



Research Paper

Social determinants of street children phenomenon and their family reintegration in Parakou (North Benin)

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ABSTRACT: In all African countries, despite the fact that children occupy an important place in society, it is not uncommon today to note that the phenomenon of street children has become a serious problem which is gaining magnitude. This work analyzes the causes of the phenomenon of street children and determines the reasons for the failure of the social inclusion strategies implemented so far. Qualitative data was collected from 36 people including 27 street children. Descriptive statistics, content analysis and categorical analysis are the analysis methods used. The results indicate that parental death, divorce, abuse and extreme poverty are the determining factors in the production process of street children. The failures of family reintegration of street children can be explained by the deviant behavior of children, the advantages that the street offers them and the insufficient means available to social actors. These results will allow political decision-makers and institutions responsible for the protection and education of children to have new elements which will facilitate their interventions with a view to eradicating this phenomenon.

Keywords: social factors, street children, family reintegration, Benin

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, as the world has experienced an unprecedented economic crisis, the number of people living in poverty has increased considerably and has engendered social phenomena, including that of street children. This is why sociologists see the phenomenon of street children as being both “endemic” (phenomenon produced by an economic crisis; for example, poverty) and “anomic” (due to socio-cultural changes, in disorganization of family and loss of traditional values in urban areas). According to UNICEF (2013), the street child is defined as a child who simply performs his daily activities on the street (work, begging, theft, etc.) and lives on the street. The problem of street children is universal (Agarwal, 2010). The extent of this social phenomenon varies between nations and cities. It is estimated that there are 1,000 million children worldwide who live on the streets (Backer et al, 2011). In South America alone there are at least 40 million children; Asia and Europe have around 25 million. The phenomenon has taken on a very considerable scale in developing countries and especially in sub-Saharan Africa where urbanization has been accelerated in recent decades. Figures put forward by international organizations most often point to a range of between 30 and 100 million children living on the streets of developing countries. Benin, which is not on the fringes of this reality, is moreover additionally faced with this problem of street children. Estimates in most countries have fluctuated widely (UNICEF 2013), with many children suffering from various illnesses due to their poor living conditions. When they become adults, they will be illiterate or if they survive hunger, thirst, dangerous and poorly paid work, prostitution, sexual abuse, endemics, social exclusion, police harassment, the harassment of justice, the prison, cheap and destructive drugs, domestic work transformed into slavery (UNESCO, 1999).

The Beninese tradition like other African traditions considers the child as one of the most precious goods for the whole family. It constitutes wealth, social and economic strength. At the family level, for example, it represents social security. It is through the child that the line remains from generation to generation. But in recent years, we have observed that the child who has always been a treasure is being left to himself for several reasons which can be political or socio-economic (Tano, 2017). It is in this context that many children found themselves on the street, living in bus stations, in markets, begging, rummaging through trash, selling on the run, either to participate in the maintenance of their family, or actually to support themselves. Although there are no precise figures in Benin on the number of concerned children, in the absence of a systematic collection of data or statistics, it is obvious that the scale of the phenomenon is both alarming and takes on disproportionate

importance. Despite the actions directed towards these children for their family reintegration, the phenomenon still persists. The family reintegration of street children can only be effective and efficient by identifying the factors at the root of the problem. This is the interest of this research which seeks to understand the root causes of this complex phenomenon and have the best means to contribute to its eradication. The present study aims to analyze the determining factors of the phenomenon of street children and to identify the causes of family reintegration failures in Parakou.

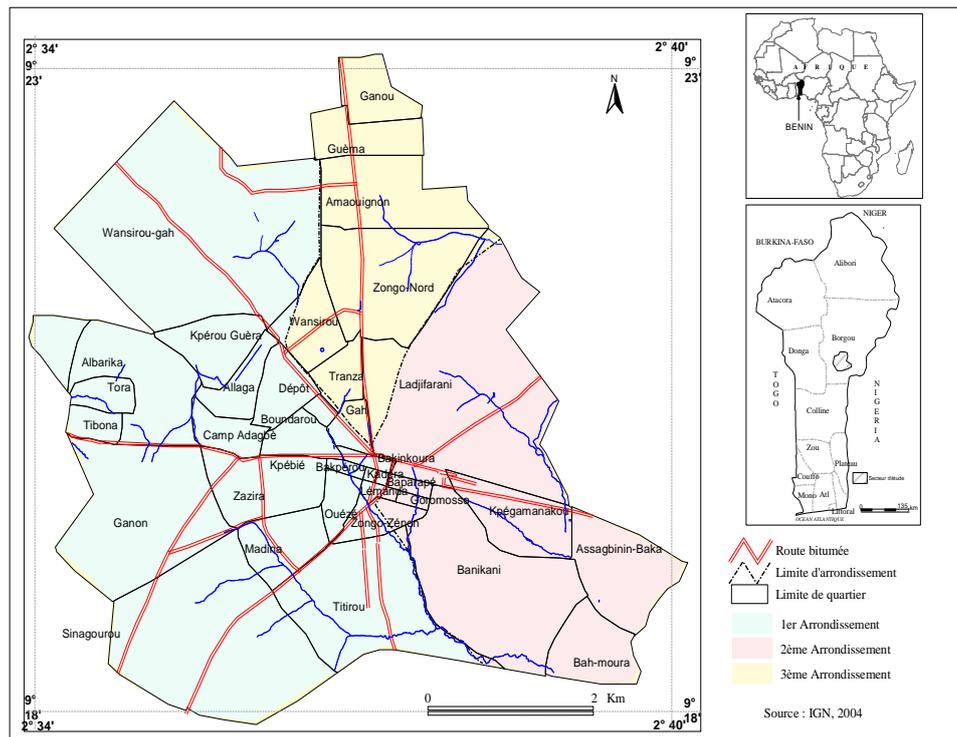
II. STUDY METHODOLOGY

2.1. Theoretical frame

The literature has written very little on the issue of family reintegration of street children in Benin. On the other hand, there is an abundant literature revolving around the phenomenon of “street children” around the world, but dominated by stories which describe the different causes which are the origin of the presence of children on the street. The recommended solutions are as diverse as the causes. Marguerat and Poitou (1994) finds urbanization as factors responsible for the emergence of the phenomenon; This is also due to the disorganisation of the family unit. For Ouizan-Bi (1998), the political and economic reasons created by historical conditions would explain the phenomenon of street children. Thus, the variables linked to unemployment, wars, increasing poverty, the race for power, demographic growth are the dominant indicators. The theories of Bourdieu and Passeron (1965) for their part insist on social reproduction through school. Massive school failures undoubtedly contribute to increasing the numbers of these children. Whatever the option, specialists seem to agree that the best solution remains family reintegration. For Pirot (2004), the problematic of street children also concerns to fight against poverty, from which families must be given the opportunity to increase their resources. Concerning the difficult return of children to the family, he said that: “in absolute terms, return to the family is of course entirely desirable, but in reality, it is quite rarely possible: the family cannot be the solution when it is itself the problem. So you have to invent other ways of living.” For Ricardo (1993): “the exit from the street is built over time and according to the children, it can last more or less long”. Indeed, each child is also a special case with their personal history and their own personality. The most important essential element for the child to start leaving the street is the “reorganization of his identity system”.

1. Study environment, data sampling and analysis

The study took place in September-October 2017 in Parakou located at 9 ° 21 'north latitude and 2 ° 36' longitude. To achieve the objectives of this study, three (03) categories of actors have been chosen according to the roles they play. The first category (i) consists of the Center for Social Promotion (CPS) and the “Au pied de la Croix” orphanage. The choice of these institutions is due to the fact that they play a leading role in the care of street children. The second category (ii) concerns technical and financial partners, given the support they provide to childcare structures. As for the third category (iii), it concerns children living on the street and those benefiting from the services of the “Au pied de la Croix” orphanage, which represent the subject of this study. Simple random sampling was used. A total of 36 people were investigated, including 27 street children; 3 parents, 2 managers of social centers, 3 social workers and 1 financial partner. A questionnaire has been developed for this purpose. Descriptive statistics, content analysis and categorical information analysis are the analysis methods used.



Carte n°1 : Situation géographique de la Ville de Parakou

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Socio-demographic profiles of the street children surveyed

3.1.1. Gender, age of street children surveyed

The majority of children hanging out on the streets (85.18%) are boys, but there are also girls. Street children have an average age between 10 and 16 years and represent 62.9% of respondents. This age group generally corresponds to adolescence, which is fundamentally characterized by a crisis that appears earlier and earlier. In fact, adolescence is a difficult and complex period for some children. This period was marked by profound physical and psychological upheavals and manifested in a revolt and sometimes violent opposition to parental and school models. Entering adolescence disrupts family relationships. Communication between parents and children becomes so difficult that for some young people, the only solution or the only possible means of expression becomes flight.

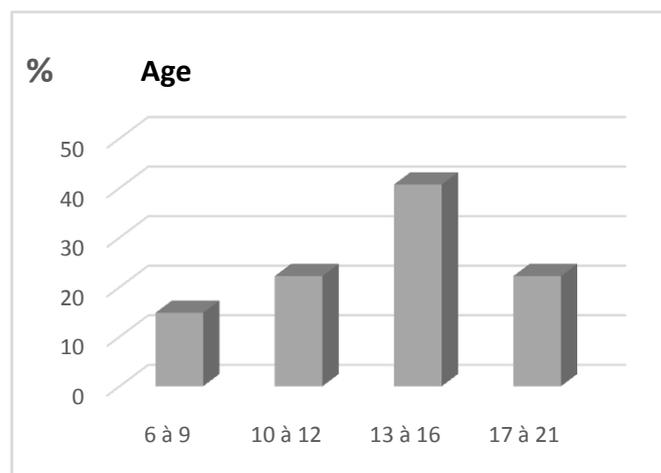


Figure 1:investigated distribution according to the age/âge

Source: Data analysis results, 2017 years

3.1.2 Level of education of the children surveyed

More than half of the street children went to school before dropping out and went to primary school. The phenomenon of street children also affects children in the care of Koranic teachers, around 22% of these children have learned the Koran. The presence of these children on the street is explained by the harsh educational conditions imposed on these children. 18.51% of the sample is uneducated, this could be explained by the fact that the foster families of entrusted children do not offer them the opportunity to go to school. Most of them become caretakers while the father and mother are at work and their own children at school. The massive presence of these children in the street constitutes a real danger for themselves because the street and its environment constitute a risk factor, of crime by the influence which it exerts on the teenagers.

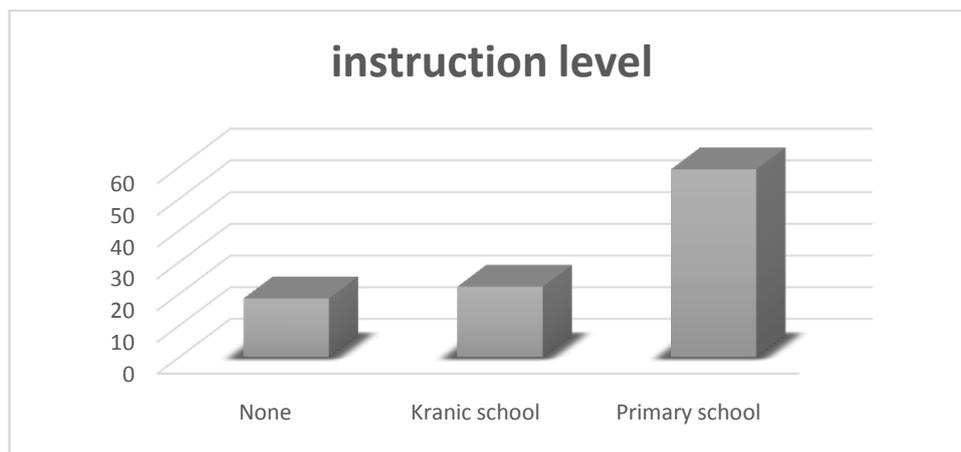


Figure 2: distribution of investigated according to the instruction

Source : Results of data analysis, 2017

3.1.1 Marital status of surveyed children parents

The majority of the children surveyed (44.44%) have their two parents living together (single-parent family, or polygamous family) and 22.22% have their parents dead or one of them dead. The difficulties encounters by children whose parents living together explain their presence on the street: these are the perverse effects of polygamy such as ill-treatment, stigma, discrimination, etc.

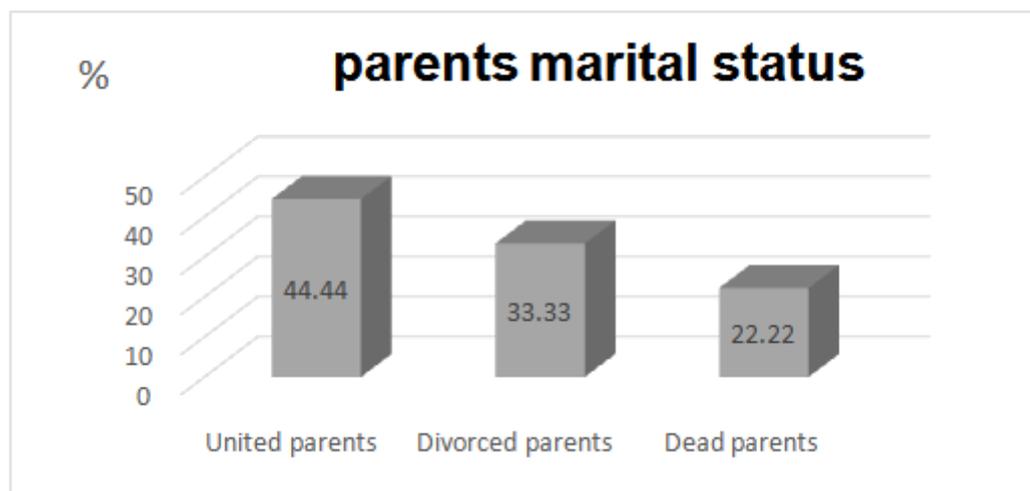


Figure3: investigated distribution according to according to marital status

Source :data analysis results, 2017

1.1. Determinants of street children in Parakou

The majority of street children (59.25) came to stay with a nearparent or a tutor in Parakou; we sometimes call them intrusted children. The fact to intrust children to the families or to the friends in the cities in order to to be instructed is a danger and a major probelm that we should cure.near the half or 45.71% of children have chosen street because of mistreatment (body violence and verbal, the lack of food, etc.)that they are victimin the family.Other are in the street because of the precarity that live their own parent or their tutors, either

because of the divorce or parents death. These difficulties encountered by children is one of the main factors that push them to go to the street. The situation of 40.7% investigated children born in Parakou could be explained by the absence of a positive parental authority and polygamous fathers' resignation who are not able to control all their children mainly when all the family does not live in the house. Mistreatments, extreme poverty and parents' death or their separation are the main factors that push children to see themselves in the streets in Parakou by searching for a better living condition. Nkouika et al. (2006) had also found that the death of parents and the poverty are the determinants of the street children phenomenon in Brazzaville street.

Tableau 1: reasons of children presence in the street of Parakou

	Fréquence (%)	
Reasons of street children presence in Parakou	Come and stay with a parent or a tutor	59.25
	Born at Parakou	40.7
Raison de la présence des enfants dans la rue	Parents dead	8.57
	Parents divorced	20
	mistreatment	45.71
	Parents poverty	25.71

Source: Results of data analysis, 2017

After identifying the reasons for the presence of children on the street, the study looked at whether there were opportunities for these children to leave the streets, what they will want for the future. The answers to this question are diverse: 48.14% wish to return with the family; 22.22% opt to stay in a center to benefit from vocational training or to resume with school, and 29.62% prefer to stay on the street because he prefers to be free. These results show that most street children aspire to find a life in line with their model of society: going to school, learning a trade, starting a family and taking better care of their children.

3.2 Cause of family reintegration failures for street children

At the "Au pied de la Croix" orphanage, out of a total of 13 children admitted in 2015, only 4 were reintegrated into the family in the same year, or 20%. In 2016, sixteen (16) children were taken in and nine returned. A total of 13 children out of 29 taken in during the past two years by the "Au pied de la Croix" orphanage have been reintegrated into their families.

But not all reintegrated children are well accepted in their families. Out of 13 reintegrated children, 7 are not accepted as full family members, ie 53.84%. This can be explained by the fact that family members complain about their deviant and delinquent behavior. On the one hand, the street child is stigmatized and fingered like a thief. Having lived on the street for years produces a feeling of failure and helplessness among families in general. This is expressed, for example, by the father of Médard A. as follows:

... if you want to know more, ask the neighbors what have I not done so that this child does not leave on the street?" But since he came back there is not much change, because he disappears from the house and only returns at night ... yet he has everything he wants at home.. .. I come from a noble family and this child disappoints us as a teacher, it is with impotence that I observe the behavior of my son ... ».

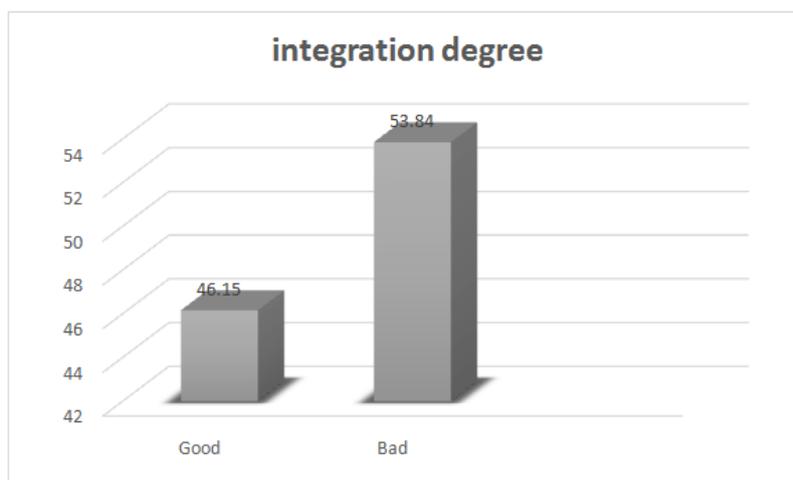


Figure 4 : Children family integration degree

Source: Results of data analysis, 2017

The child's acceptance to return to the family is motivated by short-term financial or material gain. Indeed, the children reintegrated by the orphanage "At the foot of the Cross" to whom we asked what they received when they returned with the family, the following responses came back regularly: "When I returned with the family they did give me something" or "when I returned with my family they only gave me clothes". For example, Bernard O. says: "... I received clothes and notebooks, but for the notebooks it was Mr. X who gave me it...".

Likewise, Habib M. said: "they told me to return to the family by promising me that they will come back to make me learn some work somewhere and up to now, they did not return ...".

Efforts are not made by the children themselves in terms of behavioral stability to merit this reintegration. These are violence, theft, vagrancy and inattention to advice and comments made about them. On the other hand, the street taking into account the advantages (freedom, money, etc.) that it offers to children constitutes an obstacle to family reintegration. Indeed, the street offers most children, especially those who have chosen to be there, independence, an opportunity to discover other ideas, other forms of social life. It puts everyone on an equal footing. For example, Gamal K. declares "I don't want to go back to my family because I earn a lot of money at the market by transporting the luggage of the traders". Activities carried out by children on the streets provide them with fairly substantial income, often sheltering them from needs such as food and clothing.

In addition, interviews with private childcare structures reveal that they are highly dependent on external aid. The "Au pied de la Croix" orphanage, like most associations working for street children, faces financial challenges. They lack a clear self-financing strategy. This situation prevents successful family reintegration in terms of impact and observable effect. Indeed, the return of certain children with their family is for example motivated by obtaining material or financial gain. In addition, the support provided by the government to support children in difficult situations is insufficient. The inadequacy of the means available to social actors and the deviant behavior of children are the reason for the failure of their family reintegration in Parakou.

IV. CONCLUSION

With the aim of combating the phenomenon of street children, the present study has endeavored to find the reasons for this phenomenon and the causes of the failure of the family reintegration of street children in Parakou. Using a mixed approach.

The results of the study show that the phenomenon of street children is mainly caused by the extreme poverty and mistreatment of their children. Then, come the divorce and the death of the parents. However, family breakdown and the economic criterion cannot be sufficient to explain this phenomenon. The results also reveal that 48.14% of children want to return to their families and 29.62% want to stay on the street because they prefer to be free. This study also reveals that not all reintegrated children are well accepted in their families as full members. Several factors prevent the success of this reintegration in terms of impact and observable effect: on the one hand, we have the deviant behavior of children (violence, robberies, fights, vagrancy, inattention given to advice and comments made about them), the advantages (freedom, money, etc.) that the street offers them and on the other hand, the insufficient financial means available to social actors.

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