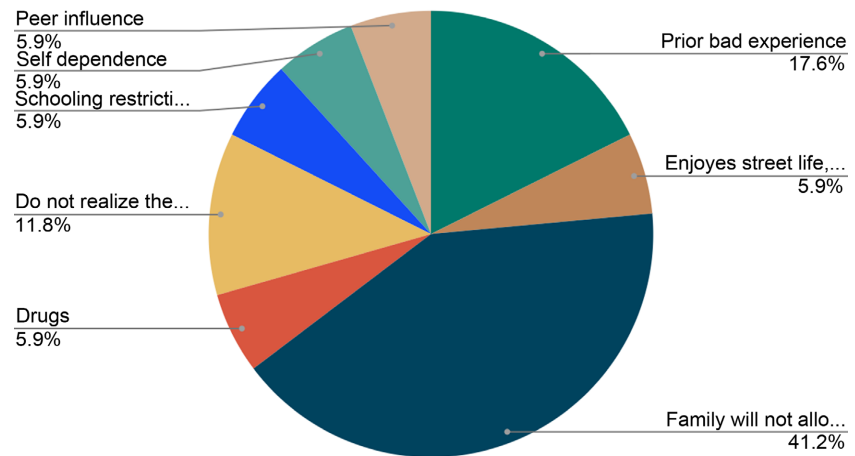


Figure 6. Reasons behind rejecting rehabilitation.

In addition to the abovementioned reasons, some rehabilitation centers have abusive environments, and untrained teachers and responsible persons of those centers adopt physical torture as punishment in case they are not in order.

Case Study 3: Maruf, a 15-year-old boy living in *Kamalapur* railway station has gone through a horrifying experience in a rehabilitation center. He has been in a governmental rehabilitation center of *kamlapur*. There the authorities used to steal the blood of the children at night. The presence of visible scars on Maruf's hands suggests physical harm inflicted upon him, further emphasizing the severity of the situation. The lack of intervention from the police despite being aware of these actions speaks to systemic failures and a disregard for the well-being of vulnerable individuals.

“Police that night had come and verbally warned those people in the rehabilitation center for stealing blood from us. I will not go back there” (Maruf, 15-year-old-boy, Kamalapur)

When a child gets used to living on the street, it gets tougher for him/her to resettle with a new family in a new environment. There are cases where children were adopted and provided with the most loving environment possible. Yet, the children could not get adapted and got back to the street after a few days or a few months.

Case Study 4: Mobarak, a 10-year-old-boy, was rehabilitated by a few students of Islamic University from *Kamalapur* railway station. That little boy was adopted by a loving family. Both the family and the child accepted one another and were living a stable life. He got unimaginable love and empathy from the family and a sense of attachment grew in me. He was having Islamic education in a *Madrasa* (Islamic school) for a few months. After a certain time, the child did not want to be in that house anymore. He had no complaint but only demanded to have his street life back. Neither a good life nor a loving family could stop him. That boy got back to the station and started living there and never came back.

“I love my new family and they take good care of me. Still, I do not want to be with them anymore. I just want to go back to the station and live my old life.”

(*Mobarak, 10-year-old-body, Kamalapur Railway Station*)

Social exclusion theory seems to be relevant in the above situation. Because, a street child who has been rehabilitated might receive healthy treatment from the family or person. But society keeps making the child realize that he or she belongs to the street and is not one of them. Such behavior is mentally so hurtful that it makes them choose the street life again. Also, socialization theory works in this situation as the children on street become socialized with the fun and joy of street life and so are reluctant to lead a mainstream disciplined life. Since a social life requires some level of discipline and restrictions, the children on street do not want to lose their adventurous and independent life that they have tested for a while.

7.6. Expectation of Street Children from Rehabilitation Process

During the interview, when we asked them about their expected rehabilitation process, almost 40% children outwardly shared their unwillingness for rehabilitation. Almost one-third of the respondents agreed for rehabilitation provided their parents are also rehabilitated with them together. As shown in **Figure 7**, 4 children have shared their concern that the rehabilitation centers should be free from abusive behavior. In addition, a nominal number of participants expressed they did not want rehabilitation but they were ready to receive schooling.

What is your expectation from rehabilitation process?

18 responses

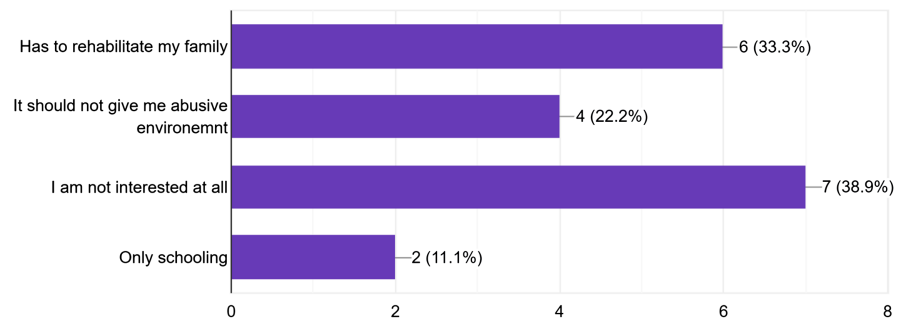


Figure 7. Street children's expectations regarding rehabilitation.

The expectation of the street children to receive a full-fledged rehabilitation with their family members support the rational choice theory. Because of the emotional attachment, they cannot deny the family and just go by themselves for a better life. These children demand a better life for their entire family, which seems quite tough for any rehabilitation initiative.

8. Recommendations

The street children are in many occasions unwilling to accept rehabilitation for so many reasons as the authors discussed in the previous sections of the paper. Also, the rehabilitation initiatives fail for so many reasons. Based on the data and

discussion, the authors recommend the following to better the state of rehabilitation process for the street kids:

- Before offering rehabilitation, the street children should be provided with proper counselling so that they can realize the significance of rehabilitation process. They should know why they need to lead a healthy life and realize how rehabilitation can help them.
- The rehabilitation programs should be made more children-friendly. Since the street children already have enough traumas to deal with, they should be treated with love and care rather than physical or mental abuse.
- Though it is tough to rehabilitate the whole family of the street children, they may be encouraged to avail the rehabilitation by providing work or financial support to their families.
- More children friendly legislation dedicated to protect and rehabilitate the street children should be developed.
- Rehabilitation centers should be strictly regulated by the government. It should ensure that children are absolutely safe and growing sound in those centers.
- Collaboration with local organizations and government agencies that have experience working with street children is key to developing effective rehabilitation programs.

9. Conclusion

In the event of the existence of a number of rehabilitation initiatives, many have failed to succeed. The quality of street life makes children experience all the unwanted things and makes them mentally traumatized. Rehabilitation is not enough because they also need a sense of freedom, love and care in their lives. Many children fear that rehabilitation will lead to exploitation and people want to take them for their own benefits. Unregulated rehabilitation programs fail to provide a safe environment for these children and treat them with neglectful and abusive behavior. Being in such an environment, these children neither feel confidence nor interest. Instead, they prefer the freedom and financial independence that comes with street life challenges.

The study makes a significant contribution to the literature on street children and rehabilitation by finding out the core reason for their apathy. It has examined the push factors driving the motive of being street children and the pull factors that impede their rehabilitation efforts. In the case of effectively addressing the issue of street children, one can consider both push and pull factors in developing strategies for rehabilitation. By addressing the root causes of why children end up on the streets in the first place, such as poverty, abuse, and neglect, we can work to prevent children from becoming street dwellers. Additionally, by providing effective support services and resources to assist street children in successfully reintegrating into society, they can counteract the pull factors and might get successful in enticing them back to the streets.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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