

A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF STREET CHILDREN IN MUMBAI

**Barnabe D'Souza, sdb
Larissa Castelino
Dakshayani Madangopal**

NOVEMBER 2002

SHELTER DON BOSCO RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION CENTER
DON BOSCO CAMPUS, MATUNGA, MUMBAI – 400 019.

TEL: 2 416 33 43 / 2 415 41 18 (ext.716/733)

E-mail: ifcu@vsnl.net

Introduction

The phenomenon of Street Children has come into existence because of the interplay between a medley of factors such as industrialization, migration from rural to urban areas, poverty, a dearth of opportunities for education, broken families, cruelty and abuse, neglect, natural calamities, etc. All these have led to an escalation in the number of children running away from their homes or being left to fend for themselves.

India – the land that is popularly known as the ‘melting pot’ of an assortment of cultures and races, is home to more than 1.27 billion people, making it the second most populated country in the world¹. India is predominantly agricultural and has a sizeable rural population (741.7 million)¹.

Asia, Africa, and Latin America are infamous for having the largest percentages of street children in the world. India has a child population (0-14 years) of more than 300 million, which accounts for approximately 35% of the entire population. In 1999, R. Agrawal² estimated that India was home to about 20 million street children (approximately 7% of the child population). A decade ago, the figures for child labour were estimated at 11.28 million³. There is however, no census data available for street children since they constitute a floating population. No one knows for certain how many street children there are in India although the phenomenon is evident all over the country. For most purposes however, figures are inconsequential because, quoting R. Pandey⁴, “...even a single child living, working or learning about life alone on the street is one too many.”

Classification of Street Children

Based on the relationship of the child with its family, the United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF (1988)⁵, and the World Health Organization⁶ distinguished between three categories of street children, namely:

¹ *Provisional Population Totals : India*. Census of India 2001, Paper 1 of 2001.

² Agrawal, R. 1999. *Street Children*. Shipra Publications, New Delhi.

³ Manorama Yearbook 2002. Ed. K.M. Mathew. Malayala Manorama Press, Kottayam.

⁴ Pandey, R. 1991. *Street Children of India*. Chugh Publications. Allahabad.

⁵ UNICEF: Background paper prepared by UNICEF, New Delhi, for National Workshop on Street Children held from 29th to 30th August, 1988.

⁶ WHO Publication at http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/PDFfiles/module1.pdf

- a) Children on the Street: This category comprises children working on the street but maintaining more or less regular ties with their families. Their focus is home, to which they return at the end of the working day and have a sense of belonging to the local community.
- b) Children of the Street: Children in this category maintain only tenuous relations with their families, visiting them only occasionally. They see the street as their home where they seek shelter, food and companionship.
- c) Abandoned Children: Children in this category are also children of the street but are differentiated from that category (category 'b' above) by the fact that they have cut off all ties with their biological families and are completely on their own.

Children who leave, run away, or are sent away from their homes, are generally attracted to Mumbai because of the city's glamorous and wealthy reputation. Mumbai is called "*the city of dreams*" and is often depicted in films as a city where anyone and everyone can acquire the job of their choosing and have a good life. It is popularly known as the hub of Bollywood (the Indian counterpart of Hollywood) and is known to be home to a number of film personalities thus increasing its 'glamour quotient'. Mumbai is one of the most famous cities in the world and is renowned for its immense variety of educational and employment opportunities. As the commercial capital of India, railways and roadways connect Mumbai to virtually every region of India, making travel to and from the city easy and accessible.

Shelter Don Bosco

Shelter Don Bosco is a non-governmental organization under the umbrella of the Salesians of Don Bosco, and has been working with 'rootless' and 'roofless' street children in Mumbai for the past 15 years. Over these years various projects for the roofless & rootless street children have been initiated. Each of these emerged in response to a need expressed by the children. One of the major problems that street children face is that they are rootless (i.e. have no one to belong to, no one to call their own) and roofless (have no shelter / roof over their heads). In order to help them address these needs, Shelter keeps its doors twenty four hours open, so that the child can walk in any time to rest inside in a safe environment. Besides, this, it also offers a wide array of other facilities namely:

Projects Initiated by Shelter Don Bosco

1. Street Contact (regular contact with children on the streets across Mumbai)
2. Residential Home (housing about 150 street children) offering facilities mentioned below:
 - **Bathing and Washing** - Any street boy can come in for a bath or to wash clothes at any time of the day or night.
 - **Medical Aid** – Any street boy found ill or with injuries, is given first aid and the necessary medical care.
 - **Counselling** – Every street child has his/her unique reason for being on the street. Every boys unique problem is tackled individually by trained personnel.
 - **Non-formal and formal education** – Formal education is a distant dream for many street children. They all have a desire to learn but not all of them are prepared to enter the existing formal education system. Inspired and interested children who aspire for formal education are encouraged and supported.
 - **Hobby Centre** – children are encouraged to use their free time productively to express their talents in modes of art, craft and other skillful activities.
 - **Self-employment** – The boys by nature are industrious and ingenious in earning their living. They are encouraged with finance in the form of small credit facilities and are provided with the know-how of venturing into small businesses.
 - **Skill training** – Most street children are very interested in picking up simple and practical/ technical skills. Keeping this in mind they are placed in small functional and practical workshops where they learn trades like welding, carpentry, printing, tailoring, banner painting, motor mechanics, etc.
 - **Monthly melas (fairs)** – These are monthly festive gatherings of street children, organized with the primary objective of creating fundamental social change by building fellowship among street children, making them aware of existing services, providing healthy recreation/ entertainment and facilitating group work. These melas are frequented by at least 250 to 300 street children from within and outside Mumbai.
 - **Annual Diwali Mela** – Shelter hosts an annual Mela for 3 days during the season of Diwali. Boys and girls from slums, pavements, and from organizations working with marginalized children participate in this fun-filled programme. The third day is exclusively for street children. There are a number of activity stalls where the children can learn a skill or craft such as flower making, pottery, etc. Space and material is also provided for children to draw, paint, jump, sing, play, and dance. Activities like face painting and

artificial tattooing are very popular with all the children. There are also game stalls and organized group games. Besides this there are stage programmes such as skits, dances, mimicry, ventriloquism acts, magic shows, etc. Awareness programmes on relevant topics such as personal hygiene, drug addiction, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, etc. impart a lot of information and clarify superstitious beliefs held by the children.

3. Drop-In Centre (with a daily average attendance of 40 children)
4. Group Settlement (of over 50 older children)
5. HIV/AIDS Awareness and Prevention Programme (with an annual target of reaching out to a thousand children)
6. A Street Community College (where so far, 10 street youth have been trained as para-professional social workers)
7. 13 Pavement Khelwadis (playschools reaching out to over 400 children living on pavements)
8. A Drug Rehabilitation Programme for Street Addicts (over 700 children have been in contact for rehabilitation, of which, over a hundred have completed the programme successfully)
9. A Research and Documentation Centre (focusing on issues affecting street children and youth at risk)

Research Undertaken

The Research and Documentation Centre recently conducted a quick survey to obtain a small profile of each street child they came in contact with. The information obtained is as follows:

- 1. The Place of Origin of the Street Children (by Zones of India)**
- 2. The State of Origin of the Street Children**
- 3. The current place of stay of the street children**
- 4. The average age of the street children**
- 5. The number of years the street children had spent in Mumbai**
- 6. The number of years the street children had spent on the streets**
- 7. The number of Shelter Don Bosco 'melas' the street children had attended**

This was an effort towards documenting the "street child" phenomenon. We managed to get in touch with 1,359 street children in the city of Mumbai. The required data was collected. All data was compiled using a computer package called 'SPSS' (Statistical Package for Social Sciences – Version 10.0). The findings of the study are discussed below:

Findings and Discussions

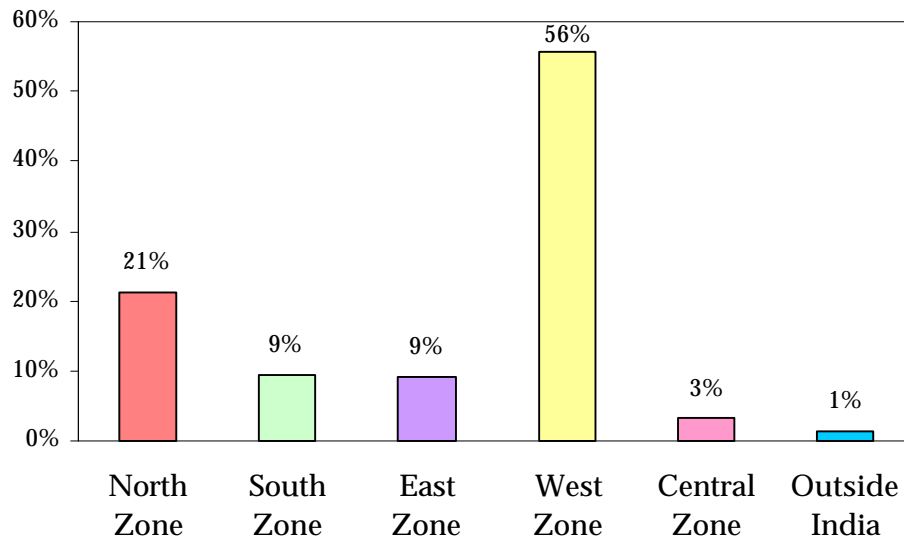
Place of Origin of the Street Children (Zones in India)

Figure 1 reveals that a large majority (56%) of the street children, were originally from the West Zone of India, (i.e. from Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan). An earlier study conducted in 1999 (sample size = 1,176 street children) calculated 31% of the children as originating from the west zone. The current study thus reveals a dramatic increase (25%) in the number of street children originating from the west zone. It is conceivable that a lot of these children have fled to Mumbai after the various natural calamities that have taken place in areas like Jamnagar, Latur, etc. Another reason could be the proximity of these regions to Mumbai, thus making it cost and time efficient to travel here. A glance at Figure 2 shows that most of the street children coming from the west zone, were from Maharashtra itself. Related to this finding, the 1991 census showed that Maharashtra accounted for 43.51% of the migrant population to the city of Mumbai⁷.

21% of the street children originated from the North Zone, i.e. from Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh. This finding is comparable to the earlier study conducted in 1999, which revealed that 20% of the children had originated from the north zone. The states in the north zone are known to have, primarily, an agrarian economy. Hence because of the seasonal nature of employment, many more are attracted to city life for short spans of time. An additional factor may be the glamour associated with city life. In 1991, Uttar Pradesh⁷ accounted for 16.38% of the migrant population to the city of Mumbai. Besides this, the states in the north zone have large percentages of their population living below the poverty line – Bihar (54.96%), Uttar Pradesh (40.85%), Himachal Pradesh (28.44%), Jammu and Kashmir (25.17%), Haryana (25.05%), Delhi (14.69%), and Punjab (11.77%). These people are likely to be lured to the city in hope of employment. Poverty, and the consequent migration in search of employment are the fundamental causes for the breakdown of the family system which in turn is a major cause of children fleeing their homes or being forced out in search of work.

⁷ Danait, W.J.N. and Deshmukh, B.G. 2000. Fact Book on Mumbai. Published by Bombay First. Compiled by Maharashtra Economic Development Council. Nariman Point, Mumbai.

Figure 1: Origin of Street Children from Different Zones in India



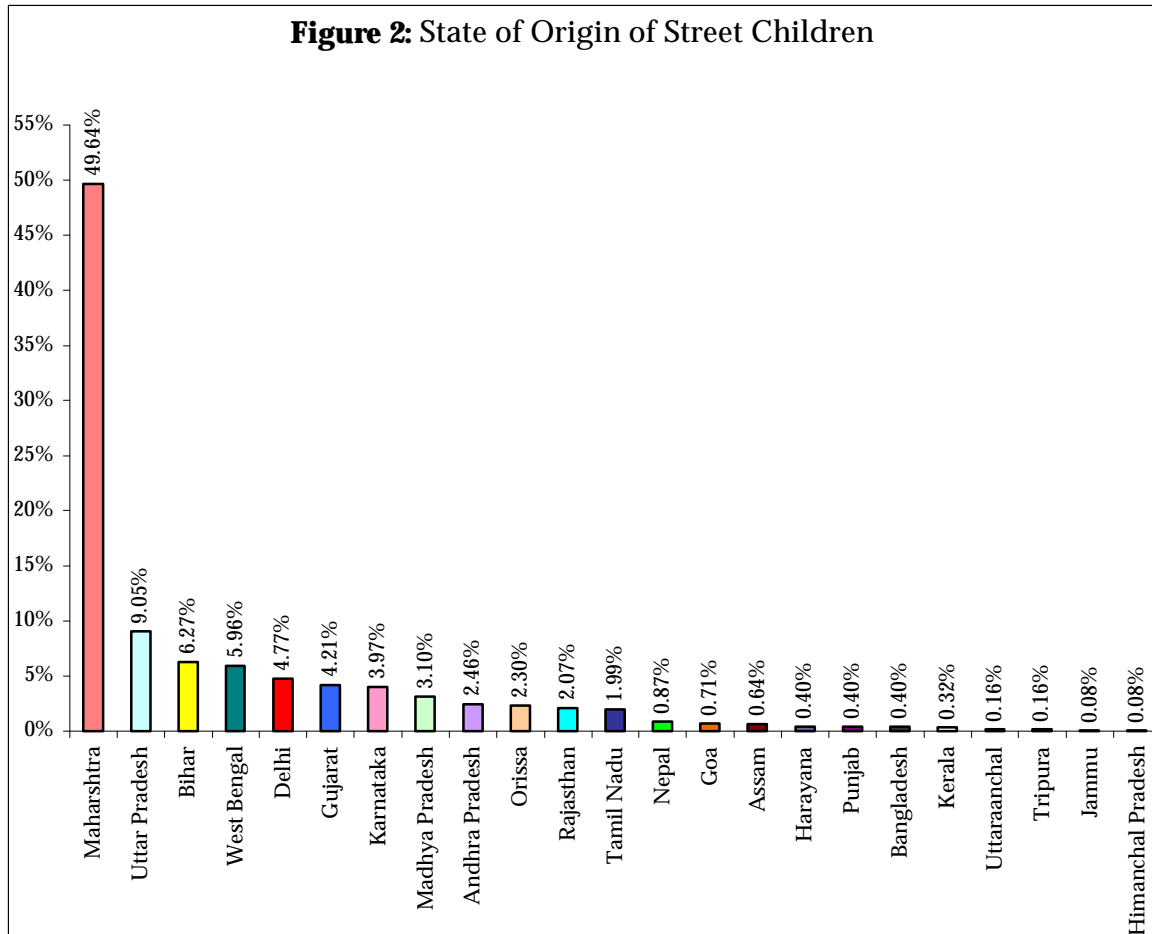
Note:

North Zone	:	Bihar, Delhi, Harayana, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh
South Zone	:	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala
East Zone	:	Orissa, West Bengal, Assam, Tripura
West Zone	:	Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan
Central Zone	:	Madhya Pradesh
Outside India	:	Nepal, Bangladesh

The east zone and the south zone of India contribute approximately 9% each to the population of street children. The percentages are probably lower from these zones because of the higher levels of literacy associated with them. Higher literacy levels ensure higher and more professional levels of occupation and more gainful employment. The concomitant development of industries in the southern and eastern states absorb large numbers of people and thus curb the need for them to move out in search of work.

State of Origin of the Street Children

Figure 2 shows the state of origin of the street children. This bears out the fact that Maharashtra (West Zone), and Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (North Zone) are the main contributors to the body of street children in Mumbai.

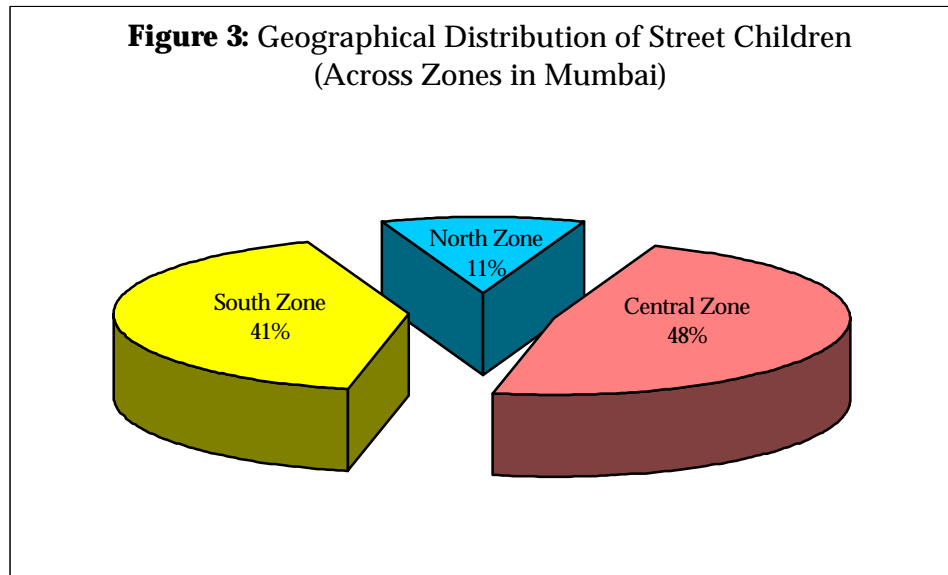


Current Place of Stay in Mumbai (Across Zones in Mumbai)

Mumbai is divided into three zones namely: The South Zone (Colaba to Mumbai Central; C.S.T. to Byculla), the Central Zone (Mahalaxmi to Bandra; Parel to Chembur), and the North Zone (Khar to Virar; Kurla to Kalyan / Panvel).

Figure 3 reveals that most of the street children were living in the Central (48%) and South (41%) Zones of Mumbai. These zones include the major train terminuses (Chattrapati Shivaji Terminus, Churchgate, Bombay Central, Bandra, Dadar) that connect Mumbai to other parts of India. They also include the chief centres of economic activity (C.S.T., Crawford

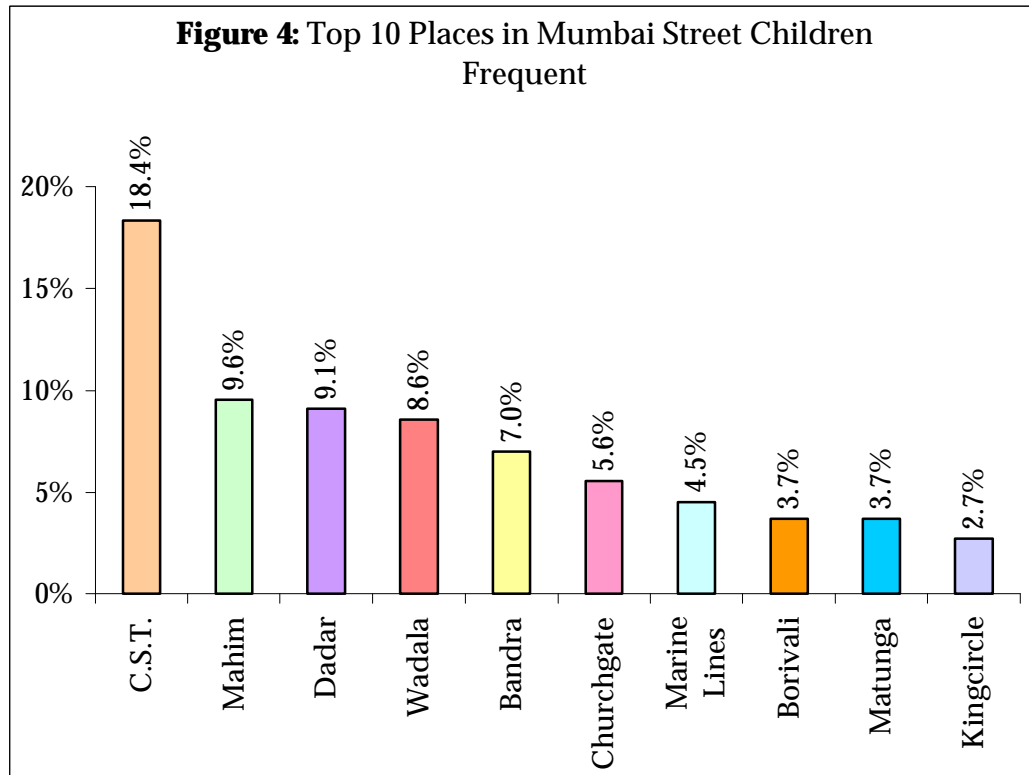
Market, Churchgate, Marine Lines, etc.) and some areas of industrial activity (Reay Road, Sewri, etc.). Thus, these become the favourite spots for street children since they provide ample opportunity for begging, obtaining cheap food and drugs, and making a living. These zones also include major places of worship namely, the Mahim Darga, St. Michael's Church, Mount Mary's Basilica, Haji Ali Mosque, Siddhivinayak Temple, Churchgate Darga, etc. where free food is frequently distributed to all the poor and homeless around. These attract a lot of street children who have no other means of obtaining a meal. Other places that offer free meals occasionally are 'Kaka Hotel'* (Crawford Market), 'Bara Handi'* (Crawford Market), 'Mama Kane' (Dadar B.B.), 'Ram Mandir' (Near G.T. Hospital, Masjid Bunder.), etc.



Note:	Mumbai North Zone	=	Khar to Virar Kurla to Kalyan / Panvel
	Mumbai Central Zone	=	Mahalaxmi to Bandra Parel to Chembur
	Mumbai South Zone	=	Colaba to Mumbai Central C.S.T. to Byculla

* These are the street names and not the actual names of the places. For example, 'Kaka Hotel' is actually called New Sahajan Hotel.

A glance at [Figure 4](#) reiterates the fact that the top ten places in Mumbai that street children frequent, lie mainly in the South and Central Zones. (For more detailed information about the exact number of children found in each area please refer to [Table 1](#) in [Appendix A](#)).

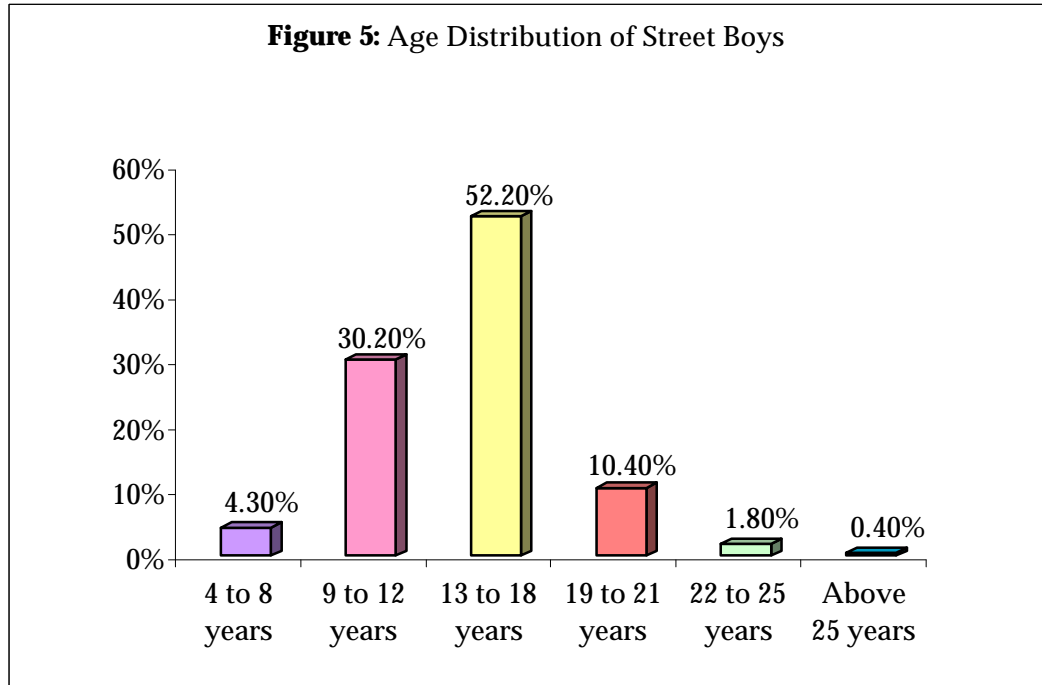


Age Group of Children

A large majority of children (see [Figure 5](#)) were in the age group of 13 to 18 years (52.2%) followed by those in the age group of 9 to 12 years (30.2%). The mean age of the children attending was 14.6 years.

A number of street children who run away from home are between 8 to 18 years of age. The phase they are at, comprises the onset of puberty and the stage of adolescence. At the age of nine or ten years, children begin to see themselves as independent people. Most of them are able to look after themselves in terms of dressing, eating, and bathing on their own. They are therefore more able to consider running away as an option. As children move into puberty, they begin to want their own personal space and develop a need for experimentation, novelty, and adventure. Impulsive behaviour and a decreased fear of consequences is characteristic of the

phase of adolescence. Because of the characteristics of this phase, adolescents are more likely to decide to leave home on impulse, at the slightest confrontation.

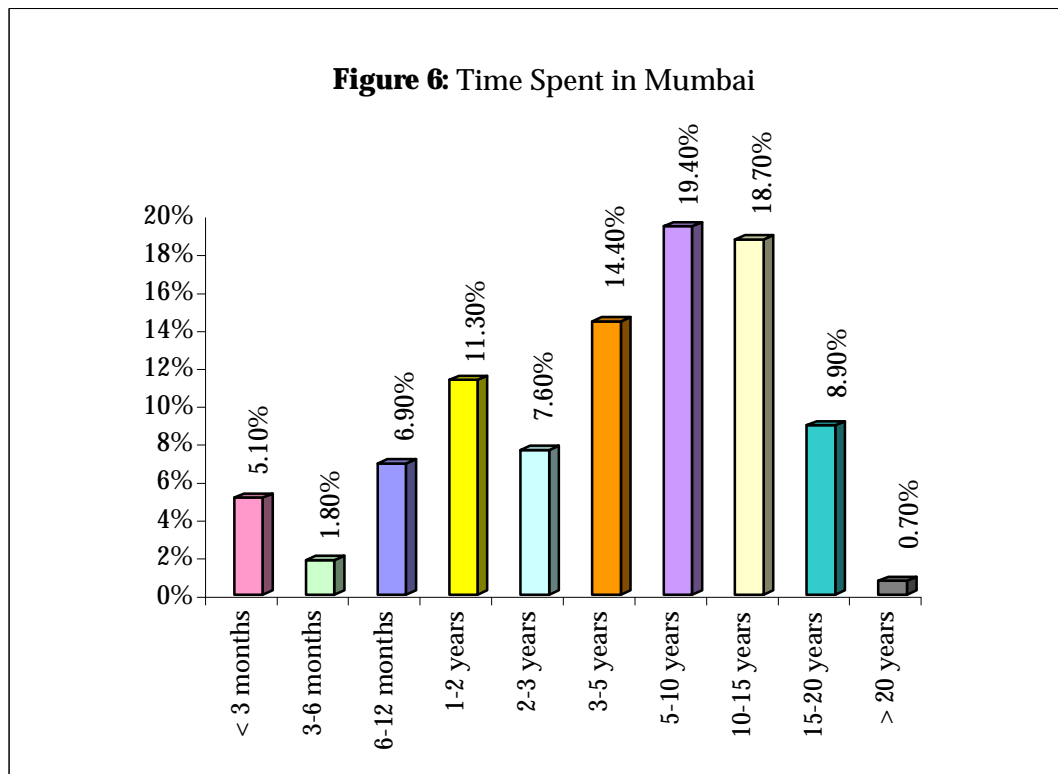


Another reason why most street children were between 13-18 years of age is probably because that is the age when children can see themselves as old enough to work and earn and are hence more likely to leave home or be sent out to work. After age 18, a good number of boys on the street are settled in small trades or occupations and find their own small place to live in or share with others. Some even choose to return home with their earnings or to make a living in the place of their home. Hence, there are fewer boys (approximately 13%) above the age of 18 who are still living on the streets. The very young street children (4 to 8 years old - approximately 4%) are most likely to be those who have been abandoned in Mumbai by their families, those who have older siblings living on the streets or, or those who have families in Mumbai who also live on the streets.

Time Spent in Mumbai

Figure 6 reveals that most of the street boys (approximately 34%), had spent between 5 to 15 years in Mumbai (M = 7 years^{*}). Many of them had been born and brought up here. Others

have been here for shorter spans of time and a few have been in Mumbai for just a few hours or days. Since many of these children originate from places other than Mumbai, it is conceivable that they have spent time on the streets in places other than Mumbai.

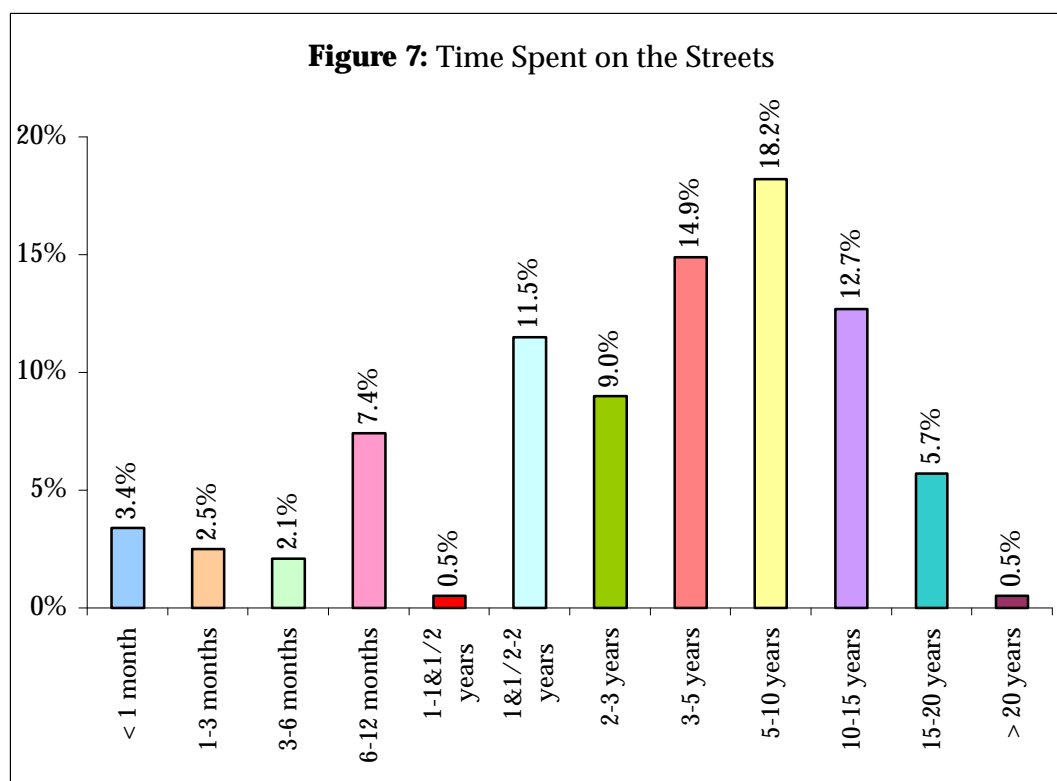


Time Spent on the Streets

Most of the street boys (approximately 37%) had spent more than 5 years on the streets (M = 6.16 years*) (see [Figure 7](#)). Very few (approximately 6%) had spent less than 3 months on the street. This is an alarming finding though not an unexpected one. It alerts us to the fact that the street child phenomenon is reaching serious proportions with more children being attracted to the streets and becoming more able to adapt and survive on the streets. The streets offer them a sense of freedom rarely experienced in the confines of a family. In a sense, street life grows on them and after a certain period of time, they find it very difficult to give it up. It becomes a 'culture', a 'lifestyle'; one that defines them and becomes a part of their identity. This is why

* M = Mean / Average

many organizations are realizing the importance of keeping children off the streets, believing in the philosophy that *'prevention is better than cure'*.



In Conclusion...

The Shelter Don Bosco Research and Documentation Centre came in contact with over 1,350 street children of whom, 56% had originated from other places in Maharashtra. A majority of these children now live in the Central and South Zones of Mumbai. Most of the children were between 9 to 18 years of age and had spent more than 5 years on the streets. More than 40% of the street children had never been to a Shelter Don Bosco 'Mela'.

The data obtained through this research reaffirms the fact that the 'street child phenomenon' has attained enormous proportions. The fact that so many displaced children migrate to Mumbai reveals the tragic proportions to which our country's ailment has swelled. Not only is the number of children on the street expanding, these children are finding this atmosphere an improvement over their previous situations, which indicates the grave depths to which abject poverty reaches.

Since eradication of poverty is a distant dream, we must pursue the next option. Since sustained time on the streets seems to create complaisance with this wandering way of life, the ideal method of seizing the problem is reaching out to these children before the essence of the streets converts them permanently.

As an organization, we at Shelter Don Bosco aim to touch the lives of the street children of Mumbai in one way or another. We continue to strive to be agents of change in our society and moreover, we sincerely endeavor to eliminate the “culture of the street” from the lives of these children.

We hope this research has fulfilled its aim of contributing to the existing body of knowledge on street children and making others more aware about the immense proportions this phenomenon has reached.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agrawal, R. 1999. Street Children. Shipra Publications, New Delhi.
- Danait, W.J.N. and Deshmukh, B.G. 2000. Fact Book on Mumbai. Published by Bombay First. Compiled by Maharashtra Economic Development Council. Nariman Point, Mumbai.
- Manorama Yearbook 2002. Ed. K.M. Mathew. Malayala Manorama Press, Kottayam.
- Pandey, R. 1991. Street Children of India. Chugh Publications. Allahabad.
- Provisional Population Totals : India. Census of India 2001, Paper 1 of 2001.
- UNICEF: Background paper prepared by UNICEF, New Delhi, for National Workshop on Street Children held from 29th to 30th August, 1988.
- WHO Publication: http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/PDFfiles/module1.pdf

APPENDIX

Table 1: Places in Mumbai that Street Children Frequent

Places in Mumbai	Number of Street Children	Percentage
C.S.T.	244	18.35
Mahim	127	9.55
Dadar	121	9.10
Wadala	114	8.57
Bandra	93	7.00
Churchgate	74	5.56
Marine Lines	60	4.51
Borivali	49	3.68
Matunga	49	3.68
Kingcircle	36	2.71
Sandhurst Road	36	2.71
Mumbai Central	34	2.56
Reay Road	24	1.80
Grant Road	21	1.59
Masjid	21	1.59
Colaba	20	1.50
Kurla	18	1.36
Byculla	18	1.36
Andheri	12	0.90
Haji Ali	12	0.90
Sion	11	0.83
Kalyan	11	0.83
Ghatkopar	11	0.83
Elphinstone Road	11	0.83
Khar	8	0.60
Charni Road	6	0.45
Koliwada	6	0.45
Parel	6	0.45
Dharavi	5	0.38
Sewri	5	0.38
Vile Parle	5	0.38
Govandi	4	0.30
Juhu	4	0.30
Mahalaxmi	4	0.30
Mulund	4	0.30
Cotton Green	3	0.23
Dockyard Road	3	0.23
Goregaon	3	0.23
Jogeshwari	3	0.23
Kalwa	3	0.23
Malad	3	0.23
Thane	3	0.23

Umerkhadi	3	0.23
Kandivli	2	0.15
Chunabatti	2	0.15
Currey Road	2	0.15
Dahisar	1	0.07
Dombivli	1	0.07
Mira Road	1	0.07
Nariman Point	1	0.07
Nalasopara	1	0.07
Santacruz	1	0.07
Thakurli	1	0.07
Tilak Nagar	1	0.07
Vashi	1	0.07
Vikhroli	1	0.07
Worli	1	0.07
Bhayander	1	0.07
Any Footpath	1	0.07
Any Empty Vehicle	1	0.07
Anywhere	1	0.07
Just Arrived in Mumbai	1	0.07
Missing Information	29	2.18
Total	1330	100.00
