

**SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OF STREET GIRLS IN NAIROBI**

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ABSTRACT

In the last few years, there has been a continued increase in the number of street children especially in most urban areas in Kenya. This occurs despite the most recent government efforts to rehabilitate them. There has, however, been no specific study targeting street girls. This study examined the Nairobi street girls' survival strategies and how these impact on their reproductive health. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the nature of the survival strategies, that is, sexual activities, begging and how the street girls organize themselves in order to enhance their survival; and the impact of these survival strategies on the street girls' reproductive health.

The study utilized mainly qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with a purposively selected sample of 50 street girls. Sources of supplementary data included four Focus Group Discussions with the street girls, 12 key informant interviews, and observations. Basic quantitative data on the street girl's socio-demographic background was gathered. Sociological theories (structural functionalism and vicious circle theory of poverty) and concepts were used in making sense of the responses.

The findings showed that sex, begging, and social groupings are important survival strategies for the street girls. Street girls organize themselves into groups that enhance survival in the streets. The groups are hierarchically

structured for the purposes of; acquisition and sharing of food; instilling discipline among the members; providing security especially at night to guard against sexual exploitation and harassment from street boys and; socializing new members.

These strategies, especially sex, have adverse implications for the reproductive health of the street girls. Girls get infected with sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. This may result in death from opportunistic infections. Abortions, as a result of unwanted pregnancies, are common among the street girls and lead to other infections or death. Proceeds from begging are not only used to buy food, clothes and for medical care but also to purchase glue and other drugs which only serve to increase vulnerability to sexual advances and exploitation which further compound their reproductive health problems.

The study, therefore, recommends that the government should develop adequate sex education programmes, including sexual reproductive health issues for the street girls, as long as they are in the streets. This should encompass provision of reproductive health services and affordable, acceptable and accessible health care facilities to the street girls. The government should also develop a legal framework that recognizes the street

girls' rights and obligations so as to address issues of harassment. Finally, families need to be economically empowered and core family values strengthened to curb the flow of girls into the streets.