

STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI **A RAPID ASSESSMENT**



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SATYARTHI

KAILASH SATYARTHI CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

JULY 2021

STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI **A RAPID ASSESSMENT**

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Executive Summary

The phenomenon of street children is a growing social problem in our country, especially in mega cities like the NCT of Delhi. The poor children living in streets, bus stands, railway stations, staying with or without family, constitutes an important portion of human society. They should not be ignored in any society as societies are judged by the way they treat their children. These children come to the streets to work either to supplement their families' income, or compelled into forced labour and/or begging or even illegal activities by traffickers and/or exploiters. Often, street children are engaged in begging, selling items, peddling drugs, cleaning cars on busy roads and traffic signals, and collecting waste and as ragpickers, street performers, etc. Many are parts of street gangs and forced into criminal activities such as thieving, snatching, etc.

The life of the street child is strife with dangers including poverty. This permeates into all aspect of their lives from growth to well-being. They face numerous physical, emotional, psychological and social problems. All these conditions worsen with lack of education, hunger, malnutrition, and unhygienic living standards, and constant threats of violence, insecurity and uncertainties. Since childhood is the most crucial period of development, paying attention to it and providing appropriate support to these children is the need of the hour. The miserable life of these poor children impacted hugely by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown imposed during the first and second

wave of COVID-19 in the NCT of Delhi has also exposed these children to many other challenges, such as the greater risk of COVID-19 infection, lack of access to food and health care.

Through a rapid situation assessment interviewing 481 street children in the NCT of Delhi from 29 June 2021 to 1 July 2021 by the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, estimates 60,431 street children in Delhi (very conservative calculations). The study defines street children as *“the children who depend on the streets to live and/or work, whether alone, with peers and children who live on the streets with their families.”*

Key Findings of the Rapid Assessment

Basic information

- 43% of the street children were spotted in markets, followed by traffic signals/flyovers (26%), railway station/bus stands (16%), and landfills (9%).
- 71% belonged to the 6 to 14 years age group, while 16 percent were from the 3 to 5 years age group and 12 percent in the 15 to <18 years age group.

Vulnerable Children

- **A very conservative calculation suggests that the approximate number of street children in the NCT of Delhi is 60,431.**
- The rapid assessment found 4,182 children either working in various locations of NCT of Delhi or staying with

STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI - A RAPID ASSESSMENT

the respondent children. Total respondents interviewed were 481 across 50 location points in Delhi.

School Going Status

- Only 29% of total surveyed street children in Delhi reported having ever gone to school. Out of 138 children who ever attended school, 75% said they had not gone to school since the outbreak of COVID-19. This indicates that children from the marginalised/at-risk families are being forced to work on the streets to supplement their family income.

Awareness on COVID and Support Received

- Only one in five (19%) respondents are aware of COVID-19 appropriate

precautionary measures like wearing masks, washing hands and maintaining a safe distance. Only 12% of respondents were approached by someone in the last three months and informed of COVID related precautions.

- Mere 5% of the respondents reported that someone had reached out to them with face masks in the last three months.
- 4% of the respondent reported symptoms like fever and cough during the last 6 months. Similarly, when asked about having gone through the COVID test, only 5% reported in affirmative.
- 29% of the street children reported receipt of free ration during the last three months. Of which 79% reported Government as the source of support.

Content

Executive Summary.....	i
Context.....	1
The present Study.....	3
Findings.....	5
Conclusions.....	14
Recommendation.....	15

I. Context

A growing number of street children in urban cities is a major concern for India. Factors such as poverty, rapid urbanisation, the uneven distribution of wealth, and the effects of globalisation play a crucial role in increasing the migration of people from rural to urban areas. In this process, many poor people, including children running away from violence and abuse, migrate to cities and end up living on the streets. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1994 has defined street children as “boys and girls for whom ‘the street’ (including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become their home and/or source of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised by responsible adults.”¹

As per the Census 2011, India has 1.77 million homeless people, out of which 53% percent (0.94 million) reside in urban areas.² Most homeless people, including children in urban areas, depend on the streets to earn their livelihood and struggle to survive every day. These street children are at the mercy of other people giving them alms or food to eat. Some others are engaged in activities like selling items, cleaning cars, rag-picking, labour, etc. These children can be easily seen in busy market areas, traffic signals, bus and railway stations, etc. Most of these children and their families or friends spend their nights on the footpaths, under the flyovers, bus stands, railway stations, dump yards, etc.

Like other children, street children do not have the privilege to access education and nutritious food. Instead, they live in the unsafe and challenging streets, always susceptible to various forms of physical and sexual abuse and exploitation. According to the study conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development on child abuse in 2007, 66% of street children live with their families. Out of these children, 52% sleep on the sidewalks, 18% in night shelters and 31% in other locations such as under flyovers, bridges, railway platforms, bus stops, parks, marketplaces, etc.³ The study also highlighted that the incidence of sexual assault is substantially high among the children living on the streets. Another study conducted by TISS and ActionAid in Mumbai found that two out of five children experienced verbal, physical or sexual abuse, torture and forced starvation.⁴ Not only abuse, the daylong struggle and quest for food also push these children towards substance abuse.

1 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street, dated 11th January, 2012 (https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-19-35_en.pdf) accessed on 01/07/2021

2 Census of India 2011

3 Study on Child Abuse, 2007: Ministry of Women and Child Development (<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/4978/pdf/4978.pdf>) accessed on 01/07/2021

4 Making Street Children Matter: A census study in Mumbai City. TISS and ActionAid (<https://www.actionaidindia.org/publications/making-street-children-matter/>) accessed on 01/07/2021

Street Children in NCT of Delhi

According to a Hindustan Times article dated 1st January 2019, a survey conducted by the Delhi Commission for Protection for Child Rights (DCPCR) in Delhi displays a gloomy picture of street children in the city of Delhi. The DCPCR survey report shows that there are 70,000 children in the streets of Delhi.⁵ According to the survey, many children were begging and working as labourers, rag pickers, etc. They are also exposed to substance abuse. Another estimate made eight years prior to the DCPCR study suggested that the total number of street children in Delhi is 51,000. It also revealed that 61% of the total street children were in the age group of 7-14 years. Half of the children experienced verbal, physical or sexual abuse.⁶

In the light of the above, the welfare and safety of street children require greater attention from national bodies. In this regard, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, with the assistance of various NGOs, is running 66 permanent and 84 temporary shelter homes in different parts of Delhi.⁷ These night shelters have special provisions for women and children, as they can stay in these homes during the daytime.

Challenges Faced by Street Children During COVID-19

Street children are the most deprived children without a safety net to ensure their care and protection. The situation of this marginalised section of society has worsened with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. As discussed in previous paragraphs, these vulnerable children often depend upon other people's mercy in giving them food and other daily necessities such as money in traffic signals, markets, railway and bus stations, etc. The lockdown imposed during the first and second wave of COVID-19 in Delhi has completely restricted the movement of people in markets, on roads, railway stations, etc. The unprecedented outbreak of COVID-19 and lockdown in Delhi has exposed these children to many other challenges, such as the greater risk of COVID-19 infection, access to food and health care/medical supplies, water, and other necessities.

5 Delhi News: On Delhi's streets, 70,000 children have nowhere to go : Hindustan Times, dated 01/01/2019 (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/on-delhi-s-streets-70-000-children-have-nowhere-to-go/story-eOS1UqQCztDgqXm4aztVgJ.html>) accessed on 01/07/2021

6 Surviving the Streets: A census of street children in Delhi by the Institute for Human Development and Save the Children (2011) (<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/5332/pdf/5332.pdf>) accessed on 01/07/2021

7 Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (https://delhishelterboard.in/main/?page_id=483) accessed on 01/07/2021

II. The Present Study

In view of the above, Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation has undertaken a rapid situation assessment of street children in the NCT of Delhi. The following working definition was adopted to define the street children,

“The children who depend on the streets to live and/or work, whether alone, with peers and children who live on the streets with their families.”

Fifty locations from the NCT of Delhi were selected randomly for the rapid assessment. Seven teams consisting of 21 researchers visited all locations from 29th June to 1st July 2021. During the visit, attempts were made to interview all children falling within the above definition.

Limitations of the Present Study

Although the rapid assessment method is scientific enough to assess the current situation of street dwellers of a given city, it still has several practical limitations. The present study also has certain limitations, which is described below,

- The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the movement restrictions imposed in Delhi have forced many street dwellers, including street children and their families, to move out to locations or places with less restrictions, where they could at least earn their livelihood. Therefore, there is a good possibility that it might have resulted in an underestimation of the total number of street children in Delhi.
- The sweltering heat during the survey period was a challenge that kept many street children away from their usual locations, such as red lights, marketplaces, etc. Tracing street children was easier only in the evenings. It might also have resulted in an underestimation of the street children in Delhi.
- More extensive coverage and selection of sample locations from all districts would have strengthened the study results. Also, it was felt that rag-picking sites and landfills are not adequately represented in the selected sample.
- As the fieldwork was carried out in a brief period of three days, a detailed investigation of the issues faced by street children could not be done.
- The results of the present study give a broad idea about the extent of the problem. More detailed research studies are required to be carried out to build a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of street children, their needs and requirements.

III. Findings

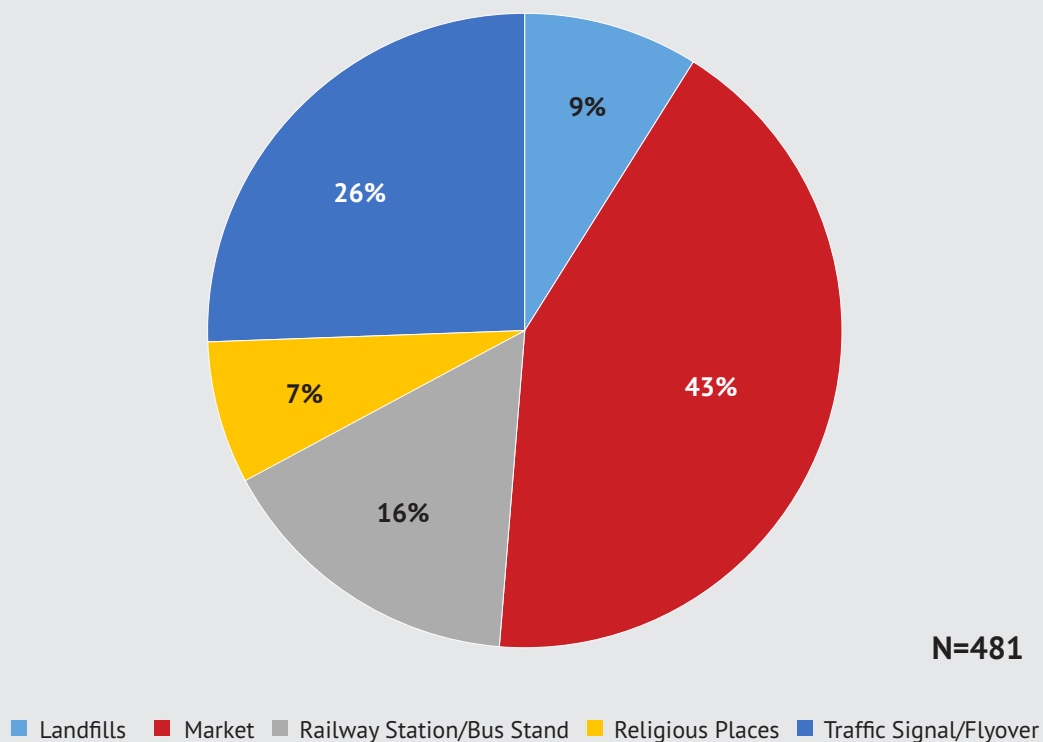
1. Basic Characteristics of Street Children

The survey identified 4,182 street children below 18 years of age in Delhi through interviews with 481 respondents across 50 location points. Their basic characteristics related to location, age groups, gender, places of stay, education, and working status are described below:

1.1. Location Status

Nearly 43 percent of the street children in Delhi were spotted in markets, followed by traffic signals/flyovers (26%), railway station/bus stands (16%), landfills and waste disposal plants/sites (9%), and religious places (7%).

Figure-1: Distribution of Street Children by Location Status (%)

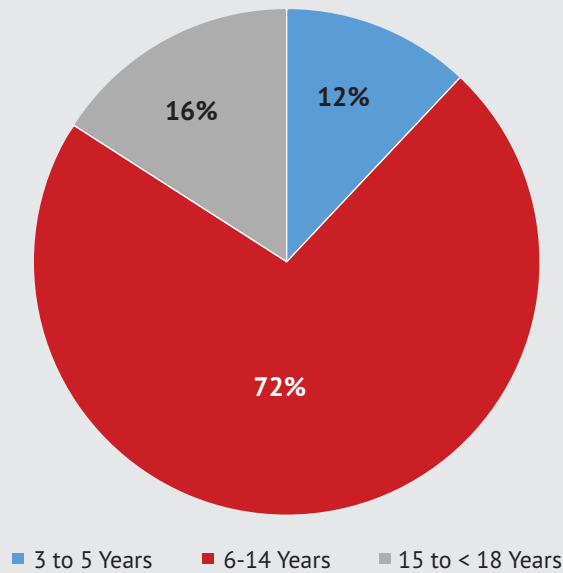


Age-Groups

Around three out of four street children, i.e., 71 percent, belonged to the 6 to 14 years age group, while 16 percent were from the 3 to 5 years age group and 12 percent in the 15 to <18 years age group.

STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI - A RAPID ASSESSMENT

Figure-2: Street Children by Age-Groups

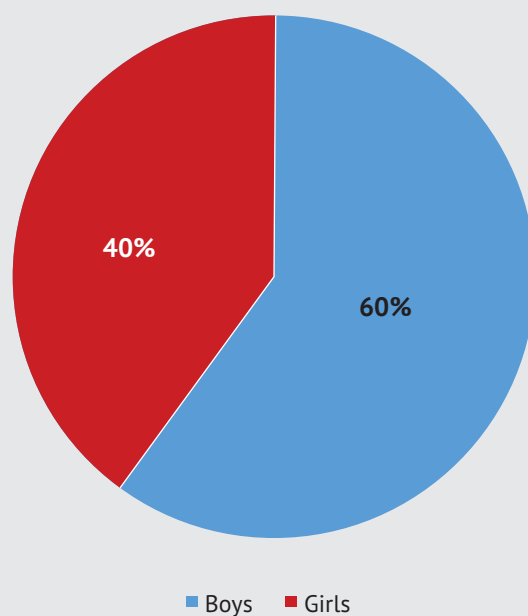


N=481

1.2. Gender Distribution

The gender distribution of the street children showed that the survey data also follows the findings of other studies that most of the children were boys (60%), and the percentage of girls found on Delhi's streets was only 40.

Figure-3: Street Children by Gender (%)



N=481

STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI - A RAPID ASSESSMENT

1.3. Place of Stay in Delhi

One of the reasons for the vulnerability of street children relates to where they stay in the city. Normally their homes/rented places, camps/ rain baseras or open shelters need to be a place of safety that these children look for. Nearly 36 percent of the street children reported having rented places as their staying arrangements. Though girls were much less in terms of absolute numbers, their percentage share of slum/rented place, camp/rain basera, and street dwellers varied from boys'. (Table-1).

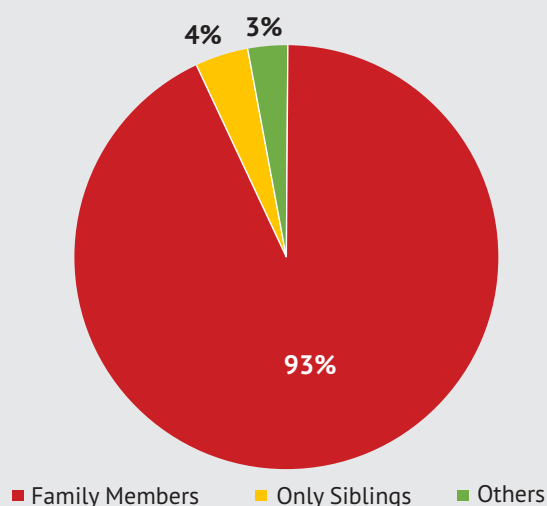
Table-1: Distribution of Street Children by Place of Stay (%)

Places of Stay	Girls	Boys	Total
Rented place	24%	44%	36%
On street/No designated place	34%	23%	27%
Camp/Rain Basera	20%	15%	17%
Open Shelter	15%	11%	12%
Place provided by the leader/master	8%	7%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%

1.4. Who All are Children Staying with?

According to the survey, most street children (93%) stayed with their family members in Delhi, while 4% with their siblings only, and 3% with others, including friends and unknown persons. Considering that siblings are also part of their families, an overwhelming 97% of the street children in Delhi were living with their families in one way or the other. Thus, most street children (97%) in Delhi belonged to the last category of children from street families.

Figure-4: Who All are Children Staying with (%)?



STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI - A RAPID ASSESSMENT

1.5. School Going Status

Understanding the school going status of street children is critical for providing them appropriate basic education and skill training. Data shows that only 29 percent of total surveyed street children in Delhi reported having ever gone to school. School going status of street children by gender also shows more or less the same poor trends both for boys (29%) and girls (28%).

Figure-5: School Going Status of Street Children by Gender (%)

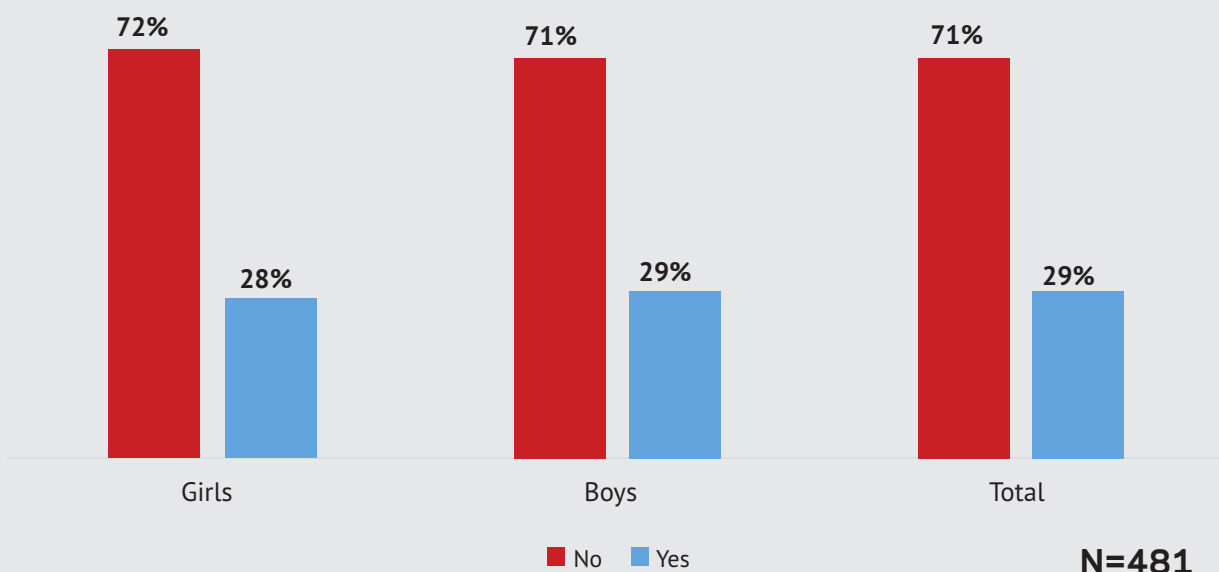
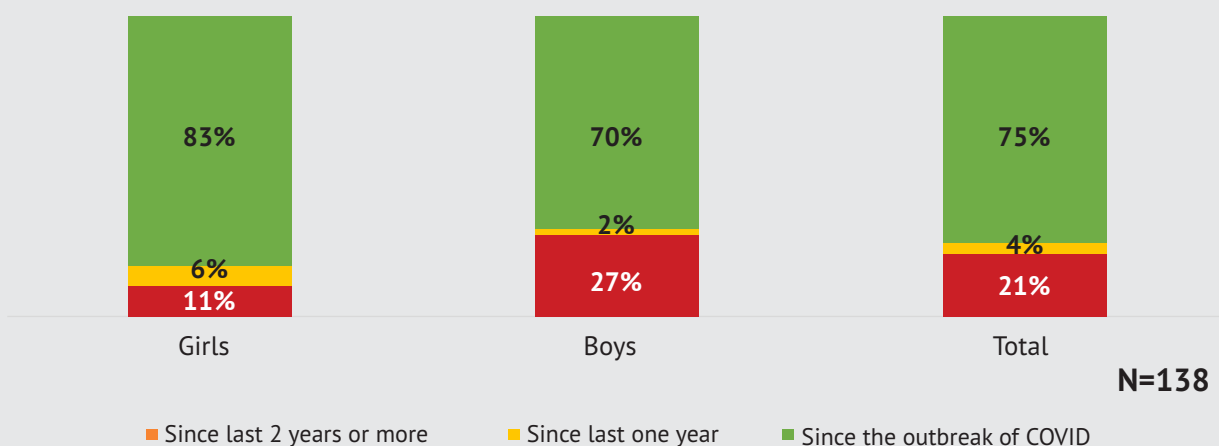


Figure-6: Since When Not Going to School (%)



STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI - A RAPID ASSESSMENT

Out of 138 street children who said they had gone to school at some point of time, three-fourths (75%) reported they had not gone to school since the outbreak of COVID-19, while 21% reported not going to school since one year, and four percent reported not having done so since the last 2 years or more. Thus, COVID-19 has completely derailed the education of street children as well.

1.6. Approximate Number of Street Children in NCT of Delhi

The respondent street children were also asked as to the total number of street children staying with them or working or operating in their respective areas. Results show that 4,182 street children were found either working in various locations of NCT of Delhi or staying with the respondent children. The average number of street children per surveyed location was found varying from 42 in railway station/bus stand to 98 in large market places.

An attempt was made in this study to estimate the approximate number of street children in the NCT of Delhi. About 858 locations were identified based on the data obtained from secondary sources and with certain assumptions. If the average number of street children counted per location type based on the study's findings stands constant for all respective locations, then **the conservative approximate number of street children in the NCT of Delhi is expected to be 60,431** (Table 2).

Table-2: Estimated Number of Street Children in NCT of Delhi

Type of Location	Approximate No. of locations in Delhi	Based on identified Street children during the survey	
		Average No. of children identified by location	Estimate of the number of street children
Traffic Junctions and flyovers (approximately 100)*	100	94.08	9,408
Religious Places (Approximately 50 per Dist.)**	550	71.00	39,050
Large Markets #	50	98.04	4,902
Railway Station/Bus Stand \$	128	42.00	5,376
Landfills and waste processing/ ragpicking sites ⌘	30	56.50	1,695
Total	858		60,431

*MOHUA - Report on High Powered Committee on Decongesting Traffic in Delhi (2016) (http://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/Decongesting_TrafficDelhi06.pdf)

**Major religious places (approximated from 1901 identified sites to main sites of worship -

http://discomm.delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/doiit_ocpd/DolT_OCPD/Home/Accessibility+of+Built+Environment/?presentationtemplate=PT_Print.)

#50 large commercial markets in Delhi not community markets

\$ Major railway stations (15 of 47 stations in Delhi) and Bus stands (3 major terminus + 10 main bus stands per districts from an approx of 500 per district) (NCT of Delhi Transport Dept)

⌘ 3 Major landfills in Delhi and 27 Waste Processing Plants -as ragpicking sites (<https://www.dpcc.delhigovt.nic.in/uploads/pdf/Status-of-Solid-Waste-Management-in-Delhipdf-83e80619a099843e1cb437a00af5c09d.pdf>)

STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI - A RAPID ASSESSMENT

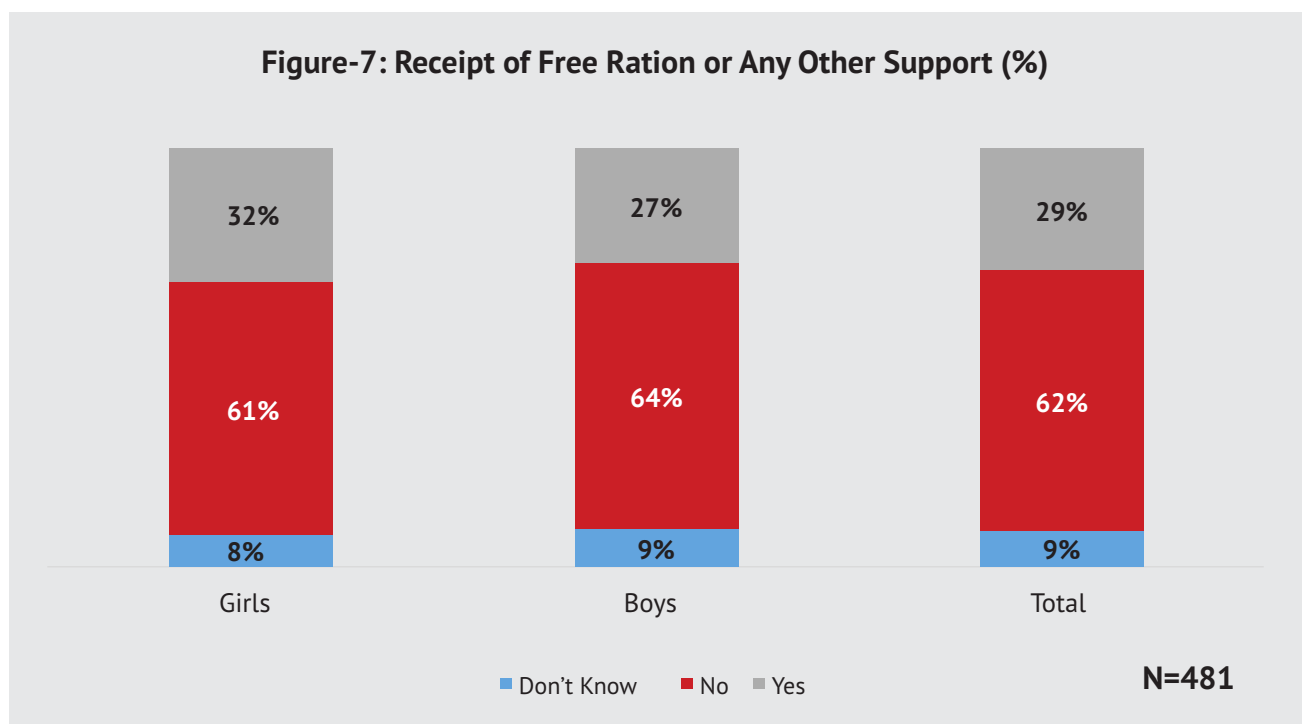
Though this estimation has its limitations, it is indicative of the large number of street children in the NCT of Delhi, despite its conservative calculations following COVID-19 second wave lockdowns with the ensuing mass exodus of the migrant population back home, peak summer at the time of the survey, and the very tight schedule for data collection (3 days of data collection at 50 locations) in light of the matter in the Delhi High Court.

2. COVID awareness of Street Children and Support Received

The survey also tried to understand the COVID-19-related awareness among the street children and the support and treatment they might have received during this pandemic. The main findings of the survey in this regard are described below:

2.1. Receipt of Free Ration or Any Other Support

Only 29% of the street children in Delhi reported receipt of free ration or any other support during the last three (3) months. Receipt of free ration by gender also showed more or less the same trends both for boys (27%) and girls (32%).

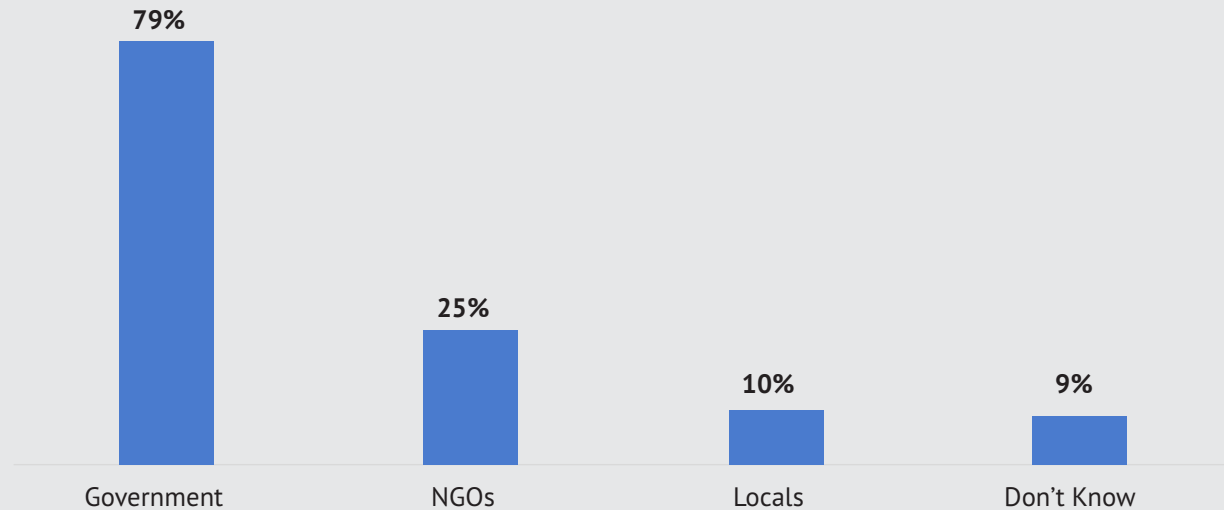


2.2. Source of Free Ration or Any Other Support

Out of 139 street children (29% of the total) who reported having received free ration or any other support during the pandemic, 79% reported Government as the source, followed by NGOs (25%) and locals (10%). However, 9% of such respondents didn't know who provided them with free ration or any other support during the pandemic.

STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI - A RAPID ASSESSMENT

Figure-8: Source of Free Ration or Any Other Support (%)

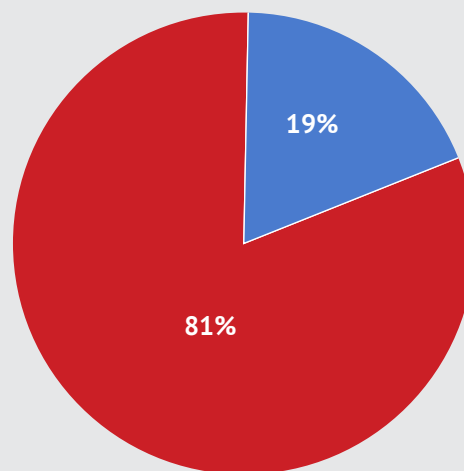


Note: Percentage may not add up to 100% due to multiple choice responses

2.3. Awareness of COVID-19 Appropriate Precautionary Measures

Street children were asked about their awareness of COVID-19 appropriate precautionary measures, such as washing hands regularly with soap and water, social distancing, wearing a mask, etc. Only 19% of the respondents reported they were aware, while the rest 81% were not, which gives us an idea of how vulnerable street children are due to their poor awareness about the precautionary measures to be followed during the pandemic.

Figure-9: Awareness of COVID Appropriate Precautionary Measures (%)



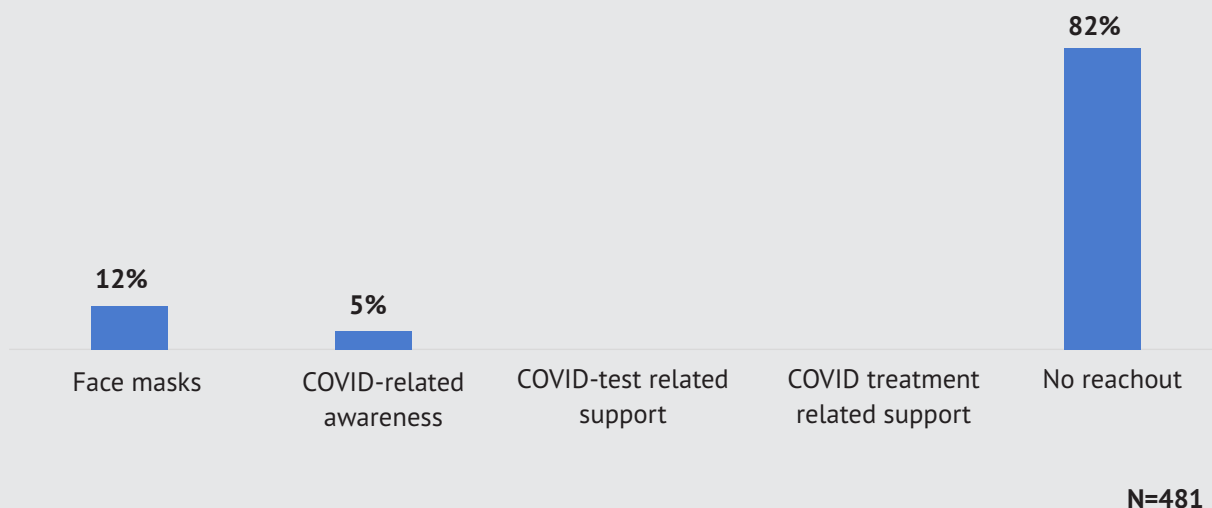
■ Aware ■ Unaware

N=481

2.4. Reaching Out to Street Children

The survey also asked street children if anyone reached out to them in the last 3 months to give them COVID-19-related amenities, such as face masks, COVID-related awareness, COVID-test-related support, or COVID-treatment-related support. Only 12% and 5% of the respondents reported that someone had reached out to them with face masks and COVID-related awareness, respectively, during the last 3 months. Almost no one reported anyone reaching out to provide them either with COVID-test-related support or COVID treatment-related support. Not surprisingly, therefore, nearly 82% of the street children reported having no reaching out to them at all.

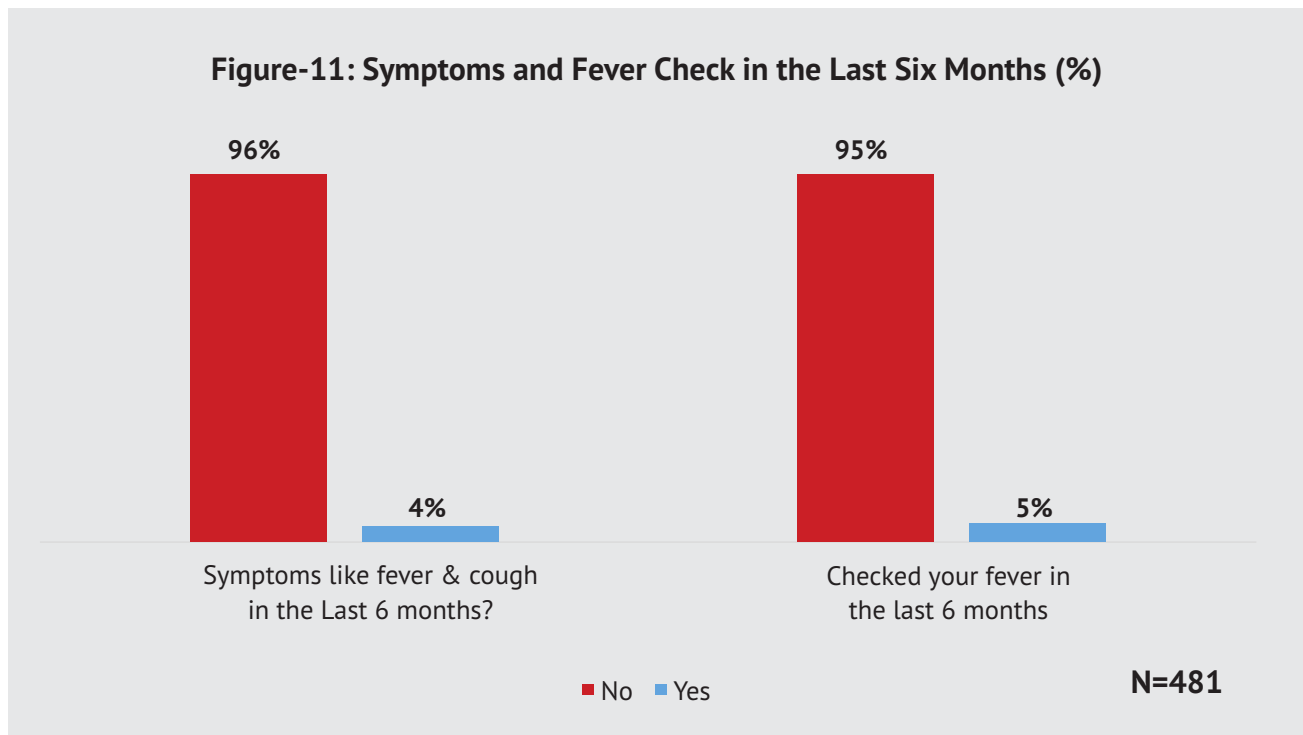
Figure-10: Reachout of COVID Support to Street Children (%)



Note: Percentage may not add up to 100% due to multiple choice responses

2.5. Symptoms Like Fever and Cough During Last 6 Months

Only 4% of the respondent street children reported symptoms like fever and cough during the last 6 months. Similarly, only 5% of the respondent street children reported having checked themselves for fever during the last 6 months.



2.6. COVID Test and COVID-related Treatment

The survey also asked street children if they had ever undergone COVID testing or not. Again only 5% of the total respondents replied in affirmative. On the other hand, upon being asked if they knew where to seek COVID related support or treatment, only 7 out of the total 481 respondents (2%) said yes. This negligible knowledge about where to seek COVID-related support or treatment among street children is a cause of concern that necessitates our immediate attention.

IV. Conclusions

A child living on the streets is a miserable situation, and additionally, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures adopted to control its spread have worsened these children's condition. The present study portrays only a glimpse of the complete picture of the actual scenario regarding street children, which may be more severe. **Through very conservative calculations, the study estimates more than 60,000 street children in Delhi, and the glaring lack of measures for their health, wellbeing, education and protection.** Though we have laws and policies to protect these children, the gaps in its implementation make these children more vulnerable. The study clearly showed that the vulnerability of these street children in NCT of Delhi to COVID-19, hunger, and losing access to education has increased in recent times. Unquestionably the problems faced by street children is enormous. To safeguard the children on the street and control the phenomenon of street children, identification and rehabilitation of these children must be focused on.

V. Recommendations

1. **A complete enumeration of street children with all identification and background particulars:** A clear and specific knowledge of the size of the street children, their needs, and challenges are the most critical and foremost activity that needs to be carried out. This information relating to age, gender, family background, health and safety needs, education, etc., of all street children, must be the basis for real-world policies and programmes for rehabilitation and reintegration of the street children. The enumeration exercise should be repeated in a three years interval.
2. **Ensure urgent provision for healthcare, awareness and aid to protect the street children amid the on-going pandemic:** The Right to Health is linked to all other social and economic issues, as well as protection mechanism for all, especially children. The finding that a mere handful of street children given either COVID-information or protection gear (in this case masks), highlights the appalling apathy of the government to the health and wellbeing of the street children even amid the most devastating pandemic. Government must with urgency reach out to each street child and his/her family to ensure that the immediate health needs are identified and essential COVID-related health care support be provided. This is above and beyond the importance of ensuring healthcare and well-being, including nutrition for all children, including of the street children.

STREET CHILDREN IN NCT OF DELHI - A RAPID ASSESSMENT

- 3. Ensure access, availability of all government social protection and safety measures:** Street children are identified as “children in need of care and protection” under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015, making it imperative and binding that the children on the street are provided with all necessary basic amenities such as safe shelter, food and safe drinking water, safe sanitation, healthcare and education. With most street children among the highest risk categories to violence and abuse, all children on the streets should be identified and linked to the AADHAAR to ensure they are receiving entitlements under various government schemes and social protection mechanisms.
- 4. Providing education to street children:** Street children are either school dropouts or never gone to school. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many families have lost their income sources, and they, along with their children, are working on the streets to earn their livelihood. The government should make efforts to enrol all street children in schools as per the RTE Act, and ensure non-formal and vocational education to the children above 14 years of age.
- 5. Reintegration of street children with their families:** Enabling street children to move away from the streets and back into a sustainable family environment is one of the most vital aspects of the rehabilitation of street children. The government needs to promote reintegration for street children with their families, including those rescued and placed in child care institutions. Furthermore, to ensure their long term reintegration, the root causes for children running for home or vulnerabilities at home, must be addressed.




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