A LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG STREET CHILDREN: APPROACHES THAT CAN BE ADOPTED IN SIERRA LEONE

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Abstract. This study reviews existing literature regarding intervention strategies for addressing substance abuse among street children and explores how Sierra Leone may be able to adopt these strategies. Given the increasing concern and limited data about this issue in Sierra Leone, this review provides insights that can strengthen governmental and non-governmental interventions focused on prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration. In total, 39 articles were retrieved from PubMed, Google Scholar and the JSTOR database were analysed, using a literature review method. The results highlight the importance of a motivational approach that includes the voices of street children as well as collaboration among social workers, policymakers, healthcare professionals, educators, families and

community members. Addressing systemic challenges through integrated policy reforms is crucial for the sustainable protection and support of street children. The study concludes that a well-coordinated, multi-sectoral approach, combined with policy reforms, is essential for creating holistic interventions and for practitioners to build rapport, support therapy, and advocate for effective policies and child protection laws targeting the needs of street children.

Keywords: substance abuse, street children, Sierra Leone, intervention strategies.

Introduction

Substance abuse is seen as both a social and health problem, with many profound implications for the physical, intellectual, social and psychological development of its victims, especially children[1]. Promoting children's welfare has been a trending debate among many countries and international organisations. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) specifies the responsibilities of governments to ensure the protection of children from psychological or physical abuse and the social integration of children who are suffering from any form of abuse, neglect or exploitation[2]. The efforts of a government can be strengthened, especially if appropriate data are available to inform responses to these problems, such as the major problem of substance abuse among street children.

Substance abuse is no longer just found in certain parts of society; it has exploded into the open streets, reaching nearly every corner of civilisation. The greatest concern, particularly in sub- Saharan Africa, is the scarcity of information available to assess the physical and mental consequences that street children

1 Bah Yahya, "Drug Abuse among Street Children", *Journal of Clinical Research In HIV AIDS And Prevention* 3 (11/28 2018): 12-45. https://doi.org/10.14302/issn.2324-7339.jcrhap-18-2291.

2 United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child.* Vol. 1577. United Nations Treaty Series, 1989. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

may face due to their misuse of multiple substances[3]. Some countries, such as India, have integrated psychosocial and community-based intervention models for responding to street children who use inhalant drugs. South Africa also uses a community-based approach.

The phenomenon of street children in Sierra Leone, West Africa, has been influenced by several factors. The country's economic growth has remained volatile over the past four decades due to recurrent domestic and external shocks, including a decade-long civil war, the Ebola pandemic, the sharp decline in iron prices in 2014-15, and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020[4]. These factors have contributed to a large population of children both on and off the street. In connection with this, in 2024, the Consortium of Street Children project in Sierra Leone described the situation of street children in the country as having been caused by the legacy of poverty and the destruction from the civil war that the country faced, resulting in a large population of street children[5].

In addition to other problems, street children often battle with psychoactive substance misuse. The age of initiation was between 10 and 15 years for Sierra Leone Street, who commonly use drugs such as alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and tramadol, with a higher prevalence reported among street children[6].

Of the few limited interventions that have been carried out, most have been performed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including local and international entities such as the Street Child Organization of Sierra Leone and Save the Children. The only census of street children in Sierra Leone was conducted by the Street Child Organisation of Sierra Leone in 2011; since then, no other census

3 Tafadzwa Ngonidzashe Jakaza and Chamunogwa Nyoni "Emerging Dynamics of Substance Abuse among Street Children in Zimbabwe: A Case of Harare Central Business District", *African Journal of Social Work* 8, no. 2 (2018).

4 "Sierra Leone - Country Diagnostic Note - February 2024", *African Development Bank Group* (2024).

5 "Street children in Sierra Leone. Consortium for Street Children", *Consortium for Street Children* (2024). https://www.streetchildren.org/our-work/projects/street-children-in-sierra-leone

6 "The dangers street children face in Sierra Leone and possible ways they can be resolved", *Develop Africa,* (2024). https://www.developafrica.org/dangers-street-children-face-sierra-leone-and-possible-ways-can-be-resolved

has been conducted. The findings from this survey found that there were 49,698 street children in the country, with 24,615 in the capital city, Freetown. Of the total, 4,388 were children aged(6 years) mainly in Freetown, and 1,821 underage girls were engaging in sex and drugs[7]. From 2011 to now, the numbers have doubled, clearly showing this field's relevance.

Research object: Intervention strategies for addressing substance abuse among street children. Thus, the general objective of this literature review was to identify intervention strategies aimed at addressing substance abuse among street children that could be adopted in Sierra Leone.

1. Literature Review

This section covers the definition of street children, child protection systems, and intervention strategies for responding to the needs of street children in Sierra Leone.

1.1. Street Children

Our understanding of street children is ever evolving, as this social phenomenon is a global concern that is threatening the fabric of society[8]. It is a social problem that governments and NGOs alike battle with in their efforts to promote children's rights. Several definitions contribute to our understanding of this social problem. A street child, as defined by UNICEF, is "one 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" [9].

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7 *Headcount: A National Report on the Population of Street Children in Sierra Leone* (Street Child, 2012). https://a.storyblok.com/f/138292/x/5179c0abc6/headcount_draft_report__finalcfedit-1.pdf.

8 Mokoena Patronella Maepa, "Self-Esteem and Resilience Differences among Street Children Compared to Non-Street Children in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Baseline Study", *Frontiers in Public Health* 9 (2021). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.542778.

9 Board, UNICEF Executive. Session (1986a), Exploitation of Working Children and Street Children E. ICEF/1986/CRP. 3, 14 March (1986).

Two overlapping types of street children have been identified. One type comprises children who work on the street, who are street-based but primarily sleep at home. The other type children of the street, who rarely, if ever, return home, as the streets become their home, as they move from one point to another[10].

1.2. The Child Protection System in Sierra Leone

The child protection system in Sierra Leone has three main domains: legal frameworks, government institutions and the role played by NGOs. Sierra Leone is a signatory to many international conventions and treaties, including the UNCRC. The domestication of these treaties has largely influenced the legal frameworks that protect children's rights in the country. Of note are the Child Rights Act of 2007, the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 (later amended in 2019) and the Anti-Human Trafficking Act of 2005. The Free Quality Education Initiative of 2020 also contributed to the existing legal framework that upholds children's rights. The relevant government institutions include the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and the Family Support Unit, situated within the police department of Sierra Leone.

Meanwhile, the NGOs include but are not limited to Street Child, UNICEF, Plan International, Save the Children, Defence for Children International, and Don Bosco Fambul, who complement the efforts of the government in the protection of children.

1.3. Current Intervention Strategies for Street Children in Sierra Leone

Although robust national policies have been developed since the end of Sierra Leone's civil war, the practical responses to the needs of street children remain

10 Jessica Woan, Jessica Lin, and Colette Auerswald, "The Health Status of Street Children and Youth in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review of the Literature", *Journal of Adolescent Health* 53, no. 3 (2013/09/01/ 2013): 314-21.e12. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.03.013.

largely dependent on NGOs. However, NGOs such as Street Child and its supporting partners, face considerable resource constraints in their efforts to address these needs[11].

Despite these challenges, the organisation has adopted therapeutic pedagogy as a key intervention strategy aimed at supporting street children with complex trauma. This approach prioritises these children's voices, focusing on their needs and enhancing their educational experiences[12]. Additionally, the role of the Street Child organization in the city of Kenema has been investigated[13]. This analytical study of the organisation and, their work with children, both on and off the street, identified a wide array of strategies, such as the provision of educational support, prioritising the return of street street children to school; counselling services centered on trauma to reduce the psychological impact of living on the street and misusing drugs; livelihood support services, which included supporting families and caregivers with financial aid; and collaborations, where the organisation collaborates with other organisations to support children needs, including in-service training in the form of vocational training[14]. In addition, in 2017, the NGO Don Bosco Fambul launched a mobile outreach and counselling programme, targeting street children across the country. This programme not only provided essential counselling and educational services but also facilitated the reintegration of some children into their families[15].

The above brief review, highlights the existing intervention strategies used

11 Aaron Jell, "Exploring effective therapeutic pedagogy for traumatized street children through education: A case study of Street Child Sierra Leone", *Academia* (2014).

12 *Ibid.,* 11.

13 Mani, E. K. F., and D. J. Amara, "Assessing the Problem Associated with the Incidence of Street Children in Sierra Leone: A Case Study of Kenema City", *International Journal of Scientific Research and Engineering Development* 5, no. 4 (2022).

14 *Ibid*.

15 "Sierra Leone: Mobile outreach provides counseling and medical care to street children in Freetown", *Mission Newswire,* (2017, May 23). https://missionnewswire.org/sierra-leone-mobile-outreach-provides-counseling-and-medical-care-to-street-children-in-freetown/.

in Sierra Leone to respond to the needs of street children. However, it is clear that these interventions are not stand-alone approaches specifically targeting substance abuse among street children. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive intervention strategy that focuses on responding to children with drug addiction.

2. Methods

This study adopted a literature review approach, focusing on systematically collecting, analysing and synthesising data relevant to the study's objectives. During this process, the authors used specific inclusion criteria, such as selecting articles and studies that relate to street children and substance abuse. Exclusion criteria were articles or studies that did not support the study's objectives.

PubMed, Google Scholar and JSTOR were used to search for available relevant literature, using search terms such as 'substance abuse', 'street children', 'Sierra Leone' and 'intervention strategies'. In total, 39 articles were retrieved that met the inclusion criteria.

3. Results

After thoroughly reviewing the articles, they were thematically analysed to identify intervention strategies used to address substance abuse among street children.

Motivational Intervention Strategy

One of the intervention strategies employed was motivational intervention[16]. This examined ways of improving the psychological, medical and social circumstances of street children with concurrent substance use disorders by providing guidelines and optimal intervention strategies for practitioners, such as social

16 Maarefvand, et al. "Social Work Guidelines for Street Children with Substance Use Disorders", *Iranian Rehabilitation Journal* 13 (4) (2015): 47–55.

workers, to maximise positive treatment outcomes. Motivational intervention was considered to be an effective strategy, given that these children are sometimes dislocated from their school and community, and they might show negative attitudes towards or even refuse to seek help or treatment. Using this method can help social workers to build trust and, at the same time, include the voices of children in their treatment.

Motivational intervention sessions must be held in favourable environments based on the unique needs of these children. Their study further emphasised the inclusion of families within these motivational interventions, as parents can sometimes play an important role in efficiently motivating their child to seek appropriate treatment. It is important to engage and motivate children with concrete rewards and provide an attractive and safe environment for them in treatment centres[17]. The insights from this study therefore show that motivational intervention is indeed useful for building trust and gaining children's and their families participation, to promote positive outcomes of treatments aimed at addressing addiction among street children[18].

Family-based Intervention Strategy

Family-based intervention is regarded as an effective strategy for responding to substance abuse among street children. This intervention strategy is noted to be a top priority in treating street children with substance use disorders. By employing family-based interventions, practitioners can help to strengthen the foundation upon which successful interventions can be built. The study further outlined the various dimensions within the family-based approach that practitioners can adopt. These include multidimensional family therapy (MDFT), brief strategic family therapy (BSFT) and the adolescent community reinforcement

17 Maarefvand, *supra note*, 16.

18 *Ibid.*

approach (A-CRA)[19]. These interventions have been demonstrated to be useful. For instance, MDFT helps practitioners to improve family relationships, improving communication between parents and their children, while BSFT identifies dysfunctional families and tries to improve family dynamics. Finally, A-CRA therapy seeks to reinforce positive attitudes and coping skills[20]. These therapies can greatly assist in supporting the recovery process from addiction among street children, as family involvement helps to improve communication and strengthen family relationships between parents and their children, thereby contributing to positive behavioural changes. This is reinforced by findings that street-life experiences, peer pressure and family drug exposure can have a major impact on children's substance use behaviour, emphasising the importance of family-centred education programmes as part of the recovery process of street children[21]. Family safety net programmes should strengthen and empower parents or caregivers to help them prevent children from resorting to street life, as poverty is regarded as one of the key causes of children moving to the street[22]. Similarly, research highlights the importance of family dynamics in shaping street children's experiences and underscores the need for family-level interventions[23]. Furthermore, effective rehabilitation and family reintegration programmes should be prioritised[24]. In summary, a family-based intervention strategy is important in responding to substance addiction among street children. Results from studies have proven the

19 Maarefvand, *supra note*, 16.

20 *Ibid*.

21 Gomes, Nadja Maryelly de Oliveira, and Eloisa Dutra Caldas, "Street and Drug Use Experiences among Sheltered Children and Adolescents in the Federal District of Brazil", *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing* 36, no. 2 (2023): 105-13.

22 Nnama-Okechukwu, Chinwe U., Samuel O. Ebimgbo, Agha A. Agha, and Chinyere E. Onalu, "Vulnerable children aiding visually challenged beggars in Nigeria: Need for social work intervention", *Children & Society* 37, no. 2 (2023): 616-633.

23 Abimbola M. Obimakinde, and Moosa Shabir, "The Family Dynamics of Children on the Streets of Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria", *South African Family Practice* 65, no. 4 (2023).

24 Johanna K.P. Greeson, John R Gyourko, Sarah Wasch, and Christopher S. Page, "Reintegration of Street-Connected Children in Kenya: Evaluation of Agape Children's Ministry's Family Strengthening Programme", *Child & Family Social Work* 29, no. 4 (2024): 1008-21.

effectiveness of these interventions as they target the understanding of family dynamics and their contribution to either the prevention or rehabilitation process.

Comprehensive Educational and Skill Development Intervention Strategy

This study found that to ensure better educational outcomes, it is essential to understand barriers to education so that policymakers, child welfare providers, and governments can design inclusive educational services that cater to the needs of street children[25]. Additionally, strategies such as income generating activities(IGAs), the provision of shelter, community support, child protection interventions, and access to education, healthcare and life coaching, should be implemented in the context of the voice of the children, so they are perceived in a positive manner[26].

Notably, life skills training has a significant impact regardless of gender [27]. Local and national authorities play a key role in the provision of the necessary facilities and in encouraging participation in such training programmes[28].

Moreover, skills training focusing on strengths and coping mechanisms can help reduce the likelihood of an overdose, prevent relapses, and enhance self-efficacy; this also entails sex education for children about the negative effects of drug use and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)[29]. In conclusion, education and skills training are crucial to improving the well-being of street children, as they play an important role in ensuring that children are able to develop self-efficacy, avoid relapses, and give children the strength to escape from drug exploitation or abuse.

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25 Moumita Basak, and Tanusree Moitra, "Effectiveness of Life Skill Training on Self-esteem and Self-perception Among Street Children", *Psychological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2024): 112-120.

26 Zahra Arabbadvi, et al., "Education as an Effective Strategy to Promote Nutritional Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors in Street Children", *BMC Public Health* 23, no. 1 (2023): 989.

27 Farzane Alidost, et al., "Local Action for Sexual and Reproductive Health of Street Children: A Systematic Review", *Journal of Pediatrics Review* 9, no. 3 (2021): 209-18. https://doi.org/10.32598/jpr.9.3.902.1

28 Crispin Rakibu Mbamba, et al., "I Don't Think Anyone Thinks of Us": Experiences of Teenage Head Porters Amidst Covid-19 in Ghana", *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* 17, no. 3 (2022/07/03 2022): 221-31. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2021.1975860.

29 Maarefvand, et al., *supra note*, 16.

The Holistic Approach as an intervention Strategy

Promoting holistic approaches for responding to the situation of street children is essential in ensuring that the well-being of children is protected. Studies have pointed out key areas that could support a holistic approach to intervention. One of these areas is health. Ensuring access to healthcare is critical, as allocating affordable and accessible healthcare facilities that offer non-judgemental services is essential for street children[30]. This helps to promote their overall health and well-being.

Another area is effective collaboration. Studies show that to address this issue effectively, social workers need to spearhead intervention campaigns and collaborate with relevant agencies to provide alternative economic engagements such as vocational training. This type of collaboration can help in sharing ideas, models and methods useful for ensuring successful work with street children, particularly those with addiction issues[31].

Promoting a supportive environment is another area of focus. Studies have indicated that a supportive environment plays a crucial role in addressing the systemic factors contributing to children's vulnerability[32]. This can be achieved when harm reduction interventions consider both psychosocial needs and the cultural aspects of substance use. From a social work perspective, successful interventions typically capitalise on individuals' strengths, emphasising participation, self-help and mutual support while minimising stigma[33]. Equally important, social workers play a crucial role in advocating interventions and collaborating

30 Alidost, et al., *supra note*, 27.

31 Rakibu Mbamba, et al., *supra note*, 28.

32 Hakim Shoushtari, Mitra, Ansar Khougar, and Hadi Ranjbar, "Street as a Place for Survival, Emotions, and Suffering; a Qualitative Exploration of Street-Connected Children in Iran", *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* 19 (3) (2024): 485–504.

33 David Victor Ogunkan, "The Dynamics of Street Children in Nigerian Cities: The Significance of Age and Gender", *Journal of Gender Studies* 34(4) (2025): 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2024.2376428.

with organisations to provide vocational training opportunities[34]. This is crucial as an enabling environment helps to promote the confidence, trust, and cooperative attitudes of these children.

Community-based interventions can help to accelerate treatment and reduce the possibility of relapse after treatment. To achieve this, the study presented eight steps, which are: (i) evaluate the local community: conduct interviews with potential and active advocates to obtain information about the risks and protective factors in the community; (ii) community mobilisation: arrange a meeting with advocates to sensitise them to the threats and negative effects of a possible relapse on the recovering child and their families, providing information about community-based relapse prevention methods and encouraging them to participate in these interventions; (iii) form local teams for relapse prevention, dividing volunteers into small teams; (iv) plan interventions to prevent relapses among children and review relapse prevention strategies with the teams, teaching them how to organise the projects if necessary; (v) execute local projects for relapse prevention, explaining that the team members are the sole executors of the project while the social worker functions as a facilitator; (vi collaborative evaluation and monitoring, with training about the evaluation process for teams, supervision of the weekly evaluations, and documenting the reports; (vii) exit the community: explain to local people that the presence of social workers is temporary and for the duration of the intervention; it is also important to train some local individuals to work as facilitators once the social workers have left the community; (viii) follow-up, maintaining contact with the local team, especially the local facilitator, for a minimum of three months after leaving the community and requesting weekly progress reports . In conclusion, a holistic approach can be an effective strategy. The integration of healthcare, a supportive environment, community-based

34 Ongowo Eliud Okumu, Kibet Ngetich, and Hadija Murenga, "A step of faith: The experiences of street children in search of survival in Nakuru City, Kenya, and its implications on policy", *Child & Family Social Work*, 29(1) (2023):138-148https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371911007.

intervention models, and effective collaboration ensures a sustainable process for achieving the recovery and integration of street children.

A Policy Intervention Strategy

While survival tactics are crucial for street children, studies emphasise the need for intensified state and non-state interventions to improve their living conditions[35]. Moreover, the relationship between state and non-state actors should ideally be the cornerstone in the formulation of policies that support the psychosocial and developmental efforts necessary to enhance the well-being of street children[36]. In addition, intervention programmes should be sensitive to the diversity of children's street involvement, considering differences in age and gender, which should be reflected in policies[37]. Furthermore, while policies aimed at guaranteeing the survival and protection of children are important, scientific research is crucial in shaping child-sensitive policies of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders that also cater to the needs of street children. Despite existing efforts, without proactive interventions, the well-being of street children remains at risk, potentially leading to broader societal crises[38]. On a structural level, social protection mechanisms contribute to fostering social cohesion and improving the lives of street children. Policy intervention strategy is also crucial, as it promotes the involvement of both the government and NGOs, with effective policies that ensure the promotion of social protection, which guarantees development in the lives of street children with addiction.

35 Kwamina Abekah-Carter, "Surviving on the Periphery of Society: Experiences of Street Children in Accra, Ghana", *Children & Society* 38, no. 5 (2024): 1749-68. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12841

36 Constance Gunhidzirai, "An Ecological Systems Approach to Assess the Well-Being of Street Children in Zimbabwe: Implications for Developmental Social Work Practice", *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 59, no. 4 (12/04 2023): 282-303. https://doi.org/10.15270/59-4-1168.

37 Patricia Buzzi, Sarah H. Morton, Alice M. Kyerematen, and G. J. Macdonald, "Interventions for Reducing Risks and Promoting Inclusion of Street Children and Young People: A Cochrane Systematic Review", *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* Issue 1 (2015).https://www.cochrane.org/CD009823/PUBHLTH_interventions-reducing-risks-and-promoting-inclusion-street-children-and-young-people.

38 Jessy Julissa Caicedo Córdoba, and Diana Perozo, "Perspectivas Teóricas De La Intervención Psicosocial: Aplicaciones En Niños, Niñas Y Adolescentes En Situación De Calle", *Interacción y perspectiva: Revista de Trabajo Social* 15, no. 1 (2025): 34-53.

Discussion

The articles reviewed support the main objective of this study, which was to highlight potential intervention strategies to respond to substance abuse among street children in Sierra Leone. As stated earlier, few studies have been conducted in Sierra Leone to explore intervention strategies for drug abuse; thus, this study aimed to address this knowledge gap . The findings have revealed positive practices that can be adopted.

Firstly, the motivational approach intervention was identified to be an interesting method that can help boost children's participation in the treatment process. Practitioners are advised to always ensure that a child's self-determination is respected and promoted during the treatment process. Trust building plays an important role in ensuring this. Practitioners are also strongly encouraged to include parents, caretakers and guardians while using this strategy. This is because they may serve as a potential booster to ensure children's compliance with the treatment.

Secondly, some of the findings also emphasise the importance of child-sensitive policy interventions and practices to ensure the advancement of the welfare of street children who misuse drugs, involving both state and non-state interventions, underscoring the necessity of a multi-component psychosocial and development intervention to promote the welfare of street children[39]. Recognising the need for policies that acknowledge the diversity of street children's experiences is important[40]. This indicates that effective policies should be aligned to meet children's needs, considering their gender, age, religion and culture. The efforts of both governments and NGOs should be coordinated to shape policies that

39 Lusire Lumumba, and Logiron Augustine Tioko, "Strategies to Improve Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Interventions for Street Children Social Development in Kakamega Central Sub-County, Kenya", *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies (IJIRAS)* 9, no. 1 (2022): 36-44.

40 Córdoba, and Perozo, *supra note,* 38: 34-53.

guarantee the survival of and protect the rights of street children[41]. Thus, there is a need for practitioners who work with street children to understand these policies and laws, as this will ensure that they are in a better and more informed position to advocate for their well-being.

Another important intervention practice identified from the findings is the need to provide street children with education and skills. These factors can help break the cycle of poverty and prevent children from being marginalised as they grow up. There is also an emphasis on empowering children through socioeconomic interventions that focus on developing their skills and helping them to engage in economically productive activities, which can help them occupy their time and shift their attention from indulging in substance abuse. It is thus important to understand the barriers to formulating effective educational services[42]. Additionally, skill development initiatives, including life-skills training and vocational education, can positively empower street children. Promoting good connections with school among street children may help in reducing their use of psychoactive substances[43]. This necessitates the integration of street children into educational settings. IGAs and community support systems have also been identified as practical strategies to reintegrate children into society and provide them with sustainable opportunities[44]. The findings highlight the need for authorities to implement effective training programmes and encourage street children's participation in skills -based education.

41 Suha Mohammed Elhassan Ali Hassan, Satti Abdelrahim Satti, and Mohammed Abdulrahman Alhassan, "Reasons for Leaving Home and Pattern of Child Abuse and Substance Misuse among Street Children in Khartoum, Sudan: A Cross-Sectional Survey", *Pan African medical journal* 46, no. 1 (2023).

42 Sabri Sulaiman, et al., "Growing up on the Street: Barriers to Educational Services Among Street Children in Malaysia", *Journal of Social Service Research* 50(3) (2024). DOI:10.1080/01488376.2024.2348536.

43 Mengistu Ayenew, Teshome Kabeta, and Kifle Woldemichael, "Prevalence and Factors Associated with Substance Use among Street Children in Jimma Town, Oromiya National Regional State, Ethiopia: A Community Based Cross-Sectional Study", *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 15, no. 1 (2020): 61. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-020-00304-3.

44 Ayana Chimdessa, "Initiation into the Street, Challenges, Means of Survival and Perceived Strategies to Prevent Plights among Street Children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 2019: A Phenomenological Study Design", *PLOS ONE* 17, no. 8 (2022): e0272411. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272411.

Other findings also highlighted the need to ensure that the best practices of interventions include targeting the health and well-being of street children. Health-related challenges are one of the major issues faced by street children due to the inaccessibility of healthcare services, making them vulnerable to diseases. There is an increasing need for affordable and accessible healthcare centres and facilities to provide services that do not alienate street children.

Other interventions speak about the need to prioritise both social work engagement and harm reduction approaches to ensure that the well-being of street children is promoted[45]. Addressing these healthcare concerns would greatly help improve the quality of life of street children , thereby reducing their vulnerability.

Promoting a supportive environment was highlighted as an additional key intervention. An emphasis was placed on the need to invest in family support systems. Furthermore, the family is the foundation for ensuring that children have a supportive environment to help mitigate the risks of becoming involved in harmful behaviours. Promoting programmes that target families and communities will contribute to a reduction in the number of street children.

Additional arguments were made that to ensure a conducive and safe environment for street children, there is a need for collaborative efforts from governments and NGOs in supporting harm reduction programmes, taking into consideration the cultural and psychosocial context of street children[46].

Other findings show that considering both family and community support structures and promoting community ownership of social support systems are important in responding to street children with drug abuse issues. In support of this, studies have suggested that well-coordinated social protection measures can

45 Lazarus Obed Livingstone Banda, et al., "Unraveling Substance Abuse among Malawian Street Children: A Qualitative Exploration", *PLOS ONE* 19, no. 5 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0304353.

46 Kwaku Oppong Asante, and Mashudu Tshifaro Nefale, "Substance Use among Street-Connected Children and Adolescents in Ghana and South Africa: A Cross-Country Comparison Study", *Behavioral Sciences* 11, no. 3 (2021): 28. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs11030028.

serve as a safety net to keep children within family settings. Therefore, there is a need to understand family dynamics, and implementing interventions at the family level can help prevent the escalation of child homelessness and children having to resort to street survival strategies. Rehabilitation and family reintegration efforts should be strengthened to ensure children have a stable support system that fosters their development. Ensuring that community involvement is considered through supportive relationships helps greatly when responding to drug abuse among street children. Other findings also indicated the need for a collaborative approach among professionals, such as social workers and other humanitarian workers, to respond to this phenomenon.

As it is a helping profession, social work programmes can be tailored to promote a supportive environment to develop the resilience of street children and facilitate their integration. However, social interventions should be informed by theoretical frameworks to ensure that programmes are well-structured and effective in addressing the complex challenges faced by street children.

Finally, coordinated efforts from all stakeholders within Sierra Leone are needed to reduce the number of cases of child homelessness, as turning a blind eye may exacerbate the general crisis regarding the well-being of street children. This study has demonstrated the value of social protection for street children and the resultant social cohesion.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that a holistic and multidimensional approach is required when responding to street children engaging in risky behaviours such as substance abuse. These findings supported the objective of this study and will help Sierra Leone to learn and improve the situation of street children in the country. The review revealed street children's multifaceted challenges and indicated the need for comprehensive interventions. The study highlighted

different strategies and interventions that can be used to address these challenges, such as collaborative efforts from social workers, policymakers, healthcare professionals, community members and educators. Also, there is a need to strengthen intervention programmes, particularly the provision of healthcare, the reinforcement of family and community support, and increased access to education, as part of the efforts made to address substance abuse. Tackling systemic and structural challenges will help to ensure the promotion of a protective and inclusive environment for children. Finally, the integration of child-sensitive policy and practice will ensure the promotion of effective and sustainable efforts to enhance the well-being and rights of children.

Recommendations

- Child protection practitioners should endeavour to implement motivational and family-based interventions that focus on building trust, strengthening parental support, providing therapy, and advocating for effective child-sensitive policies and laws targeting street children's needs and concerns.
- Sierra Leone should embark on creating a child protection research data centre that adopts a well-coordinated, multisectoral approach to data collection, which will help to inform the development of contextual practices that speak to the needs of not just children as a whole but to substance abuse among street children in the country.

LITERATŪROS APŽVALGA APIE INTERVENCIJOS STRATEGIJAS, SKIRTAS KOVOTI SU GATVĖS VAIKŲ PIKTNAUDŽIAVIMU NARKOTINEMIS MEDŽIAGOMIS: BŪDAI, KURIUOS GALIMA TAIKYTI SIERA LEONĖJE

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Santrauka. Šiame tyrime apžvelgiama esama literatūra apie intervencijos strategijas, skirtas spręsti gatvės vaikų piktnaudžiavimo narkotinėmis medžiagomis problemą, ir nagrinėjama, kaip Siera Leonė gali pritaikyti šias strategijas. Atsižvelgiant į didėjantį susirūpinimą ir ribotus duomenis šia problema Siera Leonėje, ši apžvalga pateikia įžvalgų, kurios gali sustiprinti vyriausybines ir nevyriausybines intervencijas, skirtas prevencijai, reabilitacijai ir reintegracijai. Trisdešimt devyni (39) akademiniai šaltiniai iš „PubMed“, „Google Scholar“ ir „JSTOR“ duomenų bazių buvo analizuojami naudojant literatūros apžvalgos metodą. Rezultatai rodo motyvacinio požiūrio, apimančio gatvės vaikų balsus, bendradarbiavimą tarp socialinių darbuotojų, politikos formuotojų, sveikatos priežiūros specialistų, pedagogų, šeimų ir bendruomenės narių, svarbą. Tyrimo išvada yra ta, kad gerai koordinuotas, daugiasektoris požiūris ir politikos reformos yra būtini kuriant holistines intervencijas ir tam, kad specialistai galėtų užmegzti ryšius, teikti palaikomąją terapiją ir ginti veiksmingą politiką bei vaikų apsaugos įstatymus, orientuotus į gatvės vaikų poreikius.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: piktnaudžiavimas narkotinėmis medžiagomis, gatvės vaikai, Siera Leonė, intervencijos strategijos.