Although living on the street is an accepted way for Kenyan boys to cope with family poverty, girls are expected to remain at home. Thus girls' presence on the street is more likely to reflect family breakdown and be associated with negative developmental and mental health outcomes.

Street Children in Nairobi: Gender Differences in Mental Health

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Two common hypotheses have been advanced about the origins of street children: that modernization leads to a breakdown of families and that street children come from aberrant families who abandon, abuse, or neglect their children. After being accepted in Latin America, these hypotheses were also accepted in Kenya (Dallape, 1987-1 Kariuki, 1989; Kilbride and Kilbride, 1990-1 Onyango, Orwa, Ayako, Ojwang, and Kariuki, 1991; Wainaina, 1981). Despite the apparent common sense of these explanations, however, it may well be that only a small percentage of street children come from dysfunctional families. We think this is particularly true if street boys are considered separately from street girls.

In Latin America, particularly Colombia and Brazil, street children have been the focus of research for more than two decades. Most early studies referred to "street children" rather than "street boys" and "street girls." As a result, the differences between the genders were minimized, although there were some notable exceptions (Campos and others, 1994; Raffaelli and others, 1993; Rizzini and Lusk, 1995). The lack of a differential research focus on street boys and street girls is particularly salient in Kenya because girls are more likely to be abandoned and abused than boys (Kabeberi, 1990; Korbin, 1981). Thus if being a street child is the result of neglect or abuse, we would expect a high proportion of girls to be on the streets. As is true in almost all of the underdeveloped countries, however, in Kenya male street children greatly outnumber female street children.

We hypothesized that most Kenyan street boys are taught by their impoverished head-of-household mothers to cope with a very limited economic environment by becoming independent at a far earlier age than the dominant society deems appropriate (Aptekar, Cathey, Ciano, and Giardino, 1995; Aptekar and Stocklin, 1996). We suspected that an alternate situation exists for street girls. Generally, Kenyan mothers teach girls to cope with the difficulties of poverty by staying at home. Thus if poor girls become street girls, we also hypothesized that, because their presence on the street stems from a breakdown in the family process, they would have more developmental and psychological problems than street boys.

If these hypotheses can be confirmed, the notion that all street children are the products of family dysfunction could be laid aside and explanations of their situation made more gender-specific. Considering that in Kenya nine out of ten street children are male (Onyango, Suda, and Orwa, 1991) and that similar findings come from other places in the developing world (Agnelli, 1986; Aptekar,

1994), these results would lead to a major change not only in understanding the origins of street children but also in perceptions of their psychological functioning. In this chapter, we describe a project funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation to examine how family dynamics relate to the origins of street children, with particular attention given to gender differences.

The Kenyan Context

Kenya, located on the equator in East Africa, offered ample opportunities to pursue our research question. Kenya's population is composed of Bantu, Nilotic, and Islamic groups that differ considerably in family structure and child-rearing practices (Hakansson, 1994). For example, among some traditional Bantu groups, a divorced woman with children can expect support from her natal family, whereas among some Nilotic groups, such a woman would be forced to fend for herself. There is cross-cultural evidence that child abuse is high in societies where women's opportunities for financial and emotional independence are limited (Korbin, 1981).

If family structures deteriorate due to modernizing pressures, Kenya can also yield information from comparisons of street children from families with varying degrees of modernization. Research indicates that the Kenyan families from which street children emerge are overwhelmingly headed by women (Clark, 1984; Kayongo-Male and Onyango, 1991), nearly 85 percent of whom are unmarried (Onyango, Suda, and Orwa, 1991 - Wainaina, 198 1). We worked in two of Nairobi's major slums, Kibera and Maihare, to control for the effects of poverty on child rearing while examining gender differences among families with different degrees of traditional culture. We were able to find more traditional cultural practices in Kibera than in Mathare. For example, residents in Kibera were more likely to have extended families involved in child rearing, to have gone through initiation ceremonies, and to identify themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic village in Kibera. In contrast, the Mathare slum was less traditional. Checking the statistics in Murayas 1993 study of street girls, we found that only 2 percent came from traditional Kibera but more than half came from Mathare. Thus it appeared that modernization was a predicting factor for street girls.

In general, we observed that most Kenyans rarely engaged street children of either gender beyond brief, uncomfortable interactions. From these few encounters and from information received from the sensational stories and images found in the media, we concluded that middle-class Kenyans believe that the problem of street children is epidemic, which has led to considerable inaccuracies about their numbers. For example, in July 1994, the Daily Nation reported that there were half a million youth living on Kenyan streets, three hundred thousand of them in Nairobi ("We Will Care for Nairobi's Children"). However, according to an article appearing in the same newspaper two weeks later, the number of street children in Nairobi was thirty thousand ("City Street Children Now 30,000"). In 1991, Undugu, the largest and most experienced group working with street children in Kenya, estimated five to ten thousand street children in Nairobi (Undugu Society of Kenya, 1990-1991). These inconsistencies are reflected by the general public. When we organized focus groups to ascertain the public's opinion of street children, estimates of their number in Nairobi ranged from a thousand to one hundred thousand. When asked to estimate the number of street youth in Kenya, answers ranged from five thousand to a million and a half.

Professional publications present Kenyan street children as a unified, undifferentiated whole, with information broken down by neither gender nor family structure. These publications do, however, depict

the children's poverty (Munyakho, 1992). Onyango, Suda, and Orwa (1991) found that 90 percent of street children in Nairobi went to school without anything to eat, 85 percent ate only one meal per day, and fewer than 10 percent of their parents earned more than the equivalent of $20 per month. Suda (1993) found that 75 percent of street children lived in a one-room house with no running water or indoor plumbing. We assumed that poverty was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the origins of Kenyan street children of both genders. We concluded that it is the difference in how families help their male and female children cope with poverty that explains the psychosocial functioning of street children, and this process appears to be gender-specific.

The Well-Being of Street Children

To get a clearer picture of gender differences in the functioning of street children, we used two methods of data collection: traditional psychological measures and ethnography Participants in the psychological study were sampled from five programs that served street and working children. The children had different degrees of street experience, ranging from living with neither supervision from parents nor assistance from helping agencies to working on the streets but returning home to families at the end of each working day. Boys were randomly selected from client lists, but it was impossible to get an equal number of randomly selected street girls because there were so few street girls available, so we chose them non-randomly (as they were made known to us by agencies, researchers, and so on), which tempers the robustness of our conclusions. The sixty-one street children (forty-two male, nineteen female) in the study ranged in age from eight to seventeen *(M* = 12.70 years, SD = 2.17). Each child was administered three psychological tests. The Bender-Gestalt (BG) was used to assess neurological functioning. The Draw A Person (DAP) test was used to measure the child's overall emotional well-being to give an idea of the degree of abuse or neglect they might have experienced. Finally, the Raven's Progressive Matrices was used for intellectual assessment. These tests were chosen because they had been successfully used before in cross-cultural contexts, including in Kenya with children of similar ages, as well as with street children in other cultures (Aptekar, 1988, 1994). The tests were translated into Kiswahili and then back translated into English to verify the accuracy of the translation. All but four children were given the tests in Kiswahili. The tests were scored by Kenyans and Americans who did not have an interest in the outcomes of the study or knowledge about the hypotheses. For more information on the testing, see Aptekar, Cathey Ciano, and Giardinc, (1995).

An analysis of variance was performed on each of the measures using gender as the subject variable and controlling for age. Street boys performed significantly better than street girls on the Draw A Person (DAP), Man test, $F(1,45) = 4.13$, $p < .05$. The mean score on the DAP, Man test for street boys was 86.03 (SD = 14.85) versus 78.31 (SD = 11.57) for street girls. Boys and girls did not differ significantly in intellectual functioning (street boys' score on the Raven's- *M* = 29.70, SD = 15.87; street girls' score on the Ravens: *M* = 24.79, SD = 4.59), on one test of emotional well-being (street boys' score on the DAP, Woman: *M* = 84.33, SD = 18.11 -1 street girls' score on the DAP Woman: *M* = 80.43, SD = 11. 11), or on neurological functioning (street boys' score on the BG: *M* = 49.97, SD = 32.38-1 street girls' score on the BG: M = 69.82, SD = 32.92), all $P > .05$. Thus the hypothesis that street girls would exhibit more psychological maladjustment than boys was only partly supported. Although gender differences on most of these measures were not significant, boys scored in the direction indicating superior functioning on all measures, thus suggesting that further study of these trends is warranted with larger sample sizes.

Ethnographic Findings

Because of various problems inherent in quantitative testing of street children (see Chapter Five), we also collected ethnographic data. These data were collected by representatives of a variety of disciplines (psychology, anthropology, sociology), ethnic groups (Gusii, Luo, Luhyia, Kamba, Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Meru, Taita), and occupations (an attorney, demographers, a physician, several social scientists, and a group of university students). We also included both current and former street children as researchers. We did this because in ethnography, as in beauty, much of what is seen is in the eye of the beholder.

The ethnographers worked in pairs. For example, one person would ask the child's age, while the other would make an independent estimate of the child's age. Similar procedures were used for comparing the children's stated tribal affiliation with physical characteristics and language skills. The degree of discrepancy noted gave us some idea about the validity of information the children were supplying, and by using this procedure over time, we had some notion of the reliability of the data being collected. We met with the ethnographic data collectors nearly every day to check for problems.

Ethnographers obtained their information from random time samplings, including collecting data during the day and night, during the week and weekends, and in all kinds of weather. We did this to obtain a representative sample of the street children's daily lives. Ethnographic data were also collected during several events and situations, including functions sponsored both for and by street children, when the children were in contact with the police, when the children made a public march en masse to protest the killing of one of their colleagues by a police reservist, and at meetings where the children were asked to talk to representatives from the governmental and non-governmental programs working with them. These observations provided information not only about street children but also about the publics response to the children.

Before discussing the ethnographic findings, we will present one case study to illustrate the family dynamics and processes. We met Pleasant, the mother of a street child in our study, when she was twenty-eight years of age. By understanding how Pleasant functioned as the head of her impoverished household and coped with both poverty and unstable romantic relationships, it became possible to begin to contextualize the mental health of street children.

At the time of the interview, Pleasant had been married for five years by common law to a night watchman. They had four children (three boys and a girl), whom they supported together until about two years earlier, when her husband began to drift away from the family This did not come as a surprise to Pleasant: "This is what most men do," she said simply By the time the husband left home, Pleasant had developed strong ties to other women in her neighborhood who had also been abandoned by their husbands. According to Pleasant, "This is what women do." These women helped each other when necessary, including obtaining food and gaining access to medical care.

By the time Pleasant's oldest son, Mbisa, had his sixth birthday, he was accustomed to playing with older boys in the neighborhood streets. He had plenty of time to practice taking care of himself because his mother rarely supervised his whereabouts. After his father left (and the household income dropped), Mbisa began to drift further from home and go into other neighborhoods to park cars, clean windows, and find other sources of income for his family Pleasant worked off and on as a domestic servant and

showed her daughter, Dominion, how to take care of household chores. By the time Dominion was seven years of age, she would fetch water, make fires, and cook most meals.

While Pleasant and Mbisa both earned income, there was enough money to pay, at least on occasion, school fees for the two younger boys. When Dmisa, a man Pleasant knew from her upcountry community, moved in with Pleasant, their combined incomes not only kept the two younger boys in school for longer periods of time but also allowed Mbisa to return to school.

Pleasant knew the ups and downs of a woman's economic and romantic situation. The fact that her boyfriend would move out (or that she would kick him out) was as expected as the demise in the relationship between herself and her common law husband had been. She knew what the economic implications of these changes would be. Without additional family income, the two younger boys would have to leave school and go work on the streets like Mbisa. However, only complete financial destitution or the utter breakdown of her mental health would result in sending Dominion to the streets. (Some women did have daughters working in the streets, but they would most likely be supervised by an older child, and the mother would make every effort to see that her daughter was not abused.)

Neither Pleasant nor the other women in our study believed they were living in "broken" homes. Many of these women believed they were better off without husbands whom, they reported, were "too expensive to keep in drink, let alone food and clothes." They told us that even if their "husbands" wanted to work, they were unable to find employment. In part this was because of the increasing opportunities in the informal sectors for women and decreasing opportunities in the formal sectors for men. The diary of Maria de Jesus (1962) gives a gripping literary description of how one poor Brazilian woman in a similar situation learned that having men in her house was just too emotionally and economically costly. Peatrie (1968) provides a more scientific account of the same point of view in Venezuela. Similar findings come from a study of family life among the poor in Nairobi, where "40 percent of the mothers ... felt that marriage spoils a relationship and gives the man too much power and control over the woman" (Suda, 1993, p. 113).

Similar to their mothers, the children in the houses we visited did not view themselves as abandoned when their fathers left, because they had grown up to expect either polygamy or serial partnerships between adult men and women. In addition, we found that most of the children in our study had not experienced 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 short periods of time, some of them more benign than others.

More than three-quarters of the families in our study began with a man and a woman who were not legally married, had children, and later separated. Subsequently, the man and woman formed unions with other partners. As a result, the children eventually belonged to three families: their biological families, their mothers' remarried families (usually common law marriage), and their fathers' remarried families (also common law). In fact, the children in one household might not even come from the same community Other Kenyan studies point to the same type of family structure (Aptekar, Cathey, Ciano, and Giardino, 1995-1 Clark, 1984; Njeru, 1994). It has been speculated that this new modern family, unlike the extended traditional family, will not be bound by the sense of common community associated with traditional African kin (Erny, 1981).

There are interpersonal and psychological problems associated with this new family structure that relate to the origins of street children. First, sibling relationships in this type of family become very complex. Although it is less recognized as a cause of the children's move to the streets than the alleged abusive stepfather or absent father, sibling rivalry may account for more children leaving their homes than is commonly thought. We found that this information was obscured in studies that asked children only if family problems caused them to leave home. Children did not understand that "family problems" included problems with siblings-, if they were not fighting with their parents, they did not report family problems in their responses. However, when we talked in depth with the children, we discovered that many left home because they were having trouble with their half-brothers or half-sisters.

Another problem is that, because of poverty, children are often forced to sleep in the same bed as their mother and siblings (Onyango and others, 1991) and in the same room as their mothers' partners. For example, the 1990-1991 Undugu report stated that 80 percent of the street girls came from homes with only a single room. A major reason we found that girls left home was because they could no longer sleep without the fear of being violated by a non-related man living in the house. According to Onyango, Suda, and Orwa (1991), more than 80 percent of the street girls in Nairobi have been sexually abused. The boys in our study, for their part, believed themselves to be too old to sleep in the same bed with their mothers. They had outgrown what they considered to be childlike behavior. No wonder, since they had plenty of time on the streets, learning the ropes of a wide variety of environments, as well as shouldering the responsibility for earning some income.

Boys' Adaptation to the Street

During our study of street children, we were impressed particularly by the resourcefulness and loyalty of street boys. We found that street boys rarely began street life before they were five years old, and many were in full control of their lives by ten or twelve. Even though independent and occupied by street life, the boys maintained contact with their families. They also earned sufficient money on the streets to share some of it with their families, developed many friendships, found programs available to serve them, and in many other ways acted like adults. Other aspects of the boys' coping strategies also illustrated their ability to function rationally For example, the boys were able to maneuver the legal system. Each time they were arrested, they gave authorities a different name, which meant that with each offense they were given the light sentences afforded first offenders. The boys also took advantage of their friendships with totes, young men who escort passengers into matatus (van like public transportation buses) and collect their money, and drivers of the matatus, who helped them travel free on public transportation. Indeed, when compared to other poor boys, street boys worked and played in a far larger geographical area (Suda, 1994). In this expanded geographical terrain, the boys were capable of making the many entrepreneurial deals (for example, finding things cheap in one place and selling them dearer in another) that comprised their daily survival, and this took considerable cognitive skills. The street boys were also aware of the importance of making peace with social workers so that their medical needs could be met when they were ill or injured.

Girls' Adaptation to the Street

Largely as we characterize our sample of street boys as resourceful, we characterize our sample of street girls as victims of society In contrast to boys, the girls we studied began street life much later, usually not before they were ten years of age. As girls entered puberty, they were perceived (and

evaluated) in sexual terms. if they were not considered attractive by men, they were shunned. Thus girls were reduced to two options, either being rejected by other street children or forced into the role of prostitute. In either case, they were perceived as unworthy of care by street boys and middle-class Kenyans.

We present the following story to illustrate the reason we characterize street girls as victims. One evening a female ethnographer and the first author stopped to talk to several street boys who were living at the end of a deserted alley near an open sewer just outside the city center. They lived in two shacks they had constructed from rubble. To enter we had to bend low to pass through the doorway To our surprise, we found that two of the occupants were female. Jocylyn, who appeared to have just reached puberty, lay covered in rags, a jar of inhalant in her hand. Through glazed eyes, she barely greeted us. We inferred that she didn't need our attention because she was being "protected" by several of the older street boys. The next day, we returned to the site, and thanks to the skill of the female ethnographer (and promises of financial assistance), we were able to take her to a center that serves street girls where she had been treated well before. Presumably because she was cooperating with us and violating the behavioral expectations put on street girls by street boys, upon arrival at the center, none of her peers, some of whom she knew, greeted her.

Over the next several days, we were able to get some idea of Jocylyn's background. Jocylyn had been raised in Mathare by her mother and had three older brothers. When sales of her mother's illegal beer were good, Jocylyn's brothers went to school while Jocylyn stayed at home to help out with chores and business. Because her mother was not always present, she was abused several times by men who came in to buy beer. Her mother, Jocylyn said, "never helped me." Over time, she began to make friends with older boys, one of whom she liked enough to accept his invitation to live with him in the alley Before long, she was in a similar position as she had been at home. Because many of the boys found her attractive, they paid her friend to enjoy her company With nowhere to turn, she tried to find refuge in inhalants.

We tried to bring Jocylyn's mother in to help with the situation but could not locate her. We were told that she had been caught by the police and was in prison. We were eventually able to find her, but Jocylyn had returned to the streets by then. Our forays into the alley to find her were met with increasing hostility; once she threw stones at us. The next time we looked for her, we could not gain entry and we never saw her again.

The path that Jocylyn appeared to be traveling was a common one for street girls. For example, by the time they became young adults, the girls studied by Muraya (1993) and Suda (1994) were following in their mothers' footsteps, having children, often many and by different men. As a rule, the men did not regard them as legitimate wives and therefore deemed the women and children unworthy of continued financial support. Other Kenyan studies corroborate this finding (Clark, 1984; Kilbride and Kilbride, 1990-, Nelson, 1978-1979;Suda,1994).

Our ethnographic data indicated that boys coped with the pressures of street life by congregating in groups with other male street children. The leaders of these groups commonly took on several street girls as "wives." Each boy saw that his "wives" were not bothered by other boys, from inside or outside the group, and that the girls got enough to eat. In return, the boys received the sexual privileges of husbands. Although some of the girls on the streets exchanged sex for money on a limited basis, none of

the girls in Murayas study (1993), the most complete study of Kenyan street girls, supported herself solely by prostitution. Similarly, we found that the "husbands" were content to let their "wives" live with the dual roles of wife and prostitute. Whatever else the street girls were learning in these male groups, they were learning the low status of women, the same status they witnessed as children in the homes of their mothers.

It would have seemed just as developmentally appropriate for the girls to be deeply committed to same-sex friendships in groups as the boys were (see Aptekar, 1988, 1989, on the psychological value of prepubescent street children of both sexes to play with same-gender friends). However, neither we nor Muraya (1993) found a strong unisex group structure among the girls. Many girls seemed to cope only as appendages to boys, even though the boys did not provide the support they needed. Indeed, the very liberty that the boys allowed the girls in their dual roles as "wives" and as sources of income via sexual favors illustrated the lack of care they gave them. Yet the girls accepted this, evidently feeling unable to conceive an alternative possibility

If, as we assume, boys are expected to bring income into the house, and thus go to the streets to do so, while girls are expected to stay at home and help out with household chores, street boys and street girls will relate to their families of origin differently Indeed, we found that almost all the street boys in our study remained connected to their mothers-, in fact, the boys often contributed part of their income to the parent. (The same is true of street children in Latin America; see Aptekar, 1988, 1992; Ennew, 1994; Lusk, 1992.) One of the for America, mer street boys working on the project, for example, routinely took a three-hour bus trip to give his mother half of what he had earned during the week. This was common knowledge among his peers, and he was given high status for his behavior. In contrast, the girls were not connected to their families of origin. For example, Muraya (1993) found that two-thirds of Nairobi's street girls severed family ties completely. We also found that street boys were eager to make friends with outsiders and establish close sibling-type relationships with other boys. In contrast, street girls remained distant, even after considerable time spent with Kenyan women experienced in working with street girls (including the women working in our study). As mentioned earlier, street girls did not form strong friendships with other girls.

Our ethnographic findings confirmed our hypotheses. We found that many Kenyan girls are raised in female-centered homes, and if they end up on the streets, it is often because they were abused or had conflicts at home. On the streets, the coping strategies of their mothers failed to protect them. Whereas boys are taught by their mothers from an early age to survive on the streets and rummage to supplement the family income, girls do not get such training, which contributes to their vulnerability in this harsh context. Partly as a result of this situation, our findings suggest that girls may suffer from more mental health problems than street boys.

Conclusions

Street children generally come from homes headed by single mothers. These women have developed a coping strategy that teaches their male children to develop independence at a far faster rate than is assumed to be healthy by middle-class norms. The public regards the children as out of control and in need of help. These views are reinforced and encouraged by the press and by the under funded programs that must demonstrate to donors that the problem is endemic.

Despite the fact that street children are often referred to generically, the differences between Kenyan street boys and street girls are considerable. The results of the psychological study and the ethnographic data, taken together, suggest that girls on the streets show more evidence of developmental problems and psychological disturbance than boys. Boys were found to be significantly better adjusted than girls on a measure of overall emotional well-being. Because girls are trained to stay at home and learn from their mothers how to become women, girls on the streets represent a broken path of development. They are more likely to be on the streets because they have fled from homes in which they have not been protected. Conversely, boys are more likely to leave home because they have been taught, by economic necessity, to leave. These gender differences suggest a need to rethink how street children are viewed and dealt with.

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