AN EXAMINATION OF THE PHENOMENON OF STREET CHILDREN IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN ACCRA (GHANA)

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This dissertation entitled

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Abstract

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PHENOMENON OF STREET CHILDREN IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN ACCRA (GHANA) (259 pp.)

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This research examines the phenomenon of street children in Accra, Ghana. The purpose was to highlight the general characteristics of street children in Ghana, which included how the phenomenon of street children was defined street children in Ghana, officials of government and non-government agencies working with children in Ghana, and parent of a street child. The research also focused on how the general public perceived street children in Ghana and the factors that accounted for the phenomenon of street children in Ghana.

The methodological inquiry was a phenomenological case study approach. This research approach was appropriate as I was trying to understand the complexities of the phenomenon through the experiences, perceptions and perspectives from a holistic standpoint. Based on the research questions,
qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate. The primary instrument of data collection was a semi structured interview schedule. In all, 15 people were interviewed, including 11 children, an official from the Department of Social Welfare, an official from the Ghana National Commission on Children and an official from Street Academy, a Non governmental agency working to improve education for street children in Ghana. Also interviewed was a parent of a street child.

Approved:

Francis E. Godwyll
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Acknowledgments

Heights by great men reached and kept were not obtained by sudden flight but, while their companions slept, they were toiling upward in the night.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

All praise and glory belongs to the Almighty God for the tremendous strength and courage he bestowed on me during my entire education enterprise.

It has been a great delight to work with the faculty, staff and students of the Educational Studies department, and more especially the Cultural Studies program in Ohio University during my tenure as a doctoral student. The latitude to pursue a research of my interest is greatly appreciated.

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To all who were not mentioned, please accept my omission, but always remember you hold a special place in my heart.
Dedication

I wish to dedicate this work to the loving memory of my father Barfuo Dr. Abayie Boaten 1, my mother Mrs. Rene Boakye-Boaten, my lovely wife Dr. Tiece Ruffin Boakye-Boaten and my son, Barfuo (The Warrior) Abayie Boakye-Boaten
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to the Study

My first contact with street children was in 1997 when I was doing my field work for my degree in Social Work in Ghana. The circumstances and experiences of street children, including abuse, sexual and physical from other children, sleeping on pavements, and engaging in survival activities, which in most cases bordered on criminality, astounded me. Children as young as nine years old, fending for themselves on the street by engaging in odd jobs under the watchful eyes of the whole society was a travesty of human responsibility. Their complex ways of survival was indeed difficult to comprehend. In most cases their lives were reduced to the lowest ebb of human dignity, and society allowed it to continue. A common stand was to blame the children for their circumstances. Many of the children did not experience a childhood where they were assured of protection, safety, and care from adults. Rather, the day to day survival thrust these children into a kind of instant adulthood, even though many children were under ten years old.
I contended that society's obligation in protecting one of its most vulnerable people was neglected, with the vacuum filled by ill-equipped non-governmental organizations, who in my opinion lack the basic understanding of the circumstances of the children. These children have become part of the urban landscape, yet they remain invisible in the larger scheme of things. The State of the World’s children report 2006 posits that;

Street children are among the most physically visible of all children, living and working on the roads and public squares of cities all over the world. Yet, paradoxically, they are also among the most invisible and, therefore, hardest children to reach with vital services, such as education and health care, and the most difficult to protect (p.40).

Their existence on the streets evokes a lot of passions not because of the circumstances that necessitated their existence, but because of the competition of street children with other users of the public space. These include the general public, business owners and city officials particularly the police, due to the perception that street children are prone to criminal activities. The phenomenon where children have become "adults" and are to
fend for themselves is a failure on the part of society to protect its most vulnerable members.

My objective in this research is to understand the lives the street children in Ghana, with respect to their experiences, the causalities, the perceptions of street children about their plight, the perception of various stakeholders including government and non-governmental agencies (e.g. Ghana National Commission on Children, Social Welfare Department, Street Academy, Catholic Action for Street Children) about the phenomenon and how some parents of street children conceptualize the issue.

The problem of street children is a worldwide phenomenon. Many capitals and urban centers of the world have become a haven of survival for many of children in distress. For instance, LeRoux & Sylvia (1998) indicate that;

The street children phenomenon is an alarming and escalating worldwide problem. Street children are maltreated, imprisoned, and in some countries killed. . . The phenomenon of street children, and offspring of the modern urban environment, represents one of humanity’s most complex and serious challenges (p. xx).
The LeRoux & Sylvia's findings point to a problematic phenomenon that is emerging and threatening the very fabric of our societal advancement. The problems facing the 21st century child is further embodied in the recent report of The State of the World's Children 2005, from the United Nations, "Childhood Under Threat," that more than 1 billion children are denied a healthy and protected upbringing as promised by 1989's Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2005). This coupled with the growing disparity in incomes between the rural and the urban, and unequal development between the industrialized north and the developing south further exacerbates the already difficult circumstances of deprived children.

The situation of children in Africa in the 21st century presents a challenge to all stakeholders in the society. Mwansa, Mufune & Osei-Hwedie (1994) maintain that the street children phenomenon has become one of the biggest problems of social welfare in most African countries. The condition of children living and working on the streets of most urban areas in Africa has assumed problematic dimensions because many people are beginning to identify with the situation as needing an urgent and pragmatic attention. Unfortunately, the realization of the
problematic nature of the street children phenomenon has not corresponded with an aggressive response from governments to deal with the problem. Epstein (1996) asserts that the inaction of governments of developing states is as a result of many factors. Among other things, he posits that;

subject to influences of several external economic dependency and/or internal civil strife, most of the institutional apparatus that have been created in support of the state are immature or incomplete and are unable to fulfill the mandates that would offer the promise of broad social and political inclusivity (p. 296).

The social and political accountability of most African societies to these children is non-existent and to a large extent not challenged either by internal or external elements. The plight of these children is thus left in their own hands or on some few NGOs who are limited by their function and resources to deal effectively with the situation.

The escalating proportions of children surviving on the urban streets in Africa (see Mwansa, Mufune, & Osei-Hwedie, 1994). and other developing states including Ghana
should prompt an engagement among the various stakeholders in the society to begin to open up a dialogue on the concept of the child in Africa.

The African child does not only have limited access to basic resources, but in many instances has been denied the right to childhood. Stephens (1995) contends that the dominion of childhood has been threatened, invaded and polluted by adults. Stephens further asserts that children in many instances are perceived as miniature adults and not as biologically immature human beings. Children are thus entrapped in a quagmire of social, political and cultural misunderstandings. Scheper-Hughes & Sargent (1998) assert that children "exist in a social liminal realm, vilified as dangerous and antisocial dwarves—enemies of families and civilized society" (p.26).

In Ghana, it is a common feature to see children ranging between the ages of 10 -15 years roaming the street and engaging in menial jobs for their survival. It is estimated that there are about 20,000 street children in the capital, Accra, alone (Beauchemin, 1999). Although the figures could be higher, lack of statistical data make their estimate speculative. But their visibility on the streets signals the enormity of the problem. The street
children phenomenon in Ghana has become problematic because of the multiple factors of causality. Among them are rural urban income disparities, rapid urbanization, breakdown of the extended family system, single parenthood, and physical and sexual abuse (Beauchemin, 1999).

The perception of the street child by the general public and government agencies in Ghana is viewed as a social problem. Kingdon (1994) posits that a condition becomes problematic when many in a society believe that something should be done. He further asserts that "problems are not simply the conditions or external events themselves; there is also a perpetual, interpretative element" (p.115). Kingdon also contends that the value associated with a particular condition influences the decision to problematize the condition.

A social condition could be defined as a social problem "as soon as a significant number of individuals are adversely affected by a phenomenon related to social factors" (Henshel, 1990, p.8). Rwomire (2001) also maintains that;

A social problem arises when a significant number of people, or a number of significant people, perceive a condition to be problematic. Social problems are
conditions that are socially recognized and shared. However deplorable or disgusting a situation may be, it will not be defined as a social problem unless and until it is recognized as such by a large number of people or by a number of influential people within a given society (p.7).

There are two categorizations of how a social problem affects people. First are those who the problem affects directly and second are those who are affected remotely by that particular problem. The children whose lives have been interrupted by the conditions that necessitated their existence on the street bore the direct consequences of streetism as a problem. For the city officials and other stakeholders, the problem of streetism (children using the street as the main source of engagement) does not define the existence of their lives, but challenges their response to their social contractual obligations of protecting all members of the problem. The lack of the realization of the need to adequately protect children, and more especially street children qualifies as an indirect problem.

This study examines the perception of street children in Ghana as a problem is analyzed from three perspectives. First, from the perspectives of those who work with
children, which includes, policy makers, police and local government officials, second, civil society, service providers and the general public and finally how the children conceptualize and justify their existence on the streets. Perhaps the common denominator of these three perspectives is the consensus that streetism is a social problem. However, approaches to the analysis of the street children problem by these different perspectives will differ very much due to their varying experiences and exposure to the problem.

According to Beauchemin (1999), "In Ghana and elsewhere, authorities and society view street children as a "problem" (p.81). The literature points to some reasons for street children to be viewed as a "problem". Hecht (1998), points out that these street children occupy a prohibited space. Hecht, posits that, "Street children challenge the hierarchy worlds of home and school and threaten the commercialized "public" space such as stores and shopping centers....They subvert their country's....social apartheid that keeps the poor....out of view" (p.211). The conflict between street children, authorities and the general public stems from a denial on the part of the latter two on the complicities of structural inadequacies as the major
catalyst to the woes of the children. The children's occupation of a public space has been an important defining contention of their total existence as problematic. In other words, the children will largely remain invisible if they were not in the full glare of the public. Baizerman (1990) posits that "street kids are part of the background of city life for some adults, while for others they live in the foreground....their visibility to adult depends upon their place in the everyday life of these adults" (p.4). As part of the urban landscape, street children have proved useful to some urban dwellers by providing cheap and sometimes free labor. Others tend to ignore their presence, making the street children invisible. As long as the children compete with other powerful elements within the urban contours, their presence is what becomes problematic, but not the circumstance the children find themselves. Government officials including law enforcement agents associate the presence of the children on the streets as vagrancy and potential source of criminal activities. The association of delinquency with street children influences the reaction of the government officials to their presence. While the situation of street children is problematized from the parochial notion of individual inadequacies,
government response has been punitive than remedial or reformative. Swart (1988) further maintains that "on the whole, official measures adopted in an attempt to deal with the problem reveal a negative, punitive attitude, with street children subjected to arrest and detention in harsh circumstances at the hands of law enforcement agencies" (p.35).

The urban landscape is dominated by those who wield economic and political power, and any attempt of intrusion by elements considered undesirable, in this case street children, face potential abuse and retribution. Although the urban contour is a public space, access to certain members of the public especially street children are perceived by authorities and other members of the society as illegitimate. That is they have absolutely no legitimate claims to the habitation of those spaces.

Alexander (1987) further maintains that street children in Guatemala are prone to widespread abuse and intimidation from the police. These children are considered pets and subjected to inhumane treatment. The perception that street children are delinquents and social misfits, a definition widely held in western literature has affected policy formulation in many developing states (Richter,
1989). Richter further maintains that the distinction between “runaways and throwaways” does not permeate policies that deal with the problem. He concludes that although street children may indulge in illegal activities, those who could be identified as delinquents are in the minority. How street children are defined and perceived by governments and the general public to a large extent influences the policy. In many respects, the negative perceptions associated with the children reflect the lack of policy advanced towards solving the problem.

The government of Ghana in fulfillment of its statutory obligation as a signatory to the Geneva Convention of the Child (1989) enacted a legislative instrument, The Children's Act of 1998. Among other things, the Act seeks to address issues pertaining to adoption and maintenance, foster care and child labor, and the provision of institutional facilities for abused and neglected children. The Act also enjoins the government to partner with the private and the informal sector to provide apprentice facilities for children willing to go into vocational training. Among the provisions of the Act is the clause which prohibits any individual from depriving the child access to basic education, primary health care,
immunization, shelter and adequate dietary supply. While the objectives of the Act are laudable, implementation and supervision has been woefully inadequate Beauchemin (1999). The government claims that inadequate financial resources have made it impossible to realize those objectives. While the Children’s Act of 1998 provides documentary evidence of the Ghanaian government's awareness of the issues pertaining to distressed children, fulfillment of the tenets of the Act has remained largely a political rhetoric.

The perception of street children by the various stakeholders in Ghana may not be very different from what pertains in other developing countries especially in African and Latin America. Beauchemin (1999) maintains that in Ghana;

The street children phenomenon is becoming so widespread that NGOs in Accra and elsewhere are staggering under the sheer numbers. And yet more children are coming. The present generation of street children is luring more children, and these children, trying to find future for themselves on the streets are begetting more street children (p.81).
Thus it is important to understand the dynamics of the street children phenomenon in Ghana. Also with the ever changing definition of the child within the cultural milieu of Ghana, understanding and appreciating the experiences of children may initiate a starting point for a greater societal dialogue on how to protect our children. As long as these children continue to be socialized through hardships, their sense of protection from the society remains an illusion.

Statement of the Problem

Although the issue of street children is a world wide phenomenon, it is even more precarious in developing nations where lack of adequate social infrastructure and socio-economic program threatens the developmental needs of these unfortunate ones. The current study will focus on street children in Ghana and how government policy affects them. The Catholic Action for Street children\(^1\) in 1998 estimated that the number of children living in the streets in Accra, the capital of Ghana, alone is about 15,000. Indeed, the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare in 1997 came up with a policy framework aimed at addressing

\(^1\) This is the leading Non Government Organization working with street children especially in Accra, the capital of the country.
the needs and concerns of children, including programs for street children. Currently, institutional assistance from the government in providing some resources for the street children is either inadequate or non existent (CAS, 2003). The gap has been filled by the NGOs, whose assistance is just a drop in the ocean, considering the high influx of children onto the streets of the capital and other urban areas. Although an immediate attribution to the phenomenon can be laid squarely on the economic disparity between the rural and the urban areas, there are also inadequate programs to discourage the influx of disgruntled children from seeking greener pastures in the urban capitals. Beauchemin (1999) posits that;

....while the consequences of the growing numbers of street children are a problem, these children are not responsible for their predicament. They are turning to the street because of the failures of the education system, parental negligence and abuse....growing poverty (p.81).

The plight of these children should be the concern of all stakeholders. Apart from humanitarian reasons, the potential contribution of these children towards the development of the nation will be lost. These children
occupy the lowest strata of the social ladder. They are everywhere yet they remain extremely invisible. The focus of attention should shift from the perceived inadequacies of these children to the social injustices, political neglect and the structural imbalances that have contributed to their existence and continues to further hinder any innovative remedial strategies. Although the magnitude of the street children phenomenon in Ghana may not be in the proportions of some other countries in Latin America and other African countries, (see Aptekar 1994) the problem is progressing with little attention. To the best of my knowledge, there is no research to even know their numbers, and what can be done. That is why this study is important, to make visible and a glaring situation that many, including societal institutions and the general public have consciously tried to ignore. If we wait for the problem to explode, then we would have missed our chances to reason through lasting pragmatic solutions. Problems are better contained in their infancy than at a matured stage.

Research Questions

To fully understand the situation of the street children in Ghana and possible programs that will fully tap
their potentials to make them contribute meaningfully to society, the following will be my guiding questions.

• What are some of the experiences of street children in Ghana?

• How do the various stakeholders (governmental and non-governmental organizations, parents, and civil society) characterize street children in Ghana?

• How do street children in Ghana characterize themselves?

• What factors account for street children in Ghana?

• How does the Ghanaian public perceive street children from the perspectives of stakeholders and the children?

These questions hopefully will provide an understanding and knowledge of the street children phenomenon in Ghana.

*Purpose of the Study*

I have stated earlier that very little is known about street children in Ghana. Many people who visit the capital of Ghana, Accra and other urban centers are troubled by the presence of these children on the streets, yet not much
attention and awareness of the plight of the children has been generated. I hope to understand the plight of the children through their own experiences, by interviewing some of them, and bringing their important but hidden voices to the forefront of any solutions to their problems. Also important are the experiences of those who work on issues related to children, both from the perspectives of government institutions and NGOs, and how they perceive the problem and some parents of street children. This will provide an understanding of the street children phenomenon as it exists in Ghana today, factors that account for the problem from the various perspectives.

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to understand a marginalized population to understand their needs and problems. The changing concept of the child and childhood needs pragmatic and innovative ideas in finding solutions to problems associated with children. Although the street children phenomenon presents an important challenge to many countries including Ghana, the situation in Ghana is further exacerbated by lack of signification research on the phenomenon. This also means pragmatic solutions to problems, which are associated with the phenomenon, would
not only be challenging, but could in fact prove to be very elusive. Thus this research is not only timely but also significant because;

1. There is understood about the street children in Ghana

2. To the best of my knowledge there is no study about what street children see as their situation

3. To the best of my knowledge there is no study that includes their parents’ perspectives about the children

4. This study includes an evaluation of multiple agencies whose mission is to assist the underprivileged, of which street children are a significant part.

Understanding children is predicated upon giving them a voice on issues that relate to them. Studies on children should be child centered and must provide an inquest into the lived experiences of the children in their own uniqueness.

Institutions that are responsible for the welfare of children like the Ghana Commission on Children, Department of Social Welfare and the Non-formal Education Division of the Ghana Education Service may benefit from this study, because the experiences and expectations of the children will be known to them. NGOs that work with children will
also gain a better understanding of the plight and circumstances of the children, which will enhance their service delivery to the children. The research is a start and it is hoped will generate further studies on the street children situation in order to understand the underlying complexities and causes.

**Delimitation of the Study**

Although street children can found in all the ten regional capitals of Ghana, and perspectives may vary regionally, the study will be limited to a sample in Accra the capital of Ghana. Additionally, the street children I intend to interview will be under the auspices of two NGOs based in Accra, Street Academy and the Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS). I also plan to interview senior level officials from the government institutions and the NGOs and that may also not be representative in a generalized sense. However as a qualitative inquiry, the focus is not on generalization, but on particularization, thus the delimitations will not affect the out of the research. I wish to understand a little known phenomenon.

**Operational Definitions of the Terms**

To avoid confusion of the key terminologies I will operationalize them as they pertain to this study.
Street children

The definition of street children given by Inter-Non Governmental Organizations (Inter-NGOs) as “those for whom the street more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults” (Ennew, 1994, p.15). This definition is considered simplistic. Panter-Brick, (2004) argues that there should be a shift in the paradigm of analysis on the street child from the street as the primary focus to the children and their experience and views. Thus street children are not viewed in isolation from other children living in abject poverty in the urban areas. In this study however, all children under between the ages of 9-18 years who spend the bulk of their time on the streets (ie. Either working all day on the streets and returning home or sleeping on the streets) without a responsible adult supervision and are not enrolled in any educational training or program will be considered as a street child.

Stakeholders

They may be defined as individuals, groups or organizations that are affected by and/or have an interest
in a particular issue.


In this study, government institutions like the Department of Social Welfare, Ghana National Commission on Children, the Non-formal Education division of the Ghana Education Service, and NGOs are part of the stakeholders.
Chapter 2 Review of the Significant Literature

Introduction
The street children phenomenon from available literature has been categorized into their common characteristics, including their backgrounds that are their age ranges, socio-economic status and gender disparity. The literature also highlights the factors that are attributed to the children taking to the streets as the only rational option for survival. Some of these factors include physical abuse of the children from their domestic caregivers, the concept of attachment, poverty and family structure. The other academic dimension of this phenomenon, which is encapsulated by the literature, is social programs for the street children, the inadequacy of government involvement, public perception and the direct influence of the media on societal perception on street children.

Childhood as a Concept
There is no doubt that the concept of childhood in Africa and indeed Ghana has undergone some tremendous redefinition. Childhood as a social construction is very relevant within the Africa context. Children are perceived both as biologically vulnerable beings in need of
protection and nurturing and at the same time a social construction, which prescribes certain social functions and relationships (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). Children prescribe the roles that parents play. Fathers are the providers for the family and the mothers provide the needed nurturing for the children. The importance of children in traditional Africa is their fundamental role as future insurance for their families. Children are expected to cater for their families when they grew older. Children are also trained to perpetuate the existence of their family and cultural legacies.

Africa as a traditional society was perceived by early European Colonialists as a very dangerous environment. Thus, social patterns were developed around a communal and organic philosophy for protection and survival against adversities. Valentine & Revson (1979), claim that;

The climate, insect, and endemic disease in many areas have all conspired against man’s ability to populate the continent...the way of life that evolved was geared to facilitate survival. The society was tightly organized, communal in nature, with kinship systems in extended families whose members made up a
network of relationships that carried benefits and obligations to each other (p.457).

Although these assertions are inherently exaggerated, it provides a starting point for an inquest into the cultural milieu from which the child exists. I will briefly define culture. Onwauchi (1972), postulate that culture “is the sum total of the integrated learned behavior patterns characteristic of members of a society. It is the sum total of a people’s customary way of doing things” (p.241).

Culture is a learned process, which is transmitted from one generation to the other. A society continues to exist, if its cultural strategies of survival are impacted into the younger generation. This is the epitome of the importance of the child to the Africa. Onwauchi (1972) maintains that in every society, irrespective of its level of social advancement, every child is born with the innate qualities of mind and body. Children are socialized through the various institutional structures to acquire the cultural behaviors of the society.

Onwauchi (1972) further maintains that;

The indigenous African societies educated their children through the on-going processes of life in their traditional customs and values. Through their
traditional tales and myths, the elders teach the children the moral ethical codes of behaviors and social relationship. Through certain religious rituals and practices, communal attainments of spiritual ideas were established. These spiritual ideals lay the foundation for the respect which the indigenous Africans have for their political institutions; the love, respect and obedience which the children must show their parents and elders (p.242).

It is important to emphasize that children in traditional Africa were perceived to be human beings in need of help and direction. Childhood in Africa also entailed a spiritual component. In traditional African religion, the belief in reincarnation meant that children were reincarnated people who had lived and died in previous generations. Children were thus not only accorded respect by members of the society, it was also the responsibility of the society to ensure the protection and proper socialization of children. Using the modes promulgated by DeMause, as cited in Jenks (1996), an assertion can be made that childhood in Africa is trapped in period of socializing mode, where the transmission of culture is very rigid and pervasive. The Africa child is trained to conform
to tenets of the culture. Children are trained to follow the prescribed paths set by the custodians of the culture.

The importance of the child in traditional Africa is their fundamental role as future insurance for their families. As I have stated earlier, children are trained to perpetuate the existence of their family and cultural legacies.

Fortes (1957) writing about the Tallensi in Ghana, divides child development into two stages, the babyhood and childhood. The first stage, the babyhood is the period of birth till about a year old. Although the baby is in the absolute care of the mother, the responsibility of care for the baby is that of the whole household, including older brothers and sisters, the mother’s co-wives and grandparents. The fathers at this stage of the child’s life play a very insignificant role with respecting to rearing of the child. The babies in Tallensi tradition are weaned around the age of three, but are fed exclusively on the mother’ breast milk for the first year after birth.

According to Fortes (1957), the first development stage is marked by the completion of weaning. This is the period when the child is physically and psychological severed from its mother. After the child is weaned, the Tallensi child
often followed their older siblings, playing and communicating their feeling verbally. This increased freedom of the child does not diminish the position of the mother as the center of the universe for the child. For girls, the reference of the mother as the center of the universe remains until marriage, but ends sooner for boys, who must be attached to the trades of their fathers. For the Tallensi child, although the primary distinction and recognition exists for the biological parents, such distinctions are blurred with the wider household in that all adults in the household are referred to as ‘mothers’ and ‘fathers’.

The next period in the development in the Tale child is the period of childhood. This is between the ages of 4-8 years, and its the happiest and freest of the child’s life (Fortes, 1957). The child begins to participate in the daily events in the community through observation and mimicking of such activities. Parents begin to instill discipline and exert some authority over the children. Fortes (1957) claims that;

Until it (the child) reaches the threshold of adolescence, at about 12 to 14 years of age, it still remains free to play for much of its time. But from
the age of 7 or so boys and girls are eager to participate in the adult routine of life and they become more and more involved in it. They begin by being given the simplest economic and household tasks (p.190).

Division of labor begins to manifest during this period. Boys are generally trained to engage in the manual aspect of the labor process, while girls follow their mothers in their occupational duties. Although the Tale child is allowed some latitude in value conformation up until the age of 5 years, the period between the ages of 8 and 9 is considered the period in which the child has acquired some sense. At this stage conformation to the values and norms of the community is expected from the children. Children are expected to cognitively differentiate between acceptable cultural behaviors and abominable behaviors.

Another important conceptualization of childhood and rearing practices is through the concept of lineage in Africa. There are two main lineages in Africa, the matrilineage and the patrilineage. The lineage in which a child is born has two important significances. First, it determines which household the child will spend the greater
part of his/her childhood. In matrilineal societies, childhood training, and apprenticeship exists mainly in a matrilocal context. The reverse is the truism in patrilineal societies where rearing and training practices are conducted within the patrilocal context. The second is how inheritance is arranged. In a matrilineal culture, one can only inherit from the maternal side of the family. For example, a son in a matrilineal society cannot directly inherit from the father, but can contest for an inheritance from the brothers of the mother. However, inheritance in a patrilineal society holds that children of the father are the direct beneficiaries of the property(s) of their father. This is interesting because, when it comes to child rearing the role of the mothers are uncontested. However, when the child is between the ages of 7-9 years, their maternal uncles train boys from matrilineal societies, and those from the patrilineal remain under the tutelage of their biological fathers. Whatever the dichotomization of lineage is, the child from the union of a man and woman possesses some important features of both. Particularly from the Akan perspective, the child possesses the sunsum

\[^2\] I must emphasize that I am an Akan, by birth, with my mother a Fante and my father an Asante. Thus my assertions are based on my experiences and authority in the traditions and customs of the Akan.
that is the spirit of the genitor. The child also possesses the mogya (blood) of the mother. It is the possession of the mogya of mother by the child that earns him/her lineage. An Akan child ascribes to the abusua (clan) of the mother and the sunsum of the father. The prominence of the matriarch in Akan polity does not diminish the role and importance of the patriarchy in the lives of children. The child within this traditional lineage arrangements is perceived to be sacred and in need of protection, physically and spiritually.

The concept of childhood in Africa is not very different from our earlier discussions. Childhood in African philosophical thought is considered as delicate as holding an egg in one’s palm. Holding the egg too tight crushes it; a careless handling of the egg may fall from the palm and be destroyed too. Childhood is a delicate concept in African traditional system, which provides a political and social space for children to develop and perpetuate the cultural legacies of their ancestors.

The concept of childhood in Africa is incomplete without a discussion of the fostering practices. Fostering includes the provision of the needed material and spiritual support for the development of the children. According to

A child born out of wedlock will live with his mother’s parents, usually permanently. At the death of one or both parents, a child may move to live with the relatives (uncle, aunt, etc.) after the funeral. A child is sent to a “more prosperous” relative but will visit his or her parents regularly and will eventually return to live with them. If living alone, one can request a child from a sister to alleviate loneliness or to live in the house while the resident is away at work, on night or periodically absent (p.28).

In traditional African societies, the notion of destitution was non-existent. Every child belonged to a family, a kinship or a community. The rearing of the child was the responsibility of not only the family, but all well-meaning members of the society. As has been opined by Kilbride and Kilbride (1990), the family support system invariably formed a barrier against child abuse and neglect. The support system inherent in the African
traditional family system actually reduced the rate of child destitution.

The circumstances and the status of the African child today are very different from what has been described above. The social structure of Africa has undergone tremendous changes, and these changes have undermined the ability of the social institutions within African societies to sustain practices and values, which defined and protected children. Changes in the political, economic and the social institution have been the main culprits in the realignment of children within the cultural context of Africa. Among other things, I will discuss the impact of colonialism, education and globalization on the tradition African culture, and how children have ultimately been affected.

There is very little disagreement of the assertion that problems of contemporary Africa are a consequence of the disruptions created by colonialism. Craig (1971) contends that;

One of the keys to understanding the problems of new Africa nations of the twentieth century is the briefness of the period which intervened between the end to their isolation from the modern world and their
admission to statehood. As late as the 1800s, most of Africa was still uncharted and free from alien penetration. Then with the rush, that is still astonishing to recall, the white man arrived and within twenty years had carved all of Africa into dependencies of their home governments. The traumatic effects of an advanced industrial civilization upon a primitive tribal society are still having repercussions today (p. 408).

The characterization of colonialism in Africa as a brief period is historically inaccurate (Craig 1971). Craig however provides an important starting point for the analysis. He maintains that colonialism was a radical break with Africa’s past. This was a period in the history of Africa, where the continent was divided amongst the various imperialist powers in Europe. Imperial Europeans imposed their cultural values through coercive mechanism on indigenous African societies. The process of gross cultural imposition sometimes referred to as cultural terrorism, completely altered the African cultural landscape. The imperialist introduced their foreign social structural system to replace the existing institutions in Africa. Imperial education, which functioned outside the cultural
reference of the people, replaced traditional African socialization processes. According to Onwauchi (1972);

Indigenous African societies educated their children through the on-going process of life in their traditional customs and values. Through their traditional tales and myths, the elders teach the children the moral codes of behavior and social relationships....through some form of apprenticeship and cultural participation, children acquired the techniques of communication and making a living, as well as those of the creative expressions within the culture (p. 242).

The pedagogical philosophy in African socialization was informal and had relevance to the existence of the child within the cultural context. However, colonialism introduced radical changes in the socialization of the African. The informal apprenticeship and direct participation of the children in contributing to their society was substituted with a formal regimental curriculum education based on the cultural values of the colonizer. Onwauchi (1972) intimates there were disengagements between colonial education and the lives of the children in their natural environment. He posits, “The typical African child
is often faced with many unusual problems of cultural conflict when he goes to formal, schematized school. This conflict is due essentially to the existing discontinuity between the school environment and the home environment” (p.243). Colonialism redefined the relationship between the child and the community. The relevance of the family and the community as socialization agents was replaced by the surrogate imperial education system, which did not value the relevance of the people’s culture.

The educational or the socialization institution was not the only institution affected by colonialism. The religious institution was affected to the same extent. In most cases, Christianity replaced African traditional religion. A point of interest, there was a synergy between the educational and religious institutions. Christian religious establishments founded most of the early schools established in colonial Africa (Boahen, 1985). Part of the core curriculum in most colonial schools was Christian religious studies. Thus, a child could not be in school without being indoctrinated against his/her native religion. In traditional Africa, family traditions, including the concept of childhood, child-rearing practices were inextricably linked to the religious practices and
beliefs. In the Akan tradition specifically, religious rituals known as bragoro\textsuperscript{3} marked the transition from a child to an adolescent. The maturity of the child was to a large extent determined by the religious rites and rituals that children were qualified. Children who spotted their first menstruation were candidates for the ritual. Before the initiation rites of the children into adolescence, the child was the responsibility of the community. The transitional phases of a child from birth to death were celebrated with the rites of passage. These rituals were significantly social control mechanisms, to protect the members of the society.

For instance, sexual intercourse was forbidden for girls who had not gone through the bragoro. The social and religious consequences served as deterrence for members of the society. The punishment was sometimes as sever as banishment from the community. One also risked extreme isolation her family members for bringing shame upon the family name. And in many instances, girls who failed this traditional test were most certain not get anyone to marry them. With these threatening sanctions, children born out

\textsuperscript{3} Bragoro is known as the rites of passage for the transition from a child to adolescence. For girl it is celebrated at the first sighting of her menstruation. For boys, they should have been able to endure circumcision without expressing pain, or they must have braved the odds of darkness to hunt for a difficult game in the thick forest alone. This was to prevent infidelity among women.
of wedlock were a rarity. Also, adultery was forbidden by all accounts. The Ewes in Ghana for instance, deterred adulterous behaviors with a hex of chastity⁴. Although some of these social regulatory mechanisms have been criticized as a medium for the perpetual patriarchy dominance in traditional African societies, these religious practices nonetheless provided protection for women and children in the society. For the African, religion defined the essence of his/her existence. In other words, for the African, religion was a component of the cultural system, which epitomized the ontology and epistemology of his/her existence. Thus, the removal of the African from his/her religious milieu has had grave consequences for children. In other words, the protection guaranteed children under the traditional system has been compromised, making these children extremely vulnerable to social maltreatment, including abandonment and economic exploitation. Although Christianity condemned all traditional African religious practices, it could not guarantee the protections African enjoyed under the African traditional religious institution.

⁴ A spiritual charm, which was placed under a door mate at the entrance of the abode of a couple. Ironically the hex of chastity only affected the wife and not the husband. This was to prevent infidelity among women.
The political institution was also affected tremendously by colonialism. Imperial political structures replaced the modes of governance in traditional African societies. The use of traditional authority in governance by the colonizer through the indirect rule system fueled mistrust between the people and the traditional rulers. The role of the political institution changed from the primary goal of protecting members of the society, to the maintenance of law and order. The primary political object of the colonizer was to maintain absolute control over the colonized, and to ensure an uninterrupted perpetuation of colonial ideology and policies. While I do not intend to fully explore the intricacies of the colonial political structure, I intend to claim that, colonialism drastically altered the political serenity of traditional African societies, and replaced it with a foreign concept of governance, which did not provide the needed protections for children.

For all of the institutional changes under colonial rule in Africa, the institution, which severely affected the concept of childhood and child rearing practices, was the economic institution. Before the advent of a monetized economic institution in Africa, economic activity was
organized around subsistence living and the barter system. For example economic activities in the traditional Asante revolved around the nnoboa system, which was a cooperative farming system where community members would help each other on the farms during farming seasons. The colonial economic system introduced for the first time the concept of poll taxes and the payment of fees for schooling. Valentine & Revson (1979), assert that;

Throughout much of Africa, the introduction of the head or hut tax required major modification of the social structure. Africans no longer worked only on their needs, but also had to meet the requirements of the colonial administration or lose their land (p.464).

Colonial economy soon introduced the cash crop economy for the sole intent of making Africa the hub of raw material export. This culminated with the evolution of urbanization. Men stayed for long periods away from their families, which culminated in changes in social behavior patterns. Valentine & Revson (1979), posits that “.....by going into town, both men and women had a chance to enjoy freedom from family discipline, and they subsequently became less
submissive to the social controls which had governed their behavior since early childhood” (p.464).

Due to the dislocation caused by colonial political economy, many children lost their status as economic assets for their families and became economic liabilities Valentine & Revson (1979). Political economic polices during colonial times did not only introduce institutionalized poverty, but also legitimized the use of children as labor. Although children always served as farm hands for their families subsistence farming, the attachment of economic value to their labor changed the dynamics of their definition as children. Children as part of the labor force makeup of the colonial political economy of Africa forever changed the concept of childhood and child rearing practices in contemporary African societies. Occupational patterns of the new political economy could not sustain the subsistence agricultural practices of the traditional African societies, and diminished the relevance of the extended family system, which provided support and protection for children.

As a result of the factors discussed above, the notion of the child as a vulnerable member of society in need of protection and care was no longer tenable. The
commercialization of the children in contemporary Africa is one of the main factors that impinge upon the development of the child today.

Another socio-political factor worth noting when discussing the concept of the child in contemporary Africa is globalization. I must emphasize that globalization is not a new phenomenon, but was actually in operation during Africa’s period of colonization. However the recent surge in globalization has placed Africa at the receiving end of the global political economic enterprise. The continuous engagement of Africa in the global economic and political enterprise has created a dependency syndrome, whereby contemporary African states must rely on the benevolence of industrialized western societies for survival (Ake, 1996).

Ake (1996) maintains that the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) a socio-political prescription for development of African states, was a direct result of this dependency syndrome of African economies. These programs were designed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to revamp the ailing economies of African states. The unintended consequences of these programs produced some of the most severe social catastrophes in recent times. As part of the conditions for
the SAPs implementation, all social services including, welfare programs, government subsidies on health and education were abolished. Unfortunately, the most affected by these policies were children. Increased poverty as a result of the SAPs, which also required African countries to fulfill their foreign debts obligations, further jeopardized the wellbeing of children in many communities. Bass (2004) postulates that;

These structural adjustment policies have created general suffering in many poor countries, and particularly among children, by cutting government expenditure on food, healthcare, social services and education in order to save money for debt repayment….the impact of the global debt crisis on children found that externally imposed measures have directly or indirectly impeded child survival, childhood immunization, economic growth, prevalence of health attendants, and adequate nutrition (p.52).

Although the predicament of children in Africa in general, and Ghana particularly, can be blamed on the changing trends in global political, economic and social dimensions, local leadership in Africa cannot be spared of complicities. Endemic corruption in most African countries
has been detrimental to the promotion of child welfare. Bass (2004) maintains that;

Corrupt leaders and poor oversight among the educated elite have crippled the ability of African societies to get ahead economically. Across the board, the average African has a lower standard of living and is saddled with more debt today than at independence. Forty years later, children are born in societies strapped with debt and low incomes, and therefore their children toil away their childhoods in order to eke out a living for their families and pay the debts of the previous generation of elites (p, 53).

One last important influential factor that has affected children and childhood in Ghana, and Africa in general has been the ravaging effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is estimated that about 20 million deaths in Africa are AIDS related (Bass, 2004). This has had and continues to have a profound impact on children. Firstly, in many communities that have been ravaged by the AIDS pandemic. Many children have lost many of their parents and caretakers. The family structure which used to be a haven for children is on the brink of total extinction because many of the members have been claimed by AIDS. Bass (2004) further posits that "AIDS
has broken up the family structure, and it is now common to see grandparents caring for children, countless children caring for children, and many orphans caring for orphans" (p.59). Many of these children have had to play the roles of adults without adequate preparation and support from the family system. The resulting consequences have greatly robbed many children of their childhood.

I have discussed the factors that have influenced the concept of childhood and children in Africa and Ghana. Albeit many of the examples that have been cited from the general perspective of the African situation, they apply directly to the Ghanaian situation. Ghana has been a direct beneficiary of all the negative factors that have affected children on the African continent in contemporary times.

I have asserted that childhood and children including child rearing practices have undergone tremendous transformation. However, in spite of all these changes I can not amply justify that childhood has ceased to exist in contemporary Africa and Ghana particularly. The changes in the social structure have indeed changed the roles and responsibilities of many of the social actors in the Africa, but children continue to be children in other ways. Although they have taken adult responsibilities, they still
remain children by age and by their vulnerability. Irrespective of the changing roles of children in Ghana today, children continue to participate in shaping their image in the society. Children continue to display their biological and psychological immaturity and the general society still perceive children as helpless beings. Childhood will be dead when children are no more children. However, the position of the child continues to change and in many cases in a negative spectrum.

The dynamics of childhood in Ghana is shaped by economics. Children from wealthier families may have the luxuries of protected childhood, the reverse is true for many who have been affected by some of the factors discussed above. Many poor children are forced into traumatizing experiences of adult responsibilities without the needed securities. I will thus argue that childhood still pertains in Ghana, but the experiences of children have changed as a result of some societal imbalances that I have discussed.

The changing social dynamic in Ghana and many parts of Africa has undermined the communal philosophy of living, which had the proverbial accolade of the child being reared by the whole village. I must emphasize that the socio-
political changes that have occurred in Ghana and other parts of Africa have been incapable of exterminating all the cultural and identity traits of the societies. All children in Ghana are born within a socio-cultural context, but in different consequences and experiences depending on where the child is located structurally. Children are either born in the villages/rural areas or the cities/urban areas. The context within which children are born determines the extent of community involvement in their upbringing. In cities/urban areas, childrearing is the primary responsibility of the individual household, which consists primarily of a wife and a husband. In many cases, occupational pressures on the parents will demand a surrogate taking responsibilities of the immediate needs of the child. In an urban context the philosophy of social organization is based on individualist thinking. The community, which rears the child in urban context, will be the biological parents, and social institutions like schools, churches, and the media.

This is very different from the context in the villages/rural communities, where the child may still exist within the contours of the extended family system and community solidarity to each may still exist. Nonetheless,
with the mitigating factors discussed above, to the best of my knowledge there is no society in Ghana which is isolated from the effects of the changes that have occurred. The communities may still be in existence, but their commitment and motivation towards the protection and rearing of the child within their preferred context has been altered by many of the exogenous factors, discussed above. In other words the village is no longer a sanctuary for children.

With all the changes in the social structure of Africa in general and Ghana in particular, the dynamics of economics and politics have further worsened the condition of the child. According to Kopoka (2002);

Poverty is a major cause of street children....It is the result of poverty that is resulting in children being forced to work on the streets to support themselves and their families. It is poverty that is causing families to break up with parents being unable to support their children (p.265).

Poverty and the gradual disintegration of the traditional family network system have contributed negatively to the development of the child. On the continent of Africa, civil and ethnic strife have placed
children in extremely vulnerable situations, where hundreds of thousands have been killed, maimed, orphaned or displaced (Veale & Dona, 2003). While it is almost a cliché that the street children phenomenon is assuming high socio-problematic dimensions in many developing countries, very little in terms of pragmatic policies have been promulgated to deal with the purported problem.

**Characteristics of Street Children**

The bulk of the literature on street children provides the insight into the profile of the street child (Taqon, 1991; Ricter, 1988; Keen, 1990; Swart, 1990; Aptekar, 1989). Most of the street children range from new born infants to between 16-18 years. (Kilbride, P., Suda, C, Njeru, E. 2000). However, many of the children due to malnutrition look much younger than their chronological ages. For those who are born on the streets prospects of having some form of formal education are highly negligible. They instead have been trained in street smartness and survival. For those born on the streets their only form of assistance comes from the benevolence of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and some individuals. It is estimated that a majority of the world's street children including those in Ghana are males (Kilbride et al., 2000). There
are several reasons that may account for gender disparity among the children on the streets. For instance, Gebers (1990) concluded that the main reason why street children in South Africa are predominantly male is because girls are traditionally responsible for staying home and caring for their younger siblings. Gebers' study showed that males made up 81% of street children while only 9% were females.

In a study conducted in South Africa by Le Roux (1993), it reported that the average age of the street children was 13 years and were predominantly male of African origin. In a similar research conducted by Richter (1991) street children in South Africa ranged between the ages of 7 and 18 years, with the majority between the ages of 13 and 18 years. There was a disparity in the ages of street children in the developing states and street children in developed states. Richter (1991) reports that while the ages of street children in developing nations ranged between 11-16 years, that of developed states was 16 years and older. The disparity in age difference between of children in developed countries and developing countries may be due to the available social resources in developed countries. Children below the age of 16 are very likely to assistance from government agencies in many developed
countries. Their counterparts in developing countries have no access to such agencies.

As has been discussed above, there are two kinds of street children, children of the street and children on the street. Children of the street are children who live and work on the streets, and children on the streets are children who work on the streets and return home at night. Among these categories, children of the street are most likely to be homeless, since any form of family assistance is non existent. It is estimated that this category of street children comprise about 20% of the total world population of street children (Glasser, 1994). Most of these kids use the pavements of the streets, lorry stations, frontage of shopping centers, alleys and any available public space as their sleeping places.

Albeit there is difficulty in a consensual definition of who street children are, there has been some classification or categorization of children living and working on the streets in many urban areas. For instance, Lusk (1992) advanced four categorizations. The first are children who work on the streets and have a home to retire to after work. They may be enrolled in school and are generally not considered delinquent. The second category of
children work independently on the streets and their family ties are beginning to wane. Their school attendance becomes inconsistent and their level of truancy begins to increase. The third are children of street families who live and work with their families on the streets. The final categorization of street children are the children who have broken all family ties and are permanent residents and workers of the streets. Many of these children are truant, engaging in petty crimes and advanced in street thug tactics.

The United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) also provides a useful dichotomization of street children. Among other things children on the streets are those whose family support base has become increasingly weakened mainly due to poverty, and who must share in the responsibility for family survival by working on city streets and marketplaces. For these children, the home ceases to be their center of play, cultural and daily life, with the streets providing the necessary financial and social gratification. Nevertheless, while the street becomes their daytime activity, most of these children will return home most nights. While their family situation may be deteriorating, they are still definitely in place, and the
children continue to view life from the point of view of their family.

Children of the streets are the minority of children who struggle daily for survival without family support. While often called “abandoned”, they too might have also abandoned their families due to insecurity and rejection and grown up with violence (Tacon, 1985).

The degree of family involvement in the lives of the children and the degree of deviant behavior has been used to further provide classifications for street children. Cosgrove (1990) posits that “any individual under the age of majority whose behavior is predominately at variance with the community norms, and whose primary support for his/her development needs is not family or a family substitute” (p.192). While this definition does not distinguish between children on the street or children of the street, it places a lot of emphasis on the institution of care giving available to the child.

According to Aptekar (1994), the cultural relevance of the children should be the focal point of the analysis; otherwise, Cosgrove’s premise encounters some internal inconsistencies. He acclaims that “...how do we handle the fact that in many cases, the life of the street children is
healthier—both physically and emotionally than the child at home? Which life is deviant?” (p. 197). Family ties and perceived rebellion against the dominant norms does not necessarily lead to a deviant personality, such as drug use and petty stealing usually associated with street children. Thus, there might be other equally engaging factors that account for how street children are classified.

Another classification of street children by UNICEF (1994) is children at risk, who are defined as children of the urban poor and it is from this group that street children emerge. They are also the largest of the various classifications. The second is children of the street. These are children who spend all their time on the streets and have no family ties. They are often referred to as abandoned children. Refugees, orphans, displaced persons are all within this category of children of the streets.

According to the UNICEF;

Become premature adults and develop behavior patterns which can be summarized in a rejection of authority, aggressiveness, and an absence of limits, independence, and a lack of affection. They are also ....characterized by problems with drug addiction, alcoholism, delinquency, prostitution, and moral and
physical abuse (UNICEF, 1984).

Another typology of street children is the children in the street. These children operate within the family system. They have families they return to after their daily work on the streets. They may attend school and they form an important avenue for generation of income for many urban poor families (Lalor, 1999).

Street children in many developing countries, including many in Africa, can be conceptualized within the thematic frameworks discussed above. For instance in Kenya, street children are referred to as chokora, a Kiswahili word literally translated as “pokers at dustbins, or garbage heaps in search of food and other valuable items” (Kilbride, Suda & Njeru, 2000, p.2). Most of the street children in Kenya as are the case of street children in other parts of the world fall in the category of children on the streets, that is, these children have family ties, return home after work and provide substantial income supplementation to their various families. As Kilbride et. al. (2000) claim, about 80% of the street children in Kenya fall under this category.

Another important classification that is generally associated with street children as has been mentioned above
is the usage of drugs, or at least the perception of the use of drugs. As Kilbride et. al. (2000) posits; Kenyan street children were frequently observed sniffing glue, as do other children worldwide who often develop addictions to glue and other substances. The “glue bottle” in the public mind negatively symbolizes what is taken to be, in Kenya...defining the characteristics of street children: that is, people who are troublemakers and a threat to society (p.2).

Street children in Kenya, which may exist in other developing states, live in peer groups. There is a strict enforcement of gender and age differentiations, with each group developing strict codes of conduct and engagement. As indicated by Onyango, Orwa, Ojwang, & Kariuki (1991) their ways of living are extremely dangerous. These children face tremendous risk that potentially influences their development adversely. Onyango et al. (1991) posits that "they lack parental guidance and protection; they are exposed to violence and criminal activities, and their primary socialization is among their peers" (p.394). This raises the question of societal responsibility towards its younger generation and the abysmal performance of the
family system in ensuring the maintenance of one of its primary roles as the primary unit of socialization.

Factors Accounting for the Children in the Streets

For instance the reasons for children leaving their homes have been well documented by various authors. One of the salient points of consideration has been family or parental conflict (Bradley, 1997). These conflicts in many instances results in abuse of the child. The conflict may arise due to a clash of values of the parents and that of the children. Children at certain point also rebel at parental control towards an acclamation of independence. The decision to leave home according to (Miller, Eggertson-Tacon, Quigg, 1990) is often times a reaction to stressful situations and conflicts based on gross irrational beliefs. The street is perceived by these children as an abode of freedom, negating the consequential affects associated with street life. Indeed Lundy (1995) posits that among the homeless children she interviewed, a majority claimed that the most singular factor that precipitated their flight from the home to the streets was conflictual situations with the parents. The literature highlighted above, only provides the profile of the street children, but not programs to enhance their reintegration into the society.
Among the reasons why children leave their homes for the streets is physical abuse. According to Russell (1998) about 79.3% of the homeless street children report some history of physical abuse. Extreme physical abuse in the home promotes rebellious attitudes among many adolescents, who may perceive leaving the home the only opportunity towards emancipation. Suffice to mention that in many developing nations, traditional practices in most cases clash with modern societal orientation. For instance, traditional authoritative sanctions and a growing assertion of individual rights and freedoms are highly contentious issues. For a child, these traditional sanctions which were hitherto seen as appropriate punitive measures are perceived to be an affront to his or her rights and freedoms. I shall address the traditional context of this phenomenon in due course.

The above literature has focused on some of the causalities of the street children problem, through the individual perspective. Our attention may now be turned to some of the structural problems which contribute to the rise of the problem. Some of the factors, which have been identified as contributing to the street children phenomenon, are social turbulence, war, displacement, that
is internally or externally as refugees (Aptekar 1994). The UNICEF report about the state of the world’s children published in 1996 identified the rising military cost, falling of world commodity prices, structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, together with the debt crisis as the main catalysts to the upward surge of the problem. It is estimated that about eight hundred million people in the developing world have had their incomes reduced drastically as a result of the factors above. Notably among the factors, structural adjustment programs have caused considerable reduction in the provision of essential social services, including primary health care, education at all levels, environmental and sanitation issues. These factors have contributed to the increment of people living below the poverty line. These changes at the macro level have had some negative impact on the family system and more especially children, contributing to the influx of children on the streets (Creuziger 1997; Le Roux 1996).

It is a common scholarly assertion that most of the children found in the streets are abandoned by their families and society. This is followed by the conception that these children pose a threat to the stability of the
society which has rejected them (Veale, Taylor, Linehan 2000). Veale et al (2000) posits that there is the need to reexamine the concept of abandonment associated with street children. While they claim not to underestimate the contribution of the macro changes to the phenomenon of street children, it is imperative to understand some of the psychological underpinning of the abandonment concept.

Veale et al (2000) concluded by asserting that street children are not always seen as abandoned or without any family support. From their studies in Sudan and Ethiopia, children looked to the streets as an avenue to fulfill their unmet needs. It is also important to mention that these children perceived self reliance and efficacy, an attribute known to be a focal point in the protective psychological mechanism for children at risk (Dweck 1996). In spite of the troubling effects of the streets on the children, most of these children exhibit resilience through creative coping capabilities in their harsh street environment.

Another important dimension worthy of explication is some contractions in the literature concerning street children and attachment to their families. I have stated earlier that some scholars assert that children who have
had little attachment to their primary giver have higher potential to leave their homes for the streets and vice versa. Felsman (1981), studying in Columbia, concluded that 60% of the street children had a close contact with their families. Also in a study conducted by Veale and Adefrisew (1993) found that fewer than 20% of the children regularly slept on the streets. Aptekar (1988) in a study conducted in Columbia concluded that parents supported their children leaving the home in search of a better life in the streets. He claimed that this was as training for the children to be independent and self assured in an environment of abject poverty and severe institutional or structure neglect on the part of the government.

For many of the street children in Africa and other developing regions, inaccessibility to resources for decent livelihood has been blamed as the main causality of child mobility from rural areas to urban regions with the hope of attaining some of the perceived resources in the urban centers. The attribute of the rise of street children to poverty is a global phenomenon. The rise of street children has been linked to societal stress associated with rapid industrialization and urbanization (le Roux et. el. 1998). In a research conducted in Indonesia, Silva (1991)
concluded that poverty was the predominant factor in the rise of street children in that country.

The causes attributed to street children phenomenon may be varied depending on which side of the global divide one is arguing from. The dichotomization of the world according to the level of development into the industrialized north and the underdeveloped south may have similar structural reasons for the prevalence of street children, but their levels of intensity and uniqueness of causality may vary. Albeit there is a potential differentiation in global causality of street children, we can categorize the causes into two, the micro and the macro causes. The macro causes are the effects individual countries face as a result of their engagement within the global enterprise. The micro causes are those that result from the internal dynamics of individual states and the projected localized remedies for the problem including civil wars, family structure, and responsible social institutions. Furthermore, the macro causes entail a systematic engagement of states on the international scene and the influence within the power politics of international relations. I must however emphasize that most of the causalities overlap. For instance, a civil war may
be a consequence of both endogenous and exogenous factors. Also the causes of poverty could either be a macro cause that is, the unfavorable global conditions against developing states, or a micro causality resulting from institutionalized corruption and mismanagement of a country's resources.

It has been argued that the rapidity of the rise of the global economic enterprise and its concomitant association with competitive markets has precipitated the need for cheap local labor, thus playing a crucial role in perpetuating the street children phenomenon. Scheper-Hughes & Sargent (1998) assert that children, who use to work in their home communities, have as a result of current global economic trends form a huge portion of the industrialized labor. Bayat (2000) provides an interesting perspective on the current global economic trends and its consequences on developing states, especially Africa. Bayat, (2000) claims that;

The historic shift in the periphery from socialist and populist regimes to liberal economic policies, through the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), has led to the erosion of much of the social contract, collective responsibility and welfare state structures. Thus,
millions of people in the global south who depended on
the state provisions must now rely on their own to
survive (p. 534).

The new global restructuring according to Bayat (2000)
has created social exclusion pushing many people to the
periphery of the society. Many, especially children have
been disenfranchised and dislocated within their mandated
space for growth and development, pushing them to encroach
upon the space of the beneficiaries of this new world
order.

Specifically to the case of Africa, the introduction
of the SAP by the World Bank and the International Monetary
Fund (IMF) in the 1970s as an attempt to revamp the ailing
economies of African countries was the alternative panacea
to the disintegration of the social fabric of most African
countries. In a study in the Philippines, (Philippines also
adopted the SAPs) on the impact of poverty on street
children, Silva (1996) maintains that;

The injustices of structural adjustment, which largely
dictates the substantive part of bilateral and
multilateral loan arrangements, force debtor nations
to exercise fiscal restraint in their national
expenditures and to allocate funds to meet high debts

service rates in their national budget, rather than pay for social services and much needed infrastructure, at the expense of an authentic development for people (p. 280).

The implementation of SAP was accompanied by certain conditonalities. A major component of the conditionalities was the removal of all subsidies provided by the governments. Citizens were to be financially responsible for the services they attained irrespective of the question of affordability. The removal of subsidies also affected the main hub of the economies of many of the nations, agriculture. Farmers could no longer enjoy the subsidies the government granted for fertilizers and other farming accoutrements. Government expenditure on education and health was drastically reduced. This made primary healthcare and education highly inaccessible to a majority of the population. Malaria and HIV/AIDS have taken a great toll on the population, with majority of the governments lacking the financial and other resources to combat them. Sub-Saharan Africa has the worse situation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has been linked to poverty. Illiteracy rates are very high either because people cannot afford to send their children to school, or the governments lack
adequate financial resources to provide and improve on the educational infrastructure.

Although SAPs may have played an enormous role in the present predicaments of the children, and poor people in many developing states, the issue of corruption and political instability has also impinged negatively on children. For instance Silva (1996) asserts that;

Poverty of debtor nations.....is further exacerbated by widespread graft and corruption in the government bureaucracy as well as being intermittently affected by both man-made disasters, which drain so much of the nation’s resources and energies that could have been channeled to more productive enterprises (p. 280).

These factors no doubt have contributed to the increased poverty levels in many African countries. Poverty has precipitated an increase in the demand for families to allow their children to engage in economic activities to supplement the household income. According to Aptekar (1994) most children are in the streets because of poverty. Mufune (2000) also posits that "being on the street is a public disclosure of destitution. It is a statement to both the public and the individual concerned that one is poor" (p.237).
An important cause of street children in Africa is the ravaging effects of HIV/AIDS pandemic. Sub-Saharan African has the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS infection and a major cause of death among people aged between 15-49 years (UNAIDS, 1998). With estimated deaths of 2 million annual in Africa as a result of HIV/AIDS, many children are left orphaned with the streets providing a ready avenue for survival. Evens (2002) claim that;

Children whose parent(s) died from AIDS, are vulnerable to rejection by the relative, due to the AIDS stigma and are susceptible to exploitation and harassment as domestic servants within the extended family or in wealthier households in urban areas (p.60).

Statistics on the impact of AIDS among African children are sketchy but nonetheless grim. UNICEF predicted that by 1999, up to 5 million African children will have lost their mothers to AIDS. Of the 9.5 million people in sub-Saharan Africa who either have the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)--which causes AIDS--or the disease itself, an estimated 1.3 million are children.

While it is imperative to understand the causal
linkage between HIV/AIDS and street children, it is worth noting that street children are some of the most vulnerable candidates for HIV/AIDS infection. The lack of proper education and access to basic primary healthcare needs exposes the children to many of the hazardous sicknesses in the society including HIV/AIDS.

The African continent is plagued with several civil conflicts resulting in the killings of millions and the displacement of millions. Some of these wars have resulted in genocide and the extermination of all social institutions, with some states collapsing totally. While some of these wars have been staged to suit the political whims of selfish leaders, children and women have endured the greatest suffering. As a result of the many wars in Africa, millions of children have either been killed or displaced. Many have also been conscripted as child soldiers fighting for a cause they barely understand. For instance, Nyani (1995) commenting on the situation in Angola claims that;

In addition the country's health sector suffered drastic cuts in state funding at the expense of military spending in recent years. But the survivors
have not been totally spared other effects of one of Africa's longest running conflicts. Apart from the general psychological war trauma, Angolan children have among them some of the highest numbers of disabled, orphaned or abandoned children (p.XX).

*Family Structure as a Major Causal Factor*

The issue of street children cannot be complete without an inquest into the current family situation in many developing nations and Ghana in particular. As has been stated earlier, the structure of the African family system has undergone tremendous changes. Mufune (2000) intimates that changes in the family structure have occurred largely due to factors of modernization. The modernization process in Africa de-emphasized the important role of the extended family system. Thus, the increase in street children reflects the dissatisfaction and the social stresses that are associated with industrialization and urbanization (Le Roux & Smith, 1998a).

Modernization allegedly produces new forms of social values and control. The basic social institutions are affected by modernization. These are the family structure, the education system and the forms of authority (Mufune, 2000). The role of the family as the primary mode of
socialization is greatly diminished, while the designated surrogate institutions are inadequate in dealing with the issues of socialization solely. Suffice to mention that along with the diminished role of the family system is the perpetual impotence of the kinship system to provide support for family members in distress, thus the streets become the only alternative for survival.

The family as a self perpetuating institution has been the most instrumental institution of socialization. The structure of the family no doubt has changed tremendously over the years. Before we examine some of the factors that account for the changes, it is imperative to understand the ontological and epistemological significance of the family structure in Africa in general and Ghana specifically. The family structure in pre-colonial Africa existed as a solid unit of the social structure. It was not only responsible for procreation, but was the pinnacle for the perpetuation and survival of the culture. As a primary mode of socialization, the family network comprises a series of structured stratum, which were assigned various roles.

The historical basis of the family structure in Africa is not well documented due to the paucity of resources. The historical inaccuracies of the family structure again have
to do with definition. There is no academic consensus as to
which of the units to be studied (Shula Marks and Richard
Rathbone, 1983). Was the family to be studied as an
economic unit or a political unit? Pre-colonial African
family structure was a political unit with various
structures and functions (Nukunya, 1969). The family
structure was primarily responsible for the protection of
its members. Within the political set up of the wider
community, the various families were represented by the
family head (Abusuapayin). Nukunya (1969) notes that the
cohesiveness of the family structure was the authoritative
and leadership role played by the Abusuapayin. The family
structure was organized along lineage lines, with the
boundaries transcending beyond one’s allegiance to his or
her biological parents. He further posits that “the
economic life of an individual was enclosed within the
framework of the lineage system” (p165). A person’s
membership of a particular lineage automatically entitled
him/her to some of the land or other properties owned by
the family. This common interest in land according to
Nukunya (1969) resulted in a special relationship or
bonding among members of a particular lineage. This bonding
system or the unified structure of the family made members
responsible for one another. One owed much to his/her kinsfolk on whom he/she depended.

Pre-colonial family structures also had a different system of fostering and child rearing. First, a new born child was the responsibility of the whole community. It was the responsibility of the community to ensure the safe delivery of the new born. According to Nukunya (1969), loud cries of the woman in labor would draw a large crowd of neighbors who gather around the hut of the woman to offer prayers and support. There is a huge celebration when the newborn arrives and ceremonies to outdoor the baby is planned. This is a ceremony when the child is showed to the public eight days after birth. The traditional African family system provided the needed social cushioning for all its members. However with the introduction of colonial rule and the rise of money economy, the importance of the family system started to steadily decline. Economic pressures changed the dynamics of relationships within the family, and reduced the family’s ability to adequately cater for its members.

There is a strong correlation between family structure model and the development abilities of the child (Bilblarz 1997). Although poverty is has been suggested to be the
biggest motivating factor for street children in most developing nation and specifically Ghana, McLanahan (1994) seem to suggest that family structure may be more important than poverty in determining the behavioral and psychological problems of the child.

As has been opined by Kilbride and Kilbride (1990), the family support system invariably formed a barrier against child abuse and neglect. The support system inherent in the African traditional family system actually reduced the rate of child destitution. In many societies children were considered as treasures. The children were thought to be the future perpetuation of a particular family lineage, and also an economic potential, vital for the existence of the family. Children were considered prestigious to the family as it symbolized a blessing from God. Also children were thought to have brought stability in the family. For the sake of the children many families were brought together and parents considered divorce as a disservice to the growth of the child. Suda (1997) opine that;

The ideal in nearly all traditional African societies was to have a stable family and as many children as possible. In traditional Africa children meant wealth
and were seen as a source of power and prestige in addition to being regarded as a blessing from God and the ancestors. Children were also seen as the strongest rope that could tie couples and families together and it was mainly for their sake that unhappy marital relationships were endured (p.200).

Suda (1997) further claims that;

the support networks had the potential to reduce destitute children in the family or community. Such children did not have to be left to cope on their own or to turn to the streets to beg, or to be taken to institutions (p.200).

This is not to suggest in any way that the African family system was insulated from potential problems, or inherent dysfunctionality. Some evidence suggests that the traditional African family may have been overrated in its potential to be a stabilizing unit and as a protector of children. It has been argued by Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1984) in their discussion on traditional African family system that although the system was fairly stable, there were credible incidences of divorce and abuse. This stemmed from polygynous family systems where co-wives competed for the attention and resources for their children. Children
were witnesses to occasional family squabbles between their mothers and also among the children. There was jealousy and scramble for family resources especially from the children. A study conducted by Aptekar and Ciano-Federoff (1999) in Kenya concluded that street children generally come from homes headed by single mothers. The authors further postulate that:

Most of the children in our study had not experience the emotional plight that comes from parents dissolving a marriage in a Western-style divorce. Instead these children were accustomed to living in a family that included a series of men staying for a short period of time, some of them more benign than others (p. 40.).

Although no reasons were assigned for these trends, it plausible to suggest that changes in family structure may be due to economic pressures and fast changing indigenous traditions due to modernization.

2.4 Perceptions about Street Children

The general perception of the public towards street children is generally negative. The public perception and hostilities against street children according to Aptekar (1995) is as a result of the children being treated in
aggregate, and the total disregard to their individual and personal predicaments. Thus irrespective of the unique characteristics and predicaments of each child, they are all lumped together and treated with scorn.

Le Roux (1998) postulates that “adults negative interpretations of the lifestyle, and hostile condemnatory responses to street children would seem to make it almost impossible for them to retain healthy self-esteem” (p.xx). This is also translated in the provisions of services and the general attitude of most government agencies. For instance, Wilson & Arnold (1986) maintain that there are few safety nets for street children because they are alienated from the society and are regarded as deviants and social misfits. This stereotypical ascription of street children holds them in contempt for their existence within a society which is organized by rules and regulations. Street children are considered immoral and their long relationship with the street earn them their criminal status. However, Swart-Kruger & Donald (1994), argue that street children, in order to survive in a world that has alienated them, employ lying and deceitful tactics. The chaotic circumstances of the world of street children could be better understood by the appreciating the traumatized
engagement that characterizes their existence in a space they are unappreciated and unwanted. Their frustrations and resentments of the treatment meted to them by society are sometimes vented through a perpetuation of violence against society (Swart, 1988). It has also been suggested that the deviant behavior of street children could be as a result of the depravity of their fundamental social needs, including food and shelter, security and the affection of a peaceful and loving family (Paton, 1990).

Alexander (1987) maintains that street children in Guatemala are prone to widespread abuse and intimidation from the police. These children are considered pets and subjected to inhumane treatment. The epistemological basis of the definition of street children mostly determines the policy framework of most governments. The perception that street children are delinquents and social misfits, a definition widely held in western literature has affected policy formulation in many developing states (Richter, 1989). He maintains that the distinction between “runaways and throwaways” does not permeate policies that deal with the problem. He concludes that although street children may indulge in illegal activities, those who could be identified as delinquents are in the minority.
To fully understand the epistemological underpinnings of the negative public reaction towards street children, I will explore the concept of stigmatization, which makes it easier for people to perceive and treat street children negatively.

The stigmatization of the poor and in this case including street children and the tendency to blame them for their predicaments is a result of two mutually reinforcing social psychological processes, first, sociopolitical roots and second, cognitive/perceptual basis (Phelan & Link, Moore & Stueve 1997). The dominant group in society uses societal institutions and mechanisms to maintain the social stratification system. Through the beliefs, values and attitudes, the dominant group is able to perpetuate their ideology, which is internalized by the members of the society (Phelan et. al. 1997). The public stigmatization towards street children and the projection of the notion of personal inadequacies of the children relieves the structural elements of the society of any responsibility. This system of blame does not allow for a thorough analysis of the status-quo, which in many instances has been the core culprit of the perpetuation of the rigid social stratification system.
Phelan et. al. (1997), acclaim that fundamental attribution error “is a reliable cognitive inclination to underestimate the power of situations to influence other people’s behavior and to correspondingly overestimate the role of personal attributes” (p. 325). The emphasis on the internal dispositions of street children rather than the situational analysis of their conditions stimulates the bias the larger society projects against them. This personality based disposition and the attribution of the street children phenomenon on the internal inadequacies of the children foreshadows not only a lack of imagination in dealing with the problem, but it also displaces the available resources to for remedial action.

Stigmatization leads potentially to abuse, which many street children are subjected to in their daily encounters on the streets. Society made up of law enforcement agents, government agents and service providers, and the general public, abuse and treat these children with contempt and open hostilities (le Roux, Smith & Sylvia, 1998). Street children are fearful of authority especially the police because of their notoriety and brutality. Because of the public demand for the cleaning of the streets, city officials and the police are forced to use unorthodox
methods in dealing with street children.

Police brutality has been well documented in Brazil, where street children have been killed in execution style (Dewees & Kless, 1995). Scheper-Hughes (1997) suggests that while Brazilian street children in 1960s were referred to with a blend of annoyance and affection as moleques, these children in the 1990s were perceived to be scandalous, public nuisance and a danger. The public perception of the street children is reflected in the morphology of their names. While in the 1960s they were referred to as moleque (street wise, cute cunning etc.) they are currently referred to as pivete (young thief), trombadinha (pick pocket), and maloqueiro (street child, thief) (Scheper-Hughes, 1997). It can be inferred that the name given to the children justifies the perception of the public about the children, which also determines how the children are treated.

The brutality of street children at the hands of police and other law enforcement agents in Brazil has been a result of an alliance between off duty police officers and some business and shop owners who perceive the presence of the children on the streets to be bad for business,
tourism, and the general health of the public (Schepers-Hughes, 1997). The author further estimates that between 1988 and 1990, about five thousand street children between the ages of 15 and 19 were murdered and the police were reluctant to investigate these homicides.

Another important example of intimidation and abuse by police and other law enforcement agents is in Guatemala as reported by Alexander (1987). The author posits that street children were widely abused and intimidated by police in Guatemala, where the children were perceived to be delinquents and pests to the general public. This identity ascribed to the children gave the moral justification for the control of the street children before they were socially uncontrollable. Le Roux & Smith (1998c) suggest that the public perceive street youths as an impersonal aggregate rather than individuals. This has created a profound misunderstanding of the street children.

Aptekar (1995) maintains that the insensitivity of the press towards the plight of the children through unsubstantiated allegations increases the fear of the public, resulting in hostile attitudes of the public towards the children. The author states that recently in
the Kenyan press there was a report that street children were carrying HIV infected syringes and people who refused to give money were threatened with injection. The author asserts that although the reports were not collaborated, there was an increased apprehension of the public towards the street children.

Other false allegations against street children have been made in Brazil. For instance, Schepfer-Hughes (1997) reports that there was a report in a weekly magazine in May, 1991, which claimed that street children in a particular shopping plaza in Sao Paulo committed more than thirty two thousand robberies every year. There were other reports in 1992 in both print and electronic media on how street gangs were robbing people in certain areas in Rio de Janeiro. These allegations were however unsubstantiated. Just isolated incidences of such cases had actually occurred. What these rumor mills do is to further widen the mistrust between the children and the general public which is a catalyst to the abuse and neglect these children face from the public and the societal institutions.

Suffice to mention that while other members of the society have avenues to seek redress, street children have very limited avenues and in most cases may refuse to report
abuses against them because of the mistrust they have in the system. Some have argued that the traditionally the street in Africa plays an important role in the lives of young people (Aptekar, Cathey, Ciano & Giardino 1995), and may be the reason why society pays very little attention to children on the streets.

The idea of survival connotes an opportunity to vie for a piece of the available resources. This opportunity should be guaranteed to all without regard to any social categorizations. However, street children are excluded from any such opportunities because they are perceived to be against the conventional notion of decency and social decorum. This non-visible and non-communicated exclusionary philosophy against the children provides them no incentives to conform to the rules of engagement of a society where they are not recognized. This is not to justify the criminal behaviors of the street children, but to highlight the limited options and opportunities available for their survival. For them, survival is key and if society denies them the appropriate channels of survival, then they must do whatever is necessary for their survival and that is the human spirit.
The Street Children Situation in Ghana

There are no indications that the influx of children into the urban streets will be abating in the near future. However in Ghana, the government in conjunction with NGOs has instituted a number of programs to alleviate the plight of the children. In 1998 the government introduced the Children’s Act which was designed to protect the rights of children. Among other things, the Act seeks to address issues pertaining to adoption and maintenance, fostering and child labor, and the provision of institutional facilities for abused and neglected children (Ministry of Women & Children’s Affairs 2004). The Act also enjoins the government to partner with the private and the informal sector in the provision of apprentice facilities for children willing to go into vocational training. Among the provisions of the Act is the clause which prohibits any individual from depriving the child access to basic education, primary health care, immunization, shelter and adequate dietary supply. While the objectives of the Act are laudable, implementation and supervision has been woefully inadequate. The government claims that inadequate financial resources have made it impossible to realize those objectives.
The government agency responsible for the implementation of the policies often cites staffing and lack of resources as reasons for its abysmal failure. The departments of Social Welfare and the Ghana National Commission on Children have failed to harness the necessary resources for the protection of the child. The vacuum thus created has been the playing grounds for most NGOs, some of whom lack the expertise in dealing with child development issues. Also the lack of cooperation among these NGOs has in many cases resulted in the duplication of functions and wastage of their meager resources. While many NGOs can boost of programs for the street children, their efforts are just a drop in the ocean (Beauchemin 1999). A variety of the programs initiated by the NGOs have not achieved the desired effects due to a lack of synergy between the implemented projects and the needs of the children. The formulation of programs uses the top-bottom approach without the inputs of the children who are supposed to be the true beneficiaries of the programs. The primary goal of this research is to arrive at some programming conclusions from the perspective of the children. It is my belief that programs that include the children at the stages of conceptualization and formulation may have a greater chance
of success and benefits to the children. Program formulation with the potential beneficiaries also would increase their claim to ownership of the programs, and with a strong sense of enthusiasm culminating in effective and sustainable programming.

Very little academic research has been conducted on the street children issue in Ghana, compared to others conducted in other sub Saharan African countries. Among the few is a study conducted by the Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), indicates that the ages of the street children in Ghana ranges between 10-18 years, which is consistent with the estimated numbers other African countries. The research was conducted in fifty towns and villages, with samples from government agencies, NGOs, street children, parents and opinion leaders from various communities. The research identifies certain factors as pull factors and the triggers. Among the pull factors were urbanization, electricity, relatives and peer pressure. For many of the children, the urban centers offer an opportunity that does not exist in their areas of origin, the rural areas. Rapid urbanization and the promise of employment attract many young people from the rural areas of Ghana to the urban
centers, which invariably have limited opportunities for these children. The report also cites the introduction of electricity as one of the factors that attract rural children to the urban centers. The Beauchemin (1999) report states that:

The arrival of electricity has a profound impact on rural communities, and particularly on the young people. In the village of Dunkwa (W/R), for instance, a unit committee member told us that since the arrival of electricity two years ago, growing number of children had been leaving the village. Television opens people’s eyes to the “modern” world, and they believe the city has much more to offer (p.29).

This assertion may be a little simplification of the problem. As part of Ghana’s rural development initiative, rural electrification is supposed to open these areas for investments opportunities and economic development. The research cites rural electrification as a potential culprit for street children, but does not show any statistical significance of this assertion. For example, the report cites the opinion of local officials, not the children as to how rural electrification has impacted their decision to move to the urban areas.
The report also indicts that children who have relatives living in the cities have a higher propensity to move to the urban areas. The relatives of these children serve as an incentive to leave their rural homes. The children may expect their relatives will help them adjust to city life, either assisting them in attending school or enrolling in an apprenticeship for a trade. This calculation is irrespective of whether the relative welcomes the idea, or actually has the means to support such an endeavor. Often times, the children find out their fate too late and eventually end up on the streets.

Another pull factor the report cites is the pressure from the peers of the children. Beauchemin (1999) indicates that;

In the absence of role models for the young people in most villages, these adolescents are respected, and rural teenagers want to emulate them. In the village of Namong in the Ashanti Region, dozens of teenagers had returned from Accra, Kumasi, Cotonou and Abidjan for the Christmas holidays. The assemblyman told us that after the New Year, they would go back to the urban centers, taking friends or other younger relatives with then as they do every year (p.31).
Among the triggers or the push factors include violence, rural underdevelopment, and adventure. Although the report cites ethnic violence as a trigger, its significance is limited. Apart from the ethnic clashes in northern Ghana in 1994 between the Kokombas and the Dagombas, ethnic clashes are very minimal and have a negligible impact as a trigger. The other factor, rural underdevelopment probably may be the biggest trigger for the children leaving the rural areas for the urban areas. According to Beauchemin (1999);

Rural areas not only offer few employment opportunities, they also have low educational standards and poor facilities. Many students say they want to go to Accra, Kumasi or a regional capital, either to further their education or acquire vocational skills. None of the rural villages we visited had secondary schools (p.33).

The disparity between the urban areas and rural areas is largely a function of underdevelopment and societal inequalities. It has been discussed earlier in this section that economic mismanagement, political instability and the policies of international donor agencies are partly to blame for the precarious situation in Ghana and other developing nations in the world. It must also be noted that
upsurge in the numbers of street children is largely a function of unequal distribution of resources and the lack of access to available resources. The provision of basic necessities by the government and community has been lacking, which pushes many people on the brink of near survival. Thus, there is the need to address this issue from a holistic point of view. There must be both a structural overhaul and the introduction of micro programs tailored to suit the needs of the children. For any intervention program to succeed, the inputs of the beneficiaries are very vital. From all indications these children possess some unique qualities such as creativity and emotional maturity which the society often undervalue because of the stigma associated with their conditions.

To promote a strong sense of self determination and worthiness among these disadvantaged children, their inputs are vital and may also enhance their credibility among the public. Child development planners owe it a moral sense of duty to listen to the buried cry of these children.

Policy Framework for Children in Ghana

Ghana as country has several legislative and policy guidelines for its children. This section examines some of these legislative and policy guidelines, and how they
affect the phenomenon of street children in Ghana. According to the report submitted by the government of Ghana to the United Nation’s Committee on the Rights of the Child, (2003) several policy and legislative initiatives were reported. Among other things was the harmonization of Ghana laws on children. Among other things the report maintains that following initiatives have been instituted:

a) A comprehensive review of all domestic legislation conducted by the Child Law Reform Advisory Committee from 1995 to 1998 culminating in the adoption of the under mentioned legislative instruments;

b) In 1998 the Criminal Code was amended by the passage of the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act (Act554) to conform to the Charter on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Included in this amendment is an increase in the age of criminal responsibility; increased protection for the ill treatment and abduction of children; increased protection against sexual offenses, including incest, and other areas of increased protection for children relating to defilement of children,
seduction, child prostitution and child marriages.

c) The Children’s Act 1998 (Act560) conforms to the CRC. Included in this Act is a list of enforceable rights of the child and parental duties; orders for the care and protection of children; establishment of rules and procedures for the adjudication of judiciary and quasi-judiciary matters affecting children; establishment of family tribunals; rules for parental duties and responsibilities, custody and access; rules on fosterage and adoption; rules prohibiting numerous forms of child labor; rules guiding apprenticeship; rules outlining the admission of children to institutional care; rules for the operation of day-care centers; and rules guiding the registration of births.

d) The Legislative Instrument (L.I 1705), Child Rights Regulation 2002 has also been passed to operationalize the Children’s Act.

e) The Juvenile Justice Act 2003, (Act653), is in place to protect the rights of juveniles and young offenders in accordance with the CRC and
In spite of these elaborate legislative and policy framework, the issue of street children is rarely acknowledged. Conspicuously missing from and the Ghana Report to the United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child is any elaborate policy on street children. Although the government purports in Early Childhood Care and Development Policy (ECCD) (2004) that “The Government of Ghana is obliged to ensure the survival and development of the child through the provision of ECCD services leading to the realization of a healthy nation” (p.4), many of the policies of the government on social services including services for children have been woefully inadequate. The government insists that:

The traditional extended family system has been an in-built safety net, which to some extent provides for the well-being of children. The system encourages family members to contribute towards the upkeep of children of their less endowed relatives. The state cannot boast of sufficient resources to make provisions for substantial government funding to
support social security or social insurance schemes for children. There is also a lack of firm institutional framework to carry out any comprehensive social insurance scheme (Ghana Report, 2004, p. 51).

The government’s initiatives on children are bold and innovative, but unfortunately, the family support system, which used to provide security and comfort for children, is nearly extinct due to several factors that have been discussed previously in this chapter.

Theoretical Framework

The social capital theory offers a beginning point in the theoretical analysis of the street children phenomenon in Ghana. This theory draws a correlation between family structure and home-leaving. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as resources which "inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors….and is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (p. S98). For a child to have access to other resources in the society, the family of the child should possess some social capital, which should be accessible to the child. Coleman further posits that;
The social capital of the family is the relationship between children and parents. That is, if the human capital possessed by the parents is not complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child's educational growth that the parent has a great deal, or a small amount of human capital (p. S110).

The social capital of a child should include the synergy of the family social capital and community social capital. Coleman (1988) refers to family social capital as the relationships between parents and their children, which encompass the time, efforts, resources and energy that parents invest in their children. In contrast, community social capital represents the family’s interactions and relationships with the surrounding community. Here, the community encompasses both residents and local social institutions, including schools and other non formal systems of support. Coleman (1990) further contends that “unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons. It is logged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production” (p. 302). Thus the
family structure becomes the important component in the transmission of the social benefits to its members.

The importance of social capital theory in providing a firm theoretical basis for understanding the delinquency among children has been offered by Hagan and McCarthy (1997). They contend that the focus of social capital theory on institutional sources, which includes work, family, school, neighborhood, and community, provides an important insight to the explanation of crime and delinquency among children. Hagan and McCarthy (1997a, b) link a lack of social capital in the family to the youth becoming homeless and, while on the street, to their participation in criminal conduct.

To link this theory to the phenomenon of street children in Ghana, I will first explore some theoretical assumptions from Coleman’s assertions. Coleman (1990) contends that family capital investment in children is to ensure their access to other forms of social capital. Wright, Cullen & Miller (2001) further posit that:

A family will invest time, effort, and resources in its children with the goal to forge an intergenerational link that embeds the youth into relationships of mutual trust and obligation what
Coleman refers to as closure. Coleman makes explicit reference to certain, but not all, potential outcomes associated with family investment (p. 3).

Investments in children in according to Coleman should yield some positive futuristic benefits to the child. Wright et. al. (2001), assert that if families are committed towards the education of their children, the likely results will not only be success in the educational enterprise of the children, but will also reduce the tendency of the children being delinquent.

Children with little or no social capital are bound to leave their nesting home in search of a better life and other avenues of comfort. In the case of street children based on some assertions made above, one can conclude that the lack of social capital within the children's cycle of existence is a major catalytic causality of their decision to leaving their nesting homes. At this point I will stop short of making any speculations on the particularities of the situation of street children in Ghana, due to my lack of understanding of their circumstances. However, my analysis of the data will either collaborate or contradict the assertions of the social capital theory.
Chapter 3 Methodology

Research Design

Since the focus of this research will entail a personal and professional dialogue with the children, and other stakeholders the methodological approach will be qualitative. The case study approach will be used in this research. This study will be a phenomenological study, because it is an attempt to understand the perceptions and perspectives of the street children as well as stakeholders on the street children phenomenon in Ghana.

Qualitative enquiry focuses on describing, understanding, exploring, and interpreting to understand social situations and/or how participants in a social setting perceive the world around them. It important to note that qualitative research is based upon a premise that there is no single measurable concrete truth, but multiple social dimensions that emerge from complex societal interactions (Patton 2002). Therefore, in order to look at these multiple perspectives, the self as researcher is significant in observing, asking questions, and interacting with research participants extensively in the field. This study will also use the case study approach, which is to
probe deeply and analyze interactions between factors that explain present data and organize social data for the purposes of viewing social reality. A case study is the “study of particularity and complexity of a single case in coming to understand its activity within important circumstance” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). The researcher in a case study collects data on the individuals on which the investigation is focused. Since, a case study is especially suitable for learning about a little known situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001), it fits appropriately for understanding the complexities of the street children phenomenon.

Qualitative inquiry takes place within a socio-cultural context, which makes the dynamism of the researcher an important tool in the field. In fact, the researcher must acknowledge the self as an instrument and be able to comprehend the various energies that are engaged in the field. In other words, the researcher must be able to positively exploit his or her own subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988). The researcher's ability to interpret and make meaning of what he or she sees is crucial for understanding a social phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Although in many cases an interpretation may bear the subjective philosophies of the research, it may not be considered as
negative, but a unique interpretation of a phenomenon, (Peshkin, 1988).

Sample Population

My total sample size was 15 people. The breakdown is as follows:

- 11 street children from the Street Academy and the Catholic Action for Street children
- 1 official from the Ghana National Commission on Children
- 1 official from the Department of Social Welfare
- 1 parent of street children
- 1 official from the Street Academy

Participants were chosen using purposive and criterion sampling. The sample was appropriate for the purpose of the study and met certain criteria. For instance, street children interviewed fit the criteria or the definition that has been given previously. Also, since the purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of a particular phenomenon that is the examination of street children in Ghana, participants who were key players in the phenomenon were chosen. Albeit 14 participants may not seem enough, the sample size is not out of the norm for a
phenomenological qualitative study. For example, Patton (2002) posits that, “... qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases” (p.227). The focus of the study is not to generalize, but to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Again, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) argue that, “Qualitative researchers do not need to depend on a particular numerical basis for generation of generalizations......” (p.27). Furthermore they postulate that “In the numbers game, depth is traded for breadth. For in-depth understanding one should repeatedly spend extended periods with a few respondents” (p.27). In agreement to the above assertions by Glesne and Peshkin, Patton maintains that “Qualitative inquiry focuses in depth on relatively small samples,... selected purposefully” (p.227).

Unit of Analysis
The analysis was perspective based. In this study, the perspectives of the children, parents of street children and stakeholders formed the basis of analysis. Also the experiences of the street children were particularly highlighted.
Procedure

These were the steps the researcher followed in collecting the data. As I have noted earlier, this is a phenomenological study, to understand the phenomenon of street children in Ghana. I grouped my research sample into three, the children, stakeholders (governmental and non-governmental), and a parent of a street child. My initial process was the interviewing of the children with the consent of the Street Academy, and the Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS) who acted as the guardians of the children. The interviews were conducted at the place(s) with little interruptions. All interviews were conducted on the premises of the Street Academy and the Catholic Action for Street Children. I ensured confidentiality by using pseudonyms for the children. The stakeholders were interviewed in their offices or conference rooms, again the aim was to reduce interruptions during the interviewing process. A parent of a street child from the Street Academy was interviewed on the premises of the Street Academy. I was introduced to the parent of a street child by the Director of the Street Academy. Her child has been attending some of the programs of the Academy.
Instrumentation

The major instrumentation for this study was semi-structured interviews. According to Patton (2002), the interviewing is “to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (p. 348). Also, Holstein & Gubrium (Weinberg, p.112-113) define interviewing as delving into the social world, as well as being collaborative, interactional, and meaning making: "Interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives".

There are some general characteristics that a researcher doing interviews and more especially with children who have developed little trust for people to possess. Children open up to people they trust. Trust building is an essential component in interviewing.

Time frame

The researcher spent approximately four and a half weeks in the field for the data collection.
Transcriptions

The researcher transcribed all the interviews to aid in the final analysis of the data. In cases where the interviews were not conducted in English, the researcher translated from the indigenous language to English. In cases where the language spoken by a participant was not the working language of the researcher, interpretations services were sought. Apart one street child who could speak English, all other street children spoke in their native languages. The children either spoke Fanti or Twi. These languages are spoken predominately from natives from southern and middle sections of the country. The parent participant spoke Ga, the language of the natives of Accra, the capital of the country. My working knowledge of the language was inadequate, so the services of a translator were sought. All other participants were interviewed in English.

Data Analysis

Methods used in analyzing data for a case study includes categorization and interpretation of data in terms of common themes, and the synthesis of data into an overall portrait of the case (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The date was organized around the perspectives of the respondents on the
phenomenon of street children in Ghana. I employed analytic noting, coding and highlighting as the techniques for analysis. Using the processes suggested by Strauss & Corbin (1998), I open coded by uncovering, naming and developing concepts in my gathered data. Strauss & Corbin (1998) contend that “events, happenings, objects, and actions/interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts termed categories” (p.102). Because the study is a phenomenological study, analysis using a phenomenological framework included

a. A focus on understanding people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of the street children phenomenon

b. The final result was a description of the phenomenon, as seen through the eyes of people who have experienced it firsthand, that is the street children

The choice of the methodology was based on the nature of the study. Understanding a phenomenon required the researcher to dialogue with all who have a stake in the issue. The researcher used the proposed methods and procedures as much as possible, but also remained open
minded, and followed the directions of the data as much as possible.

Reciprocity

Important in a qualitative research is the notion of reciprocity. The research should be mutual beneficial, with the participants and in this case the children as the ultimate beneficiaries of the study. According to Patton (2002) “participants in research provide us with something of great value, their stories and their perspectives on their world. We show that we value what they give us by offering something in exchange” (p.415). To this end, I will make available my research to any agency working with children in Ghana. Also as gesture of my gratitude to the Street Academy, and the Catholic Action for Street Children I have started writing a proposal for the construction of a library, and an information resource center. Children who patronize these centers will have the opportunity to use computers and other modern information technology equipment.

Description of Data Collection Sites

I had initially proposed to use just the Street Academy for my interviews, but I also ended up using the Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS) due to certain
changes. The Street Academy was chosen because of my initial research idea, which was to develop alternative education programs for street children in Ghana. The street Academy was the perfect fit that ideal because they have been providing alternative education to street children in Ghana since it was founded in 1985. However, somewhere along the line, the focus shifted to the examination of the lives of these children, and how they and others perceived them. The rationale for the shift in focus was that, to better serve the needs of these children, it was imperative to understand the phenomenon of street children in Ghana, and most importantly from the perspectives of the children, and those who worked directly with them. Also at the time I arrived in Ghana for my research, the Street Academy was to close for renovations of their facility. Their roof was at the verge of caving in, potentially risking the lives of the children. Although the center did not have money to immediately repair the roof, the director contended that by removing the roof, they could marshal some public sympathy for assistance. To that effect the children had been told not to come to the center due to the potential hazards associated with the repair works. However, I was able to arrange with some of the children under the auspices of the
director to meet at an adjacent building for our interviews. For the most parts, the interview setting was comfortable to many of the children, because it was on their turf. They have been operating in the area very well, and their sense of security was not in anyway threatened. We had a long bench given to us by a woman who sold food across from us, and since I patronized her food, she was always willing to help with seating. Her kindness was also a reflection of her attachment to the center, and her personal acquaintance with the director and staff of the center. Although the center was not officially opened for school, I was able to meet with any of the children at my request, with the help of the director, and other children.

Other interviews took place at the premises of the CAS. CAS operates a refuge for street children in Accra. The children come to the refuge during the day, and leave for the streets at night. I will discuss the operational outlook of CAS later in the paper. I had worked in CAS as part of my social work field placement in 1998, and so it was a warm home coming for me. Ironically some of the children I had known back in 1998 were still around, thus it not difficult to break the initial ice. The interviews
told place under a hut adjacent to the main CAS building. The hut doubled as a kitchen, but was rarely used since. My other interviews with non-governmental and governmental agencies took place in their offices at a day and time of their convenience.

The interview settings were very comfortable to the participants, and in all there was a high sense of privacy. In most cases I used my tape recorder with the consent of the participants. In one instance a child participant was did not want to be recorded. I was able to write our conversation after our interaction.

All the respondents in the research participated on voluntary basis. Specifically with the children, no particular criterion was used. Some of the children were interested in talking and while others showed very little interest. Selection was thus based solely on children who were willing to talk to me.

Selection of the Participants
Participation in this research was on purely voluntary basis, and in some respects availability of the participants. Contacts and consent for participation with officials was the easy part. My first point of contact was with the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) located in
Accra. I was the first at the offices of the DSW, after asking a couple of people for direction. After informing the receptionist about my mission, I was directed to the offices of the research officer, who took me to the office of the deputy director. After discussing the parameters of my research, we scheduled a formal interview at a time and day of the deputy director’s convenience.

My next contact was with the Ghana National Commission on Children. I had been to that office a year ago to conduct a pilot study on street children, so I had some contacts there. My contact was the senior programs officer. Although we had met before, it was our second meeting that she realized I was the son of her teacher in high school. She knew me when I was a child, and meeting again after several years in a capacity as a researcher was a happy reunion and a huge surprise.

The hardest to find was a parent of a street children. I thought this was going to be easy, or may be did not think it would be difficult. My plan was to bond with some of the children, and hopefully some may take me to their parent(s). Unfortunately many of the children in my study had little or no relationship with parents. Majority of the children in my study had had some altercation or had
suffered some abuse from their immediate family. Almost my entire children respondents did not have a clue where their immediate family members were, including their parents. Thus my initial plan of talking to parents of my some of my children participants was quashed. However, the director of the Street Academy was able to link me with a parent of one of the street children at the center. Unfortunately, she was the only parent I was able to interview.

Officials from the non-governmental agencies were drawn from the two agencies I worked with, CAS and the Street Academy. In CAS, I interviewed the deputy director. The director of the Street Academy was my other participant. He was also my contact point to the community where some of the children came from.

All the children who participated in the study were either affiliated with CAS or the Street Academy. There are two reasons for this decision. Firstly, for the purposes of protecting the rights of the children, and ensuring their safety and that of the researcher, all contacts with the children had to be under the supervision of either CAS or the Street Academy, who acted as their de-facto guardians. Interviewing the children by themselves in the streets was a risky adventure. Albeit the majority of the children were
autonomous with respect to fending for themselves, they were protected by certain individuals, whom I refer to as “landlords”. These “landlords in most cases were invisible, inaccessible, and very untrustworthy. These “landlords” had a lot of influence over the children, which in some cases resulted in abuse and intimidation. Conducting research with children under those circumstances would not have ensured their safety. Also, the integrity of the research could have been compromised with my children participants feeling unsecured and intimidated by the presence and supervision of their “landlords”.

Secondly, the Institutional Review Board would not have approved my research without guarantees of protection of the children from the CAS and the Street Academy. I must however emphasize that to the best of my knowledge the relationship between the children and the centers in no way prevented the children from sharing their experiences. The centers in no way influenced the responses of the children to my question or hindered in anyway an honest dialogue between the children and I. They played just an advisory role, with the children making all the choices and bearing the consequences associated with their decisions.
It is important to put into perspective the contextual framework of the concept of autonomy and self determination of the children, and their relationship to the centers. The relationship between the Street Academy, CAS, and the street children is more of an established cultural relationship in the form of a surrogate guardian. The children are very autonomous from the centers. When the street centers close for the day, the children are on their own, relying on their own established networks on the streets for survival. The centers provide some oversight for the children as long as they come to the premises of the centers. Issues of security and protection are negotiated by the children themselves. The center play no role in the lives of the children once they doors close for the day.

Culturally any responsible adult is able to provide consent and protection to a child. Although these children legally are children, their circumstances and conditions exclude them from the traditional sense of a child. They are the sole providers of their basic needs, including security and shelter. Thus under strict legal terms, they can provide their own consent, at least within the cultural parameters of their existence in Ghana. The legal status of
the children at least by age is not arguable, but their socio-cultural functions and characteristics elevate them from legal notion of a child. In the Ghanaian society, these children are considered miniature adults, and they claim their legitimate status and role within the urban contours.

The selection of the children who participated in the study was an interesting process. I will start with the Street Academy. My initial contact with the Street Academy was through a family friend, who knew the chairman of the Board of Governors of the Street Academy. Upon arriving in Ghana, I contacted the chairman, who introduced me to the director of the Street Academy. This began my official affiliation with the Street Academy. After going through the traditional ritual of greeting all the staff members, I was introduced to the children by the director. With my professional background as a social worker I began my initial process of acquainting myself with the children and the operations of the center. For the first few days, I played games, and tutored some of the children, and at the same time observed their interactions amongst themselves. Although the center was closed for renovations, a couple of children kept coming to center to interact with me. It was
among these children that I selected my sample. These were children who were available and willing to work with me.

Majority of the children from the Street Academy were indigenes of Accra. Accra is the indigenous home of the Gas, who are settled predominantly along the coast of the capital. The main occupation is fishing, and many of the children in those communities engage in the trades of their parents. I visited two of the communities where majority of the children hailed from Bukuom and James Town. My visit to these communities was to give me some perspective on the background of the children. Although these communities are in close proximity to the city center and the seat of government, these communities are some of the most deprived in the country. Bukuom and James Town are approximately 3 miles from the seat of government and a couple of meters from the Central Bank. These communities are very congested and highly unplanned, with very limited social amenities, including indoor plumbing.

The few afternoons that I visited these communities in the company of the director of the Street Academy who resides in one of the communities, there seemed to be no activity going on. Most of the men were sitting under a shade mending their fishing nets with the women either
-selling fish or other food stuffs. Very evident was the number of children roaming around. According to the director of the Street Academy, majority of the parents in these communities did not value education, but were interested in training their children in the art of fishing. This would have been the pride of every child to learn the art and mastery of their parent(s) occupation. According to the director of the Street Academy, many of the children were unenthused about their parents’ trade, and the parents were uninterested in investing in any alternatives.

Against this background, many of the children ended up on the streets. But these were children on the streets; they had a family support system and returned home after their daily activities on streets. These were the majority of the children who made up the bulk of the children at the Street Academy.

Selecting children at CAS proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. While the children at the Street Academy were more welcoming, children at CAS were more skeptical and not trusting of an “outsider”, or an adult. Children at the Street Academy were very curious, and wanted to know where I came from, what I did, and very
excited to play with my camera. Initiating a rapport with the Street Academy was much easier. It did not take long to establish a high sense of trust between me and the children. As I have stated above, majority of the children from the Street Academy still had their family support, thus more trusting of people.

The situation was very different at the CAS. After my initial briefing with the staff of CAS, I was introduced to the children by one of the social workers. My first contact was with a child I knew back in 1998, when I was doing my field placement with CAS. We had a long conversation to catch up on old times. It was during our conversation that some of the children began to pay some attention to me. At this point the girls were still not very welcoming. Many of the girls I casually started conversations with seemed very uninterested in my research. Many of the girls were sleeping during the day or attending to their children. Those who were not engaged in neither were hanging out with their boyfriends. I later found out from my children participants, the boys, that many of the girls were night workers, and were uncomfortable telling their stories, especially to outsiders, and more especially men. I was however fortunate to have two girls to participant in my
research, on the condition that they spoke together with me. My other female participant only talked to me on condition that I will not record our interview. That was done, and I had some of the incredible insights into the lives of female street children in Accra.

**Ethical Considerations**

Conducting research with children leaving under difficult circumstances will also present some serious ethical considerations. The major question that kept ringing in my mind was how did the system fail these children? And how had I contributed to their predicament. After talking to these children I drove away in the comfort of my private car to my parents’ home in an upscale neighborhood in Accra, and I could not stop feeling guilty and in some cases depressed and disappointed. What could I do in my own small way to alleviate the predicaments of these children? I expressed this feeling to one of the supervisors at CAS, and he said “it is natural to feel sorry for the children, but to them, they find more comfort and security in their present situation than where they came from. These children, although their living conditions may be subhuman, they have adapted to their situation and in some cases help us to deal with our own
disappointments”. Finding the balance between my personal feelings, and my professional etiquette was very challenging. All the things you learn in the classroom and other professional development skills or credentials cannot adequately prepare anyone in dealing with children who have been psychologically and emotionally battered by their circumstances. I must however emphasize that these children were extremely intelligent and emotionally matured, and they gave me enormous strength through the process with their energies and optimism about life.

The most important ethical issue was about the direct benefits my children participants would derive from being part of the study? This was difficult, because I know the impact of the research although extremely relevant, was not going to directly alleviate the children from their present predicaments. Part of this ethical dilemma is addressed by Helseth and Slettebø (2004). They claim that;

This is usually the problem with nontherapeutic research: the child is exposed to the risk without having any direct benefit and any possible benefit will most likely be produced for future generations (p.300).
However, one could argue that, for the children participating in a study, it may be a positive experience to be able to speak freely about a major life event, which could count as a beneficial result of their participation.

Giving the children a voice in discussing their situation was a fundamental part of this research, and to a large extent all the children in this research were very much empowered through this process.

Because of the involvement of children in this research, many precautions had to be taken into consideration. As I have stated earlier, the utmost safety and privacy of the children was my primary concern. The following steps postulated by Helseth and Slettebø (2004) became a guide for my research and my interaction with the children. They include;

- The possible harm to the children is minimized and precautions are built into the design;
- The researchers have sufficient knowledge about children;
- The research is beneficial to children in general and preferably also to the children involved;
- The knowledge cannot be obtained unless children are included in the research.
Obtaining informed consent from the children was the tricky part. In Ghanaian culture any agreement, which requires signature connotes a level of seriousness, bureaucratic, and often misconstrued with trustworthiness. Although I had the legal authorization from the center, getting consent from the children was very important. I explained the purpose of my research, and was very frank with who was going to be the immediate beneficiary, me. I showed them the informed consent letter that I had, albeit they could not read, they perused through with some seriousness and curiosity. I translated the document verbally from English to Akan, the language that majority of the children spoke, and upon their verbal agreement I included them in the study.

Summary

The methodology chapter provides the rationale behind the choice of the methodology, sample size and a brief description of the research participants. Also data analysis procedure is discussed. This is a phenomenological study, and the main instrument for data collection was interviewing. It is also a case study, where the phenomenon of street children in Ghana is characterized as a case study. Using a qualitative inquiry methodology, I seek an
in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of street children in Ghana, through the perspectives of the children, people who work with children, and parent(s) of street children.
Chapter 4 Interview Results

Introduction
The research questions provided the framework for the interviews. This chapter will highlight the important themes and experiences of the children from the interviews, and which addresses the questions for this research. As I have aforesaid in the previous chapter, the results of the interview will be reported around the reoccurring themes from the interviews, including experiences of street children on the streets, how street children are perceived by the general public from the perspectives of the children, the stakeholders and the parent, how the children define themselves and how others define them among other things.

In interacting with my research participants certain themes kept reoccurring. For instance, on the question of causalities of the phenomenon of street children in Ghana all my participants alluded to poverty and the breakdown of the family system as the most influential causes.

The research is centered on the perspectives of three distinct groups; the children; stakeholders, which included the government and non governmental officials who worked
directly with children; and a parent of a street child. Many of the perspectives of these three groups were similar, but also had a lot of contradictions.

I will restate the research questions for easy reference:

- What are some of the experiences of street children in Ghana?
- How do the various stakeholders (governmental and non-governmental organizations, parents, and civil society) characterize street children in Ghana?
- How do street children in Ghana characterize themselves?
- What factors account for street children in Ghana?
- How does the Ghanaian public perceive street children from the perspectives of the children, and the stakeholder?

In this chapter I highlight the interconnectedness between the data and the questions for this research. Further more, I strive to put a human face on the experiences of the children so that their voices do not
remain mere statements, but also convey a sense of appreciation of their plight, and an understanding of the overall phenomenon of street children in Ghana. I will first address some of experiences the children, with respect to how they came to the streets, and the general conditions of living in the streets of the Accra as a child. This will also give us a picture of how these children are able to cope and survive on the streets. This answers the first research question, what are some of the experiences of the street children in Ghana? To protect the identity and the rights of my children participants, I will use pseudonyms.

The Street Children
During my first few days I realized the stratification among the children. These classifications were based on my observation and my working knowledge of street children interaction. The children associated in groups. I was able to distinguish between the groups and their characteristics. Whereas the children at the Street Academy were fairly a homogenous group in terms of age, the children at CAS were very varied in age distribution. The group formation of the children at CAS was based on age characteristics. I grouped them into three groups. The
first group comprised of children ranging between the ages of 17-19 years and have acquired the power and control over the place (centre/CAS) and the other children included in the group were young girls most of whom had children, the ages of 0-1 years. Many of the girls had specific a boy who they associate with, including running small errands for the boys. Although some of the children in this group may technically be able to be considered as children, they were allowed to the centre because of their long association with the centre.

The boys in this group were well dressed and many of them carry backpacks, which contains mainly their clothes. The girls were also dressed decently with some of them having nice and elaborate hairstyles. The children in this group did not associate much with the other children. Many arrived at the centre much later in the afternoon, sometime after 1pm after working in the morning. Control within this group is maintained through strict adherence to their own codes of ethics. Members of this group are notorious for their physical abuse and their reputation as drug users and abusers of alcohol. A lot of the boys also had tattoos, which symbolized their braveness. This braveness is associated with the painful nature of acquiring those
tattoos. The more the tattoos, the braver the person was perceived.

Physical strength in this group is essential for one’s continuous membership and reputation. Many of the boys in the group are physically built, and have prowess in street smartness. Many of the boys especially, have had some brushes with the law in the form of police arrests for various petty offences, including pick pocketing and vagrancy.

The second group was mainly young boys between the ages of 12-15 years who have acquired a lot of group recognition and respect, by virtue of their long association with the streets. Members of this group had long standing association with each other. They have been on the streets for not less than five years. Many of them have been surviving on the streets since the age of eight years and have maintained little or no contacts with their families. Members of the group were much smaller in size and rarely accepted girls in the group. Some of them were engaged in some sexual activities and some had had trials with drugs and alcohol. These children are mainly porters’ aids to women who sell cooked food at the market. There were rarely girls in this age group. If there were any,
they were closely associated with the first group. As I stated earlier, majority of the girls were in some kind of romantic relationship with the older boys.

The third group I referred to as the new conscripts. They ranged between the ages of 9-12 years. These were new entrants to the streets with duration of not more than five months on the streets. These children were at the mercy of the two previously described groups. They served as the errand boys and were easily punished for various offences, especially disobedience of their codes of ethics. Since group association are based on age and size differences members of this group were very tiny in size compared to the others. They were much filthier, and seemed very isolated and vulnerable. They occupied the periphery areas of the centre, and were not allowed at certain places. For instance there was a huge tree, which provided shade, but boys in this group could not enjoy the shade because it was considered the territory of the senior boys. They risked severe punishment if they disobeyed some of these codes of engagement.

The bulk of my children participants came from the second and the third group. Members from the first group were very uninterested and the least trusting of outsiders.
For the first couple of days, many of the children in the second and the third were very interested in singing and playing the drums. I used my tape recorder to record some of their singing. Their songs were in the form of rapping, which was in Akan. I also played drums with them and taught them a few tricks on the drums. This was when they began to pay some serious attention to me. From that time onwards, many of the children will not leave my sight. They hunged out with me throughout the whole day, and that was when my rapport with the children for the purposes of my research began.

There were eleven children in all, two children from the Street Academy, and nine from CAS.

Introducing the Children in the Study
AB, 15 year old boy from the Ashanti Region (CAS)
Bansa, 14 year old boy from the Central Region (CAS)
Michael P., 16 years old from the Central Region (CAS)
Aba, 15 years old from Western Region (CAS)
Musah, 18 years old from Northern Region (SA)
KN, 13 years old boy from the Central Region (CAS)
Abi, 15 year old girl from the Western Region (CAS)
Sedi, 18 year old from Greater Accra Region (CAS)
Mant, 18 year from Greater Accra Region (SA)
BJ, 15 year old from the Central Region (CAS)

Baba, 9 years from the Volta Region (CAS)

The tragic experiences of these children are compounded by the ages of the children, especially those that I encountered in this research. These children were between 9-18 years of age.

Below is a diagram of the ages of the children in the research.

Table 1. Ages of the Children

![Bar Chart of Child Ages]

Source: Interview data (Boakye-Boaten, 2006).
According to Lalor (1999), worldwide age distribution of street children is between the ages of 10-14 years. Older children tend to lose their innocent appeal with the public. According to Aptekar (1989) children were considered cute before adolescence, but perceived as thugs and thieves when they reached adolescence. This was very true especially with children who worked as beggars. While this assertion may be true in certain societies, the children I interviewed did not indicate that their ages were much of a consideration to the public. The difference may lie in their line of occupation. All of them worked as porters in the market and not as beggars, which requires a lot of sympathy and benevolence from the public.

When it comes to the ages of street children, research from other African countries highlight enormous diversities. Veale, Aderfrsew & Lalor (1993) from their study of street children in Ethiopia found the average of children beginning street life to be about 11 years. In Sudan 60% of street boys were about 13 years or older (Veale, 1996). The Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS) put the average age of street children in Ghana at about 15½ years. This diversity of ages of street children
underscores the uniqueness of street children, and difficulty in advancing unqualified generalizations.

**Experiences of Street Children Participants**

Street children have some of the horrific experiences, and one can only understand their circumstances by appreciating their experiences. While the immediate circumstances of all street children can not be address to anyone’s satisfaction, their experiences when reported may ignite the appropriate responses from various stakeholders. The question was how did you get to Accra?

AB who is a 15 year old boy from the Ashanti region of Ghana intimated that;

> I used to live with my mother. When my mother and father divorced, the case was taken to the social welfare office and it was agreed that I should stay with my mother and my father was supposed to give my mother ¢200,000 towards my upkeep.\(^5\) One day while in school my father sent ¢40,000 through one of my siblings to be given to me. He indicated that I was supposed to give it to my mother since he was traveling. At that time, I was hungry so I used some of the money to buy food and I was left with ¢25,000.

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\(^5\) Ghanaian currency is called Cedi. 1 American dollar is equivalent to 9000 cedis.
I took the rest of the money to my mother and she was not pleased that I had spent the money. She then decided that if I’ve used money that was for my upkeep, then she cannot cater or look after me anymore. Because I had no where else to go, I went to my father and he told me that Social Welfare had ordered that I should not come to his house or else I would be arrested. My father’s wife used to drive me away whenever I went to the house. I had nobody to turn to so I stole my mother’s twenty thousand cedis and I came to Accra. I went to the main transport station in Kumasi central, and boarded a bus to Accra. I alighted at Circle around 5pm, and started roaming the streets (AB).

He continued with his first experience in the streets of Accra.

When I got here, it was in the evening so I walked to the station near the Mosque. I saw a church building and I slept there because other people were sleeping there. In the morning I met a boy from a nearby town who said he was a porter and that if I was strong enough to carry stuff, I will have money to buy food. He gave me a customer and the woman I carried the
stuff for gave me $3,000 and I used that to buy food (AB).

Bansa a 14 year old boy from the Central Region of Ghana claimed that:

After my parent (mother) refused to take me back to school, my mother left leaving me with my grandmother. We had to go to the farm every day, and we had very little food to eat. I did not enjoy living in my village, so I went to Mankessim, which is a five hour walk from my village. After carrying goods at the market for a couple of days, I saved some money to board a bus to Accra, with my friend. We alighted at the Kaneshie market\(^6\) in the afternoon, and met some boys who showed us where we could find work (Bansa).

The highlight of my field work was when I met a child I knew from my days as an undergraduate at the University of Ghana. I knew Michael P. when I was doing my field work at Catholic Action for street children (CAS) in 1998. He had just come to Accra from Saltpond in the Central Region of Ghana. Almost 7 years later, Michael P. was still on the streets, with a lot of experience, and commanded a lot of

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\(^6\) Kaneshie Market is a one of the busiest marketing centers in Accra. It is home to a huge market (flee market), and a major transport hop.
respect from his peers. At the age of 16 years Michael P. physically looked like a 10 year old boy. He contended that;

I took my father’s money and picked up a car. First I made up my mind to go and see my mother. I picked up a vehicle which costs ¢9000..... I met a boy at Kaneshie and we started to move together. He stole tins of milk from the sellers we passed by on our way. He in turn went to sell them. His lifestyle was too risky for me, so I started working for a woman at the market who sold food. I will wash her dishes, fetch her water, and she in turn would give me food, and some money. Anytime that I was sick, she would buy me medicine. She is the only nice person I have known.

(Michael P.)

The experiences of every individual child are very different and unique in their own perspective. But they also share very similar characteristics. Aba is a female aged 15 years. She came to Accra at the age of 13 from the Western Region of Ghana, a placed called Sefwi. According to Aba,

The first time I came to Accra was with my mother’s sister. She used to come and sell goods in Accra. We
went back after four days. A couple of weeks later I
decided to come back, this time on my own. Since I did
not like school, and I did not want to stay in my
village, I decided to move to Accra. I sold oranges at
the local market to get some money for my lorry fare
to Accra. I first boarded a transport from Sefwi to
Takoradi, and boarded one from Takoradi to Accra. I
alighted at Kaneshie in the evening and roamed the
market to find a place to sleep (Aba).

The story of my next participant was also very
intriguing. Musah was in fact staying on the streets of
Accra with his father. His father had been a genitor at the
Ministries, which refers to the area of the capital, which
houses all the government offices. His father was
incapacitated, and as a casual worker (temporary employee)
did not have any benefits or retirement. They lost their
housing and ended up sleeping outside the offices at the
Ministries. According to Musah “We were (he and the father)
sleeping on the corridors outside the offices in the
Ministries…….because my father had worked there for several
years the watchmen (security) allowed us to sleep on the
corridors” He further asserted that although their sleeping
place was secured “When it was raining, we had to stand
till it stopped, and waited for the floor to dry before sleeping again.” But there were other problems he encountered sleeping on the streets. Musah posits that;

During the harmattan season (period between November and March) it was so cold and the cloth I used to cover my self was not big enough to cover my whole body, this made me feel very cold at night. Also we were fair game for mosquitoes. Because of the many open drains around the area, there are so many mosquitoes, they really “fed on us” (Musah).

The daily experiences of my respondents in many ways were very similar. All of these children were living lives of extreme abject deprivation, but also in many respects every one of my participants had their own unique twist to their experiences, and I try to capture some of these experiences in their own words.

The daily experiences of the children defy every reasonable definition of a child. All the children in my study had gone through some traumatic experiences, which in many cases, are epitomized by abuse, be it physical, emotional or sexual. For these children negotiating the complexities of the hostile urban streets is an art of survival, and sheer guts.
KN is a 13 year old boy from a village in the Central Region of Ghana called Krofo. At the time I met him, he had only been in Accra for five months, and there was no immediate indication that he was going back to his village. Although Accra was very strange and chaotic for a rural child, the prospects outweighed the risk associated with living on the streets. KN contends that

I was at village and a friend of mine was coming to Accra, so I told him to bring me along and he agreed. A little while after we got to Accra, our money got exhausted, so we went begging. That day I got £5,000. It was then I realized there was money to be made here, so I decided not to go back (KN).

But how was his living condition in the streets of Accra? According to KN

“I sleep anywhere I get. If I get a cardboard I just spread it out and sleep on it”

There is a popular place that many of the children I came into contact with were sleeping at night. Kaneshie is a major market and transportation center in Accra with bustling business. This provides an attractive conduit for the children to earn their daily living by working as porters at the market. At night, this same place becomes a
lodging place for the children. It is very convenient because they wake up in the early hours of the morning and start working right there. The most popular of their sleeping places is under the “overhead bridge”. The “overhead bridge” is a foot bridge across a major thoroughfare in Kaneshie. Beneath the bridge is where you will find many of the children sleeping at night. But the place is also a den for thieves and urban scavengers. And for new entrants like KN, the “overhead” could be a lion den for him. When I asked KN why he did not sleep at the “overhead”, he said;

When you sleep there (Overhead) the older guys come with blades (razors) to cut your dress and strip you naked and steal your money so I hardly sleep there….if someone attacks me, Ah! there is no one to report to…. I used to sleep under the overhead but because of stealing and extortion there, I now sleep at the cold store7 ((KN).

There is no safe place for children in the streets of Accra. As long as they sleep in the streets they are prone to abuse. Truly no one knows the extent of abuse these

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7 A refrigerated warehouse for frozen fish and meat located around the Kaneshie Market.
children are subjected to on the streets. This is mainly due to the fact that they never report these crimes for fear of further retributions. According to KN “at dawn people come to search your pockets, if they don’t find any money they beat you up. They stop when you cry and plead with them. But if you don’t cry they will not stop beating you” (KN).

The situation of girls in the streets is even more precarious. Apart from the general hardships of surviving on the streets, many of the girls endure the most gruesome sexual attacks on the streets. Because of the sensitive nature of their experiences, with respect to sexual abuse and rape, they do not talk about it openly. Also there is a lot of stigma amongst the children especially the girls if you were a victim of rape. A victimized girl street child is perceived by her peers as weak, and that her assault was her own doing. Abi a 15 year old girl claimed that;

Sometimes the boys strip you naked when you are sleeping and rape you. Some of the girls agree to sleep with them and others don’t, so they wait till you are fast asleep. They come between 1 and 2 a.m. to strip you naked and do whatever they want to do to you (Abi).
Abi has been in the streets for the past 1½ years, and has no immediate plans to go back home, despite the harsh realities of her daily existence on the streets. Another girl participant was 18 years old Sedi, who also had 9 months old baby girl. She was the only one who would not allow me to audio record our interview. Her reason was that, she did not want her voice to be anywhere she could not be. She was very untrusting, and had a hard time talking about her experiences. Among my participants, Sedi was the one with the longest experience on the streets. She had been on the streets for about 4 ½ years, and actually this was her second child. The first child died before the age of one. But she provided valuable insights into the difficulty of being a street child, as well as a girl. On how girls were treated at night on the streets, she claimed on the verge of tears that sometimes the boys invited girls to share a drink with them. After getting the girls intoxicated the boys will take them to an isolated place and rape them. She also mentioned that sometimes people just came and “pounced” on them while they slept.

The perspectives of the girls and boys on the issue of sexual abuse were interesting, and I want to share some of the sentiments of the participants, which also opens a
window to the grim experiences of these children in the streets. According to BJ, who had 3 years of experience on the streets of Accra, many of girls bring these problems upon themselves. He left home at the age of 12 years, and has been surviving on his own. He is well traveled, including aiding a blind man on a trip to Nigeria to beg on the streets of Lagos. He asserted that;

I suppose since you came around, you have heard people using the phrase, 'I have collected your John'?... Ok, sometimes, the girls collect money from the boys to have sex with them, they then runaway that is the girls, without performing their part of the deal. That is when they use the phrase, 'I have collected your John'. There are prostitutes there you can pay to have sex with. As for some of the girls, the guys come to ask them to be their girlfriends. In that sense you can’t harass them if you give them money and they refuse you sex (BJ).

This is not in anyway justifying the traumatic experiences of girls on the street. The atrocities against these children are not justifiable under any condition. However the contentions by the boys go to portray how girls in the streets are perceived as sexual objects. This
perception increases the vulnerability of the girls, which makes them easy targets for sexual aggression. In fact the experiences of street girls in relation to sexual abuse on the streets are not peculiar to the Ghanaian situation. For instance Kilbride, Suda, & Njeru (2000) asserted that “perhaps the most threatening to girls is a fear of rape by street boys that is frequently realized in practice” (p.123). It is also reported by Suda (1997) in a study of street children in Kenya that;

The most common forms of abuse experienced by street children during the course of their work include harassment by the police and other law enforcement agencies, rape by some night watchmen, rape by street boys, commercial sexual exploitation, lack of food……..and lack of sympathy or contempt from the public(p.231).

The insecurities experienced by the children on the streets prompt many of the children to arrange for their own protections on the streets. For the girls their best protection is to be in a relationship with a strong boy. The boys on the other hand have to bond together to avoid harassment, or sometimes pay for some older person to protect them.
According to Sedi;

If you have a boyfriend, it is much safer, because he will protect you from other boys. You sleep with him at night, and during the day, when he makes money, he gives you some. The girls who do not have boyfriends or anybody to protect them are those who get raped and beaten for sex at night. I have a boyfriend, he is the father of my child, and he gives me money everyday (Sedi).

Because the children are highly sexually active, many of the girls I came into contact with were already mothers. Of all three girls that I interviewed two of them were mothers before the age of 16. I also witnessed at CAS that many of the girls were carrying babies. For the period of my stay at CAS I observed about ten girls with babies, and all of them were either 18 years or below. The trade off for security for the girls is to be in relationships, and that unfortunately is producing a second generation of street toddlers.

The younger boys rely on the older ones for their protection on the street. Baba a 9 year old boy was protected by AB during the day. Baba was the youngest of my participants. He had been on the street for just over a
month. He ended up on the street when his mother was evicted from her rental house for delinquency in a suburb of Accra. He was sent to his father in a village in the Volta Region of Ghana. After staying for a couple of days, he ran back to Accra, only this time not to the comfort of a nesting house, but to the chaos of the street. At the time I met him, he looked unkempt with wounds all over his body. He claimed it was as a result of mosquito bites. Baba stated that;

I sleep at the Cold Store with AB, and sometimes the older boys will come and take money from us. Sometime we have to pay them before we can get a place to sleep. If you do not pay, they will take your sleeping box from you, and there will be no place to sleep.

When the older boys come we all get scared (Baba).

The children also reported how certain individuals (adults), were taking advantage of their situations. Some of these individuals collected monies from the children under the guise of providing security or providing some “services” for the children. BJ for instance referring to the activities of these adults said;

They collect $1000 from the blind persons who beg around here (where they sleep). They also collect from
the little kids…. There is this man we call Van Damm, when he comes around he collects thousand cedis from all the beggars and street kids regardless of your age and sex. Van Damme has cloths that have been sewn into tents. He ties the tents to the walls and sells the space for people who want to have sex. No one sees you when you are in the tent (BJ).

The lives of these children have exposed them to all the possible ills in the society. They talk about drug use, prostitution and pick pocketing and other activities, which borders on criminality. However, none of the children I interviewed ever owned up to any of the activities I have mentioned above. When I talked to the girls separately, they alluded to the fact that some of the boys engaged in illegal activities including male prostitution, drug use etc. I must emphasize that these were mere allegations, and all the boys that I interviewed denied ever engaging in such activities. There is however evidence from other studies that seem to confirm the allegations of drug use among street children. For example, in a study conducted by Kilbride et.el (2000), in Kenya, many of the children were abusing some form of a drug. Common among the children in Kenya was glue sniffing. In Ghana, many of the younger boys
although denied ever using drugs, they alleged that the older boys usually used drugs, and common among these children was “wee” marijuana.

The boys also intimated that many of the girls engaged in prostitution. According to BJ;

If you want to know where the girls get their money to do their hair and buy all the nice cloths, just go to Circle or the CMB\(^8\) at night, and I bet you will see many of them working as prostitutes. I have seen many of them, and they are aware I know what they do (BJ).

I must emphasize that the trading of allegations along gender lines is very common among the children I interviewed. This may be due to the general relationship between the genders. The boys normally did not play with the girls, unless they were romantically involved. In spite of this trend, the underlying difficulties characterizing the lives of these children were very evident. Many of these children engage in odd jobs to maintain themselves. For Abi, my 15 year old girl participant, making enough money to cater for her daily expenses on the street was not only physically challenging, but it also posed some health

\(^8\) Circle is a popular intersection downtown Accra. CMB is referred to the area around the Cocoa Market Board headquarters, which is in the central business district of Accra.
risks. She worked in a chop bar (a road side eating place, where local dishes are served), but she endured some hardships. She claimed that, “I work at a chop bar but the sun shines hard on your head when you go outside. I have this sickness which occurs every time I am exposed to harsh sunshine, my nose starts to bleed” (Abi).

For Michael P. a typical day involves waking up in the morning, and scrambling to find someone’s goods to carry around the market. He maintained that;

Sometimes we have to fight to get some loads to carry. The bigger boys will be pushing us off the buses that bring the goods, and sometimes the market women refuse to let us carry their loads because they claim we are too small to carry the load. On a bad day, I will make no money, and that means no food. I sometimes go to bed with no food and I cry (Michael P.)

The life stories of these children on the streets of Accra underscores an important fact, and that is the neglect of a section of population, children, who do not have the requisite capacity to function in a chaotic and adult environment. These are children, but they have already experienced some of the difficult circumstances of lives. AB is 15 years old, and has been living on the
streets of Accra for the past 6 months. As a relatively newcomer, his only social networking system on the streets are some benevolent individuals. He came to Accra after his parents divorced and no one was prepared to cater for his school or provide for his basic needs, including providing for adequate food and shelter. He joined a friend of his, who was much older and had moved to Accra. His friend paid for his lorry fare, and set him up at Circle. On a typical day

AB said;

If I don’t start early and I wait till 5.00 p.m., I will not get anything to carry because there’s no brisk business in the evening. Some customers believe that the porters can run away with their goods because it’s dark. This has happened to me before (AB).

He continued that on some days;

I had no money so I had to go to bed with an empty stomach. In the middle of the night, I had hunger pangs and I had to go to a porridge (cereal) seller to beg for some. She had mercy on me and gave me a little to eat. I then went back to sleep (AB).

AB further asserts that;
Sometimes I’m happy, sometimes I’m not. The reason why I’m not happy all the time is that around here I sleep alone so when I remember my siblings back in Juaso, I cry. I’m happy sometimes because I get to buy whatever I want (AB).

Many of these children have been deprived of their childhoods, and the skills available to them are those learned from the harsh realities of the streets. Their stories are not only compelling, but it gives them a voice, which has been buried from the major discourse of social and human development (see Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998)

Characterizations of Street Children

This segment is to delve further into the phenomenon of street children in Ghana from multiple perspectives, by examining how street children are characterized in Ghana. Two of the research questions will be answered. These are how do the various stakeholders (including officials from governmental and non government organizations, as well as a parent of a street child) characterize, and percieve street children in Ghana? And how do the children characterize themselves?

For every phenomenon, there are always some general characteristics. Street children in Ghana are characterized
by an official from the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) Ghana as;

A person below 18 years old who spends a substantial amount of their day on the street. In that whole group there are some categories. There are some who will work on the street and earn a living on the street but in evening they go back to a place they can call a home. So they have not yet lost contact with family even though the link will not be that strong. There is the other group who spends the whole time day and night on the street. So they sleep, bath, eat and earn their living on the street. That group has almost lost contact with family. There is a third group usually young children who are abandoned (DSW official).

An official from the Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC) characterizing the children posits that;

These are children who spend a considerable amount of their time on the street, usually with no responsible adult supervision, and are under the age of 18. Some of these children return home after their daily chores on the streets, and for many others the street remains their permanent home (GNCC, official).

The director of the Street Academy (SA) characterizes
these children as;

Children who have been abandoned, and have been left to fend for themselves on the streets. These children some as young as nine (9) years old have been neglected, forcing them to go on the street to find work and food. On a typical day, you will see these children roaming the street, engaging in odd jobs for their basic survival. Many of them have families, but their families do not care for their welfare including, providing them with food, clothing and shelter (SA, director).

The general notion is that street children may have been abandoned by their families. Tacon (1985), however contend that these children might have abandoned their families due to abuse and insecurities. From my interviews with the children however, it came across that they had very limited opportunities to alter their predicaments. Many of the children I came into contact with had a very good case of family abandonment or neglect.

The general characterizations of street children in Ghana are consistent with the characteristics of street children from other studies. For instance, Kilbride, Suda & Njeru, (2000), in their study of street children in Kenya, contend
that many of Kenya’s street children have a place they call home, where they return after their daily encounters with the streets. Many of the street children in Ghana also have a place to retire after their daily chores on the streets. However, there are also a large number of these children who consider the streets as their permanent home.

The Street Academy (SA) director further conceded that classifying these distressed children as street children is potentially negative for the children. He insists that;

You see it is a stigma that we place on them. The word literally means somebody who has no home and just moving around the street. But that should not be the case. We also have children of the street children who were born on the streets. (SA Director).

Despite what others think of them the street children have their own conceptualization of who they are. In seeking to find out how the street children characterize themselves the following views were obtained. According to Musah;

A street child is a person who has nobody to care for him and he is loitering around and has to struggle to fend for himself and sleeps on the street. If a child
has parents and he chooses to stay outside for his own reasons, he is not a street child (Musah).

Another child participant characterized street children as; “Children who have been neglected by their family, and have to struggle everyday to find food to eat” (Michael P.). Another one of the participant summed up street children as “those of us who have moved from home and ‘making a living’ on streets. We are our own bosses, and we don’t have to listen to anyone” (AB). KN also classified street children as;

We are hustlers. We make life for ourselves because no one really cares about us. Many of us do not know where our parents are, and our parents do not know where we are. ...children who go to the comfort of their homes are not true street children (KN).

From the characterizations of street children by the participants, it will be difficult to justify that these children are generally abandoned. I previously discussed the street children within the context of abandonment. There is a contention that street children may have been abandoned by their families. However from the classifications of street children by the participants in my study, it is apparent that the decision to leave home
was based on their own accord. Thus, an assertion can be made that these children may have abandoned their families than their families abandoning them. For instance Felsman (1981) contends that these children can adequately be classified as “abandoners rather than as “abandoned”. Aptekar (1988) further claimed in a study of street children in Colombia that;

We found considerably less rejection by the parents than commonly believed, and more rejection on the part of the children, who left home out of a mixture of adventure, good sense, opportunity, because they were angry at being mistreated or ignored (p.191).

The fact that street children ultimately abandon their families does not absolve the family institution of its basic responsibilities towards the children. Children will in most cases abandon their families for the harsh conditions of the street, if they perceive the streets to be a viable option to their present predicament. And for many of the children this assertion was a truism.

The causality of the street children phenomenon is multifaceted. From the interviews there were some reoccurring themes. Among the themes, which resonated were poverty, cultural practices, family system/parenting, and
resilience of the street children. These themes provides the framework for understanding the causal uniqueness of street children in Ghana, and also in many respects underlying some similarities with the causes of street children from other parts of the Africa and the world. These themes to a large extent are captured in the voices of my participants. The following answers the question, what factors accounted for street children in Ghana.

Theme 1: Poverty
The role of poverty as an important causal factor of the phenomenon of street children in Ghana was very well articulated by the respondents. Ghana is a developing country and also one of the poorest in world (UNDP, 2005). Thus the role played by poverty in many socially dysfunctional phenomena cannot be overemphasized. The income and development disparity between the rural poor and urban rich areas in Ghana make no secret the perception that there are greener pastures in the urban areas.

For reasons why there are many street children in the street of Accra, one official asserted that;

Usually poverty is to blame. Poverty is linked with unavailability of opportunities in areas where the children come from. Many of them come from
the hinterlands. They come from the rural areas where opportunities for the betterment of their lives are not there. Further more there is the attraction of city life. You know when they come here the life is there. But over there, there are no social amenities and therefore they are tempted to seek better life, only to come and find out that there is no work here. You see, when you are over there (rural areas) and they talk about Accra, Kumasi they look glamorous except you get there and you find out that it is not easy. So some of the children actually first set out not to come and stay but to come and do something, get something and go back. But when they come they don’t get that something and they can’t go back. First of all they don’t have the money to go back. Secondly, you can’t go back empty handed. You will feel they would laugh at you, after all you were looking for something but what have you gain? (DSW, Official)

The official from DSW further claimed that;

Yes at the end of the day it is not only due to poverty of the individuals but it is also the poverty of the rural areas. Over there in the Northern Region there is only one farming season and after the farming
season, half of the year the place is idle and people don’t have anything to do. So now there are some places where they’ve built dams for irrigation so in the dry season they cultivate rice and onions. In these areas people do not migrate to the south, so if the economy of those areas is improved it helps everybody (DSW official).

An official from GNCC, also commenting on poverty as a catalyst to the phenomenon of street children in Ghana intimated that;

Poverty plays a central role in the issue of street children in Ghana. Many of the children on the street in Accra, are here because of abject poverty from mainly the rural areas they come from. There are very limited opportunities for these children in their areas of origin, and unfortunately the urban environment does not offer them any real alternatives (GNCC, official).

The director of the SA also blames the predicaments of these children on poverty. He posited that poverty;

Has reduced the ability of the families to adequately cater for their children, and this has led to many problems we have with street children today. Families
are not able to provide for their children who are forced onto the streets to making a living not only for themselves, but also for their families. Poverty is also tearing families apart, and those affected immediately are the children who are not in a position to cater for themselves properly. The street becomes an avenue for the children to survive their economic hardships (SA, Official).

Poverty as a concomitant factor of streetism is well documented in other studies. Suda (1997) for instance maintains that “poverty is one of the principal factors associated with a child’s decision to leave home” (p.205). Aptekar (1988) also contends in a study of street children in Cali that 48% of his research participants maintained that poverty was the single most important factor that influenced their decision to come to the streets.

The wide developmental and income disparity between rural and urban areas in many African societies has been blamed on the economic restructuring policies imposed on many African countries including Ghana. As opined by Mufune (2000), Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank diminished the capacities of African states to address
social problems and inequalities. With cuts in funding for health, education and other social programs and subsidies, poverty in many African societies including Ghana has become endemic, and poor families now depend on their children to work to augment the families’ merger income. Mufune concludes that “Being on the streets is a public disclosure of destitution. It is a statement to both the public and the individual concerned that one is poor” (p.237).

The interview with a parent of a street child puts into perspective the high cost of poverty especially for the children. The parent respondent is a single mother of four (4). The eldest of her children is 16 years old, and the youngest is 9 years old. She has two boys and two girls. All of her boys are considered street children, because they spend a considerable amount of their time on the streets. They may be referred to as children on the streets.

Her children come from two different men, and both men had passed. She has been raising her children by herself with no help from any family member. About her occupation, she claimed that;
Usually I don’t gain enough profit. You buy a bucket of crabs at thirty thousand cedis (¢30,000) and you’ll make a profit of ten thousand cedis (¢10,000) (which is equivalent of $1.50) Out of this profit, I buy pepper, salt and charcoal…I also sell kenkey. Because I have had several surgical operations I have been advised not to carry load on my head. I used to go round with it (crab & kenkey) more so now I can’t carry more crab. Formerly, I could carry about seven buckets of crab for selling but now I can only carry two buckets at a go. These days, I can only sell small amounts, example when I go to sell today I don’t go the next day because I’ve been advised not to walk for long (Parent).

So how has the financial predicament of the parent affected her ability to provide for her children? Again she gives a grim picture to her poverty stricken situation, and how providing for her children has become a near impossibility. She further indicated that;

I go with my children to sell. I’ve not been able to get them anything for this Christmas so I have decided to give her a piece of cloth I have to go and sew for

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9 Fermented corn dough, boiled in corn husk. It is usually sold with fried fish and hot pepper.
a dress but there is no money in the system so it is still there. I can’t prepare food for them. I don’t have enough money to prepare food but I give them something to eat. I am trying hard, but life is just too difficult. How can a parent not be able to find food for the children? What do you think my children will think of me? My brother, I am trying, but as you can see, life has not been fair to me. Sometimes I have to borrow money just to get my children something to eat (parent).

She further contended that;

I sometimes walk for miles upon miles just to get money to buy food for me and my children from the very little money I make. Sometimes I come home very deep in the night, late hour, and very tired. Some days I come home empty handed, and I wonder what we are going to eat (parent).

Albeit children working to augment the family’s income may be deemed as a function of cultural responsibility, the dimension of poverty has severally compromised the ability of families to provide the necessary support for their younger members. Mufune (2000) makes the assertion that
"poverty has led the poor families to depend on working or self-supporting (street) youth" (p.237).

The inability of parents or caregivers to provide for the basic needs of their children is indeed a recipe for the eventual escapades of the children on the streets, to at least satisfy their basic needs. For many of the children participants, the implications of poverty transcend beyond the inability of their parents or caregivers to provide for their basic needs. Although many of the children acknowledged that they were poor, as a result of their poverty stricken families, they were also under the impression that they were not wanted by their family. In many cases, their family members did not know where the children were, or were not interested in finding out where they were. According to BJ;

Whenever I wanted or needed anything my father asked me to go and see my mother and life was tough. There was no food in the house sometimes, and my mother really did not care. I will sometimes go to my grandmother’s house, but there will be no food either. I did not have enough clothes, and my parents were not paying for me to go to school (BJ).

Other participant contended that;
No one was caring for me. My mother used to go and sell in the market, and my father was away on his farm. My parents did not pay for my school, and some days I will go the whole day with no food. I did not have enough clothing, and I had to share my room with 6 of my siblings. I did not enjoy my life, because when all the children went to school, I will still be home playing, because my school uniform was torn, and my mother said she did not have enough money to buy me another (AB).

The perception of street children of non-caring parents presents an important function of how poverty disintegrates families and disrupts relationships among members of a family.

The children that I interviewed perceived their situation on the streets as a better option than what they were used to. When I asked if any was willing to return home, almost all replied in the negative. Their contention was that life on the streets, although very hazardous, was certainly better than when they were in their respective homes. This assertion is also confirmed by a research conducted by Kombarakaran (2004) in India on street children. He concluded that “although life on the streets
presented several hardships, most children reported that they preferred to cope with them rather than live at home” (p.865). One can then argue that if the conditions of the streets are perceived by the children to be bearable than their homes, then the conditions of their homes of origin are beyond comprehension and certainly precarious.

But I was not convinced that poverty was the single most important factor, which influenced the decision of the children to dwell on the streets.

In fact one the stakeholder participants was of the opinion that poverty cannot be the single most important culprit when it came to the issue of street children in Ghana. He contended “Poverty is everywhere, many people in Ghana are poor, but not all people parents have neglected their children. The problem transcends beyond poverty” (SA, director). He further asserted that;

There is no doubt that poverty plays an important role in the lives of street children in Ghana. But at the end of it all you shouldn’t say because of poverty you would not do anything. If you don’t help yourself nobody will help you. If you help yourself people will even come to your aid (SA, Director).

The SA director further contended that;
Especially when you talk about certain areas of Accra, the education is not there, and there is very little financial security for the children in these areas. The mother is angry and the father is not doing any work. He leaves the child and the child runs away. So we have financial problems because the parents are jobless, and the parents are doing every little to improve themselves. They are also not learning any trade, instead prefer to engage in petty business, which unfortunately is unprofitable (SA director). So what other factors are pushing these children onto the streets of Accra, and in fact making the children very adamant to any suggestions of going back home to their families?

**Theme 2: Cultural Practices**

The cohesion of societies is achieved in many respects to the preservation of institutions and cultural practices, which also serves as the identity of those societies. However, when it comes to the phenomenon of street children in Ghana, many of my respondents were of the opinion that these cultural structures and institutions to a large extent have been a motivating factor for many of these children to leave their homes, and seek “refuge” on the
streets of Accra. According to the SA director, a cultural practice of outdooring of children has something to do with children born out of wedlock, who ultimately end up on the streets. He contended that;

Cultural practices also have a role to play in streetism. Let’s take outdooring or naming ceremony as an example. When they are performing it for friends some parents force their children to bring forth so that they can perform the same thing for them. Even the children themselves get interested in it and bring forth so that the same thing could be done to them. So culture has a role to play (SA, Director).

There are other cultural practices, which also push the children from their homes of origin. According to one government official;

The North (i.e. Northern Ghana) for example, early betrothals are very common. They want to give the child out in early marriage. Therefore the child would run away. There is abuse of cultural practices also. For example, most of the ‘Kayayo’ girls from the North, the Moslem tradition is that the woman must provide the basic needs for her marriage, cloth and set of cooking utensils. So the women come here
wanting to work and buy those things so that they can marry very well. They come here and can’t make it, and because of the peer pressure, some of them become pregnant, which complicates their situation, making it even more difficult to contemplate going back home. Because once you’ve been impregnated by somebody else marriage becomes an impossibility (DSW official).

Another official asserted that:

Many of these children are running away from cultural practices, which they perceive to be abusive and outmoded. For instance the practice of bragoro (puberty rights), and betrothals have been some of the practices many of these children, especially the girls are running away from. They perceive these practices as outdated, and not relevant. They have been attracted to other life styles from those returning from big cities. These alternative life styles become the pull factor, and the cultural practices become the push factor (GNCC, official).

But for one of my children participants, none attributed the reason for becoming a street child to cultural practices. This is because all but one of my respondents was from the northern part of Ghana, where many
of these traditional practices are very pervasive. Whereas the southern part of Ghana have been transformed culturally, many of the communities in the northern Ghana still maintain many of their cultural practices, including early betrothal, female circumcision, and inheritance practices. Musah, one of my children participants attributed his predicaments and his continued existence on the streets partly to the practice of inheritance in his community. He intimated that;

After my grandpa died some members of the extended family fought over his property. In our culture, the woman is not supposed to inherit property, so my mother was left with nothing. Even her place in the family house was taken from her (Musah).

Cultural practices may have lost their relevance in many of the children’s lives because they leave their homes at a young age before some of these practices manifests in their socialization process. Also many of the children participants in this study hailed from areas in Ghana that had long abolished many of the harsh traditional practices. For example many of the Akan areas of Ghana do not practice many of these customs. But a much bigger casualty for the
street children phenomenon in Ghana was attributed to dysfunctional family system.

**Theme 3 Family/Parenting**

The family in Ghanaian society has been a place for the protection and nurturing of younger members. The extended family system especially played an important role as a primary socialization agent and a comfort zone for all members of the family. In a society where children are valued, why are there many children left to endure the hardships of catering for themselves on the streets? From my interviews, I noticed a common trend, which unfortunately was very disturbing. All the parents of my children participants were divorced or separated. In many instances, the children could only speculate the whereabouts of their parents.
The diagram below illustrates this assertion.

Table 2. Street Children and Family Relationships

Of the 11 children participants in the research only two had some minimal contacts with their family. The remaining 8 had not had contact with any family from periods ranging from between 3 months to 3 years. From this trend I can assert that the family as an institution has failed its primary obligation of providing for the needs and protections of these children.
A stakeholder participant argued that;

The traditional functions of the family are fading away. In the olden days, families took very good care of their children. These days due to economic pressures on the family, many of their primary functions have ceased to exist. In traditional Ghanaian societies there was no destitution. Every child had a caretaker, but this gradual disintegration of family system has contributed to many of its younger children looking elsewhere for survival, and unfortunately many end up in the streets (SA director).

Another stakeholder participant concluded that;

The family has not been fair to these children on the streets. When two people are married and do not get a child or children, they are cursed and treated badly. So why do you bring children to the world and make them street children? What has happened to our traditional values of the family? What has happened to the custodians of our traditional values, in the communities and homes to the extent that we have rejected and neglected our children to the world? (GNCC official)
The failure of the Ghanaian family to provide and protect children has also been attributed to pressures from the economic system. In traditional Ghanaian society children were used to measure the wealth of a family. The more children one had, the more prosperous one was perceived. Many children meant a family had the manpower to farm on large tracks of land. Children provided the much needed labor for farming, and were the insurance of the parents in their old age. However, in modern times the appeal of farming has dwindled, and children no longer want to "get dirty". The other option is to enroll in school. But for some families, who are caught in the mist of this social transformation, refusal to engage in the primary occupation of the family is considered truancy. The likely consequence is for these families to neglect their children. According to one of the stakeholder participants the traditional system is at variance with the pressures of modern day societal demands. He asserted that;

The traditional family system is not meeting the needs of their children. Irresponsible parenting is forcing the children to go to the street. Every child in this world was brought forth by somebody. By no fault of these children, they fall into wrong hands that force
them onto the street. The area that we are handling is a fishing community, a man has 2,3 wives and cannot cater for the children. They don’t value the importance of education. They feel that when you are a fisherman you shouldn’t go to school, that brings all these children onto the street (SA director).

The roles of the family and the expectations of children need further interrogation. Children in traditional Ghanaian society have been perceived as an economic asset to the family. Children had a lot of reciprocal economic benefit to their caregivers. However, the traditional role of the child as an economic asset to the family is under enormous scrutiny due to modern constraints on the varied functions that children are expected to perform. Instead of children going to the farm or fishing with their parents, children in modern times are expected to be in school. This tension, while unaddressed, places a lot of strain on children and provides justification for parents to be neglectful of their basic parental obligations.

The family system and parenting as contributing factors to the phenomenon of street children in Ghana is given further insight by a parent of a street child. This
participant as I have described earlier has four children with two different men, who are both deceased. The only primary caregiver to all these children is the mother, who cannot provide for all the basic needs of her children by herself. She intimated that she would have loved to provide for all the needs of her children, but it was practically impossible. Her trade does not provide enough financial resources to fulfill her parental obligations, thus her children are put to work to augment what she can provide. Her girls go to sell with her everyday. I was curious as to why only her girls went with her to sell. At least if the boys would not go to school, going to sell with them would prevent them from hanging out on the streets. She claimed that “as for the girl, if she is here, she can go and sell to help me raise money. But this boy (referring to her son) will not do that because he finds selling iced water and kenkey embarrassing”\footnote{Iced water is cold water sold in plastic bags} This may be one of the reasons why there are more boys on the streets than girls. At least girls are considered much more helpful when it comes to helping with domestic responsibilities of their parents.

But in Ghanaian society, which in many respects could be considered very traditional and regarded as communal,
where people are supposed to lean on each other in times of difficulty, one would think that a person in her (parent participant) predicament may have some reprieve from her family or at least the family of her children's fathers. The assumption will be that the extended family support system may kick in to lend the necessary support for its struggling members. My parent participant’s ethnicity is patrilineage, meaning the family of the father’s children is supposed to play an important role in the nurturing of her children. When I asked about support from her family this is how she described her situation with respect to her family, and that of her children's fathers' family. She claimed that;

I was married to the father of my first children, but I was not married to the father of my other two children. We were about to get married when his father (grandfather of my son) killed him over a piece of land. This was the 10 years ago. Since then I have become the only parent of my children with no help from any family member (parent participant). The failure of the family system to function properly with respect to protecting its younger members has no doubt negatively impacted on children, and unfortunately the
streets are now functioning as a surrogate family for many of the children I encountered on the streets. The dysfunction of the family system, which is epitomized by parental separation and irresponsibility, has been attributed to children running away from home (D’Lima & Gosalia, 1992).

The family as a vital institution for the proper development of children is under siege. According to Mufune (2000), modernization of society has negatively affected the traditional African family system. He asserts that;

There is a general decline in the centrality of kinship as an institution of organizing social bonds and relationships.……..migration from rural to urban areas has removed people from traditional social sanctions. One result is that vertical and horizontal ties between kin are loosened as people try to divest themselves of the extended family obligations (p.239).

Caught in this social transformation quagmire are children. The family system is failing its children and the society is fundamentally inept with a practical course of action to mitigate the problem.

The dysfunctional family system and lack of proper parenting is better captured in the experiences and voices
of the children in this study. The valuable relationships these children have unfortunately are all related to their existence on the streets. But how do these children describe the relationship with their families or parents?

None of my children participants enjoyed the comfort of a stabilized family system. All of them had parents who were either divorced or separated. In Ghanaian society, custody of the children in cases of divorced is determined by the lineage of the family. If the family is patrilineal, the father takes custody of the children, while mothers are entitled to the children in cases of matrilineal families. All my children participants were from matrilineal families but one. This means all but one of my children participants were in the custody of their mothers or with their maternal families. Unlike in most advanced societies, where parental responsibilities are mandated by legal statutes, and actually enforced, the same cannot be said of Ghana. Existing laws for financial support for children of divorced parents are not enforced, leaving the children with one struggling parent. The predicaments of these children are further exacerbated by situations where one or both parents have remarried. The focus and the energies of the parents are then directed towards their new marriages
to the detriment of their children’s welfare. A stabilized family system or better parenting would have created better opportunities for these children. How has the family contributed to making some children seek refuge on the streets?

According to AB;

My mother did not have enough money to look after me and my two siblings. So sometimes I will go to my father to collect money for school and food. Anytime I went to my father, his wife will drive me away from the house, saying my father has no money for me and my siblings. I was staying with my mother and grandmother, but none of them had money to cater for our needs (AB).

He also maintained that “my family now is my friends. I have friends I walk with and play with but most of my friends here can’t offer me any help whatsoever” (AB).

Another participant did not know his father since he died when he was very young. His mother remarried, and so he was staying with the mother and the stepfather. He claimed that;

My stepfather did not care much about me and my other siblings. He provided everything for my stepsiblings,
but would not even pay my school fees. I later went to stay with my grandmother, who was weak and could not afford to cater for me and my siblings....I haven’t seen my mother in a while and she doesn’t know where I am. I like it here because by God’s grace I always get food to eat (KN).

Another participant claimed that;

My parents divorced when I was very young. I have stayed with my mother all my life, and barely remember my father....my mother is not able to cater for me and my sibling because she has been sick, and no one in my family is prepared to take us in. Here (meaning the streets) I have a lot of friends, and we all look out for each other (Abi).

The situation of Michael P is not very different from the other children. He has 12 siblings, and he knows the whereabouts of only two of them. His mother left the father with some of her children leaving the rest with their father. She left with most of the females, and Michael P got to stay with the father. According to Michael P;

My father was financially incapable of catering for us. The little money he had, he will go and get drunk every night....there were no other families members to
turn to. After a while my older brother left, and I followed. My older brother is somewhere in Accra. I haven’t seen him for about a year. My parents don’t know where I am right now. My father might think I’m with my mother, and my mother might think I’m still with my father. They don’t really care, and I am worried about them (Michael P).

The connection between dysfunctional family system and poor parenting and the children in this research is not only compelling, but very disheartening. Why have the destinies of these children been doomed by a system which was supposed to protect them? From all indications it is obvious that the extended family network is very much non existent in the realities of these children. It is very easy to assume that may be the children did not take advantage of the extended family system. But based on the responses of the children, the extended family system, which formed the backbone of our traditional system, does not really exist. Furthermore what is in existence has different priorities than providing for the needs of these children. CAS (2003) maintain that “ the traditional extended family no longer exists in many communities, and the Ghanaian society needs to start thinking about a coping
mechanism to deal with this reality” (p.20). According to one child participant (Mant), who lives and works in Accra, his parents are divorced. Between the two parents they have a total of 8 children each. He sometimes works with the system in their father’s sister’s restaurant. They are compensated with food twice a day, that is on the days that they actual work there. They are however responsible for their other needs. Mant has some relationship with the father. The father also comes in to work sometimes. On some occasions, he’s had to give some of the money he earns by doing odd jobs in the streets to the father. Mant maintained that:

With the number of children my father has, and the job he does there is no way he can cater for all of us. As for my mother she is out of the picture, I rarely see her. Sometimes after work, my father will demand money from me, when I refuse give him some money he get angry. I expect very little from my family, and I have to struggle on my own to survive (Mant).

There was however a bright side to these sad stories. One of the children participants who lived on the streets with his father had a lot of admiration for his father. Although his father was very poor and sick, and could not
afford any decent accommodation for his children, he still fulfilled his basic parental obligation of protecting his boys from the prying eyes of societal ills. Musa claimed that;

The support that my father gave me at that time was to protect me from immoral behavior and prevent me from bad friends and I think it was good. Sometimes in terms of food if we were lucky, he could get us something, but since he had not been working it was difficult for him to even buy me a pair of trousers or shorts so we used to cloth ourselves and find food on (Musa).

It is evident from the ongoing discourse that for the children in the current research the concept of family connotes an entirely different meaning. Many of the children participants were very uncomfortable talking about their families. For them their families were the numerous associates they engage with daily on the streets. I had the sense that many of the children considered their families to have betrayed them. In times of difficulties, the most trusted of units in human relations, the family was largely unsupportive. The alienation of the children from their families may be partly blamed on the children, as a parent
alluded to, but the primary responsibility of the family is not to punish its children by neglecting them.

The relationship between the children and their family in the study is at variance with what many researchers have reported. For instance Lusk (1989) asserted that 90% of the children he studied in Columbia had regular contact with their families. Similarly, Felsman (1981) claimed in his study of street children in Columbia that 61% of his sample maintained regular contacts with their families. Aptekar (1989) also asserted that only 16% of the children in his study had no contacts with their families. Majority of the children in the research stated above were children on the streets. However, as I have stated earlier, the majority of the children in my study did not have any contacts with their families. The available explanation may be that the children in the study were all children of the streets. These are children who live and work in the streets who have very minimal or no contact with any family member.

Theme 4 Resilience

In the face of insurmountable adversities, street children to a greater extent maintain a high sense of independence and resilience. They have developed elaborate networking systems, which enable them to negotiate the
terrible terrain of the streets. Those who have been on the streets much longer often provide some support for new entrants. But I must also add the older children some preyed on the younger, vulnerable and newcomers. However, when someone comes into town the very first time, the difficulties in transitioning into street life is alleviated by the support system available through the networking of those who have lived longer in the streets, whom I refer to as the “old guard”. Because newcomers are prone to initial abuse, the initial support is extremely vital for their early successes in the streets. But the very art of making a living and in fact surviving on the streets makes these young children some of the most resilient and unrelenting people in the world. According to one stakeholder participant;

These children are more intelligent and resilient than they actually appear. They brave most of the odds against them to survive on the streets. For the ordinary person, the street is a transient point, but for these children the streets are all they know. They are very brave, and we should recognize them as such (SA Director).

Another stakeholder participant claimed that;
These children are their own mothers and fathers. They have gained mastery of the streets and are able to negotiate difficulties intelligibly. They are emotionally strong, and have developed a fearless attitude on the streets. Let the children tell some of their stories. Some of these children have been as far as Libya. They want to cross the Mediterranean to Spain and that is not easy. Some of the children die during the odious journey across the dessert and some have many horror stories to tell. But they are not afraid. They are just some strong people you can ever imagine (DSW official).

Another stakeholder participant in reference to the resilience of street children in Ghana contended that;

It is very natural to feel sorry for these children. Many of them look smaller than other children their age. But do not be fooled by them. They are some of the strongest children I have ever encountered. Many of us are scared to walk on the streets at certain times of the night, but these children actual dwell and survive in the streets (GNCC official).

The tendency to feel sorry for the predicaments of the children is always present, especially at the
initial stages of interaction with them. However, when the relationship has progressed with the children over time, you begin to realize the inherent strengths of the children, and what makes them that rigid. You cannot survive the streets if you let your guard down. The strict codes of the streets mandate that every child be concerned with their own safety, and ultimate survival depends on one’s smartness. A SA official contended that;

These children have been strengthened by their difficult circumstances on the streets. They have formed their own associations, and rules of engagement. They are very smart children, and many find comfort in what we consider very difficult lives. I used to feel very sorry for them, but after a while they were actually consoling me, how about that? They understand their situation, and they have made the best out of it.

The buoyancy of the children is best epitomized in their own voices. As has been asserted by other participants, these children are in fact much smarter, and resilient that we credit them. They have developed these elaborate codes of engagement, which regulates their relationship amongst themselves and that of the streets.
These codes are enforced along the lines of length of duration on the streets. The longer time a child has been on the streets, the more privileges she/he has. For example, the best sleeping places in the streets are for much older children, and that code is strictly enforced. Also when it comes to working, which in most cases entails carrying loads from trucks arriving with goods to the market, the older children have the first choice. In fact, there are severe punishments for those who breach some of these codes or rules of engagement. Abiding by these rules and surviving requires ingenuity on the parts of the children. Michael P a child participant intimated;

The fact that I look small does not mean that anyone can take advantage of me. I do not look strong, but I am very strong. Many of the children here are scared of me. Here if you are weak, you will not get any goods to carry and that means no food. You have to force, (struggle) otherwise you will not eat (Michael P).

Another child participant contended that;

Although I have not been long on the streets, I have come to understand some of the basic rules. For instance I know that there are some places I am not
supposed to sleep because those places belong to some of the older guys. But I am not scared anymore. I am able to take care of myself, and I have been helping my brother who just came to Accra (KN).

The portrayal of resilience, intelligence and strength from the children is not only what they said, but how they acted and carried themselves. Without any adult supervision, many of these children had developed serious work ethics. They know when to wake up and comb the streets for work. For these children laziness meant hunger. They work hard for very little compensation. They understand their rules, and they work hard to ensure strict compliance. The ability of these children to function adequately in the tumultuous environment of the streets has been advanced by Aptekar (1990). He concluded in his study of street children in Columbia that “research revealed that most street children were functioning adequately, particularly given their low socioeconomic status” (p.78). This is contrary to the general perception that street children tended to be emotionally destabilized and anti-social. However, with my experience with the children they demonstrated a high level of smartness and intellectual capacity.
Perception of Street Children in Ghana

How people perceive street children tend to have an influence on how the children are treated. If the children are perceived as victims, the general public may treat them with some compassion. On the other hand, if these children are perceived as truants and criminals, the general public’s attitude toward them tend to be hostile and negative. In trying to understanding the phenomenon of street children in Ghana, I sought to understand how the general public perceived the children through the perspectives of the stakeholders, and the parent participant and how the children perceived the way the general public treated them. The results are divided into three perspectives, the perspectives of stakeholders, parent, and from the perspectives of the children. On how the general public perceived street children in Ghana, from the various perspectives mentioned above, there was a wide range of responses, some negative, and others very encouraging.

For instance, a stakeholder asserted that;

The perception is different. The perception of these children is based on individual perception. People think that these children are people of non-entity.
They are people who grow to become thieves. They are people who commit crimes in the future. So they don’t see anything good in them. They see them to be people with no hope. Some people label them as criminals, armed-robbers and a whole lot of things. You will go to the market and then you will see children packing themselves in front of somebody’s store like unwanted goods (SA director).

The SA director further conceded that;

People look at these children as second class citizens because nobody caters for them. But I don’t want it to be so. I want them to be part of whatever we are doing. They are all Ghanaians. So they should live like every Ghanaian child. They should enjoy whatever a child at Airport Residential Area\textsuperscript{11} is enjoying (SA director).

According to another stakeholder participant the perception of the Street children by the general public depends on the activities they engage in on the street. Some of the children provide valuable services to the general public, and others are just in the way of the general public. The DSW official maintained that;

\textsuperscript{11} Airport residential area is one of the most affluent suburbs in Accra
There are a lot of people who think the children are nuisance on the street, that is at the traffic lights and so on. Some people think they are just there to cause trouble. But then the ‘kayaye’\textsuperscript{12} for example, a lot of people think they are doing useful services. You go and buy your things and you get somebody to carry your things to wherever you are going. So some people think that they serve a purpose. Other people look at them as delinquent children. They think that they are bad that is why they are on the street. So the perceptions are different since these children are without supervision by any adult they are very susceptible to abuse and contempt from some members of the public (DWS official).

A stakeholder participant further maintained that;

A lot of people use them as we use taxis. Let me drop you off. They don’t care whatever happens to them. They just treat them as a cab. The other thing to add is that a lot of people especially the big women tend to exploit these children. The load that they will carry over a long distance and the amount of money

\textsuperscript{12} Female porters, who work in the markets carting goods on their heads.
that they give them, you yourself will realize its inhumane and unjust (DSW official).

Some members of the public show a lot of compassion for some of the children. The DSW official offered a personal story to support the fact that not all people treated these children with scorn. He recounted that;

There was this woman who buys her things at Makola and there was this girl who always carries these things to the car for the woman. The woman thought she was there for money so everyday she pays her off. One day she asked the girl why she was on the street and the girl told her that she had finished Senior Secondary School (SSS) but she has nobody to help her to continue her education. So the woman took her home, clothed her and is now taking care of her in school and she is doing well. So the woman even said that actually if everybody should at least cater for one person everything will be alright. The public is now getting to know that they are not bad children (DSW official).

Another stakeholder participant explained that the perception of the general public of street children in Ghana may both be positive and negative. The participant opined that;
We think traditionally the children are to support the family because the family is very poor. So sometimes the parents don’t see anything wrong with the child supporting the family by selling. So there is a positive perception and a negative perception (GNCC official).

From the responses of the stakeholders, both from government and non-government institutions, I can consistently maintain that the perception of Ghanaian public about street children is varied. Although there is no concrete statistic to indicate the proportion of the general public who perceive street children to be negative or otherwise, there seems to be a consensus that the perception of these children depends to a large extent on the services they provide to the general public at least from the perspectives of the stakeholders in the research.

Another perspective on perception of street children in Ghana was offered by a parent who had lost her child to the streets. Her perspectives are based on her experience as mother of a street child. She was unable to adequately cater for her children thus the streets became an inevitable option for her children. She perceived her own child to be truant and very disrespectful, a behavior she
claimed was acquired on the streets. The parent claimed that;

They insult elders, they are not respectful. But this boy does not insult elders (referring to her son). Many of the children on the streets bring untold hardships upon themselves. Some of them actual steal and make trouble for many of the people in the city. This is what brings the negative attitude of the public towards the children. If the children just did their work, people will be nice to them (parent).

On how she perceived her son, the parent was of the opinion that the child was troublesome, and was prone to violence, either he was perpetuating it, or it was against him. She claimed that;

I am fed up with the problems they bring home; if I don’t take care they might cause me a heart attack. Sometimes I have to go and call my younger brother to go out there and lash him and bring him home. Sometime he brings problems home. For instance the last time one of the guys stabbed him with the broken bottle, and I had to pay ¢350,000 for the bills. I wish you would take him away (parent).
The parent participant claimed that it was painful to lose a child to the streets. Apart from the possible encounters of the children on the streets, she personally had a lot of compassion for the children. She claimed that;

I feel for them, it’s a fairly frightening experience. My heart goes out for them. I’m not happy with the situation; they should really be in school so they are learning. But they are on the streets selling, cars can hit them and people passing by give most of them a hard time (parent).

This participant further claimed that being a parent of a street child is not only challenging but many people perceived her to being a failed parent. She asserted that people did not know the sacrifices parents went through in making sure that food was on the table for their children. Her inability to provide for all the needs of her children did not make her a bad parent, but there are certain circumstances, which were outside her immediate control. She claimed that many people may be tired of seeing children on the streets. She claimed that the general public;

is sick and tired of street kids. Those who live with street children must be congratulated; because you are
never at peace not knowing where your children are, and what they are doing. People should not treat them like animals because they are also human beings (parent).

Again from perspective of the parent, perception of the public of street children in Ghana varies, some negative or otherwise. There seem to be consistency from the responses of stakeholders and the parent on how the general public perceives street children in Ghana. But to get a holistic picture of the public perception of street children, the responses of the children are essential. The question is, are there some disparities between the responses from the stakeholders, the parent and the children? For some of the children the harshness of street life is compounded by the way people perceive and treat them. According to AB;

Some people think we are all thieves. Sometimes when you pass by people’s things they will be shouting thief, thief, and if you don’t take care people around will beat you up. They have the mentality that we are all thieves. When someone can not find something, he calls the police and they come and take us away, if we don’t run quickly enough. Sometimes some members of
the public will be insulting us and calling us all sorts of ugly name (AB).

Since these children do not have any responsible adults to advocate on their behalf, when they are arrested by the police even on false charges, they risk spending several months and some times years in prison. Because of their vulnerability, they become easy targets for public abuse. According to another child;

Yes, some people do not treat us well. Some think that we are thieves and vagrants. They prevent us from selling in front of their shops. They will either come with canes at night to whip us or they will pour water on us as we sleep. Ever since I came here, I have had no problems with the Police. On one occasion they came after the “wee smokers”, we told them that we were not part of them and directed them to go to the overhead bridge where they could find some. It was in the morning so they were unable to catch anybody (KN). Another child participant I interviewed contended that;

Where I was at the Ministries, people didn’t like me. They saw me as a vagrant. People who did not know me thought I was like the other street children. People
thought I was a thief. You had to go extra to prove to people that you were different (Musah).

A child participant also lamented that “Usually the abuse comes from the shop owners we sleep in front of their shops. They think we are thieves and treat us very bad” (KN).

Another child offered an interesting perspective on how the public perceived and treated street children. According to him, the way one dressed and behaved on the street determined how people treated and responded to them. The children in the study refused any labeling, which characterized them as truants or runaway children. These characterizations and stereotypes are the basis for the negative perception of these children by the public. According to Michael P. the way some children in the streets dressed distinguished those who were truants and thieves from those who are “true street children”. He claimed that “from the way he is dressed whether dirty or not distinguishes us (“true street children”) from the thieves” (Michael P.). He further posited that, “sometimes we are taken for thieves and we insult all those who refer to us as such, sometimes we even fight them” (Michael P).
The experiences of girls with respect to public perception of street children may be different from the boys. The most visible on the streets are boys. They are the beggars, street vendors, porters, and the loudest. Boys hanging out in the streets may be considered somewhat "normal". Boys are perceived to have the strength to brave the harsh conditions of the streets. But for girls to be seen on the streets hustling sparks certain strong emotions. In Ghanaian culture girls are supposed to stay home and help with the running of the home. A girl hanging out on the street is generally perceived as an untrained person or someone with questionable moral credentials. This unfortunate cultural characterization makes the lives of the girls on the streets even more precarious. Apart from dealing with the harsh realities of the streets, they also have to overcome this cultural stigma. Even from the street boys I interviewed they perceived the girls to be prostitutes, a labeling the girls themselves rejected. This characterization unfortunately also makes them vulnerable to abuse. According one child participant;

People think that all street children (girls) are prostitutes, or are truants. Some people treat us very
bad, they call us names, and we are the first to be accused when something gets stolen or missing. I have never prostituted, I work in the market to make a living, but people think that the fact that you live on the streets, you should be prostituting yourself (Abi).

Another street girl participant also expressed similar sentiments on how people perceive and treated them. She claimed that;

People always perceive us as being prostitutes. Some people will insult you, and others will advise you to go home and help your parents. Obviously many do not understand our situation, and they treat all street children as thieves and vagrants (Sedi).

The perception of the public of street children from the perspectives of the children offers some interesting dynamics. The children I interviewed claimed to be the victims of circumstances, and the negative perception of them may be a misunderstanding of the general public of their genuine and unfortunate circumstances. While the children in my research claimed that they were not engaged
in any illegal activities, they also claimed that some of the street children were to blame for their negative perception of the public. While the girls were claiming that many of the boys were drug addicts, the girls were also accused by the boys for engaging in prostitution. Although some of the children reported to have had some positive experiences from some members of the public, the general perception of street children from the perspectives of the children was generally negative.

I was thus curious to ascertain from the children why public perceived them in that negative light. Again the responses were very varied. Commenting on some reasons for this negative perception a child participant claimed that;

Sometimes it is hatred because as a rational human being, irrespective of the individual you have to interact with the person to know them before you brand classify them. Sometimes too your age becomes a definition factor for judging because a certain age group that is youngsters is seen as capable of committing certain crimes (Musah).

Another child participant claimed that;
Since some of the children steal from people, all street children have been stereotyped as being thieves and vagrants. If these children should behave nicer, maybe people will also be nice to us. But if you continue to take people’s things, and be disrespectful to people, they will always treat us bad (Bansa).

Mant was also of the opinion that “people treat street children badly because they do not care about the children. They see us as bad children who have left home and hustling people on the streets”. Another child maintained that;

Many of the children on the street engage in many bad things......when some children come to the streets they join bad company and womanize, smoke wee and drink alcohol. Some of them misbehave and are rude to people. These are some of the reasons why people do not like us (BJ).

From my interviews there was no indication of massive public disdain, which in many places results in abuse of the children from members of the public and sometimes from agents of the government. Police brutality has been well documented in Brazil, where street children have been killed in execution style (Dewees & Kless, 1995). Alexander
(1987) has also reported that street children in Guatemala are perceived as pests and delinquents and that has led to widespread public abuse and unwarranted police intimidation. Le Roux & Smith (1998c) also suggest that the public perceive street youths as an impersonal aggregate rather than individuals. This has created a profound misunderstanding of the street children.

There is however very little misunderstanding of the situation of street children in Ghana. The Ghanaian society unlike in other places tends to be more sympathetic to these children.

The public attitude may however be different when these children attain maturity, and are perceived to be capable of committing crimes. Older street children are perceived differently, and they may be the ones who attract all the negative attention from the public. Fortunately the majority of the children participants may still be enjoying the benevolence and goodwill of the public.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an insight into some of the general characteristics of street children in Ghana, through the lives and experiences of 10 street children, a
parent of a street child, and the individuals who professionally work on children related issues. The first segment of this chapter dealt with the experiences of the children, and how street children were defined in Ghana. This section provides a rare window into the lives of these children through their own words, including how they came onto the streets, their experiences of staying on the street and how people perceived them.

The second segment of this chapter was organized around reoccurring themes from the interviews. Among the themes were poverty, family, traditional systems and resilience of the children. These themes were from the perspectives of the children, the parent of a street child, and officials who work with children from both government and non-governmental sectors.

The chapter also addresses the perception of the street children in Ghana from the perspectives of the three represented groups. In conclusion, the situation of the Ghanaian street children may not be very different from other street children in other parts of the world. However, these interviews highlight a very important fact. Street children cannot be classified as an aggregate group, with
homogenous characteristics. Every child I encountered had a very unique perspective of his or her situation, and the my aim has been to project these uniqueness, and a way of dignifying and appreciating these harsh experiences, which in many cases are diluted by strict intellectual constraints.
Chapter 5 Summary, Conclusions and Suggestions

Summary

This research was an inquest into the experiences of street children in Accra Ghana. The purpose was to highlight the general characteristics of street children in Ghana, which included how the phenomenon of street children was defined, street children in Ghana, officials of government and non-government agencies working with children in Ghana, and parent of a street child. The research also focused on how the general public perceived street children in Ghana and the factors that accounted for the phenomenon of street children in Ghana.

The methodological inquiry was a phenomenological case study approach. This research approach was appropriate as I was trying to understand the complexities of the phenomenon through the experiences, perceptions and perspectives from a holistic standpoint. Based on the research questions, qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate. The primary instrument of data collection was a semi-structured interview schedule. In all, 15 people were interviewed, including 11 children, an official from the Department of Social Welfare, an official from the Ghana National Commission on Children and an official from Street...
Academy, a Non governmental agency working to improve education for street children in Ghana. Also interviewed was a parent of a street child.

The data was analyzed to answer the research question, which were:

- What are some of the experiences of street children in Ghana?
- How do the various stakeholders (governmental and non-governmental organizations, parent, and civil society) characterize street children?
- How do street children in Ghana characterize themselves?
- What factors account for street children in Ghana?
- How does the Ghanaian public perceive street children from the perspectives of the stakeholders, and the street children?

The reporting of the results was organized around three perspectives being those of the children, the parent and officials from both the government and non governmental agencies. Much of the reporting was done in the words of my respondents. This was to ensure that their voices were not
buried in the analysis, and that readers could identify with the unadulterated experiences of the respondents, especially that of the children.

Conclusions

Experiences of Street Children

Street children in Ghana have formed some complex relationships to ensure their survival on the streets. For instance, they slept in groups and the more experienced children served as resource persons for newcomers. They also sometimes paid older people to protect them from other street scavengers. The research also found abuse against street children by some of street children and urban scavengers to be wide spread. Particularly interesting was the circumstances of the street girls. While the boys protected themselves by engaging in groups, the trade off for security for the girls is to be in sexual relationships with boys who could protect them. This unfortunately is producing a second generation of street toddlers. Many of the street girls I observed at CAS were mothers, and they were staying on the streets with their babies. There were also reports of drug use among some of the children.
Characterization of Street Children by Stakeholders

Street children in Ghana were defined by the stakeholders, which included officials from both government and non-governmental agencies, as children who spend majority of their time on the streets. They are differentiated into two groups. These were children who were on the streets to engage in economic activities but returned to their respective homes after the day’s work. They were referred to as “children on the streets”. The second category was children who lived and worked on the streets. These children were referred to as “children of the streets” (Tacon, 1985).

Characterization of Street Children by the Children

Interestingly, the children in my research defined themselves as “children who lived and worked on the streets”. This was interesting because none of the many definitions of street children showed how the street children defined themselves (see Williams, 1993; Glauser, 1990;). The children maintained that street children were children who worked and made a living on streets. This means these children were very independent of any adult supervision or family support system. This highlighted a
disparity between how everyone else defined the children and how the children defined themselves.

Factors Accounting for Street Children in Ghana

For the reasons that brought children to the streets, many factors were identified. The chart below illustrates the causal factors. I have divided these causes into two categories, macro-causes, and micro-causes.

Table 3. Causes of Street Children in Ghana

- **Macro-Causes**
  - Poverty, Rural-Urban disparity, Cultural practices
  - Urbanization, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)

- **Micro-Causes**
  - Dysfunction family, Unemployment
  - Divorce/Separation of parents, Extinction of extended family
  - Low or no education of parents

Designed from Interview data (Boakye-Boaten, 2006)

The macro-causes are the underlying causes, which are experienced by the whole society. Poverty, rural-urban
disparity and cultural practices are widespread, but not all engulfed in these factors end up on the streets. On the other hand the micro-causes, which may also be classified as the immediate causes, in my view are the major catalysts that ultimately push these children onto the streets. These factors uniquely influence the decision of children to leave home for the streets. The micro-factors were the most disturbing of my findings because they pointed to endemic proportions of child neglect by the family system. The family has failed to be a safe haven for some children. Thus, poverty and dysfunctional families were some significant factors of causality of street children in Ghana.

Based on my findings I conclude that children with low social capital are more likely to end up on the streets. Social capital as already discussed in the literature review in chapter two refers to how quality and social relationships affect the transfer of resources (capital) from one generation to the other that influences opportunities in one’s life (Coleman, 1990). The primary unit through which social capital is transmitted is the family. The family can maintain a high level of social
capital through the establishment and maintenance of long lasting emotional attachment (Coleman, 1990).

It is evident from the findings of this research that the family as the basic unit of relationship building and social capital transfer is dysfunctional when it comes to the situations and life circumstances of the street children. None of the children’s parents were educated, none of these parents were in any gainful employment, all of the parents were separated or were not married, and many of the children did not have any interactions with their families. The children did not have any contacts or emotional attachment with their families, and thus no transfer of social capital. I will thus restate that children with little or no social capital are likely to become children of the streets, and this was the case of the street children in my research. How can we use the information over here to create a more interactive diagram on the causes of street children? I must however caution that not all street children become street children because of lack of social capital. Some children on the street still maintain healthy relationships with their families. However with respect to this research all my respondents were “children of the streets”.
Perception of Street Children in Ghana

A major finding in my research is the perception and treatment of street children in Ghana. I conclude that street children in Ghana are perceived as legitimate occupiers of the urban public space. They provide invaluable services to the general public, and many are shown compassion by the general public. This is in contrast to claims of negative perception and treatment of street children in other parts of the world (see, Alexander, 1987; Richter, 1988). Conspicuously absent from my interaction with the children was the notion of police brutality. None of the children reported any deliberate police activity of intimidation, which are the cases in other places in Africa (Swart, 1990; Le Roux & Smith, 1998). This assertion in no way belittles the unreported or ignored abuses that some of these children endure at the hands of other children or some unscrupulous individuals who exploit the unfortunate circumstances of these children.

Street children in Ghana may not be different from other street children in other parts of the world. They fit the general characteristics of other street children in terms of age distribution, gender disparities, general experiences of on the streets, causes of street children
etc. etc. (see Aptekar, 1989: Keen, 1990: Richter, 1988).

But street children in Ghana also project some uniqueness, and this presents a difficulty in lumping street children into an aggregate whole.

Suggestions

From my findings I have come to the realization that Ghana is at a major transition with the transformation of its indigenous institutions to modernized institutions. This transitional phase unfortunately has provided a vacuum of social responsibility and accountability, on the part of individuals, groups and communities. With respect to street children, it is an unacceptable reality, which should be the concern of all in the society, especially social advocates, and policy makers. The question is how do we alleviate the stress on these children as the society undergoes these social transformations?

I will suggest a two prong approach to this issue. First, there should be a program of action to stem the flow of children from their areas of origin, which has been identified mostly as the rural poor areas. Second, there should be a program to reintegrate children already on the streets into proper functioning citizens of the society.
These suggestions will also have some implication on policy for both government and non-government institutions. I will start with the second approach. Understanding the needs of the children is paramount to any intervention program. How do we understand a targeted population, which exists in the periphery of the society, and whose demands are also constantly undergoing tremendous transformation?

An integrated program of action from a multi-sectoral approach should be considered. Integral in this program of action should be a mechanism to identify the constantly changing demands of the children through an aggressive re-evaluation and assessment apparatus. This will not only engage the intervening agencies in accommodating such changes, but will also make the intervention programs reflexible and responsive to the real needs of the children. Similar approach has been advanced by Brink (2001), who posits that “it is advisable to adopt a multi-component rather than a uni-model approach where different issues are addressed in parallel, such as providing support to the children’s families as well as the children themselves” (p. 81).

Understanding the real needs of the children will be the biggest challenge in any intervention program. The
harsh socialization process of these children has taught them to be less trusting of institutions and systems, which to many of these children have been either unhelpful or in the most extreme have been antagonistic to their wants and aspirations. The challenging question then is how do we move from rhetorical assertions to concrete actions to ameliorate the plight of these children? Here are some few suggestions:

There should be more aggressive government involvement in addressing the problems of street children, through adequate funding, and more partnership programs with other non-government agencies already engaged in activities for street children.

Special initiatives from multiple sectors of the government machinery should allocate manpower and financial resources to devise innovative programs for children already on the streets. The Ministries of Education and Sports, Women and Children’s Affairs, Manpower, Youth and Employment should have a special working table, where the needs of the children can be addressed holistically from their respective sectorial capacities.

Although I am adamant on institutional based approaches, I will encourage any institutional framework,
to build on the strengths and skills that the children have already acquired from the streets. The government and other street children based institutions could establish more outreach centers, which should be child-driven, and a place that provides comfort and security for these children. Part of the functions of these centers should include teaching reading and writing skills, apprenticeships in the chosen professions of the children, and most importantly allowing the children the freedom they enjoy on the streets. Any traditional institutional restrictions will alienate the children from the centers, and its purpose will have been defeated.

But there is a dilemma, which needs further interrogation. Programs, which are perceived to be rewarding the children, will then become a pull factor for other children contemplating migrating to the urban centers. Since opportunities are woefully inadequate in their areas of origin, successful urban intervention programs could provide an additional incentive for more children to migrate. This then presents another unforeseen calamitous vicious cyclical trend with no conceivable abation.
Non government organizations have been spear-heading activities for street children in Accra. However most often they are limited in their functions because of the voluminous nature of street children program.

These are some suggestions, which have implications on policy.

- Non-governmental organizations working with street children should collaborate and form working committees to share vital information and resources. This will reduce duplication of services.

- Non-governmental organizations should enhance their collaboration with government agencies in formulating action plans for street children.

The other suggestion from my two-prong approach will be to stem the flow of children from the rural and poverty stricken areas to the cities. I have already concluded that as endemic as poverty may be, other factors, which I identified as micro-factors are the most catalytic bane on streetism in Ghana. The role of dysfunctional families on street children phenomenon in Ghana cannot be overemphasized. The bed rock of any society is the family institution. The concomitant effects of the dysfunctionality of such an institution thus provide an
enormous challenge to society as a whole. Where then is the solution?

- First, we should acknowledge the transformation that the family system is undergoing, and devise remedial approaches to support the ailing institution.
- Second, decentralized government institutions at the local level should conjoin with traditional institutions particularly the chieftaincy institution in dealing with irresponsible parents.

The Community Center and Development Approach

The chieftaincy institution plays a vital role in the lives of rural people in Ghana. This institution together with local administration should initiate programs for children, through the community center approach. These centers, which would serve as after school institutional facilities, could be used to identify and develop the various talents of the children in the communities.

These community resource centers could also be avenues for the training of children in employable skills, at the expense of the local governments and the communities.
These children obviously lack mentorship. Their immediate family members may have deserted them, but there is still a place to call home. These resource centers however cannot function adequately as surrogate families, inspirational adults should be at hand to motivate the children and reverse the sense of hopelessness they harbor.

What these children need is positive reinforcement at the local level, total community responsibility and traditional sanctions for parental neglect. If this occurs, the chances are that the decision to migrate will either be delayed or completely abrogated.

The premise of these suggestions is that we understand the needs and aspirations of these children. Unfortunately we do not, and this research is the beginning of a process of understanding who these children are. It is only when we have generated the ideas of who these children are will it be possible to begin to understand their needs, and thus the appropriate remedies to their issues and problems.

These suggestions should provide some framework for policy makers and social planners in finding some solutions to the problems faced by street children in Ghana, and also discourage would be street children from realizing their street ambitions.
Contribution to Literature

This study has added to an aspect of our understanding of a growing phenomenon in Ghana, street children. Street children are part of the urban landscape in many developing areas, but unfortunately very little have been researched on them in Africa relative to research on street children in Latin America (Lalor, 1999). Even more precarious is the paucity of research on street children in Ghana (Beauchemin, 1999). Thus this research adds to an understanding of a less researched group and bridges the intellectual gap on such an important social phenomenon, street children.

Suggestions for Future Research

Thus this research is the beginning of future research endeavors. This research has provided an initial basis of understanding street children in Ghana from their experiences, and how they are perceived by the general public. However, this research is only a beginning of a process in providing a holistic picture of this very completed group. Future research is thus necessary to provide more insights into the dynamics of the phenomenon. I am however glad that the basis for future research has been established. Beginning to understand street children
unfortunately does not provide solutions in itself. It becomes the starting point for further investigation. The following follow up research endeavors must be considered;

- The effects of changes in the family system on child rearing practices
- Alternative education programs for street children in Ghana
- Effects of rural poverty alleviation programs on children in rural Ghana

These among other research could provide lasting solutions to the phenomenon of street children in Ghana.
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Appendix A

Street Children Interview Protocol

This is an interview guide, and since the format of the open ended other questions may arise during the process.

Bio data

Name (optional)
Age..........................
Sex..............

Family background

1. How many siblings do you have?
2. What is position are you in relation to your siblings, 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc?
3. Did/do you leave with your family?
4. What is the composition of your family?
5. Do you have relationships with both parents?
6. What are the occupations of your parents?
7. What is the educational level of your parents?
8. Do your siblings attend schools? If not why?
9. What grade are your siblings?

Educational Background

1. Are you currently in School?
2. Have you been ever been enrolled in school?
3. What highest level of education do you have?
4. Did you/do you like school?
5. What are some of the experiences you had in school?
6. Would you want to go back to school?
7. What kind of school would you want?
8. How would you want the school to be organized?
9. Do you wish to play an active role in your education?
10. What system should be put in place to make school a fun and meaningful?
11. Have you talked to anybody about school?
12. What contributions to society do you wish to make when you grow?
13. What do you expect your family to do to make your education process a success?
14. What do you expect the government to do to make education meaningful to you?
15. What is your concept of education?

Experiences on the Street
1. How long have you been on the streets?
2. What brought you to the streets?
3. How did you come to the streets?
4. What is your typical day on the streets?
5. What are some of the difficulties you encounter on the streets?
6. What are some of the support structures you rely on in the streets?
7. How do you fend for your self?
8. How do people treat you?
9. Where do you sleep?
10. How long have been sleeping there?
11. Do you have to always fight for a sleeping place?
12. What is your relationship with other street children?
13. How many street children do you think are in Accra?
14. What is your relationship with police?
15. How does the general public treat you? Are they friendly or hostile? Why?
16. Do you receive any form of assistance from any organization in relation to education?
17. What services would you want from organizations and the government?
18. Do you have any advice for other street children?
19. How do you feel about your present conditions?
20. Would you recommend the streets for other children?

**Family System**

1. Do you see your family often?
2. Do you have a surrogate family in the streets?
3. How are you protected?
4. How cares for you when you are sick?

**Future Ambitions**

1. Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?
2. How do you wish to get there?
3. In 10 years based on what you think should be done for street children, if there are
accomplished, it the number of street children reduce?

4. Will street children really disappear?
Appendix B

Interview Protocol for Stakeholders

1. Name of Organization
2. Address
3. Telephone
4. Fax
5. Email
6. Position of the Interviewee
7. Objectives/aims of the organization
8. Do you have an estimation of the number of street children in Accra?
9. What relationship does your organization have with street children?
10. How do you characterize the street children in Ghana?
11. What are the causalities of street children?
12. What are some of the public perception about street children?
13. Why does the public perceive the children the way they do?
14. To what extent is the government concerned about the street children phenomenon?
15. What are some of the policies that deal directly with street children?
16. Should we be concerned with the street children phenomenon?
17. Do you think there is a need to educate street children?
18. What education programs should be considered for street children?
19. What role should government and other stakeholders play in finding workable education programs for street children?
20. Should the street children be included in the policy issues concerning them?
21. How can the problem of street children be brought on the priority list of policy makers?
22. In your estimation, can the number of street children ever be reduced?
23. Any additional comments?
Appendix C

Parents of Street Children Interview Protocol

1. Name (optional) ...........................................
2. Are you married?
3. How long have you been married?
4. Have you had any education?
5. Which level of education did you reach?
6. What is your occupation?
7. How long you been doing your present job?
8. Do you earn enough from your job?
9. Do you have any other sources of finance?
10. Are you able to provide for the needs of your children?
11. How many children do you have?
12. What are their ages?
13. What is your relationship with your children?
14. Have both parents being in their lives?
15. Are your children terrified of you?
16. Do your children listen to your advice?
17. How do you perceive childhood?
18. What does it mean to be child?
19. Has that meaning changed from when you were growing up?
20. When did your child start his/her street life?
21. What was reason for him/her to go to the streets?
22. Does your child contribute to the finances of this house?
23. How often do you see your child/children?
24. Are you aware of the conditions of your child/children in the streets?
25. Did you encourage your child/children to go to the streets?
26. Are your children in school?
27. Do you know why your child/children left school?
28. What are their grades 1, 2 3 etc
29. Do they see school meaningful?
30. What kind of school do you wish for your child/children?
31. What do you think is the role of the government in catering for the educational needs of your child/children?
32. Do you think education is important?
33. Would you encourage your child/children to attend any educational programs?
34. What education program do you think should be designed for your child/children?
35. What do you think can be done to stop children from going into the streets?
36. Any other comments?
Appendix D

Volunteer Recruitment Consent Form

Dear Study Participant,

My name is Agya Boakye-Boaten a doctoral student in Cultural Studies in Education, Ohio University. I am currently working on my doctorate in education, and my study is on street children in Ghana. The topic of my research is An examination of the phenomenon of street children in selected communities in Accra (Ghana)

My study is a qualitative study which seeks to understand the phenomenon of street children in Ghana, and how the phenomenon is conceptualized by the children, parents, and other stakeholders. This study is significant given that very little has been researched on the educational needs of street children in Ghana.

The study will involve interviewing street children with the consent of their caretaker(s). In this case children from the Street Academy will be use in the study. I will also interview some parents of street children and some government and Non-governmental agencies.
If you consent to this request I will interview you at a time and place of your convenience, and the interview will be recorded with an audio tape recorder for the purposes of analysis.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at agya_boaten@yahoo.com, or my Advisor, Dr. Francis Godwyll at godwyll@ohio.edu.

Yours truly,

..........................................

Agya Boakye-Boaten

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I understand that any information obtained from me for this research will be kept confidential. To further ensure privacy, I have the option of using a pseudonym. I agree that all known risk to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I understand that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

Printed name _________________________

Signature _________________________

Date __________