

**INVESTIGATING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STREET
CHILDREN TO ABSCOND FROM INSTITUTIONS
AND RETURN TO THE STREET**

M.A (DEVELOPMENT STUDIES) THESIS

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other studies have been used, acknowledgements have been made.

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DEDICATION

To my dearest brother Richard Mussa: Many thanks for always standing by my side!

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ABSTRACT

The number of street children in the major cities of Malawi continues to rise. In order to address this problem and the plight of street children, the government of Malawi and some NGO's started to remove these children from the harsh street environment to safer places, some of which are institutions (foster homes). However, some of the children abscond from institutions and go back to the streets. This study investigated factors which influence street children to abscond from institutions. Qualitative research methods were used. Interviews were conducted with a sample of street and institutionalised children and key informants. The study found that absence of income generating activities in institutions, loss of emotional support, freedom in the street, lack of involvement of children in identification of their needs, fear of meeting the same old problems at home after re-integration, inadequate amenities in institutions, and anti-social behaviour were the major factors that pushed children back to the street. It was also established that social capital and working or doing small-scale business are some of the survival mechanisms employed by children to cope with the harsh street life. To this end, institutionalization does not solve the structural problems which pushed these children to the street in the first place. Therefore, the study argues that street children should not be treated as a homogeneous group because they have different needs which must be addressed as much as possible if they are to stay in institutions or to be re-integrated into their communities.

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LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS AND ACRONYMES

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CRC	Convention on the Rights of Children
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
HIV	Human Immune Virus
HIS	Integrated Household Survey
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STI's	Sexually Transmitted Infections
STEKA	Step Kids Awareness
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SOS	Save Our Souls
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

Street children are amongst the vulnerable and marginalized members of a society, often lacking access to food, shelter, healthcare, security and education. According to Allianza (2000), the phenomenon of street children is global, alarming and escalating. The number of street children in Malawi's major cities continues to rise each and every day (Masina, 2013: January 15). To address this problem, the government of Malawi embarked on a nation-wide exercise to sweep out the major cities and towns of street children. Mary Shawa, then Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare said the move was part of "a home for every child" campaign launched in July 2012 which ensures that every child has a home (Masina, Ibid). The campaign aimed at finding safer places for vulnerable children away from the hazardous environment of the street. Under this campaign some children are enrolled in institutions and others are re-integrated to their communities.

The phenomenon of street children has long existed in many regions of the world. Today it is also making unexpected appearances where it never existed before such as in developing countries where cities are relatively few and small (Ennew, 2003). Experts remain divided on how to quantify and define these children, especially since they seem to

fall into many categories and their numbers are difficult to establish. According to Volpi (2000) what does seem clear, however, is that street children are the manifestation of deteriorating social capital and social exclusion. While the immediate factors responsible for their condition are unique for each child, they generally represent some combination of low family income, lack of housing, failure in school, family neglect and abuse, armed conflicts, natural disasters and epidemics.

In Malawi as elsewhere, it is difficult to categorize children simply as “street children” because often what brings them to the attention of the authorities are other aspects of their lives - crime, drug abuse, ill-health and many more. Also, there is a wide variation among the children in the amount of time they spend on the street, with some spending their whole life on the street while others spend only a small fraction of their life in streets (Volpi, Ibid). Street children are but one group of children who may be said to be at risk or in difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, the nature of their experience of living on or off the streets does differentiate them from other children at risk and merits specific attention to be paid to their situation.

The issue of street children in public consciousness has a rather negative image and there is the general perception that the children are themselves somehow to blame for the situation they find themselves in; or that their behaviour is seen to be problematic for others. What this ignores are the major factors which propel children into a life on the streets. The presence of street children in major cities of the world has transcended the level where it was viewed as strictly uncommon occurrence to a worrisome global problem.

Worldwide, the problem of children roaming the streets endlessly is escalating and alarming (Le Roux and Sylvia, 1998). Global estimates of street children stood between 10 million to 100 million and the number has been increasing rapidly since 2002 (UNFPA, 2003). The phenomenon has not only attracted public concern but has also become a matter of priority to governments as well as national and international organizations (Panter-Brick, 2002). In Africa where the problem of street children is relatively new unlike the situation in Asia, the presence of large numbers of children has now become a major issue (Kopoka, 2000, Mehta, 2000).

Sub-Saharan Africa with less than 30 per cent of its population residing in cities is the least urbanized region of the developing world. Nevertheless, the region in recent times is experiencing the highest urban growth rates in the world (Mehta, 2000). Decades ago, Africa witnessed rapid and wide ranging socio-economic and political changes. There is rapid urbanization and runaway population growth, coupled with wars, internal crises and increasing disparities in wealth.

Activities ascribed to places such as homes and the street become ever more diffused the more people are pressured by the need to survive. Among very poor people, the strict distinction between home and street is getting increasingly obsolete, as women and men of all ages, including children, by force of circumstances have to use the streets as a collectively shared space for working, sleeping and living. Yet, in the discourse on street children, public judgment seldom takes context, personal histories or structural causes into consideration. Instead, the reasoning is highly moral, based on the construction of polar

oppositions, representing norms on the one hand and norm violations on the other hand. In this context, street children serve to highlight a set of working and living conditions that diverge from accepted norms about children.

The construction that distinguishes between normal children in homes and deviant children on the street, has a stigmatizing effect, resulting in both symbolic and actual violence. The way people treat street children offers a critical version of a society, which not only accepts life on the street as an alternative for those who are deprived of the possibility of a wholesome childhood, but which actively rejects them and aggravates their situation.

Since the Declaration of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, international communities and governments made commitments to ensure the protection of children. Furthermore, the Millennium Development Goals/ the Sustainable Development goals (SDGs), recognise the need to take into account vulnerable children and ensure that they are not left out in development initiatives. Therefore, it is important to understand street children to ensure that their survival, well-being and interests are not missed out in the millennium agenda. Governments and Non-governmental organisations (NGO) worldwide follow different strategies to curb the plight of street children. These are: reactive, protective and rights based strategies (Pomm, 2005: 43). Even though most programmes and projects follow a combination of reactive, protective and rights-oriented strategies, they can differ with regard to perception of children, adult-child relationship, motives, concrete measures of intervention and legal base.

Under the ‘Reactive strategy’, children have to be held responsible for their “bad conduct”, which calls for atonement and upgrading. Consequently, those in charge take a punitive approach towards these children, forcefully removing them from the streets and placing them in centres for children, often technically referred to as “houses of safety.” The legal stand for such reactive interventions is generally blurred. Homelessness gets confused with delinquency and seems to provide automatic grounds for arrest. In Malawi, this strategy is partly used, where street children are chased from streets by the Police and those who resist are arrested. According to Masina (2013: January 15), this does not work because after being realised, children go back to the street.

Tacitly counting on approval by the public, officially two main justifications are given for the above episodic measures. The first one is vagrancy and the second one is mendicancy (Pomm, 2005). Poor and desperate children on the streets spoil the illusion of a well-managed city, and the children are blamed. Pretending that the cleaning of the streets from begging children is an intervention to “protect” them, serves to hide that the society actually wants to be protected from the children. No attention at all is paid to their personal circumstances or to the motives that drive them into the streets. Whereas the reactive approach focuses vigorously on the active delinquent potential of children from which the society has to be safeguarded, the reasoning behind the protective approach does exactly the opposite in turning the cause-effect relationship upside down. Adult supervision is needed for “children’s welfare” and “normal development” is the precondition for a “useful and happy life”. Protecting vulnerable and innocent children from potential social harm is seen as imperative in this approach.

Several legal documents contain provisions of the child's rights to be protected against all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty, discrimination and exploitation. It shall be the policy of the State to protect and rehabilitate children gravely threatened or endangered by circumstances, which affect or will affect their survival and normal development and over which they have no control. Such circumstances, according to Section 23 (4) (c) of the constitution of Malawi, include "living in or fending for themselves in the streets of urban or rural areas without the care of parents or a guardian or any adult supervision needed for their welfare" and "working under conditions hazardous to life, safety and morals which unduly interfere with their normal development" (The Constitution of Republic of Malawi, 2004)

According to Pomm (2005:46), what makes the adult-child relationship subtler compared to the reactive, punitive approach is that protection is unquestionably deemed as the overall goal for this approach. As such, with the backup of being morally on the safe side, all kind of measures become easily sub-summed under this idea depending on the judgement and interpretation of adults. The emphasis within the protective approach is on outcomes rather than processes and on immediate causes rather than structural causes.

Consequently a key policy is the strong focus on specific "problems" within the areas of shelter, health, nutrition and education. A number of projects offer temporary shelter or long-term residential accommodation in non-governmental or church-based children's homes. Since housing of children outside their families is always perceived as the last resort, often there are attempts to return children to their original home environment.

Lastly, a Rights-based approach sees street children as human beings whose fundamental rights have been violated. A key policy within this approach is to take all necessary steps in accordance with the principle of “the best interest” of children to ensure their well-being. According to the 1991 Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC), children’s rights can be categorised into survival, development, protection and participation rights. All categories together make the rights-based strategy inherently holistic, given that the rights are applied coherently.

The Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) has its foundation in the normative framework of international human rights standards and principles, and the protection and promotion of these (Uvin, 2004). States, as primary duty bearers, are obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights entitlements of individuals, or rights holders as regards this thesis who happen to be the street children.

1.1 Street Children in Malawi

The increasing numbers of street children is one of the most serious urban social problems Malawi is facing today. Approximately, there are 7000 street children in Lilongwe, 5000 in Blantyre and 500 in Mzuzu city and the number is still on the rise (Phiri, 2014: September 06). In response to this, institutions and associations have been established in Malawi in order to provide support to these vulnerable children. Currently, these institutions and associations have been established in Lilongwe, Blantyre, Zomba and Mzuzu cities. The objective of these institutions is to work hand in hand with government in order to curb the plight of street children.

1.2 Interventions for Street Children in Malawi

The Malawi government and some NGOs have employed several approaches to help vulnerable children including those found in the street. The NGOs provide a range of preventive, recovery and re-integrative services targeting street children. The services provided include awareness-raising sensitization campaigns on the rights of street children, identification of street children, provision of shelter as an alternative home, provision of health care, food, vocational and skills training (carpentry and joinery, tinsmith, welding, etc.), formal education, informal education for example numeracy or literacy lessons for those who have never been to school, psycho-socio counselling, farming, relationship building, life skills, reintegration with parents, start-up capital, follow-up visits, loans to families of reintegrated street children, and sports and recreation activities.

There are two project focuses when it comes to curbing the plight of street children. These are broad-based and targeted approaches (Pomm, 2005: 39). Street children come from highly disadvantaged and vulnerable families and communities, struggling to come to terms with growing poverty and inequality. They face additional hazards when trying to survive on their own in the streets. Given this situation, responses to their problems have to be both broad-based and involving the whole community and targeted for those children who are already disconnected from their families.

At the national level, the main objectives of broad-based policies, which aim at improving the lives of poor children, are outlined for example in the Welfare of the Child and the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act (2010) of Malawi. These are statutes that are meant

to protect children from harm, violence, abuse and exploitation. The Malawi Child Care, Protection and Justice Act 2010, section 3 sub-section 2 states that ‘a parent or guardian shall provide proper guidance, care, assistance and maintenance for the child to ensure his or her survival and development including in particular, adequate diet, clothing, shelter and medical attention’. But due to some circumstances children may go to the street and stay there as their home.

On the same matter above, the Malawi government in its strategic paper, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, sub-section 4; outlines the need for the protection of vulnerable children. According to Pomm (Ibid), broad-based approaches can address and reform whole social networks, and therefore can allow more scope for preventive action.

On the other hand, targeted approaches recognize street children as a unique group of disadvantaged children who live in particularly precarious but often visible conditions. Targeted approaches can help street-living children gain access to services such as medical care, shelter and education that cannot be provided by the communities and families they come from. Such approaches can contribute to plug “gaps in the social networks through which children and street children in particular, can fall (Council of Europe Steering Committee on Social Policy, 1994).

There are two kinds of targeted approaches. These are Street-based and Centre-based. The Outreach approach is an example of the Street based initiative. This approach uses educational measures where social structures are considered as the fault and tries to meet street children on their home ground in order to, educate and empower them so as to find

individual solutions to their problems (Ansell 2005:205). In Malawi, this approach is used by both the government and other stakeholders including Chisomo Children Club, Samaritan Trust, STEKA and Bwalo Initiative. Street-based services primarily aim at reaching children where they are. They are usually carried out by social workers going to the streets and workplaces such as public markets and busy city intersections

Centre-based projects can be drop-in centres, residence shelters or temporary shelters. Drop-in-centres are safe shelters where children can avoid the dangers of the streets. Centres of this type are considered to be an effective strategy for providing an immediate and initial response to street children. Food, shelter and counselling are given to those who come. Drop-in-centres usually accommodate children for two or three months, then thereafter and transfer them to other agencies with residential facilities. Residential homes, usually boarding-house type rehabilitation centres, provide street children with care and support with emphasis on preparing them for re-integration into the community, either through their families or by independent living.

Residential homes care for children for a long period. Children in the centres are involved in a rehabilitation process so that they are re-integrated back home or they become independent away from the street. According to Ansell (2005:205), these institutions are not intended to be permanent places for children to live in but rather, transitional places for their rehabilitation in order to re-integrate them back to their families. These institutions serve as a home for street children.

1.3 Problem Statement

The “Home for Every Child Campaign” started in 2012 intended to relocate street children to safer places for proper growth. This included placing children in some of the institutions which already existed at that time (Masina, 2013: January 15). The Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare joined hands with NGOs and some well-wishers to try to mitigate and improve the lives of street children by taking them into institutions. The aim of removing children from the streets is to improve their living standards in terms of enhancing financial resources, family reunions after counselling, imparting new skills and knowledge for an independent life out of the streets. It has been observed that after these children are institutionalized, some of them go back to the street.

Institutional abscondment by children is very common. Table 1 below shows how common abscondment is at the three sampled institutions. Namely: Samaritan Trust, Chisomo children club and Bwalo Initiative Children home.

Table 1: Percentage of enrolled children who absconded between 2012 and 2014.

INSTITUTION	% ABSCONDMENT	NUMBER OF ENROLLED CHILDREN
Samaritan Trust	47	210
Chisomo Children Club	53	150
Bwalo Initiative in Zomba	34	91
All three institutions	45	451

Source: unpublished official reports from the three institutions

A number of studies have been conducted on street children in Malawi. Some of them concentrated on: The factors that push children to the street, the risk that children do face in the street and their nutrition and health Status in the street. There is a gap in literature as

to why some street children abscond from institutions. This study fills this under researched area. The slow uptake of the opportunity to join institutions and the abscondment of children from the institutions prompted the researcher to investigate what appears to be the cause of the irrational behaviour by the children. Of specific interest was why, despite that they live in gruesome environments, street children do not respond positively to the opportunities of living in a safe and more conducive environment for their proper growth.

1.4 Main Objective

To investigate factors that influence street children to abscond from institutions and return to the streets.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

1. To assess street children's awareness of the advantages of staying in institutions.
2. To explore absconders' perceptions of institutional care.
3. To investigate former street children's experiences in institutions.
4. To identify mechanisms used by children to survive in the streets.

Justification for the Specific Objectives

The first specific objective will try to establish if street children abscond from institutions out of the ignorance of the benefits of staying away from the aggressive street environment for proper growth. The second specific objective will help to find out the way children who absconded regard, understand or interpret the lived experiences in institutions hence establishing the factors which pushed them back to the street. The third specific objective

will investigate the lived experiences of children who are now in institutions so that reasons which may further push children out of institutions are established. The fourth and final specific objectives shall establish children's survival in the street in order to fully understand how they cope in the street after absconding from institutions. Together, these four specific objectives are pursued in order to understand why children abscond from institutions.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Street children are not merely a problem that needs to be addressed; they are resourceful human beings, many of whom have decided to seek a better life in the street. The findings of this study make an important contribution to the growing body of scholarly knowledge on street children in Malawi. A number of studies on street children have been conducted, and most of them have focused on the factors influencing children to leave their homes and go into the street. However, not much is known about why many children are unwilling to enrol into institutions catering for their needs and why abscondment is high. This study fills that scholarly gap by highlighting the complexity of the context in which street children make important decisions affecting their economic and social well-being.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 1 is the introduction which gave the background information, and stated the problem and objectives of the study. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to the topic of study as well as providing the theoretical frameworks that guided the research study. Chapter 3 describes the study methodology. Chapter 4 discusses the study findings. Chapter 5 provides the conclusion and implications of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of “Street Children”

It is not easy to define the concept “child”. What this period covers in terms of age range, differs from society to society depending on the diversity of roles, social change and the complexity of the society in question. On this basis, Hurrelman (1989) argues that a real definition of a child should not have fixed age limits; it is a phase of life in its own right with experiences that are a product of a society’s culture. Most southern African countries follow the UN and Commonwealth Secretariat in fixing age limits. Street children are a special type of children. In Malawi, there is no universal definition of a child. The constitution of the republic of Malawi just stipulates in section 23(5) that for the purpose of the whole section, a child shall be a person under the age of 16. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which was ratified by Malawi in 1991 in Article 1 defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set a lower legal age (UNCRC, 1989).

According to Le Roux et al (1998) the term is used for young people who spend time on the streets but who may or may not share other characteristics. Street children are a diverse group. Most definitions of street children share three elements. Spending significant amount of time on streets; making the street into a way of life; and having inadequate

protection, supervision, and care from a responsible adult. In southern Africa many of the street children are young people engaging in legal or illegal economic activities in the public arena. Annew (2003) therefore says that the street has different contexts, for some it is a place for socialization and for others it is a place where they earn a living.

UNICEF (1998) suggests that a distinction should be made between types of children found in the street depending on their relationship to responsible adults providing a home base. It distinguishes between “children in the street, children of the street, and abandoned children.” Children on the street are those involved in economic activities such as begging, carrying bags for people who have been shopping, cleaning cars and vending commodities. They work on the street and they are visible. They are said to have a home to which they go in the evening and contribute economically to the household. They have a sense of belonging to a family or household and they even attend school.

On the other hand, children of the street are a few steps further from home. Their ties to households and families are occasional and at best tenuous. Many of them are trying to have a life outside their homes or away from a responsible adult. For them the street is the significant point of reference in their situational life. According to Annew (1996), some segment of children in the street are further distinguished as abandoned children. They have little or no contact with relatives and they have little interest in being under adult supervision in a home. These children have broken up with conventional society and are committed towards surviving in the street. Since they have no intention of leaving the street, they may have adopted a street identity. Annew (1996) contested that this

operational definition of street children is a categorization that originated from observation by Latin American program workers. Mufune (2000:235) argues against the above definition. He says that the definition by Annew does not suit African conditions because Africa has a greater diversity of language and culture than Latin America. So using this conception of street children in Africa is akin to importing assumptions from a distinct environment and imposing a false cultural homogeneity on Africa.

Apteker and Abebe (1997) pointed out that the dichotomy of children on the street and children of the street is misleading because the two groups are not very distinct; they do not have different personality characteristics. He says that some of these children alternate styles; there are periods when they live on the street with little or no family contact and periods when they are at home. However for the purposes of this study, the distinction by UNICEF of street children shall be important. This study involves only “children of the street”.

2.2 Factors that Push Children to the Street

According to WHO (1993), children may end up in the streets for several reasons. This section discusses the main factors influencing children to go on to the streets. It looks at the situation in some Latin American countries, some countries in Africa, and finally in Malawi.

Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain the historic origins of street children. One relates to urban poverty, a second relates to aberrant families for example, (abandonment, abuse, witchcraft, lack of parental control or neglect), and a third is

associated with modernization. In any attempt to ascertain why certain children become street children, such factors as the psychological status of the child and the child's family, the perception of life on the streets, and the degree to which a street children culture exists must be considered. Wherever the inquiry might lead, it is important not to assume that leaving home is a mistake (Aptekar, 1988; Tyler, Echeverry, & Zea, 1991). Children find that their "living conditions on the street are often better than those at home" (Connolly, 1990: 146).

The number of children arriving in the streets because they have been abandoned by their families is far less than is commonly assumed. In Felsman's (1989) sample of 300 Colombian street children, less than 3% were abandoned. Boydon (1986) found that, of the 200,000 children on Lima's streets in Brazil, only 6,000 (or 3%) had been abandoned. Tacon (1982), speaking of all Latin American street children, estimated that less than 10% were abandoned by their families. Many authors cited above believe that most children in the developing world are in the streets because of poverty.

Lusk, who has studied street children in Juarez and Rio de Janeiro as well as in the countries of Colombia, Peru, and the Dominican Republic, refuted the abusive or neglectful family theory by showing that in "interviews with hundreds of street children in Latin America over the years, one theme has been repeated countless times: they are on the streets to work and earn money because there is not enough at home" (Lusk, 1992: 296). In a study in which they were trying to obtain physical and mental health data, and tested 80 Brazilian street children from 9 to 18 years of age Rosa, et al (1992) found that 82% of the children

left home for economic reasons. Once on the streets, the children contributed half or more of what they earned to their families-hardly a sign of family discord. In a study of 55 Nigerian street children under the age of 15 who were begging for a living, Ojanuga (1990) found that the children were on the streets because their families were poor and needed the money they earned. It was found that 80% of the children still lived with their families, and many of the children begged with them.

However, not all studies support the poverty hypothesis. After interviewing 1,000 children on the streets in Bombay, Patel (1990) claimed the major reason for street children was not poverty but family violence. Another Indian study, this one of child porters (children under age 14 working and living without family support), showed that although poverty was a significant aspect of the children being on the streets, family discord was the major problem (Subrahmanyam & Sondhi, 1990).

Often studies cite more than one reason for the origins of street children. For example, the same study of Brazilian street children that found economic reasons to be the major reason for children being on the streets also noted that it was twice as common to have fathers absent from the homes of street children as it was to have fathers absent from those of the control group of poor working children (Rosa, de Sousa, & Ebrahim, 1992). Other studies have emphasized the deleterious effects of stepfathers who abuse their stepchildren (Rumbidzai, 2003, Holinstainer & Tacon, 1983; Tacon, 1981). De Pineda et al. (2000), after conducting a UNICEF-sponsored demographic study of street children in Colombia, estimated that slightly more than a third (36%) of the children left home because of poverty,

27% because of family breakdown, and another 20% because of physical abuse or neglect. The long term consequences for them as individuals and for the societies which depend on their growth and development for the future have negative implications. For most of the countries involved, the rapid transition from centrally planned economies with predominantly state owned resources and industries, to largely privatized free market systems, has been accompanied by a number of negative conditions affecting families and children (Ouma, 2004). There are a number of indicators which show just how negative the effects are for many children.

A study to understand the problem of street children in Zambia by Lemba (2002), established that over 50% of the responses identified financial reasons as the contributing factor for them to be in the street. Many of the street children belonged to poor families who could not afford basic needs. This is supported in Malawi by a baseline survey to find out the reasons which push children to the street by Bwalo Initiative in Zomba district which found that over 80% of the street children cited financial reasons as the major problem which made them end up in the street (Bwalo Initiative, 2012). In Malawi by then, the national poverty rate was 50.7 percent as reported by the integrated household survey indicating that almost half of the population is poor (H.I.S 3, 2010-2011).

As can be seen in most empirical studies, poverty is the major cause of the influx of the problem of street children. So it is important to review literature on urban poverty since many of the street children are from homes within urban areas. In general, poverty is understood as a condition characterized by deprivation of basic needs like food, water

health, shelter, education and opportunities to fulfil those basic needs. Universally, households that do not meet minimum nutritional and essential non-food requirements or those whose daily income is equivalent to 1.25 US\$ or less are classified as living in poverty (World Bank, 2013).

The popular view has been that in Africa and the rest of the developing world, poverty is a rural phenomenon (Woldemariam, 1999; Kishindo, 2001). Estimates suggest that between 62% and 75% of the poor in Africa live in rural areas (Doward, 2004). And accelerated urbanization is viewed as a way of sustaining rapid reduction in overall poverty (World Bank, 1995, cited in Ray, 1998). Empirical studies have shown that urban poverty in developing countries contributes a significant proportion of the poor and that in Africa; the rate has been increasing over time.

Estimates indicate that 72% of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (for example, Ghana, 70%, Kenya, 71% and Malawi 91%) lives in slum settlements where basic services are neither adequate nor accessible (UN-Habitat, 2003; Kimani, 2006). Similarly, urbanization prospects indicate that Africa's population will cease to be predominantly rural by 2030 despite the inadequacy of services for the urban population (Hove, 2005). Africa is perceived as one of the fastest urbanizing continents in the world at the rate twice as fast as Latin America and Asia. Some studies have also shown that between 1970 and 1995, urban population increased by 4.7% per year yet Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropped by 0.7 per year indicating that urban population in Africa is growing amidst increasing poverty (World Development Report 1999/2000).

Empirical studies indicate that many migrants to urban areas do not possess the required training or skills to compete for opportunities in the urban environment. Even those with some qualifications find formal sector employment highly competitive and end up doing petty jobs that pay less (Ray, 1998). Losers from this competition end up facing the harsh realities of urban life which render them to a miserable life hence failing to take care of their children.

In many country reports, the effects of poverty and unemployment in terms of increasing family strain and conflict are seen to contribute directly to the breakup of families, to the divorce of parents, to alcohol and drug abuse, to the lack of adequate care for children, to the abuse and neglect of children by their families, to the need to beg and live off what might be called the “black economy” (UNICEF, 2003). The absence of an adequate system of social benefits and social assistance merely serves to compound this state of affairs and indeed makes it worse for the children and families involved.

According to UNICEF (2003), families are characterized in country reports as either having no adult in employment or in having both parents out working and still not earning enough to cater for basic needs. In these circumstances, on the basis of evidence from children themselves, children may be forced by parents to earn money or may simply be left to fend for themselves and be vulnerable to exploitation by other adults or indeed older children. A study by UNICEF (2006) to ascertain the magnitude of the problem of street children in Ethiopia, Uganda and Botswana observed that contrary to popular belief, many of the street children were not orphaned. Many of them mentioned family factors cited above as the

major reasons which pushed them to the streets. Apteker (1994) argues that the great majority— well over three-quarters and as many as 90% of the children on the streets in various developing countries, work on the streets but live at home and are working to earn money for their families. This shows that not all of them are orphaned.

2.3 Public Attitude towards Street Children

Street children are considered a blemish in the city, and a problem needing urgent solution (Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003). Beazley (2003) argues that street children are seen to be committing a social violation, as their very presence contradicts state ideological discourse on family values and ideas about public order. He also reasoned that street children appear to commit a social transgression by becoming street children, and that such an offence justifies the ‘cleaning up’ of children from the streets, arrests, imprisonment and, in some extreme cases, torture and extermination.

In a study aimed at examining how street children were perceived in the professional literature, Aptekar (1988) discovered that attitudes toward street children are based upon seeing them as threatening. When the street children reach puberty they become dangerous in the eyes of the public. Before puberty the children are considered cute and, as a result, they are successful at begging for alms. But as they grow up the image of being "cute" changes; they are perceived as thugs and are treated harshly. This means the early destruction of one developmental period, and the premature beginning of another.

Among their peers the younger children are often given the status of elders as a result of being more economically viable that is when they beg, they are more likely to receive alms, and better alms than older children. In contrast to adults in their peer groups, younger children are treated as “cute and adorable” children by the society. Yet, because of the experiences they have after leaving home at such an early age they are living as adolescents (Apteker, 1988). As soon as the children are adult-like in appearances they are treated as adults. The leeway that adolescents normally receive is absent. This makes it difficult for the adolescents to do what they had learned as small children. So, they either have to rely on their younger friends to support them or adopt a delinquent life style.

Street children also experience social exclusion. According to Pierson (2010, 12), social exclusion is a process over time that deprives individuals and families, groups and neighbourhoods of the resources required for participation in the social, economic and political activity of society as a whole. This process is primarily a consequence of poverty and low income, but other factors such as discrimination, low educational attainment and depleted environments also underpin it. Through this process people are cut off for a significant period in their lives from institutions and services, social networks and developmental opportunities that the great majority of a society enjoys.

Social exclusion prevents individuals or specific groups from meaningful participation in society. The problem of social exclusion is intensified by several factors like race, religion, economic status, employment, education, political affiliation and income. Especially, in poor developing countries like Malawi, social exclusion is one of the major unresolved

problems. Social exclusion is a paradigm on the basis of which our society becomes aware of its own dysfunction and looks, possibly through confusion and urgency, for solutions (Paugam, 1996: 7).

Socially excluded groups in the Malawian context are vulnerable people and people with deficient income and limited resources. Social exclusion promotes social inequality and relative deprivation to street children. Street children experience the phenomenon of social exclusion in many ways. In a study to establish the daily activities of street children in Philippines, Pomm (2005) observed that the more difficult the economic situation of the household, the more likely children have to work in order to supplement the meagre income of their parents. A particular problem with child work is not just that it can take dangerous and degrading forms, it also impacts upon educational attendance.

According to May et al (1998), street children are excluded not only in education but in other activities as well. For example they are unlikely to access out-reach programs in communities, or vaccinations undertaken at the homes or schools; they do not participate in cultural activities; and they are not protected by the justice system. Street children are excluded from the justice system and have few rights. They are sometimes assaulted by the police, used as informants, and forced to pay bribes.

2.4 The Risks for Street Children

Living on the street puts children at great risk not only from the treatment they receive from others but also from the effects on themselves of their life styles. The risk of sexual abuse, especially for girls is high. In one study done in Romania, 27% of the children who were interviewed reported that they had been raped. Overall, the risk of sexual exploitation is generally very high (Asquith, 2000). What this also means is that many of the young children who are sexually exploited and those who are intravenous drug users and who may share piercing materials, are exposed to the dangers associated with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including AIDS. Whilst in the street, some children are involved in drug abuse. Studies have found rates of drug use to be high. A survey among 119 street children in São Paulo, for example, classified 45% as heavy drug users, indicating the use of up to three drugs a day (Dimenstein, 1991).

In a study of street youths in Belo Horizonte in Brazil, a city of 2 million people by then, found that, 84% of the children living full-time in the street had histories of illegal drug use, 10.6% reported injection drug use, and 83.5% were sexually active (Campos et al., 1994). Additionally, in an earlier study involving this same sample, 82.6% reported having had sex while under the influence of drugs and/ or alcohol. In comparison, of the working but "home-based" children interviewed, only 25% had histories of illegal drug use and none reported the use of injection drugs (Campos et al., 1992).

An in depth study of drug use among street youths was conducted in 1992 by the Guidance Centre on Drugs and the Treatment of Drug Addicts of the University of Brasília (de Paula, 1992). The research sampled 150 males aged 10 to 17 in Ceilândia, one of Brasília's satellite towns, and examined three groups of street children- youths with no school or family ties, youths receiving assistance from social welfare institutions (typically delinquents), and youths enrolled in local schools. Data in the aforementioned study indicated that 100% of the street youths interviewed used drugs. Solvents and inhalants, typically cobbler's glue, were the most commonly used. "Frequent use," defined as daily or several times a week, was found among 88% of the entire sample, and among 72% of those in social welfare institutions. In addition, 32% of the youths reported the use of marijuana and/or cocaine.

In Malawi a study by Mandalazi et.al (2009), carried out in the cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe, established that street children are vulnerable to STIs and HIV infections, and drug abuse was found to be common among street youth. The higher risk to STIs and HIV infections was attributed to low level of knowledge, drug use, high risk sexual practices and sexual exploitation. Muchini (2001) observes that the drugs reduce feelings of shame such that the street children can do any job without any worry when their survival hangs in balance. A 1999 study by UNICEF acknowledged the existence of the risks for street children in the main cities of Lilongwe, Blantyre and Mzuzu. The study found that street children experienced a vast range of health problems including malaria, scabies and abdominal pains among other problems. The report further identified violence as one of the major problems that children on the streets experience.

Homeless street children “share the common condition of being ‘out of place’ in street environments, spending their lives largely outside the spheres typically considered appropriate for children, such as home, school and recreational settings” (Raffaelli and Larson, 1999: 1). This “out of place” condition sets street-living children outside the usual rules and protective norms of society.

In Malawi, while there is little statistical evidence to show that street children are at greater risk than other poor urban children of malnutrition or poor mental health it is assumed that the risk is high on street children (Panter-Brick, 2002). The environment on the street poses a greater risk of street accidents, exposure to high levels of environmental pollution, chronic skin infections, and exposure to AIDS, STIs, abusive sexual relationships, risk of early pregnancy and solvent abuse (Raffaelli, 1999: 20).

2.5 Institutional Care

According to Beard (2005), institutional care may also be called residential care in that children live permanently or temporarily within a building that is not located in their own village. Save the Children uses the following working definition of residential care: *A group living arrangement for children in which care is provided by remunerated adults who would not be regarded as traditional carer within the wider society* (Tofree, 1995: 1). This definition implies an organized and deliberate structure to the living arrangements for children and describes a professional relationship between the adults and the children rather than one that is parental. According to Save the children (2011) report, the reasons for so many children (over 8 million worldwide) living in residential care are multiple and

complex. At a macro level, socio-economic problems, globalization, poverty, migration, HIV and AIDS and armed conflict affect the ability of families to raise their children. Institutionalization is one aspect of child protection which assures that the already exposed children to the harsh street environment are protected. In general, Child protection means protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation and it covers a wide range of issues including child labour, sexual exploitation of children, trafficking and sale of children, children in armed conflict, juvenile justice, street children, and orphans among other groups (Munthali et al, 2006).

Social protection systems to support families facing these problems are failing, and the result is that many children are growing up outside the family. These children need care and protection, but it is social policy influenced by culture, history, politics and many other contextual factors that determines the type of support a child will receive. The Republic of Malawi National Policy on Orphans and other Vulnerable Children (2003), stresses that Care for orphans and other vulnerable children remains the responsibility of families and communities. This policy emphasizes community-based approaches because they have proved to be highly sustainable. In this regard institutional care for orphans and other vulnerable children should be the last resort. Although African societies have traditionally found homes for children within their own community, the sheer magnitude of the AIDS crisis and poverty has led to a number of children with no options. For these children, institutional care may be the only solution.

According to Rizzin (2003:15), in many countries, the principal causes of institutionalization are similar. Institutions are an alternative for low income families who see them as providing the opportunity for their children to be fed, to be secure and have access to education. Sometimes families seek out to institutions so that their children are placed there either because of poverty or that they are finding it hard to discipline them (Rizzin Ibid). A survey in Brazil showed that poverty was the major contributing factor to institutionalization. It was revealed that from 2001 to 2002 there was a 20% increase in the number of inquiries about placing children in institutions because of extreme poverty; these were parents who had strong affectionate links with their children but who could not afford to feed them.

Literature on institutional care for street children in Malawi is scarce. Much literature focuses on the factors pushing children into the streets. However, literature on institutional care from other African countries is readily available. This literature is reviewed here. Abebe (2008) conducted a comparative study that explored the well-being of children on the streets (begging during day but living with their parents) and orphans in SOS Children's Villages in Ethiopia. His findings showed that 'although children in SOS Villages seem to be secure in terms of housing, nutrition and access to education, they fare less in terms of peer interaction and social capital compared to their counterparts' (Abebe, 2008:11). This study shows that life in the institutions is not better than life on the street in all aspects. It also suggests that street children may shun institutional care if their other needs, such as the need for peer interaction, are not met.

The Bucharest Early Intervention Program compared developmental abilities of children who had been raised in large institutions against those who had not been institutionalised. The researcher found out that institutionalised children were far more likely to have social and behavioural abnormalities such as disturbances and delays in social and emotional development, aggressive behaviour problems, inattention and hyperactivity, and a syndrome that mimics autism (Csáky, 2009: 4). This assertion was further supported by Askeland (2006; 73) who explains that, ‘Largely deprived of the human touch as they grow up, children are unlikely to develop emotionally and mentally in ways that will make it possible for them to relate meaningfully and happily to other human beings, or to learn or work in meaningful ways.’ The above studies seem to support community based care for children rather than institutionalisation. However, they do not fully explain why children abscond from institutions.

A study in Zambia which was also intended to identify factors that make street children abscond from institutional care by Mtonga (2011), found that previous exposure to money, strict rules of institutions and proximity of the institutions to the streets, were some of the factors that forced children to go back to the streets. There are different institutional circumstances and processes and the way street children are institutionalized which may further explain why these children abscond in Malawian institutions.

2.6 Theoretical Frameworks

This study utilized functionalist and social action theories in order to understand street children's decision making and the context within which their decisions are made. In this context, the relevant decision is whether or not to continue staying in the institutions which potentially provide an escape from the harsh realities of street life. In this study, functionalist theory is the main explanatory theory of the two theories. It helps to analyse institutional circumstances which are not functional to the children and act as repellent to these children to go back to the street. Social action theory, on the other hand, helps us to understand and explain the extent to which the children's decisions are rational.

2.6.1 Functionalist Theory

Functionalists argue that individual meaning cannot be understood independently of a wider system of collective practices and beliefs which it is embedded in. These collective practices, in turn, are to be explained by the functions they serve for the system of social life as a whole. Different elements of social life depend on each other and fulfil functions that contribute to the maintenance of social order and its reproduction over time (Holmwood, 2004).

Robert Merton's structural-functionalism is of particular importance to the objectives of this study. Merton (as cited in Ritzer, 1980:49) states that the objects that can be subjected to structural functional analysis must represent a standardized (that is, patterned and repetitive) item. He offers examples of these items all of which are clearly social facts. These are: "social roles, institutional patterns, social processes, cultural pattern, culturally

patterned emotions, social norms, group organization, social structure, devices for social control, etc.” He insists that the focus of the structural-functionalist should be on functions rather motives. Here, functions are defined as those observed consequences which make for the adaption or adjustment of a given system.

Merton argues that we should not focus on positive consequences only. One social fact can clearly have negative consequences for another social fact (Ritzer, 1980:50). In fact, a social fact can at once have positive, negative or both positive and negative consequences for another social fact. Merton developed the concept of *dysfunction* to refer to the negative consequence. Merton emphasizes the existence of dysfunctions He argues that a social fact such as an institution, may have consequences that are generally dysfunctional or which are dysfunctional for some and functional for others. Relating the above to institutional care for street children, institutions may be functional to street children for they provide shelter, food and other basic needs. At the same time, they may be dysfunctional to the children if the institutions deprive the children of the opportunity to interact with their families or to generate income through, for example, car washing and begging.

The dual concepts of function and dysfunction raise the question of their relative weight. Merton developed the concept of *net balance* to help answer the question of whether functions outweigh dysfunctions or vice versa (Ritzer, 1980: 50). In net balance terms, institutions are probably more functional for certain street children than others and more dysfunctional for some street children than others. In addition, for children who abscond from institutions, this care may be more dysfunctional than functional to them. Merton

added the idea of *functional analysis*. For Merton, one could conduct a functional analysis of society as a whole as well as an organization, an institution, or a group. Also, a social fact can be functional at one level of analysis such as at societal or institutional level but dysfunctional at another level of analysis such as group or individual level. This study analyses the functions and dysfunctions of institutional care for street children.

Other concepts relevant to this study that Merton developed were the concepts of *intended* and *unintended consequences* (Ritzer, 1980:51). An institution's intention of providing street children with pocket money may be to keep them off begging on the street. However, the unintended consequence of such action may be the use of such money by the children to buy alcohol and drugs. The unintended consequences may be functional or dysfunctional to the institution and/or the street children.

2.6.2 Social Action Theory

Weber's Verstehen¹ theory of action which emphasizes the interpretive understanding of human beings and the meaning they themselves attach to their actions is crucial to this study. To Weber, this can only be done by sociologists putting themselves in the place of those they seek to understand and come to appreciate the reasons for their actions. Bilton et al (1996) points out that the theory emphasizes intentions held by the actor in relation to a separate act as well as goals for rational action. According to Weber, individuals are creative actors, agents whose actions determine both structure of society and the road down which history travels.

¹ A German term meaning “understanding”

Weber further notes that structural circumstances are constraints within which actors have to choose how to act. However, it is their perception of these constraints that matters. Weber puts emphasis on the individual human being as an actor. He emphasizes the individual acts; as well as the understanding of the motive of the actor and the beliefs available to the actor. Thus, the unit of analysis is the individual human being, who is filled with knowledge, self-interest and power to maximize his/her goals, needs and interests. To be a human being is therefore to be a purposive agent who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons (Giddens 1984 as cited by Bilton et al 1996). According to Weber, making decisions is about the triumph of rationality over all other forms of actions.

It is for this reason that this study focuses on rational action which occurs when actors weigh up, *or calculate*, the most *efficient* ways of achieving specific ends - when they say 'I will do this because I want that', 'I will do this because I reckon it is the most efficient way of getting that' (Bilton et al, 1996). In this study, the focus is also on the individual street child who is viewed in similar ways as Weber's rational, acting human being.

2.7 Chapter Summary

There is no universal definition of the concept "child" as this differs from country to country as evidenced in the review of literature. The review has also established that the major factor which pushes children to the street is poverty. Functionalist and the social action theories are going to be crucial to the purpose of this study. Therefore, below is the explanation of how these theories are going to guide the study.

Merton's functionalist theory and Weber's social action theory play complementary roles in explaining why individuals behave the way they do in particular circumstances. Individuals' behaviours and choices are influenced and constrained by structures. At the same time, they have the ability to make independent choices and their behaviour often influences systems. Therefore, in order to understand why street children leave institutional care for the streets, the study will examine the structural factions, the functions and dysfunctions of the institutional care as well as the choices made by the individual street children.

Functionalist theory in this study is going to be important because by using the idea of Functional analysis, some institutional patterns are going to be found as dysfunctional and others functional to street children. Therefore, in net balance terms, functions and dysfunctions are going to be explained hence getting a clear explanation as to why some street children abscond from institutions. To that end, patterns which bring the unintended consequences of institutionalization are going to be exposed and explained.

On the other hand, the social action theory is going to guide this research by showing the extent to which the individual who is the basis of analysis in this study is independent and rational to make choices which he/ she thinks is going to be helpful so that the intended immediate goals are achieved. The social action theory is going to guide this study by showing whether the dysfunctions/ unintended consequences of institutionalization are really substantial for the street children to find another efficient alternative way of achieving their goals.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

This study was conducted in Blantyre and Zomba cities. Why Zomba and Blantyre?: A study conducted by Munthali et al (2012) showed that over 6000 children were being raised in 104 child care institutions of which around 60 per cent were residential care institutions. The report also states that 51 of the 104 institutions are located in the Southern region which Blantyre and Zomba are part of. It also shows that the Southern Region has a larger number of vulnerable children than the other regions. Blantyre and Zomba happen to be the only 2 major cities in the Southern region.

The Blantyre Social Welfare Office estimates that there are nearly 4000 street children in the city. Poverty is one of several factors underlying the large number of street children in the city where the poverty rate stands at 24 percent. Poverty is blamed on unemployment, rapid population growth and lack of access to credit for economic development by the poor (UN-Habitat, 2011:12). On the other hand Zomba City is the commercial hub for the South Eastern region and has of late reported increased numbers of street and destitute children living and begging along the streets and business centres.

A baseline study by Bwalo Initiative (2011) established that there are an estimated 1004 street children in Zomba. Poverty and orphan hood were reported as the major drivers of the problem. In 2011 the poverty rate in Zomba city stood at 29 percent, with 12 percent being ultra-poor (UN-Habitat, 2011:23).

3.2 Study Sites

Bwalo Initiative Club in Zomba, Samaritan Trust, Chisomo Children Club and STEKA from Blantyre were the sites where the study was conducted. These institutions were chosen purposively because, among institutions in the southern region which address the needs of vulnerable children, they take street children in. Most of the other institutions are orphanages.

3.3 Study Design

This study is qualitative. Qualitative methods were appropriate due to the nature of this study because it sought to comprehend the attitudes, challenges, perceptions and the social values that determine the continual stay of children in the street despite being given the opportunity to stay in a conducive place. Qualitative research also helped to understand the interaction processes through which survival skills and life experiences are based on (Bryman, 2001). The study is also explanatory as it attempts to explain the factors influencing the children's behaviour.

3.4 Sampling

Key informants were identified using the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling was important in selecting only those who were well conversant with the topic at hand to inform the research problem and the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The research targeted the workers who are always in close contact with the children in the institutions. These are the people who have first-hand information on the experiences of children inside the institutions. A total of 4 interviews with key informants were conducted.

Street children were identified by using snowball sampling. This is a technique in which respondents are chosen according to information supplied by already studied subjects. In most cases, the method is used if one needs to gain entry into a little known phenomenon or where the researcher wants to secure an interview on sensitive matters that need an introduction of a most trusted person (Creswell, 2007). The snowball method was useful because not every child on the street has gone to an institution. Some of them have never been institutionalized.

The Social Welfare Departments at Chisomo Children Club, Samaritan Trust, STEKA and Bwalo Initiative were very supportive in this research. They provided a person who identified in the street, children who have absconded from their respective institutions. The work was much easier because these people had already developed a trust relationship with these children. In total 25 former and current street children were interviewed.

3.5 Methods of Data Collection

This study intended to collect data by using focus group discussions (FDGs) but that was not possible due to the fact that the children were suspicious of the intention of the researcher. The police and the government social welfare department could invite them for a meeting then round them up to be placed in centres. This meant that only key informant and individual interviews with the institutional officials and the children respectively were conducted.

3.5.1 Key Informant Interviews

Data was collected from the following 4 key informants:²

At Samaritan Trust: the head of the Social Welfare Department;

At Chisomo Children Club: the head of the Social Welfare Department;

At Bwalo Initiative: the Director; and

At STEKA: the owner of the club.

The purpose of conducting the key informant interviews was to gather specific information regarding the expectation and experiences of the officials on the keeping of children in the institutions and reasons why some children abscond. They were also interviewed to get an in-depth understanding of the role they played in informing the children about the advantages of staying inside the institutions rather than the street. A key informant interview guide was used (Appendix B).

²In order to prevent the possibility of the reader linking a particular key Informant to what he or she said, the key informants have been assigned numbers from 1 to 4, randomly. They will be referred to as Key Informant 1, 2, 3, and 4 in no particular order.

3.5.2 Individual Interviews with Children

A total of 25 children participated in individual interviews. As Table 2 indicates, the sample had more children from the streets than from institutions. Furthermore, it had more boys than girls because there are more boys in the streets than girls. It has to be noted that street children aged from 9-17 are the only ones who participated in this study.

Table 2: Number of Children Interviewed

Place where children were sampled from	Boys	Girls	Total
Institutions	5	5	10
Streets	10	5	15
Total	15	10	25

The 10 children from institutions were interviewed since they know the street life very well. It also happened that some of those who absconded were the institutionalized children's close friends. These 10 children were therefore, well positioned to describe the absconders' experiences inside the institutions, and to explain the reasons why their friends absconded. Fewer girls than boys were interviewed because girls were very hard to find in the street. An interview guide was used when conducting the interviews (Appendices A and B). The interviews were semi-structured. Respondents were expected to tell their own stories using their own definitions. Thus, respondents themselves were able to manipulate the interviews. According to Fraser (2004), semi-structured interviews are therefore an important method and very useful to elicit factual data from respondents.

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative information from both individual and key informant interviews was analysed using content analysis. Content analysis was used because the researcher wanted to make some meaning of what was gathered (Bryman, 2001). Data was prepared by organizing and reducing it into various forms through coding, then the codes were combined to come up with patterns that were emerging from key issues, and then core consistencies and meanings were identified. Themes were constructed based on the recurring ideas and events which helped in identifying the patterns. The emerging patterns were examined critically; that is the researcher tried to find alternative explanations and compare the findings using the maximum comparison method with what is found in the minimal literature he came across. According to Christian and Carey (cited in Potter 1996), this procedure increases the credibility of the data.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Child-centred approaches to data collection that view children as subjects rather than objects of research help to address dilemmas researchers have when doing research with children (Christensen 2000). The ethical principle governing research is that participants should not be harmed as a result of the research and should give their informed consent. In particular, Allmark (2002) notes that research with children must be ethically sound, and undertaken with proper respect for children's safety, integrity and privacy. It is also argued that consent to participate in the research should be given by someone competent. In this study, "children of the street" did not have guardians readily available. Therefore, the researcher asked consent from them directly. While for those who were in institutions,

consent was sought from the authorities who were in charge as well as from the children themselves. All participants were given full information regarding the purpose of the study, what was expected from them, how long the interviews were expected to last and that participation was voluntary.

3.8 Limitation of the Study

This study, as any other study, has some limitations. The first one is that children were scared to be interviewed by a stranger and at times were reticent to discuss their experiences, especially personal behaviour. Sound interviewing skills, such as establishing rapport, putting children at ease and remaining non-judgmental (Bowling, 2002) were used to help them overcome their shyness.

The other limitation concerned finding street children who absconded from the institutions. Initially the researcher got a list of names of those who absconded hoping that he was going to find them in the street. Unfortunately it was hard to find them as these children were known by different names in the streets. The researcher then decided to ask the outreach workers from the institutions who helped him to identify the children who have been in their institution. The final limitation concerns the sample size. The sample size of 25 street children and 4 institutions is too small to allow wider generalizations. However, some insights into the factors inhibiting street children from going into institutional care and factors pushing them out of such care, have been made.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the study findings. In order to address the specific objectives of the study, practical questions were directed at various respondents seeking their knowledge, perspectives and information. The following section, therefore, provides the findings according to the specific objectives of the study. Each sub-section provides an outline of the themes from the various data sources followed by an in-depth discussion of the same.

4.1 Awareness of Benefits of Institutional Care

This section tried to establish if street children abscond from institutions out of ignorance of the benefits of staying away from the aggressive life of the street. Respondents were allowed to mention more than one benefit if they knew of several benefits accruing from growing up under institutional care. The majority of the children responded that they are aware of the benefits of being in institutions rather than the street. Of the 25 street children, 18 were aware of the benefits of institutional care. This means that 72% of the children from the sample size were aware of the benefits of institutional care. It has to be noted that 7 of them were the ones who absconded and 11 were those in institutions.

The most frequently mentioned benefits were getting food; being provided with shelter; security; education opportunities including the provision of school fees; and also other respondents reported that they grow up spiritually in institutions. This was aptly reported by a “child of the street” when asked if he knew the advantages of staying in institutions:

Honestly speaking here we live like in the jungle where only the strong survive, unlike at Samaritan where life was easy (street child, Blantyre)

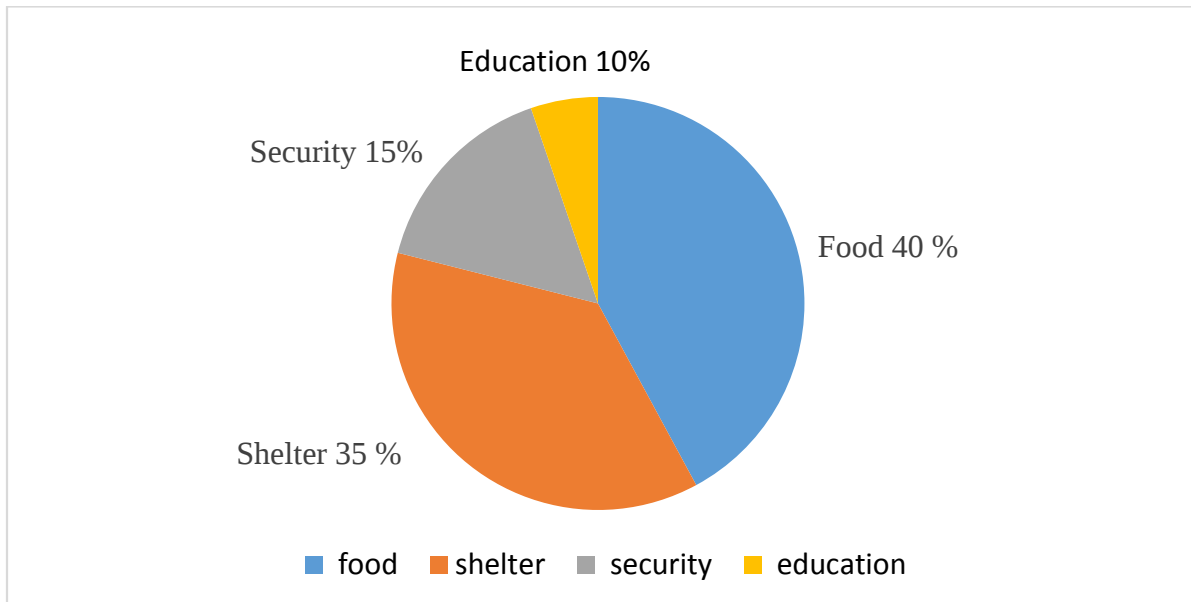
This shows that even those who no longer stay in institutions acknowledged that staying in institutions is better because one gets their basic needs without struggles unlike in the street.

Key informant 3 on the same point observed that:

Children here have everything they want, we register them to schools. We take them to the hospital when they are sick and also they do have psychotherapy sessions.

It has to be noted that several institutions have different programs and interventions which they carry out to solve the plight of street children when they are enrolled. These include the provision of food, school fees, clothes, psychotherapy sessions, shelter, training in vocational skills and some of the institutions empower financially the families of street children to facilitate their re-integration. Figure 1 below shows the most frequently mentioned benefits obtained from institutions as reported by children.

Figure 1: Distribution of the Stated Benefits



4.1.1 Availability of Food

Availability of food in institutions was frequently mentioned as the most important benefit by a huge number of the children. As it can be observed in the chart above showing the ranking of the benefits, 40% of the children mentioned food as one of the most important benefits of institutional care. Some of the children reported that when they are in the street, this basic need is very hard to find. Street children reported that they could stay for a day without finding anything to eat when they are in the street. It was observed that when children find life tough in the street, they opted to go back to their previous institutions in which they were enrolled so that they could find something to eat only to go back to the street again after a few days.

4.1.2 Shelter and Security

On shelter and security inside institutions, younger boys from 10 to 13 and the majority of girls reported these as among the important benefits of institutional care. This shows that for younger boys and most of the girls, security and a proper place to live is crucial on top of the food and clothes. Inside institutions, these children are given rooms they sleep in. Many of them reported that in the streets, they cover themselves with cartons when sleeping and they sleep in open spaces. Life is tough when there is a chill weather

For the girls, security was another major thing upon which they differentiated street life from institutional life. The majority of the girls reported that life is better in institutions because they are protected from the older boys and adult males who sexually abused them in the street. The girls reported that in the streets the *Binyas* (older boys) snatched everything which they got after begging and if they clung on to the items, the *Binyas* ' could beat them up. At night, watchmen demanded sex so that they could be given a proper place to sleep. This is different from institutions where, as most girls reported that they are given a separate place from that of boys to sleep. In the interviews, girls and younger boys reported that it is easy to survive in institutions unlike in the street where life is gruesome to them for being females and young respectively.

4.1.3 Education

Awareness of the benefits of institutional care pertaining to education was reported mostly by children who have gone beyond Standard 3 in their education. 10 % of the children reported the support they get to continue their studies as one of the important benefits of

institutional care. Unlike in the street, children do attend school without any disturbances in institutions. In institutions, girls and boys are treated equally and both of them find time to attend school. It was observed that the provision of some of the basic needs like food and clothes was directly linked to education attendance as most of the children were not busy with some of the activities involved in searching for these needs in institutions, therefore having more time to go to school.

Unlike boys, girls find life tough in the street. Girls seem to be vulnerable in the street due to their condition. Many people in the street do take the street as a place for men only and that girls should be at home. This is why a lot of the girls interviewed said they experience more hardships in the street than boys. Society treats girls as inferior to boys. The role of the female child is usually undervalued compared to that of boys, and her needs as well as interests are circumscribed by a wide range of cultural practices which are presumably thought to define feminine attributes.

The UN and OAU (1994: 22) reiterated the above finding by admitting that female children are more likely to be victims of discriminatory and harmful cultural practices and experience frequent sexual abuse and exploitation than boys. Evidence from some African societies also shows that "these discriminatory attitudes and practices deeply rooted in the cultures and traditions of many societies, are perpetuated and accepted primarily because societies are basically complacent and satisfied with the status-quo". Younger boys and female street children find life tough in the streets. This is why most in this group mentioned shelter and the provision of security inside institutions as the major advantage

of staying inside the institutions over staying on the street. From the responses which were coming out, it was very clear that going back to the street by some of the children was not a result of lack of awareness of the benefits of staying inside institutions. For those who are now staying in the street, awareness of the benefits did not make them go back to the institutions either.

4.2 Factors Influencing Children to Leave Institutional Care

The study assessed children's perceptions of institutional life. This section targeted children who absconded from institutions. This assessment helped to find out the way children regarded, understood or interpreted their experience in institutions hence establishing the factors which pushed these children out of institutions. Respondents were encouraged to give as many reasons as possible. The reasons were given by the children who absconded from the institutions, and the most common ones are presented next.

4.2.1 Absence of Income Generating Activities in Institutions

One of the prominent factors which forced children back to the street was the absence of income generating activities inside the institutions. A lot of children reported that they needed money to solve some of the problems they face in their day to day lives. One of the boys said:

In the streets I am able to do income generating activities such as washing cars, selling plastic shopping bags, and also begging, which is impossible in institutions (Street child, Zomba).

From most of the respondents' observations, it was clear that in the street, children were compelled by the presence of income generating activities which provide them with money for a living. A lot of the children responded that they were involved in several income generating activities which included shining shoes, running errands for street vendors and guarding for cars in parking lots.

In addition to the activities mentioned above, street girls reported to be involved in other extra income generating activities like working part-time jobs in restaurants, and selling confectionaries. Begging was also a means of earning cash for both girls and boys. It was also established that children could use the money earned in the street to help their relatives back home. One of the street girls said:

Am the first born in our family and my parents are very poor. Although I rarely go home, the money I get from the street is used to buy some basic needs at home (Female street child, Limbe).

Most female street children interviewed reported that they save their money to be used for certain purposes other than day to day survival in the street. This was confirmed by Key informant 2 who noted that:

For the years I have been involved with issues of street children, I have observed that female street children are fewer than males and are always in touch with their relatives back home. Also, when female street children are in the street they cannot be easily recognized unlike boys because they do some income generating activities which are slightly different from those of boys and have a tendency to save money than boys.

As stated above, it is very difficult to recognize a female street child in public places during the day because most female street children use begging as a last resort after failing to secure piece work for that day. Most girls had the propensity to save money. Most street children reported that the major factor which pushed them to the street in the first place was the need to raise money. Many of them reported that they needed money for different reasons, the major one being to help parents back home. So for them to be taken to an institution, it meant that they were deprived of the activities which generated money. Inside the institutions, although they were being provided with almost everything, absence of money was the problem.

Although street children reported that the money which they get is solely used to buy basic needs in the street, some of them reported that the money is used to help their families or relatives at home who included parents and siblings. To the surprise of this study, most of the street children interviewed reported to have either one or both of their parents alive. Most female street children and a few street boys reported that what they get from the street supports their families at home in terms of catering for basic needs. This is due to rampant poverty experienced in the homes of these children.

It was also observed that the families which benefit from the proceedings from the street, deliberately encouraged their children to earn a living in the street. Most children reported that their parents do not shout at them when they beg in the street because sometimes the parents benefit from the proceedings. Some of the families which had children in the street lived with them right there. This was common among parents with physical disabilities,

who stayed with their children in the street. To them the street is like a working place where they get everything they want and that removing them out of the street is like cutting off their sole source of income. This finding corroborates Rumbidzai et al (2003) finding in their study on street children in Zimbabwe. The study established that most children were living on the streets with a homeless parent. These families lived on minimal incomes, often eked out in the informal economy, which required long working hours for small returns, and contributions from all members of the family, including children.

In this study, the inability to provide physical support to parents with disabilities whilst in institutions forced some of the children to go back to the street to continue doing the income generating activities to help their parents or relatives. Some of the children reported that they help move around their disabled parents to places such as Ginnery Corner in Blantyre to beg. This meant that when they were in institutions, their parents were suffering in the street. To some children, this was not acceptable. Hence they went back to the streets.

4.2.2 Loss of Emotional Support

It was also observed that the children were afraid of losing emotional support from their families and friends if they continued to stay in the institutions. It has to be noted that before going to institutions, most of these children do establish strong bonds with friends and family hence having special emotional attachments with them. The strong bonds and attachments with people outside institutions make them find it tough to stay without their friends and family. Taking children from the streets breaks the social networks and friendships that children develop during their life course on the street. While in institutions,

children miss their friends and families and the support they provide. It is for this reason that some children decided to leave and go back to the streets. Even when children are re-integrated with their families, they are compelled to return to their friends in the streets because of the strong relationships they had with them.

An assessment on alternative care systems in Malawi by SOS (2014), established that the general picture about most alternative care facilities is that there are more children than the recommended number per care giver. For instance, the report indicated that Tiyamike orphan care centre in Mulanje has over 100 children and the ratio of care giver to children is 1:15. This implies that there is no any emotional bond between the children and the care givers. This makes the children feel somehow abandoned. In addition, Beazley (2003), observed that if a child has been on the street for only a few months, then there is a good chance that he will be able to live at home/ Institution again. If, however, it has been as long as a year since he/she left home then it will be very hard for him/her to stay there. He will miss his friends and become bored, and will long to be back on the street and be free.

4.2.3 Freedom in the Street

The study established that some children opted to go back to the street because the street offered more freedom to do whatever they wished unlike inside institutions. Some children complained about the strict institution rules which they said were repellent to them. One male child lamented:

I do not regret leaving the institution we were being treated like slaves, we had to slash grasses, chop logs and the rules were strict with too many chores to do (Male street child, Limbe).

The institutions were robbing the children of their freedom to engage in various activities which they could carry out in the streets, some of which could be illegal or socially unacceptable such as gambling and alcohol and drug use. In institutions children have to follow rules, the breach of which can result in punishment. A girl who had been in a different institution to the boy above emphasized this fact and had this to say:

When we broke the rules we had to mop halls, wash blankets and slash grasses as punishment, and also they emphasized that we live like a normal home. This meant that we had to do most of the chores as girls do in a normal house (Female street child, Blantyre).

On lack of freedom and strict institutional rules, most of the officials had contrary views to those offered by children who absconded. They did not agree that they have strict rules which stifled the freedom of the children inside institutions. A key informant observed:

There are rules which any place you can go follow so that order is maintained. We have rules here which to me are not strict, and we model this place like a real home; so we need them to do some of the chores and follow the rules which, some may say, are strict (Key informant 3).

Findings of this study show that more boys than girls absconded because of seeking more freedom in the street. These are the boys who have stayed for a long time in the street. A lot of those who absconded reported to have stayed for more than 2 years in the street before testing life in an institution. These boys established themselves in the street hence finding life there bearable and relatively less challenging to live than inside the institutions. It was also evident that unlike those who absconded due to the other factors, two thirds of this group of children did not stay inside the institutions for more than five months.

Some children have networks in the street, which are used as a safety nets. Children in the street do not follow any rules. It is like in the jungle where anyone can dictate proceedings so far as he has what it takes to dictate the state of affairs. Freedom to some children is valued the most rather than staying in a place where almost everything is being provided for but with limited freedom. As observed from the analysis of the key informants' reports, what the officials from institutions may call rules for bringing order, to children may be interpreted as strict rules. These children were previously exposed to a "free range" life in which no one dictated their affairs. Inside institutions, children find the environment totally different with the routine which some find boring. This is a life which, those who were well established in the street, find tough to adapt to.

Lack of freedom in institutions was also observed by Mtonga (2011) in a study in Zambia. He established that strict rules that institutions have can also be a hindrance to achieving success in removing street children from the streets. In that study some participants felt very restricted by the rules in institutions and hence returned to the streets where no one constantly told them what to do or restricted them. Because children's activities in institutions are guided by rules and schedules, some children feel bored in institutions. For children who live in institutions with strict rules and few activities to continuously entertain or keep them busy, returning to the streets becomes a better option. Here in Malawi respondents also complained about lack of entertainment activities in institutions hence they did not enjoy a dull strict life in institutions as compared to what they called a vibrant free street life full of activities.

4.2.4 Lack of Involvement in Need Identification

Many of the children who have been in institutions reported that they were not being involved in need identification. The officials just brought up anything which they perceived as necessary at that particular point in time. This was evidenced when children were asked if they were/are involved in decision making in as far as the process of need identification is concerned. Table 3 below shows the number of children involved in decision making from the sample size.

Table 3: Number of Children who were involved in Need identification

Child's Sex	Involved in Need Identification		TOTAL
	YES	NO	
Male	3	12	15
Female	1	9	10

Table 3 above indicates that 21 of the children reported that they have never been involved in the process of need identification. A street child acknowledged this:

Authorities at institutions never consulted us on our needs especially needs like food and clothes. Maybe they saw us as very desperate that they could just impose everything on us (Street child, Blantyre).

Street children felt cheated on the basic needs promised before getting to the institutions and the actual needs which were available. These children wanted to be involved in how the institutions should be addressing their needs in terms of what to give them and what time that is needed and also the type and quality of the basic needs. Another female street child in Zomba stressed that:

Where I was, we could be given nice food whilst we had bad clothes and we could have one thing in abundant supply and irrelevant whilst at the same time another thing was in short supply (Female street child, Zomba).

This suggests that, from the view point of some children, the institution's priorities were wrong and some of the needs of the children were not met. On the contrary, one of the Key informants had this to say on the issue:

Most of the institutions depend on the availability of funds or well-wishers who bring money or some items to be distributed among children here. So, sometimes the disbursement of funds is not predictable hence we give the children what we have depending on what is available (key informant 2).

Some children felt cheated by the institutions. They lamented that some items brought by donors and meant for the children were being shared among staff members. Children also complained that institutional staff could cherry-pick only good items leaving the items in bad condition for distribution to the children. More girls than boys absconded because of this reason. It is believed that girls are more concerned with their appearance especially when they are growing up. So lack of basic needs like clothes may push them out to the streets because they start feeling that they can adequately take care of themselves in the streets by selling their bodies.

Officials interviewed in this study claimed that it is very difficult to involve children who have been in the street in need identification. They said this is the case because these children are sometimes troublesome. These are children who have been traumatized by the

harsh street environment and this might have affected their attitude and the way they behave. Some institutional officials reported that in their committees, they have children who represent their colleagues. However, this study found that, in general, the children's views were not taken into consideration. Thus although the children were able to articulate their needs, there was a perceived lack of willingness and commitment to addressing these felt needs eventually resulting into frustration of the children due to loss of interest and eventual abscondment from the institutions. As put by Ennew (1994: 35), "children's involvement" means that children are encouraged in facilities to analyse their situation, decide what the priority problems are and suggest solutions.

According to Ennew (Ibid), this is rare in programs concerning street children. This study confirmed this observation. In other words, the involvement of the children displayed was simply ritual. It did not see the children's role and voice having an impact in any way on the day to day running of the institutions as regards the affairs of the children. This was of great benefit to the institutions because it enabled them to have the predetermined plans to be effected without dissent. Institutional officials saw that involving children in decision making was a waste of time because in the end their demands were seen not to be practical enough to be addressed. A study in Brazil by Swift (1997) showed why children need to be empowered in the form of involving them in making decisions that affect their lives. He observed that in programs which did not involve the street children in decision making there was lack of co-operation. In programs which involved the children, there was co-operation which led to the interventions that eventually improved their lives.

4.2.5 Fear of Meeting the Same Old Problems after Re-Integration

The study also established that some children run away from the institutions when the time of re-integration to their families or communities approached. These children reported that they were afraid of facing the same problems which brought them to the street in the first place. This was stressed by one of the children:

The reason which pushed me to the street in the first place was that I could sleep without eating anything at home due to poverty. After Bwalo Initiative found me in the street, they took me in. After receiving counselling I was to be re-integrated back to my family where I could have faced the same old problems. (Street child, Zomba).

The statement above shows that street children have sometimes valid reasons which make them go to the streets. Streets can be attractive places for children because they offer what these children miss from their homes. So for somebody to take them back home it means they still face the same problems which forced them out in the first place. Commenting on family re-integration, a key informant had this to say:

“Our institution is not a permanent place for children to stay. This is a transition Centre which takes in street children to make them aware of the disadvantages of growing up in the street and then we re-integrate them to their communities after counselling so that they start living a normal life” (Key informant 1).

Some institutions are not permanent places for children to stay. Even those homeless children who do not have somewhere to call home, soon or later, have to move out of the institutions because some of them are transit centres.

Children, who reported that they feared meeting the same old problems at home if they were re-integrated into their families, were of two categories. The first category is that of children who, after staying in the institutions were, re-integrated back home but went back to the street. The second being those children who said they left the institutions because they knew that when they are re-integrated back home they would face the same old problems they faced in the first place. The major problem these children cited was poverty. This meant that if the re-integration process overlooked some of the problems which pushed children to the street, it could eventually be unsuccessful.

The afore-mentioned has been evidenced in this study because children still go back to the street after being re-integrated or when the period of sending them back home is approaching. This was confirmed by the observation by Bwalo Initiative (2008) study in Zomba which showed that if the re-integration process is not done properly, children still go back to the street. Bwalo Initiative recognized that family re-integration was more than the mere act of physically re-unifying a child and family.

Re-integration reflects on the whole process on which a child living on the street safely moves back into family and community life and stabilizes there (Bwalo, 2008). Successful re-integration requires an emphasis on helping children to re-create a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of their lives: family, school, peers and community. Families also require support for successful re-integration. Many families struggle to provide children with adequate food, shelter and clothing.

Some children turn to the street to escape abuse and neglect at the hands of a care-giver. Sometimes they may be chased away by family members after the death of a parent or by a step-parent after a second marriage. Re-integration efforts should focus on identifying socio-economic obstacles and aim to mitigate or resolve family-based problems. Efforts also should build on child, family and community strengths to ensure a child's smooth transition and stabilization back home.

The above notion is in agreement with Beard's (2005) assessment of current practices on orphan care in Malawi, which found that one way to empower families of orphans or vulnerable children was to first train people, such as guardians in basic skills related to small business management. It was observed by Swart (1990: 37) and Aptekar (1996) that failure of many programs for street children comes from the lack of realistic alternatives for them. Children fleeing abuse and an intolerable situation at home are not helped by being returned to the same conditions. Many programs fail to teach street children how to survive in the world beyond the streets. In certain circumstances, given what is possible, the streets may provide the most viable form of livelihood for some of them. Food and income at least keep them alive in the short term.

However, although some children go back to the street, there is a high level of re-integration success at Samaritan trust and Chisomo children club. At Samaritan Trust, they carry out home assessments and eventually re-integrate the children. Chisomo Children's Club reported that it takes care of over 120 children in a year and of these, 75% are

successfully reintegrated in their families and relatives. Of the children who are reintegrated, 90% are boys while most girls find themselves in other vulnerable places Such as bars (Chisomo Children Club, 2010).

4.3 Institutionalized Children's Experience in Institutions

This section discusses the lived experiences of children inside institutions. Former street children who now stay in institutions were asked about the reasons in addition to those cited above which they thought might have pushed their colleagues or may in the long run push them back to the street. This, alongside the data collected from the key informants, helped to identify factors that might push, or already pushed, children back to the streets.

4.3.1 Inadequate Amenities in Institutions

The study established that most of the institutions had a shortage of basic needs for children at one particular point in time. This was the most common complaint raised by children in the institutions, regardless of the gender and age of the children. Resources were in short supply or totally unavailable for some days in a week or a month. This forced some of the children who were used to the street ways of obtaining these basic needs to abscond. One of the children had this to say:

Even here at institutions, we have inadequate basic needs like food and clothes. These are sometimes in short supply (former Street child, Blantyre).

When responding to the question, “What changes should be made to make your stay better” a girl had this suggestion to offer:

We need stationery to be adequate and other basic needs like food and more importantly clothes. This can reduce the number of children who abscond or are thinking of doing so (former street child, Blantyre).

More girls reported that they needed clothes so that they look smart. They complained that institutions take time to supply them with clothes. This delay made them look as if they were still staying in the street. However a lot of boys complained about the amount of food which they get. They said the food was of poor quality and inadequate and that in the street they used to get enough food. Both girls and boys agreed that the short supply of these made some of their friends to run away and may make them abscond so that they find the basic needs elsewhere.

Institutions are supposed to provide the children with basic needs. These are important things which keep children inside the institutions. Otherwise inadequate supply of these needs may make them not to differentiate institutional life and life in the street. This was supported by one key informant who said that it is important for institutions to make children stay in institutions smooth and totally different from the street, he however pointed out that:

Every institution aims at making life better for children, but it is expensive to keep children here. Imagine we use 3 bags of maize a day to feed these children. We pay their school fees and sometimes we have cases where children are sent back from school because of lack of school fees, but we try our best. We rely on funding from donors. Unfortunately, the funds are not always enough (Key informant 4).

Children who go to school from institutions suggested that institutions should be providing them with adequate stationary. Most of the institutions do not have schools inside their campuses. Children are enrolled in schools in the vicinity of their campuses. For those who are in secondary school, institutions pay school fees for them. It was evident that most of the institutions are financially not stable. The intermittent supply of funds from their donors makes it hard to cater for every need of children in institutions. So institutions find it hard to take care of the children because they are not in constant supply of adequate funds.

Most of these institutions do not get funding from government hence they find it hard to operate institutions with unreliable private funds. On disadvantages of institutional care, Beard (2005), observes that care can only be provided to a small percentage of children and that it is expensive to run these institutions. This supports the growing frustration of children inside institutions of the lack of basic needs. As observed from this study, institutions try their best to address the problems which children do face but due to some constraints they are unable to do so, giving some of the children who were used to getting things in the street an excuse to be found in the street. Some of the children reported that, although life seems to be tougher in the street than in institutions, in the streets they used to get what they wanted and in adequate amounts. This is one reason why some children abandon institutional care and go back to the streets.

In addition to inadequate basic needs, it was also observed that both boys and girls complained about the attractiveness of the places. Institutions may be safer places than the streets but they are sometimes dull places for children who are used to street life. Children

prefer places which are full of activities and interesting. These children have been exposed to a vibrant street life before. Therefore, for them to stay at a quiet place is unusual. Most of the children especially boys complained about lack of activities inside institutions. Some institutions have playgrounds whilst others do not have any, even a sporting activity.

4.3.2 Anti-Social Behaviour

The study also established that some children display extreme anti-social behaviour in institutions. This disturbs the stay of their colleagues. Some children responded that their friends were expelled because they made life of their friends miserable. There are some children who could not show any sign of changing to a normal life. The institutions could no longer bear their bad behaviour. As a key informant pointed out:

Although we take in street children to change them and make their life better, we have also the responsibility of making sure that children who are already here live in peace. Sometimes we receive children who were hard-core criminals in the street and they have a bad influence on those who have already settled here. So we cannot do otherwise but chase them
(Key informant 1).

Other key informants agreed that those who show no signs of changing for the better are expelled from institutions. Most of them said that the bad behaviour of the children is due to the fact that children go through a lot of hardships in the street and in the end they develop the bad behaviour sometimes as a defensive strategy. Interviews with both children and key informants showed that anti-social behaviour was common inside institutions. This was common among older boys aged from 14 to 17 years. These children beat their colleagues, skip classes and disturb during the distribution of basic needs like food and

clothes. These children also often jump the walls and vandalize the places surrounding the institutions at night. Some of them drink alcohol and smoke cannabis. After exhausting all the channels to counsel these children, officials are left with no other option but to expel them. Some officials lamented that sometimes children who were expelled for bad behaviour come back only to run away with other children.

It is very hard for outreach workers who enrol children to differentiate right away in the street between well-mannered children from the ones with bad behaviour. Vulnerable children are enrolled in the institutions with the help of the District Social Welfare workers and the Police without any further investigation of them. Some of them are involved in terrorizing people at night and others do harass women even in broad day light. These children may continue the anti-social behaviour when taken to institutions.

Le Roux (1998) observed that the brutality of street life and negative interactions with authorities may set into motion a process of primary and secondary deviance, with terrible consequences. Involvement in petty crime, or even proximity to such crime, has frequently made street children victims of violence. It is possible that the labelling of street children as deviant pushes them more deeply into anti-social behaviour. They may even come to accept society's perceptions of them. This labelling serves to further isolate them from society, thereby intensifying their victimization.

4.3.3 Lack of Job Opportunities or Markets

Lack of job opportunities or markets is a factor which is slightly different from the above factors. It has to be noted that this factor is not directly connected to the overall objective of this study because this was given out by children who are no longer in institutions. Still more, this factor deserved to be reported in this study so that one gains an additional insight on children who graduate from some institutions. It was found from interviews conducted on street children who were trained in various vocational skills in institutions, but returned to the street.

Some of the sampled institutions have programs which help children to be independent when they are re-integrated back to their communities. These programs include skills training in carpentry, bricklaying, and plumbing. In addition the institutions carry out family empowerment programs in order to strengthen the financial muscle of the children's families when they have been re-integrated. These include providing farm inputs and promoting irrigation farming. However, lack of employment opportunities or markets for their skills frustrates many children who have been trained in the skills and consequently, some of them returned to the street. A street boy who had been given this training lamented that:

I learned bricklaying but there were few employment opportunities. People could not hire me. So I just thought of returning to the street (Street child, Blantyre).

While accepting that jobs are scarce, a key informant also put the blame on the children who are reluctant to use the skills they gain. He said:

Of course I understand that jobs or markets are scarce due to the economic situation, but some of these children are used to hand-outs, getting things so easily from well-wishers. This pulls them to the streets (key informant 2).

All this suggests that some children who “graduate” from institutions and re-integrated into their families and communities return to the streets because of hardships at home while others do so because of their own laziness. In this study, all the children who went back to the street after skill training were male. Due to the small sample size, this study cannot conclude that the re-integration exercise is more successful for girls than it is for boys. Since it is very rare to find older street girls due to the fact that by the age of 16 most vulnerable street girls as observed, start prostitution, it would be harsh to conclude that more girls are re-integrated than boys.

4.4 Survival Mechanism Employed by Children to Cope with Life in the Street

It was important to explore children’s survival mechanism in the street. In order to fully understand all dimensions of these children’s life, the first and second tasks must be to identify factors that influence the children to go back to the streets, and to investigate how they cope with life in the streets. Earlier, this study carried out the first task. Street life is tough and this necessitates children to develop coping mechanisms for their survival. There are several mechanisms employed by street children in several aspects of their life such as: finding food, making money, finding shelter and healthcare. Data collected on survival mechanisms gave varied accounts of the way boys and girls, old and young adolescent children survive in the street. Some of the common mechanisms are presented below.

4.4.1 Finding Food, Money, and Shelter

Many children reported the use of more than one way in order to find their basic needs in the streets. This study found that female street children employed different mechanisms from males, just as younger children used different mechanisms from older children. For example, when asked the question “How do you find food and other basic needs”, an 11 year old said:

I do beg for alms at Shoprite then I use the money to buy food and other basic needs. When I get nothing on that day I go and scavenge in bins
(Male street child, Zomba).

Older boys from 15 years and above did not often mention begging as the major way of finding basic needs. They reported other activities such as selling plastic bags, washing cars and running errands for street vendors as their major source of income. On the other hand, girls, especially older ones, reported different ways of finding their basic needs. For example a 16 year old girl said:

I often go to restaurants with friends to peel potatoes, clean utensils in exchange for money or food, and some of my friends do sex with older men to get food or money” (Female street child, Limbe)

Begging was the most frequently reported mechanism street children used to find basic needs. However, this study observed that younger children aged less than 13 years were the ones who reported begging as their major way of meeting their basic needs. In Blantyre many of them said they do beg in places like Nandos, Ginnery corner and Metro, whilst in Limbe a lot of them said they beg at Shoprite Usave. Those from Zomba reported that they do beg at Metro and Shoprite Usave. It was observed that these are busy places where people do go to buy various commodities and these children are often given alms buy

people who patronize these places. Many of them said they beg so that they find money to buy food, clothes and other basic needs. They reported that, they get MK350-700 a day from begging. Begging was most influenced by age. Older street children did not get a lot of money from begging. People view them as being old enough to be able to work.

This was also observed in a study by Mtonga (2011), which found that older children were not successful in begging unlike younger children. Finding a proper place to sleep was also reported as a major problem. Street children said finding a proper place during chill weather and the rainy season is hard. Many of them sleep in verandas of shops and bus depots. They do cover themselves with cartons or worn out blankets. Many street children from Zomba and Limbe reported that they sleep in the Zomba and Limbe bus depots, whilst in Blantyre many reported that they do sleep at Nandos.

According to Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (1994), older street children find it hard to depend on begging because when children develop physically and show signs of maturity, members of the public and the police chase them away from public spaces frequented by people. Therefore, they are forced to be in hidden parts of the city less visited by people. Thus, according to Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (1994), there is a gradual progression from begging to stealing or prostitution. As children grow older, they are often dehumanized and rejected and this makes successful begging even more difficult. Therefore, as a means of survival they begin to steal and some girls start selling their bodies.

4.4.2 Accessing Healthcare

To further understand their coping mechanisms in as far as healthcare is concerned children were asked what they do when they are sick. Many of them, regardless of their gender and age, replied that they buy medicine from street vendors. Rarely do they go to health facilities. This was confirmed by a 14 year old girl who even mentioned one reason why they rarely seek help from health facilities, when she said:

I buy medicine from street vendors because one wastes a lot of time on the queue [at the hospital] only to be given Panadol in the end” (Female street child, Blantyre).

Buying medicine from vendors and shops, unlike going to the hospital, was the common response given by street children. Many of them reported that they do so because that does not waste their time. Some of them reported that they sleep off the sickness and only when the situation worsens, do they go to hospitals with their friends. Others reported that they go back home if the illness is persistent. In his study on health seeking behaviour, Amury (2004), found that street children struggle to get food each day hence this overrides any concern for their health. He also found that many street children were not concerned about their health because they had more pressing needs than seeking formal treatment.

4.4.3 Social Capital

The central and key theme of social capital theory is that relationships matter and social networking is a valuable asset that enables people to help one another. Due to the fact that individual street children share the streets with other children facing similar challenges and circumstances, they are each pushed into social interactions with other children and

eventually creating bonding social capital, which is symbolized by ties between people in similar situations (Rantalaaho & Teije, 2006: 39). Contrary to some literature that street children are violent and disoriented, this study established that social networks play a major role in children's survival in the streets. It was observed that children help each other in almost everything needed for one's survival in the street. They walked in groups in search for food, and they helped each other when sick or faced with danger from other groups or people in the street. They also protected each other when one of them was threatened by other people/rival group.

In a nutshell, it has been observed that instead of complaining about their lives (which is considered as in a bad state), street children reinforce the things that they feel are good about living on the street. Always, they are attempting to look for proof that street life is better than conventional life. For street children, problems are often glossed over and treated with humour and a light-hearted disregard, and the children create a doctrine for themselves that it is 'great in the street'; a philosophy constructed to make life more tolerable (Beazley, 2003).

However according to Beazley (Ibid), recognising this as a coping strategy does not and should not give the adult observer the feeling that they therefore know the child better than he or she knows themselves, that all street children are 'deluding' themselves, or that the street is in reality completely bad. Rather, this kind of insight, along with the evidence of positive capacities outlined above is most useful in helping us to better understand the diversity and scope for interpretation within street children's personal responses to their

situation. Thus, it is important to ensure such evidence constitutes a driving consideration in the design and implementation of re-unification programmes for these children, to avoid blindly ignoring or disrespecting the abilities they already have.

4.5 Chapter Summary

The functionalist theory, as postulated by Merton, has helped this study to explain why institutional care is dysfunctional to some children who abandon such care for the streets. Some find that the streets are more functional to them. These children weigh the functions and dysfunctions of both institutional care and street life. From their point of view the net balance between functions and dysfunctions of institutional care is in favour of the dysfunctions while the net balance between functions and dysfunctions of street life is in favour of functions. Street life gives them a better opportunity to meet their basic needs such as money, freedom, fun and networking than institutional care. Social action theory helped to understand that street children as individuals are able to make decisions on their own in the institutions and in the streets.

While each street child is influenced by factors in his or her environment, he or she has the ability to make the independent decision to enter or not to enter an institution; to stay in it or to leave it; to return to the street or to go back home and be fully re-integrated. A street child's decision is rational from his or her point of view. Nevertheless, both personal and environmental (contextual) factors play a role in influencing the decisions taken by street children.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that influence street children to go back to the street after been institutionalized. Government and some private stakeholders try to remove street children to safer places mostly institutions, with the aim of protecting them from the harsh street environment which is adverse to their emotional psychological and physical growth as they are productive citizens of tomorrow.

This study established that street children were aware of the benefits of staying away from the street. And they admitted that street life is not easy as compared to life in institutions. It has been shown in this study that children made decisions on the basis of a rational assessment of the potential benefits likely to accrue to them. This has been demonstrated by the fact that children were well aware of the potential benefits accruing from growing inside institutions, but still went back to the street after being institutionalized due to perceived losses in personal, social and economic terms. They cared a lot about what happens now rather than in the future.

With regard to the factors that make institutionalized children to go back to the street, which was the overall objective of the study, a number of factors were found. These were: the absence of income generating activities in institutions; loss of emotional support; freedom in the street; lack of involvement in need identification; fear of meeting same old hardships after re-integration; inadequate amenities in institutions; and being expelled due to anti-social behaviour. It has to be noted that the functionalist theory has played a major role in explaining how institutional patterns were dysfunctional to street children who went back to the street. Most of the factors were unintended consequences of institutional circumstances.

Contrary to popular views in Malawi that street children are disoriented and a socially disconnected group of people, this study established that these children are well organized and rely most on social networks in their daily survival in the gruesome street environment. This included the way they found food, took care of their sick friends and protected each other. In addition, the study also observed that most street children had at least one or both of their parents alive and that the major reasons they were found in the street was poverty. This was contrary to the views that most of the street children found in the major cities of Malawi are orphans.

Finally, the study also established that due to the tough street environments, girls could not compete with boys due to their physicality in as far as most survival mechanisms were concerned. They were often sexually exploited and, unlike boys, they were involved in sex mostly for survival. This helped them to find money, food and other basic needs.

5.2 Implication of the Study

Street children have their own needs which must be addressed as much as possible if they are to stay in the institutions and to be re-integrated into their communities. The children's needs are not identical for all children. They vary according to the children's sex, age, and other circumstances. In this regard, street children should not be treated as a homogenous group. This study has established that street children as social beings are calculative and motivated by wants and needs hence choosing what they perceive as the best option at that particular point in time. This requires interventions which are sensitive to their needs and that the children themselves must be involved in those interventions.

The study has also revealed that removing street children from the street cannot be successful; they would still be going back to streets if the structural causes of the phenomenon are not addressed. As established in this study, a lot of children cited poverty as the major factor which pulled them to the street and that when they are re-integrated back home they still face the same ordeal. Some of them supplement the income they get from the street to their families such that taking them to institutions is like depriving their families the meagre income these children contribute. It is important for government and other stakeholders to focus their interventions directly on the vulnerable children's families rather than institutionalizing them to address the problem of street children.

To this end, although the sample size is very small to make generalizations, it is important to shift resources from institutionalization, which is expensive towards supporting children in their families and good quality family-based care options for children who need

alternative families. The family empowerment programs which some institutions carry out in the communities of former street children must be extended to cover a lot of families which have vulnerable children to stop the children from going to the streets.

Finally, girls who this study found out that they suffer from exploitation and sexual violence must be given priority in institutions to curb their plight. Re-integration of street children cannot be successful unless the conditions that first brought them to the streets have improved hence the need to address structural causes of the problem of street children.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

A study is needed to investigate how best institutions can meet the needs of street children under the prevailing circumstances that there is inadequate funding. Is it possible to have care within the children's communities, for example care given by community based organizations (CBOs), with support from the community members themselves?

A study is also needed to ascertain transition experiences of institutional absconders from childhood to adulthood within the street and how these processes relate to their identities and future livelihoods.

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APPENDECES

APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE FOR CHILDREN IN THE STREET.

Respondent's Identification

Name :

Sex :

Age :

Home district:

Education :

PART I) Benefits of institutional care (for children in the institutions)

- 1) What are the potential benefits of institutional care?
- 2) Do the benefits make you feel to stay at an institution?
- 3) How did the institution help you to meet your basic needs?
- 4) Would you connect lack of awareness of the benefit of institutional care to abscondment?

PART II) Perception of institutional care by children in the streets

- 1) How did you come to the street?
- 2) How long have you been on the street?
- 3) Have you been to an institution or Centre?
- 4) How long have you been in an institution?
- 5) .How was life there compared to life on the street?
- 6) Why did you leave the institution/Centre?
- 7) Are there any things that you missed about life on the street?

- 8) Were you being involved in need identification in your institution?
- 9) What changes do you think should be made at the institution you were to make your Children's stay better?
- 10) How many are you in your family?
- 11) Are both your parents alive?
- 12) How would you describe your friendship with friends here on the streets?

PART III) Survival strategies (for children in the street)

- 1) How do you find your food on the street?
- 2) Which other means and ways do you use to find food?
- 3) What do you do in times when you can't find anything to eat?
- 4) What do you do when you are sick?
- 5) What would you say are the worst experiences you have ever had and how did you Overcome them
- 6) What other setbacks do you consider challenging in the street and how do you Overcome them
- 7) Who helps you when you are faced with a challenging situation?
- 8) Are there other people who help you?
- 9) Is there a particular problem or challenge that is persistent to you and how do you do Handle it?
- 10) What do you do when you have a problem and you cannot get help?
- 11) What other activities do you do and think are very important to your Survival?
- 12) What roles do your friends on the street play in your life?

APPENDIX B: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE FOR CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONS

PART I) Institutionalized children's experience in institutions

- 1) Where were you before you came here?
- 2) How long were you on the streets?
- 3) How long have you been in this institution?
- 4). How is life here compared to life on the street?
- 5) Have you stayed with friends here who have left, how many?
- 6) For how long did you stay with them?
- 7) Why do you think they left this institution/Centre?
- 8) Are you involved in the process of identifying your needs here?
- 9) Are there any things that you miss about life on the street?
- 10) What do you like about this place?
- 11) What don't you like about this place?
- 12) How would you describe your friendship with the other children here?
- 13) Are both of your parents alive?
- 14) Do you communicate with your family members, how?
- 15) How do you relate with the staff members that work here
- 16) What changes do you think should be made at this institution to make Your Stay better?

PART III) Survival strategies (for children out of the street)

- 1) How were you finding your food on the street?
- 2) Which other means and ways were you using to find food?
- 3) What were you doing in times when you couldn't find anything to eat?
- 4) What did you do when you were sick?
- 5) What would you say were worst experiences on the street and how did you Overcome them?
- 6) What other setbacks do you consider challenging on the street and how you Overcame them?
- 7) What things did you consider traumatizing and threatening to your life?
- 8) Who helped you when you were faced with a challenging situation?
- 9) Is there a particular problem or challenge that re-occurred to you and how did You handle it.
- 10) When things were very tough on the streets, did you ever go home to your family for help?
- 11) What did you do when you had a problem and you could not get help?
- 12) What other activities did you do and think were very important to your Survival?
- 13) What roles did your friends on the street play in your life?

APPENDIX C: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS QUESTION GUIDE

Respondent's Identification

Name :

Sex :

Institution :

Position held:

1. For how long has your institution been involved in affairs of street children?
2. How do you enroll street children into your institution?
3. Are there any criteria for the enrollment of street children into your organization?
4. Did the children freely choose to enroll into your institution?
5. How do you relate with children in your institution?
6. What are some of the basic needs and other activities you provide to children
7. Do you think you target the right children?
8. What are some of the things you do to make the life of these children comfortable?
9. What kind of punishment do you give to the children when they break rules
10. How do you make them aware of the benefits of staying out of the streets?
11. What mechanisms were put in place to deliberately encourage the Children to stay in your institution?

12. What have been the hindrances/difficulties on your side concerning the keeping of children in your institution?
13. How do you ensure that issues concerning children are constantly being addressed in your institution?
14. How often are the children consulted in issues relating to their life in the institution?
15. Any other comments and observations as regards children's stay in your institution?