


STREET CHILDREN'S SEXUAL LIFEWORLDS...

Facts versus Values...


Meindert Schaap, August 2006



The APSA Sexual Health Program for Street and Slum Children in India
www.streetkids-SRH.org

The Lives of Street BOYS...

The boys I am talking about... (ages 12 – 16/17)




and the world they are living in...




Boredom and loneliness...



Hazardous life circumstances & sleeping arrangements...




Addiction to inhaler drugs (correction fluids)...



With pets and peers often being their only 'family' ...

... and for whom sex often is very much part of their daily life...



STREET BOYS / CHILDREN and their Circumstances...

- Easy access to sex + frequent exposures to sexual activities...
- Little access to good information and services...
- Few recreational facilities...
- Hardly any adult support...
- Often sleeping unsupervised.

The Boys' SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS

The Boys' Sexual Behaviours (12-16yrs.)

- Start / Sexual Initiation at Young Age
- Rapid Sexual 'Career'
- Frequent, High-risk Sexual Activities (oral, anal, vaginal)
- Multiple Partners, incl. Street-based CSWs
- Same-sex Activity is VERY common
- (Almost) always Unprotected

SEX IS NOT A BIG DEAL !!!

Motives to engage in sex (rewards)

- **Pleasure**
- **Immediate Lust-reduction**
- **Some Material Gain**

Sexual behaviours are very much part of the boys' every-day lives of physical, psychological and social survival and adaptation.

The 'voluntary – consensual – forced' continuum

An Estimate →

10 % : purely voluntary (for pleasure / experimenting);

75 % : 'exchange' (commodity + pleasure + hierarchy);

15 % : by real force (either being forced or forcing).

*Almost all the boys like sex very much,
also when it is part of their 'exchange economy'*

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is a common practice among street boys and girls.

- About one-third of the boys indicated that they have experienced being forced by others (by boys as well as girls!) to have sex;
- Another one in three boys admitted that they sometimes force others to have sex with them.

The Boys' SEXUAL HEALTH

Boys' sexual health knowledge & behaviours

!!! Most boys seem to have few difficulties discussing their sexual behaviours and ideas, once basic trust is established !!!

!! It is mainly the adults who fear to talk !!

Boys' sexual health knowledge

**Only 1 in 7 boys
had reasonably good knowledge
about sexual health risks...**

Many Misconceptions...

Boys' sexual health behaviours: almost non-existent...

Some boys never heard of condoms.

Most boys had never used a condom.

Condoms were not used at all for same-sex activities.

STREET GIRLS' Sexual Lives...

*Info from a study on about hundred
street (& slum) girl children
between the ages of 5 and 19*

Sexual Activity Levels in the girls →

The extent of experience of penetrative sex was found to be very high, much higher than expected, both for girls under 12 as for older girls

More than two-thirds of all girls stated to have had penetrative sex, (almost) always unprotected.

65% of the girls had had sex with multiple partners.

Initiation into sexual activity →

Most of the girls had been initiated into sexual activity at a very young age – 55% under 12, and 37% under 9 years of age.

Typically, the girls hoped to marry their first sex partners.

Perceptions, thoughts/feelings: (1)

- Sex for most was “high on pleasure and high on risk”.
- It was perceived to be okay to have sex with multiple partners as long as no one knew about it.
- The goal for all these girls was marriage -- they were willing to have any kind of a husband rather than no husband

Perceptions, thoughts/feelings: (2)

- Most of the girls who participated in the study saw having sex as being part of a normal way of life – *you eat, you sleep, you have sex.*
- They did not perceive sexual activity as being “wrong”.

*In many ways, these girls led adult lives.
They worked, earned, and often looked after
parents and/or siblings.*

The Urge →

As in the case of boys, sexual urge & pleasure were identified by the girls as being of prime importance.

According to their perceptions, the Urge or “Aase”, once it arose or was aroused, needed to be satisfied, just like hunger (“body hunger”).

Force & Sexual Abuse →

There is a lot of sex-related violence towards street girls → almost half of the girls were forced into sex at least once...

Also, many girls say that boys and men often 'blackmail' them into sexual activity.

"...from this I can find out how much he loves me, he threatens me, if I don't go with him, he'll throw acid on my face" -- A girl who had been gang-raped by her boyfriend and his friends. She also had acid poured into her vagina after being raped.

Risk Perceptions & Sexual Health (1) →

The street girls know little about the health risks. One 19-year-old, HIV positive girl, who is in commercial sex work: **"Somebody told me if we have sex daily, our health becomes good, that's why I do it daily."**

The girls reported many misconceptions about sexual health risks.

Disturbing: in general, the girls who engaged in 'sex for money' rated this type of sex high on risk but also high on pleasure.

Risk Perceptions & Sexual Health (2) →

Though most of the girls knew about HIV/AIDS and knew that it was a deadly disease, many believed "we can't get it."

Less than half of the girls had heard about condoms.

They did not use condoms, and believed that only 'prostitutes' used them.

Risk Perceptions & Sexual Health (3) →

Also, Sexual Health is not their first priority:

"... I will continue to do this work, I will get money and enjoyment. Afterwards we will see...", says an 11-year old...

Many of these children live for the day. They often do not know if they will get food that day. If they earn money, they spend it. Safe sex is not an issue – the attitude is, enjoy yourself now, any way.

FINAL CONCLUSION

STREET CHILDREN & THE NEED FOR INTERVENTION

Number of Street / Slum Children worldwide... (20 million)

In the era of HIV and AIDS...

High-Risk group...

Estimate children per year... (at least 100,000 – 150,000...)

→ Something needs to be done...!!

!!! SEXUAL HEALTH IS NOT THEIR PRIORITY !!!

At the same time these boys and girls are at high risk for severe / deadly health problems & unhappiness...!!!



WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO... ???!!



Let us *please* prevent them from getting a deadly disease and assist them in reaching their full potentials...!! THANK YOU...

PART 02 **Young People**

This is **NOT** only about 'Street Children'

- More than 15 million young people, aged 15-24, are living with HIV or AIDS.
- About *HALF* of all new infections now occur in young people (*that is more than 2.5 million per year*).
- Every day, more than 7,000 young people become infected with HIV.

PART 03 **Discussion**

Most Common Faith-based Responses...

- The most common faith-based responses are: *Care, Compassion* and *Support* for those affected and infected...
- **BUT... what about PREVENTION!!!!??** →
 - Abstinence (?)
 - Be Faithful (?)
 - (Condoms)...

Be REALISTIC: Abstinence outside of marriage?? / Faithfulness within marriage? / Condoms only for unfaithful partners within marriage??

Prevention
is better than
Cure
is better than
Care

PART 04

Case Studies & 'ABCs'/'PQRs'

PART 05

Closure

Ethics and Attitudes...

Strict belief systems around sexual behaviours, promiscuity, relationships, and condom use → *increases stigma and an atmosphere of silence...!!*

Kevin Dowling, Catholic bishop in South Africa, has said *(about condom use)* that:

"Simplistic attitudes blind us to the realities of life for millions of poor people. In this terrible pandemic, should we focus all our efforts on proclaiming an ethic of sexuality or also on the ethic of preserving and saving life?"

"What will we tell our children about how we acted while millions were dying? Are we bystanders, contributors to the indifference, or are we fighters?"

Rabbi Harley Karz-Wagman
in a Global AIDS Sermon,
November 2002

Life is a Sacred Gift – Let's ACT !!

Life is a sacred gift → more sacred than any ideological debate!

So: better become comfortable to discuss sexual behaviours, sexuality-related feelings, and sexuality-related thoughts with teenagers!

Start the OPEN DISCUSSION – now !!!...

PART 06
Action Points

'HOPE...'
Vaclav Havel