Forced sex or rape and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe

Dr Witness Chikoko  
Women’s University in Africa,  
E-mail: wchikoko@gmail.com

Victor N. Muzvidziwa  
Midlands State University,  

Watch Ruparanganda  
University of Zimbabwe

The late Emelia Chikoko/Chimhowa  
Ministry of Public Services Labour and Social Welfare

Abstract

Very academic literature has been conducted that problematises the nexus between forced sex and substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Therefore, this paper examines the multi-dimensional nature of the relationship between forced sex or rape and substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. The child rights and agency perspectives were adopted to analyse the realities of these children. Research findings suggest that some of the street children were exposed to forced sex when they were heavily intoxicated. Conversely some of the street boys perpetrated forced sex or rape on innocent girls when they were under the influence of substance abuse. Some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District became addicted to substance abuse so as to manage the traumatic experiences associated with forced sex or rape thus thin agency. However, the behaviours of these children could be viewed as ambiguous agency or self-destructive agency. Drawing from a child rights framework, the multidimensional relationship of forced sex and substance abuse illustrate severe child rights violations prevalent on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. The qualitative research methodology that included case study research design and street ethnography approach were adopted to generate data for this paper. The paper recommends the Government of Zimbabwe to fully implement child rights issues including those of the children in streets situations.

Key words: Forced sex, rape, substance abuse, child rights, street children etc

Introduction

There seems to be dearth of academic literature on the multi-dimensional relationship between forced sex and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District. The paper interrogates the interrelatedness of substance abuse and forced sex or rape among street children of the Harare Central Business District. Makaruse (2010) defines substance abuse as taking too much of a drug, taking a drug too often or taking drugs or substances for wrong reasons. The research established that, there is a close relationship between substance abuse and forced sex. For example, some of the street children succumbed to forced sex as a result of psycho active substance abuse.
On the other hand, some of the street children resorted to substance abuse as a result of forced sex. Some of the street boys abuse aphrodisiac substances to engage in forced sex with some of the street girls of the Harare Central Business District. The child agency and child rights concepts were adopted to analyse the realities of these children. The forced sex or rape and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District demonstrate agency of these children. The behaviours or actions could be the only viable options of these children thus thin agency (Tisdall and Punch 2012). The forced sex or rape and abuse of substances among the street children could be seen as ambiguity of agency as they clash with existing societal values (Bordonaro and Payne 2012, Bordonaro 2012). Gigengack (2006 & 2008) viewed such behaviours as self-destructive agency. The forced sex and abuse of substances is associated with a number of risks among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Conversely, the forced sex or rape and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District highlight the level of vulnerability of these children. The behaviours are regarded as inconsistent with the international, the regional and the national child rights laws, policies and programmes.

However, previous studies on street children by Bourdillon from 1994 up to the present, Mhizha (2015), Mella (2012), Wakatama (2007), Chikoko (2014 & 2017), Chikoko et al (2016), Chikoko (2014 & 2017), Ruparanganda (2008), Chirwa (2007), Chirwa and Wakatama (2000) have been limited in articulating the interrelatedness of forced sex or rape and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. In other words, there is paucity of literature on multidimensional relationship of substance abuse and forced sex or rape among these children.

Conceptual Framework

Child Rights Perspective

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) (1989) defines child rights into four principles namely, the best interest of the child, the right of a child to participation, non-discrimination and the right of a child to survival and development. The Save the Children (2002) also noted that, child rights perspective recognises the relationship between the duty bearer and the rights holders. The child rights perspective could be seen as social contract that exists between the rights holders and the duty bearers.

Liebel (2012: 15) argues that “there is little guidance on how exactly the core principles of the ‘best interests of the child should be interpreted and implemented. In practice, it probably most often depends on who exactly has the authority to interpret this principle and how this authority is put into practice”.

The Government of Zimbabwe has ratified the UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (1999) so as to improve the status of children in the country. Additionally, a number of child rights legislations have been enacted. These include the Children’s Act (5:06), the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23). Apart from legislations, some of the national programmes have been implemented to fostering the well-being of children in the country. Some of the policies and programmes include the Zimbabwe National Orphan Care Policy of (1999), the National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (2011 to 2015) among others (Chikoko, 2014).

Scholars such as Bourdillon (2009), Okoli (2009) noted that the child rights perspective is discredited for its western world orientation. The authors added that it is seen as advancing western world orientation of child hood. Abebe and Tefera (2014) observed that, the UNCRC as a childhood framework is problematic in terms of its implementation in non-western societies.
The forced sex or rape and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District illustrate huge child rights violations. The behaviours are inconsistent with ‘the best interest of the child’ principle of the UNCRC (1989). The forced sex and abuse of substances affect the well-being of the street children of the Harare Central Business District.

Additionally, forced sex or rape and substance abuse among street girls of the Harare Central Business District, contravenes the provisions of the national child rights laws, policies and programmes. The Children’s Act (5:06) defines children who are involved in forced sex or rape and substance abuse as children ‘in need of care’. They are considered children in need of care because of the extent and nature of vulnerabilities of these children.

The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23) refers to children who perpetrate forced sex or rape and also abusing substances as children ‘in conflict with the law’. The National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (2011-2015) views children who are involved forced sex or rape and substance abuse as ‘victim or vulnerable’.

Child Agency

Chuta (2014: 02) has defined agency as “understood as an individual’s own capabilities, competences and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their life worlds fulfilling many economic, social and cultural expectations”. Ursin (2013), observed agency among homeless children focuses on their skills, knowledge, strength and aptitudes.

Kovats-Bernat (2006:07) observed that “the danger in emphasising the agency of street children lies in the erroneous assumption that they are not simultaneously victims of larger political and economic machinations that severely impact their lives, complicate their survival and place them at higher risk of dying younger and more violently than other children”.

Additionally, Ursin (2013: 35) noted that “by emphasising agency on behalf of the surrounding context of extreme structural constraints, the researcher run a risk of unwittingly substitute vulnerability by responsibility”.

Bordonaro and Payne (2012) have also raised concerns that child agency becomes ambiguous when it clashes with existing societal values. For example, the involvement of the street children of the Harare Central Business District in forced sex or rape and abusing of substances is seen as clashing with societal values. In Zimbabwe children including those on the streets should not be involved in forced sex or rape and also abusing substances.

The ambiguity of the agency is also explained as forced sex and substance abuse threatens the wellbeing of these children. Through forced sex and substance abuse the street children of the Harare Central Business District are exposed to a number of risks such as sexually transmitted diseases. Therefore, the behaviours also constitute self-destructive agency (Gigengack 2006 & 2008).

Some of the risks could include death as a result of excessive intoxication and HIV and AIDS.

Materials and Methods

The qualitative research methodology that included street ethnography was adopted in this study. Through the street or urban ethnography, the researcher spent more than twelve months interacting with participants in their natural environments known as ‘bases’.

In addition, the case study research design was used in the study. Yin (1994: 23) defines the case study research design “as
an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon with its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”.

There are a number of advantages of using the case study design. Yin (1994) observed that case studies provide an examination of the data is most often conducted within the context of its use. The authors also added that case studies explore or describe the data in real life environment and also help explain the complexities of real situations which may not be captured through experimental or survey research.

However, Yin (1994) has been criticised for lack of rigour. Yin (1984:21) notes that “too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy and has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions”. In addition, Yin (1984) observed it is difficult to generalise conclusions drawn from a single case exploration.

The purposive sampling was used to select or identify eight (8) participants for the study. As a result of purposive sampling, the researcher identified and targeted participant who were known to be deviant in terms of sexual behaviours and also abusing substances. Through purposive sampling it was easier to select the participants who were considered to be hard to reach ones. Scholars such as Babbie and Mouton (2012), Neuman (2011) observed that purposive sampling is suitable when working with difficult or vulnerable populations such as street children and street based sex workers. The authors added that through purposive sampling it becomes easy to identify and recruit the participants in a study. Similarly, Mhizha (2010) also used purposive sampling on his studies with the street children of Harare.

A number of the qualitative data collection techniques such as, life history interviews, in-depth interviews, informal conversations and semi-participant observation methods were adopted to collect the data for this study. The research findings of this paper were part of the author’s doctoral field work which involved street ethnography spanning more than twelve months.

The qualitative data was analysed through thematic content analysis. The data analysis focused on themes and sub themes that emerged from the study. Some of the themes and sub themes that emerged included, aphrodisiac substances, forced sex, psycho active substances among others. Scholars such as Farmer, McAlinden and Maruna (2016); Garland, Richard and Cooney (2010); Mhizha (2010, 2015); Chikoko (2014); Ruparanganda (2008) used thematic content analysis in their studies with street children.

Neuman (1997) defines ethical considerations as what is or not legitimate to do or what is ‘moral’ when conducting a research. The following ethical considerations were observed when conducting this research; informed consent, confidentiality, benevolence among others. In the case of the street children of the Harare Central Business District, the researcher obtained verbal informed consent. The researcher also ensured confidentiality by using alphabetical letters instead of writing the names of the street children on data gathering tools.

**Findings/Results**

The case studies below illustrate the multiple-dimensional relationships between forced sex or rape and substance abuse. There is evidence that suggest that the adolescent street children of the Harare Central Business District perceived that the escalation of forced sex or rape on the streets is influenced by intoxicating substances. Some of the street children resorted to substance abuse as a result of rape.
Case One

MD (not real name) is one of the street girls. She is aged 17 years. She lives on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. During the life history interviews, she revealed that she was involved in forced sex or rape when she was under the influence of intoxicating substances. She narrated her ordeal. She had this to say:

Elder\(^2\), one of the days we got drunk too much with my friend Pretty. We took different intoxicating substances such as Redds\(^3\), marijuana and blon cleer\(^4\) among others. It was on a Saturday. We started getting drunk during the morning. We did not even eat anything besides getting drunk. We bought Redds\(^5\) at Avery bottle store at corner Fifth Street and Nelson Mandela. In addition, we also smoked marijuana at the Fife Avenue base. However, during the night we went to Super Label night club, which is at corner Chinhoyi\(^6\) and Robert Mugabe\(^7\). There was a Zimbabwe dance hall musical show. That day we were enjoying ourselves as if it was a Christmas day. I did not realise that our happiness was going to cause us more trouble.

I do not know how I left Super Label night club. I only found myself around 0400 hours, at fourth street bus terminus. I was naked. I had lost my pant and also my jean trouser which I had been wearing. The people that were passing by were just laughing at me. My genitalia area had bloody stains. I had been raped, elder. People are evil (sobbing). I did not know where my friend Pretty had gone.

I was given a wrapper by one of the street vendors. She assisted me so much. I went to report the case to the police at Central office. The victim friendly unit people tremendously assisted me by taking me to Adult Rape Clinic at Parirenyatwa\(^8\) hospital. I was given medicine for me to avoid getting pregnant or contracting the deadly HIV and AIDS.

What always worry me is that the mboko\(^9\) that raped me has not been arrested or prosecuted up to this day. This worries me a lot. (sobbing). The Adult Rape Clinic had advised me to come for a review, but I did not go because I want to look for money.

Case Two

Jah K (not real name) is one of the street boys aged around 18 years. During the in depth interviews he indicated that, he became addicted to substances after he was raped. Jah K added that addiction to substances assist him cope with his traumatic experiences of forced sex on the streets. He narrated that he was raped after drinking a highly intoxicating substances that he was given by one of female strangers, at Karigamombe\(^10\) centre. Jah K revealed that, the female stranger gave him a drink that had intoxicating substances. After taking on the substance he did not know what later happened to him. He was subsequently seen the following morning, lying unconsciously on one of the street lanes without clothing. He had this to say:

Elder\(^11\), in streets, there are many problems, there are prisoners. One of the days, elder, during weekend I got myself in problems last year (November 2013). One of the mothers, who was beautiful, which could be around mid-age (40 years), gave me a drink that was highly intoxicating substances. When I took a sip of that drink, elder, I was drunk to be a useless person. That mother had a Toyota Vigo vehicle.

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1 Bases are places where street children stay or live.
2 Elder refers to the researcher
3 Redds is a type of ciders
4 Blon cleer is cough synt
5 Redds is a type of ciders
6 Chinhoyi is a road
7 Robert Mugabe is another road
8 Parirenyatwa is a central hospital in Harare
9 Mboko refers to a useless person
10 Karigamombe is a building complex that is found in the Harare Central Business District
11 Elder refers to the researcher
After getting intoxicated like a useless person, I am not sure of what happened. I was picked up one of the morning with some of the boys, naked at Food World shops at Copa Cabana. Also my penis was with bruises. Elder I was raped and I am not sure how many people raped me. Plus, I am not sure whether that was flesh to flesh or what I am not sure. That woman I have not ever seen again on the streets may be she ran away to Jozi.

Elder, from that day of forced sex, I have resorted to abusing substances. I have lost hope in life. Substances make me forget the ordeal of my forced sex.

One of the street vendors who sell psychoactive substances to street children revealed that some of her clients abuses substances so as to cope with traumatic experiences in their lives. She added that some of the street children would have been exposed to sexual violence or exploitation so they become addicted to psychoactive substances so that they can cope with their ordeal.

During the key informant interviews, a social worker based at Streets Ahead confirmed that a number of street children were addicted to substances so as to cope with the harsh realities of their lives. She added that the harsh realities included lack of food, clothing, love and other traumatic experiences such as unsafe abortion, forced sex among others.

Case Three

Stavo (not real name) is one of the street boys. He is aged around 17 years. Stavo abuses substances that enhance sexual drive such as 7 hours. He also confessed that he perpetrates sexual violence on younger girls after taking on the aphrodisiac substances. Stavo added that he does it whenever he does not have money to pay for sexual services to a sex worker. Ironically, targets the newly recruited and younger girls for forced sex.

One of the gate keepers also confirmed that some of the street children were engaged in forced sex or rape as a result of substances abuse. He affirmed that some street boys, when they are drunk, perpetrate forced sex on street girls. He had this to say:

_When some of the street boys are drunk, they perpetrate forced sex or rape on innocent girls. That is the reason why you see most of the street girls always put on trousers, so as to make it difficult for the perpetrators._

During the field work, the researcher noted that some of the street girls, as social agency, ran away from their drunken male counterparts They were running away because they were aware that their lives were at risk of forced sex. The street girl’s agency became evident as some of them always slept with their trousers on so as to reduce risks associated with forced sex.

Discussion/Interpretation

The study sought to interrogates the intricate relationship between forced sex and substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. The research findings suggest that forced sex and abuse of substances among the street children are two sides of the same coin. Drawing from child rights concept, the forced sex and substance abuse among the street children demonstrate the escalation of violence against children of the Harare Central Business District. It demonstrates that street girls of the Harare Central Business District are vulnerable to sexual abuse, exploitation and violence and substance abuse. The forced sex and substance abuse contravene the principles of the UNCRC (1989), the ACRWC (1999), and the Domestic Violence (5:16), the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23) and the Children’s Act (5:06,) among others. In other words, the forced sex and substance abuse are in
consistent with article three of the UNCRC (1989) thus ‘the best interest of the child’. The street children who engage in forced sex and substance abuse are regarded as children ‘in need of care’ in terms of the Children’s Act (5.06). The street children who are both victims and perpetrators of forced sex and substance abuse are viewed as in need of care because of the extent and level of their vulnerabilities. They become vulnerable to sexual violence, abuse and exploitation. In addition, they become vulnerable as they are fragile to contracting diseases including HIV and AIDS among others.

The street children who engage in forced sex and abuse of substances are also viewed as children ‘in conflict with the law’ in terms of Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23). This is on the basis that forced sex and abuse of substances is criminalized in Zimbabwe. For example, Stavo in Case Three, he is considered a child in conflict with the law as he perpetrates sexual violence on innocent girls. He is also in conflict with law as he abuses substances both psycho active and aphrodisiac ones. Furthermore, the street boy is a child in conflict with the law as he abusers aphrodisiac and psycho active substances with a clear intention to perpetrate sexual violence on street girls. In addition, this calls upon the key stakeholders to provide adequate child protection services to innocent children on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

The forced sex and substance abuse among the street children demonstrate that these children are social actors. They are able to have influence in their lives thus agency. The agency becomes ambiguous as forced sex and substance abuse are seen as threatening the well-being of these children and that of the community (Bordonaro and Payne 2012). The forced sex and abuse of substances among the street children is also ambiguous of agency as, the behaviours are against the societal values. For example, among the Shona people in Zimbabwe, children including those living in street situations are not expected to engage in forced sex and abuse of substances. Chikoko (2014) observed that street children in Harare Central Business District should be asexual. The behaviours can also be explained with the concept of thin agency (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). The forced sex and substance abuse could have been the only viable options of these children in a context characterised with harsh realities of life on the streets. Chikoko (2014) observed that street life is characterised with harsh realities such as violence, lack of food among others.

The forced sex and abuse of substances also highlights the self-destructive agency of the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Gigengack (2006 &2008) observed that self-destructive agency is associated with a number of risks. The forced sex and substance abuse are behaviours that are also associated with risks. For example, in Case One, the street girl had bloody stains on her genitalia area as a result of forced sex. In another example in Case Two, the street boy developed bruises on his penis as a result of forced sex. Some of the risks could be exposed to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS, death as a result of heavy intoxication among others.

The research findings suggest that, some of the street girls were forced into sex when they were highly intoxicated. As discussed in the Case One above, the street girl was subjected to forced sex or rape after she had taken intoxicating substances. Additionally, the forced sex was perpetrated on the street girls during the festive season. The festive season is associated with a lot of issues in Zimbabwe. Many people have money to spend during the period. The Zimbabwe Dance hall music has also been associated with abuse of substances and also sexual deviance in the country.

Mhizha (2010) noted that the street boys of the Harare were in the habit of intoxicating some of their victims with the intention of
subsequently raping them. Drawing from the observations made by Mhizha (2010) and Tadele (2009), the escalating cases of coercive sex on the streets were linked to substance abuse.

Swahn, Haberlen, Plamer and Kasirye (2014)’s study of street youths in Kampala, Uganda noted that substance abuse such as alcohol had influence on the risk sexual behaviours of these children. The authors cited that some of the street girls were subjected to forced sex when they were drunk. Swahn et al (2014) also observed that substance abuse exacerbated risky behaviours as the boys became more sexually aroused and subsequently raped some of the girls.

In the Case Two, it is highlighted that some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District resort to abuse substances after engaged in forced sex or rape. The street boy was raped by certain older woman. The allegedly perpetrator used highly intoxicating substances to facilitate rape or forced sex on the innocent street boy. The boy developed bruises as a result of forced sex. This also demonstrates the vulnerabilities of these boys to forced sex and he might have contracted sexually transmitted diseases including the deadly HIV and AIDS. The street boy also succumbed to abuse of substances so as to cope with the traumatic experiences associated with forced sex or rape. This also highlight that the particular street boy should have been given rehabilitation services such that he could cope with his traumatic experiences. Therefore, in a context where there were inadequate rehabilitation services, he resorted to abusing substances. The situation is worrisome because it poses further vulnerabilities to innocent children on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

The research findings also suggest that some of the street boys engage in substance abuse with a view to perpetrate forced sex on innocent girls. The boys abuse both psychoactive and aphrodisiac substances so as to abuse naive street girls particularly those who would have recently joined street life.

Oduro (2012) observed that some of the street girls were subjected to forced sex or rape so as to shame and disgust them. She added that the street boys that were perpetrating forced sex on the girls had the habit of smoking marijuana and other intoxicating substances. The author also observed that when the boys were high due to substances, they would take turns to rape street girls.

The findings also corroborate previous researching findings by scholars such Tadele (2009) who discussed that street boys were perpetrating different forms of sexual violence. Some of the street boys were addicted to the use of alcohol and other drugs such as khat and sniffing glue. However, Tadele (2009)’s study focused more on the sexual behaviours of street boys at the expense of street girls. His findings might be problematic to apply to sexual behaviours of street girls.

Maurus, (2010), Richard, (2005), Rafaelli et al (1993), Hecht, (1998) observed that forced sex or rape among street children could be regarded as a power dynamic issue. For example, Ruparanganda (2008) noted that sexual violence among street children of Harare was as a result of gender inequality issues, where street girls were regarded as sexual objects by the street boys. He analysed sexual violence among street children from a social constructionist perspective. Ruparanganda (2008) added that the issues were to do with gender socialisation in terms of masculinity and femininity. Bhattacharya and Nair (2014) showed that street girls were vulnerable to forced sex because of their gender socialisation. The authors argued that the street girls had internalised the notion that they were inferior to street boys.
Conclusion

As discussed above, the research findings suggest that substance abuse and forced sex or rape among the street children of the Harare Central Business District are two sides of the same coin. There is an intricate relationship between substance abuse and forced sex among these children. Some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District succumbed to forced sex as a result of substance abuse. Contrary some of the children resorted to substance abuse as a direct result of forced sex. The substance abuse and forced sex among these children demonstrate agency. The behaviours could be the only viable options of these children thus thin agency. However, the behaviours could be seen as ambiguous agency or self-destructive agency. They are considered self-destructive agency as forced sex and abuse of substances has a number of risks to the street children. The forced sex or rape and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District also highlight increasing level of vulnerability of these children. The behaviours constitute child rights violations on the streets. The forced sex and abuse of substances among street children of the Harare Central Business District are also inconsistent with the provisions of the international, the regional and national child rights laws, policies and programmes.

Recommendations

The study noted a number of recommendations that include the following;
• All perpetrators of forced sex or rape among street children of the Harare Central Business District must be brought to book,
• The duty bearers in the name of Government of Zimbabwe should establish functional child friendly drop in centres for substance abusing street children of the Harare Central Business District,
• There is need for more awareness raising on forced sex or rape and substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District,
• More child protection services should be availed to the street children of the Harare Central Business District so as to reduce the level of vulnerability,
• There is need for a multi-sectoral response to substance abuse and forced sex among street children and
• There is need to establish substance rehabilitation centres on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

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