



Children and HIV: Family Support First. Vienna 2010

**What about when there is no family?
Children in emergencies and armed
conflict.**

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STREET CHILDREN THROUGH
ACTION AND PARTNERSHIP



Research strategy

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ACTION AND PARTNERSHIP

- Research into the causes and effect of HIV/AIDS on street children and their access to health care,
- First hand accounts of living on the streets,
- Advocacy for policy change, ensuring the protection of street children's rights in accordance with the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**.
- Ensure that an integrated child protection framework includes the situation of street children.

If A Child Cries (Dies) In The Street, Does Anybody Hear?

A Situational Analysis of the Physical and Psychosocial Health of Street Children in Durban

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Situational Analysis

- Why children resort to living on the streets in Durban and what is the influence of HIV/AIDS in this decision?
- Children's street experiences and the reasons they give for not returning to their homes
- Basic demographic and health data
 - malnutrition, stunting, substance abuse and TB



Methods

- **Participatory Workshops**

- 4 one-week workshops with children living on the street in different areas of Durban
(Total 30 - boys: 18, girls: 12)

- **Quantitative Health Survey**

- Interviews with 110 children living in different areas of Durban

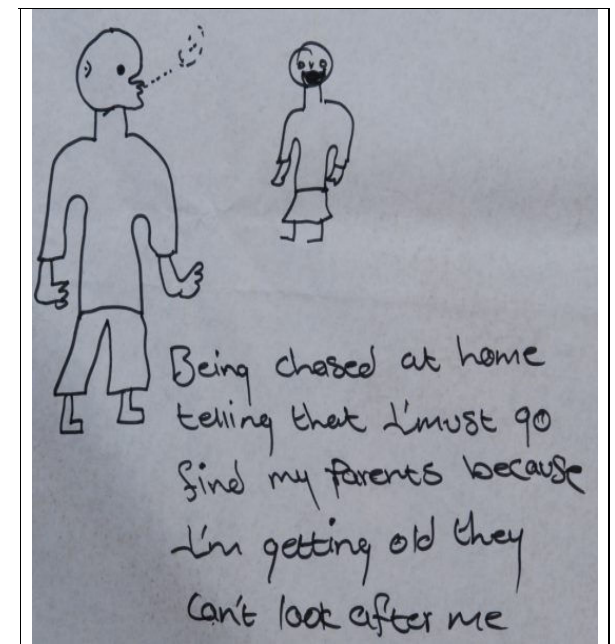
- **Feasibility and acceptability of HIV testing**

Study approved by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Biomedical Research Ethics Committee

Reasons for coming to the streets

- Median age 16 and most came to streets at 13 (25% before age of 10)
- Death of a parent → Migration → Streets
- Multiple deaths
- Abuse by, and conflict with, step-parents
- Poverty (sometimes alone) in conjunction with domestic violence or substance abuse
- Stealing from home
- Families may already be on the street or begging on the streets

My mother passed away. I had 4 brothers, one passed away and 3 are left. We are 4 girls, my sister died of AIDS and she left her child. (OG)





Inability to Return Home

- **The label of 'bad' follows the child home... this was an important issue for the children.**
- **Difficult for them to return home because the problems at home are not addressed (the poverty, abuse etc continues)**
- **Many children on the streets still had strong links to their home and community**
- **21% of the children surveyed wanted to go home immediately; 50% at some time.**



Surviving

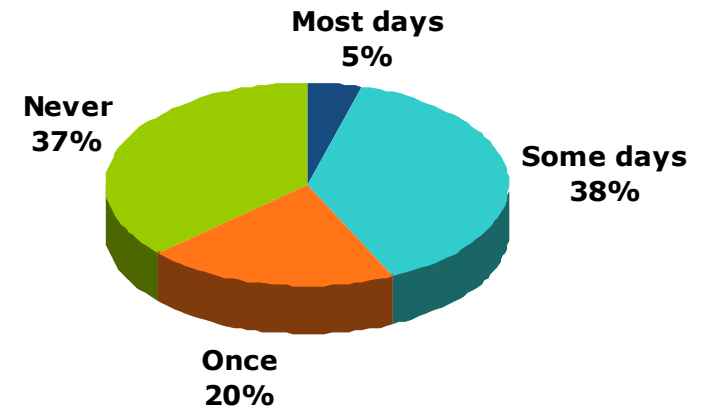
- **Street children normally are associated with a group for protection**
- **These groups are forced to move “locations” mostly due to harassment from police**
- **Older boys keep a strong control on the younger boys and have a sense of “ownership” over the girls in the group**
- **Girls must be incredibly vigilant to protect each other from rape at night**
 - **rape happens frequently and gang rape is common**
 - **girls are more vulnerable if they are drunk or high**
 - **girls spoke of a sense of being powerless and reliance on boys in the group**

Problems: Food

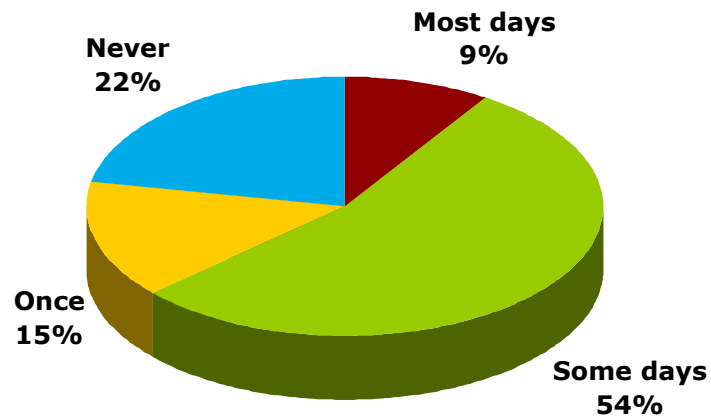
From where do you get most of your food?

Buy	62%
Donation	22%
Begging	6%
From Group	6%

In the last week did you go to sleep with no food for the day?



In the last week have there been times that you have been hungry but not had enough food to eat?

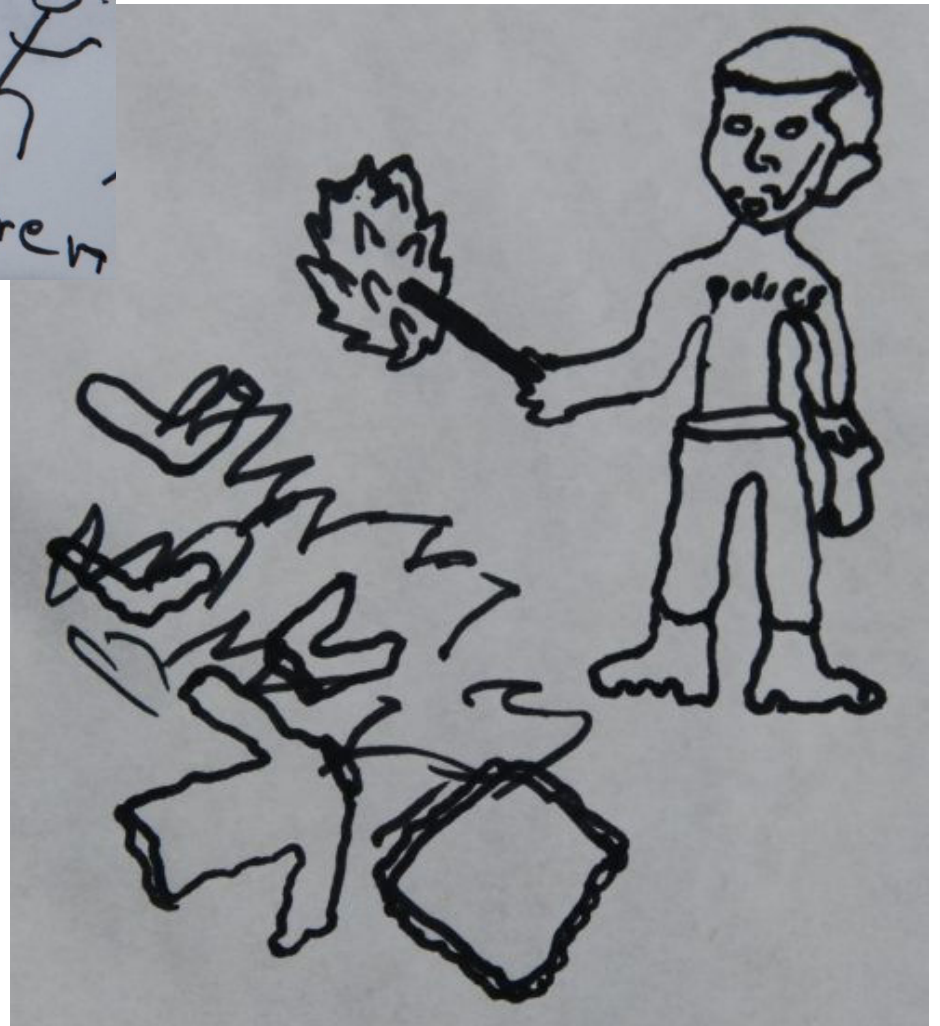
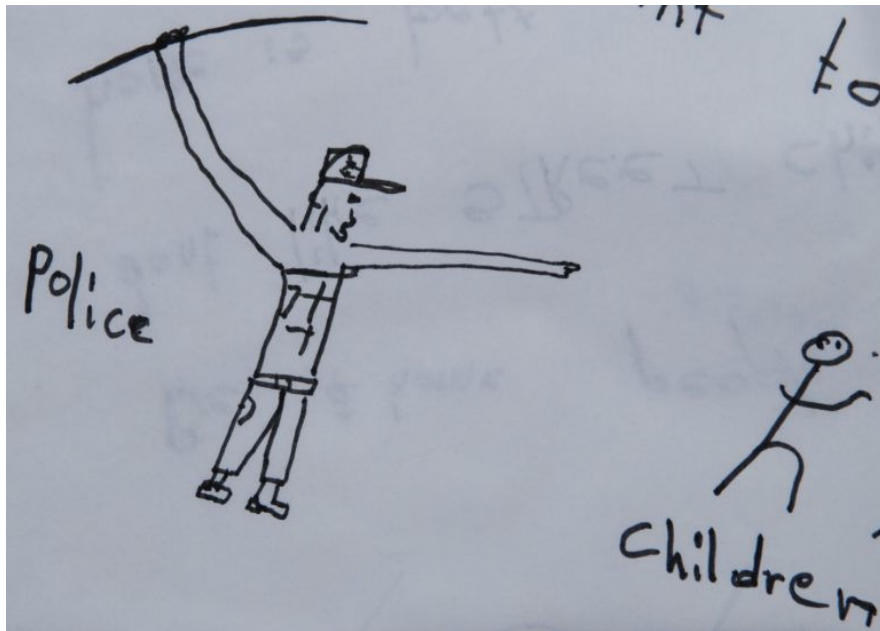


The participatory workshop revealed that the majority of the boy's time was spent doing activities for money to purchase food, glue and cigarettes.



Children's challenges on the streets

- Abuse by police and taking of personal belongings
- Living hand to mouth - the majority of the boy's time was spent doing activities for money to purchase food, glue and cigarettes.
 - **Health Survey revealed the high frequency of food insufficiency**
- Clothes - most children only have one set of clothes and this makes it difficult to stay clean.
- Staying clean was important but difficult - many physical problems with not being clean (lice, sores)
- Shelter - especially during winter months and rain





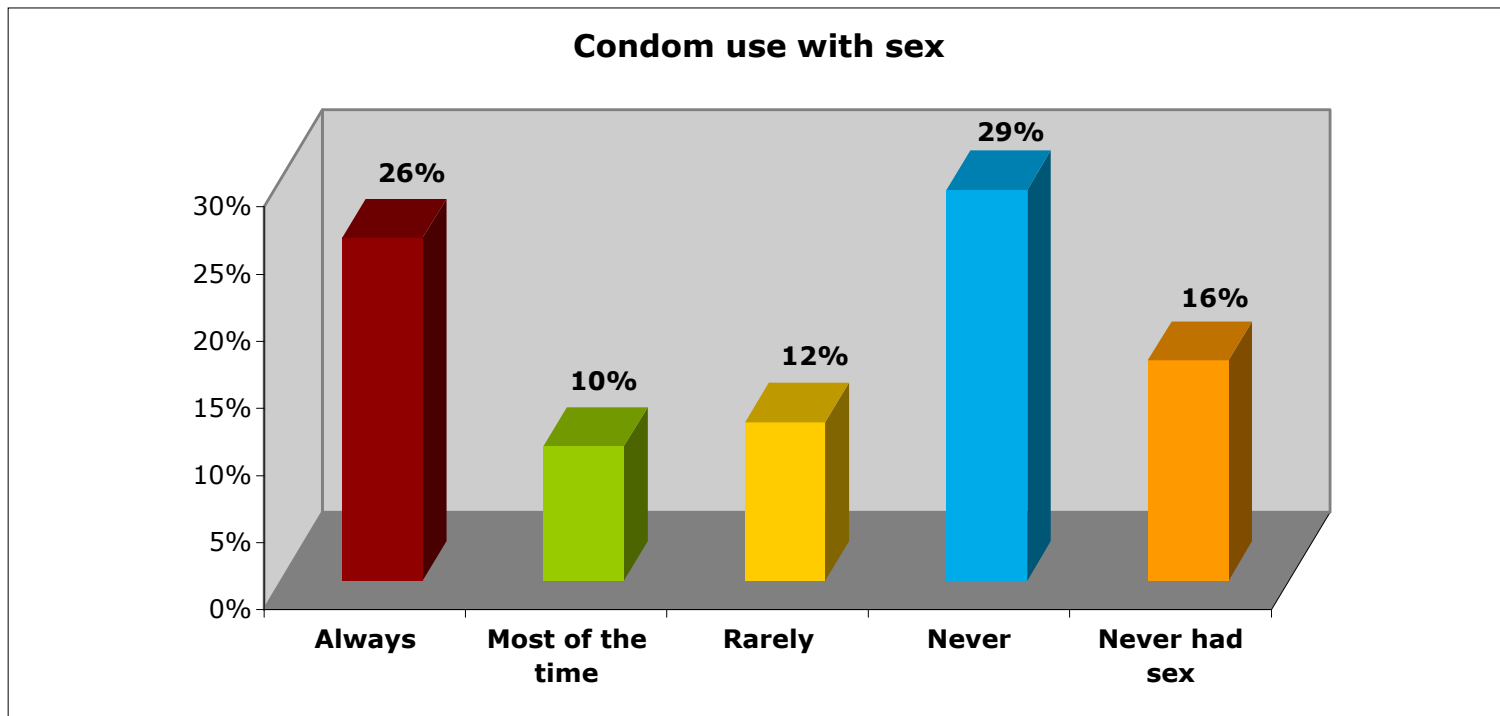


Health problems

- 32% report cough more than 3 weeks (suggestive of TB)
- 50% had reported being stabbed at least once and 15% being knocked down by a car
- 72% knew of children who had died on the streets - mostly as a result of trauma

Sexual Patterns

- **46% had sex before coming to the streets**
- **70% of children have had sex *since* coming to live on the streets**





Pregnancy and Abortions

Pregnancy was a major issue for the girls:

- Four of the twelve girls had given birth to babies
 - all of these babies were being looked after at their homes.
- One girl had had two children (and one miscarriage).
- One girl was pregnant for the second time.
- The girls in one group talked about abortions where they go and how they are done



HIV testing – acceptability and feasibility

- 47% children in street survey wanted to test for HIV as soon as possible
- Another 23% yes, but when ready
- Pilot of acceptability and feasibility
 - 36 children offered HIV testing
 - 29 accepted and tested
 - 3 children infected: all girls (12yr, 15yr, 16yr)



HIV testing – acceptability and feasibility

Questions and issues raised:

- The issues of consent for children to test in the absence of a caregiver and what the legal and ethical implications were.
- The unique environment that street children live and socialise and the influence that this has on the issue of consent.
- The need for education and provision of psychosocial support to street children to ensure that there is a change in their sexual attitudes and behaviour to reduce their risk of infection.



Deaf and Blind spots

- Though relatively low in prevalence rate, street children need to be recognised as a most at risk group. '*The missing face of the HIV epidemic*';
- Health and education services are needed that are accessible, and responsive to the needs of street children;
- Complex issues such as how to communicate voluntary consent for HIV testing and other aspects of health among children needs informed guidance;
- Harassment and abuse by authorities needs to be exposed and replaced with constructive engagement.



Will these data make any difference to the lives of children living on the streets?

- ?
- By not critically looking at the state of children living on the streets, or conceding that the complexities of doing so are just too great, further disadvantages them
- They have the right to be included in research



Where now?

- Comprehensive strategies are needed rather than cosmetic solutions (e.g. cleaning the streets)
- Service providers (and the general public) need to acknowledge and respect the humanity and special needs of these children
- Objective data can help inform these approaches

Acknowledgement

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Key recommendations

- Street Children have a right to be included in research and be recognised by policy, research and budgetary provisions.
- Supporting the development of child-centred participatory research as a process of exploring and understanding issues related to street life.
- Providing research and data analysis to inform international child protection polices of the evidence gap and lack of knowledge basis surrounding the street child experience.
- Guidelines and tools around HIV test capacity and consent need to be designed specifically for children on the streets and their circumstances need to be made available.



Conclusions

- Children come to the streets because life is unbearable at home
- Despite the many harsh realities of being on the street children still choose to stay there
- Many of the stresses are related to institutional responses and that ordinary people do not see them as children
- Many of the difficulties and vulnerabilities are even more intense for girls because of gender inequities