Chapter One
Street-Involved Children and Youth: Who are They and What Forces Them to the Street? A Cross-Sectional Study on Street-Involved Youth in Botswana

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Introduction

Street-involved children and youth is a growing social and development problem in the world, as they continue to face multiple social challenges including violence, stigmatization and abuse. They are often ignored, shunned and excluded from essential services such as education, psychosocial support, healthcare, security and protection.[1] The majority of these children come from poor households, most face psychosocial challenges, are prone to substance abuse and are stigmatized by the police and the general public.[2]

In responding to the challenges faced by street-involved children and youth, the United Nations Children's Fund/Botswana (UNICEF/Botswana) in collaboration with the Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD), contracted Stepping Stones International (SSI) to undertake a survey in Gaborone City and surrounding suburban areas of Tlokweng in South East and Gomodobu in Kweneng East.[3] The survey targeted children and youth aged 10 to 19 years of age. The results were aimed at providing technical support to a civil society organization, Botswana Council of Churches (BCC), to implement a program for the street-involved youth.[4]

UNICEF classifies street-involved children and youth into typologies including, 'youth on the streets,' defined as those who are on the street largely for economic reasons to beg, look for employment, carry bags, clean cars and/or vend commodities. They also maintain a relationship with an adult who provides a home base. 'Youth of the streets' defines those who work and sleep on the streets with little or no relationship with an adult.[5] In order to develop interventions for the street-involved children and youth in Botswana, it is necessary to profile them and identify their needs related to education, psychosocial support, and family and community involvement. Without evidenced-based and targeted interventions, the problem of street-involved children will continue to increase and will have a negative impact on human development, security and safety, and future societal productivity.

The purpose of the study is to define the type of street-involved youth living in Botswana. The characteristics and needs of these street-involved youth will be incorporated into the development

of a national second chance learning curriculum. The findings of this study highlight that the curriculum must cater for participatory learning, counselling, social activities and family involvement. The study results will also be used to assist civil society organizations to develop specific interventions for street-involved children and youth in Botswana. Currently, only one study has attempted to construct a profile of street-involved youth in Botswana and determine characteristics that differentiate street-involved from non-street-involved youth, however, this study was conducted 17 years ago.[6]

Literature demonstrates that South Africa and Namibia have appraised program interventions of street-involved children and youth, but Botswana has never conducted such program studies. The current situation in Botswana suggests that street-involved children and youth are 'invisible' and lack access to essential services such as education, psychosocial support, security and protection.

Background

Despite extensive research, the reasons for street-involvement are inadequately understood and interventions aimed at addressing the problem often lack evidence. Industrialized and developing countries face an increasing population of street-involved children and youth, yet interventions that exist are few and fragmented.[7] The true global number of street-involved children and youth is unknown, however, estimates from several years ago suggest that there are tens of millions of street children and youth worldwide. In 1999, UNICEF estimated there to be about 100 million street children globally.[8]

The term 'street children and youth' is a social concept which is criticized as labelling and stigmatizing. The term does not preserve the dignity of the children and youth and often perpetuates public and official negative attitudes towards them.[9] For this reason, the term 'street-*involved* children and youth' highlights their strengths and positive traits, such as resilience and cleverness.[10] Globally, a street-involved child or youth is any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, who derives his or her habitual source of existence on the street, including unoccupied dwellings or wastelands, and who lacks adequate adult protection, direction and supervision.[11]

Research identifies several factors that force children to the streets. Families living in poverty or near the margins of survival do not have the resilience to cope with shocks such as the death of a parent or the loss of a job. These devastations cause children to drop out of school and to work to help support the family.[12] Rural-urban migration, cultural norms, lack of feeling loved and poor quality education may also lead children to circulate constantly from their homes, sleeping in a shelter, and eventually sleeping on the streets.[13] Children and youth are forced on to the streets due to a 'spiral of vulnerability' such as violence, the effects of HIV and AIDS, exploitation and unsafe work environments. In addition, war, political unrest and the effects of climate change may drive children to the streets.[14]

Violence against children in homes, schools, communities, workplaces and institutions is a widespread global problem that drives children to the streets. Research studies in Egypt shows that 81% and 91% of children experience corporal punishment in their homes and schools, respectively.[15] Corporal punishment precipitates children to move to the streets and is the reason for some children to separate from their families. In a wide range of contexts, children most commonly cite violence

as one cause for them being on the streets.[16]

Studies show that street-involved children have either never attended school or have dropped out during primary school, which precipitates street-involvement.[17] The 2010 Global Report on Education found that 72 million children were out of school worldwide and governments were failing to address the root causes of marginalization in education.[18] The poor quality of education, lack of adaptation to children in poor, vulnerable environments, and low parental educational attainment contribute to educational failure and school drop-out among poor and vulnerable children.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the HIV pandemic has caused parental death, poverty and social exclusion. UNAIDS estimates that HIV and AIDS has orphaned over 16.6 million children, of whom 90% live in sub-Saharan Africa.[19] As a result of weakened extended family structures from HIV and AIDS, some children fall through system cracks, resulting in vulnerable environments such as living in child-headed households, engaging in unsafe labour, and migrating on to the streets.[20]

Rapid urbanization has also resulted in large, informal, unplanned settlements and urban slums. Urban slums have poor or non-existent public services, and crowded, unsanitary and polluted environments.[21] Other children migrate to urban areas alone to look for work opportunities. In Botswana, 80% of the street-involved boys were car washers, the most common income-generating activity among youth.[22]

Methodology

This research project was a cross-sectional study that collected a snapshot of data on street-involvedness among youth at a specific time.[23] The study population included any boys and girls who were on the streets in specified study areas. The study employed a census sampling technique due to the lack of a sampling frame and actual population of street-involved youth in Botswana. Youth identified by city officials, community leaders and the general public as street-involved in greater Gaborone, Tlokweng in Southeast District and Gamodubu in Kweneng East District were approached and asked to participate in the study. The study also used a snowballing technique to reach other youth considered as street-involved youth. The final sample targeted children and youth aged 10-19 years, the age group stipulated by the MoESD. Data were collected using a standardized face-to-face questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed through a consultative process that involved representatives from SSI, MoESD, UNCEF, BCC and University of Botswana (UB). The questionnaire was piloted and modified before use.[24]

Results

The study interviewed 85 children and youth around greater Gaborone, Tlokweng in Southeast, and rural Gamodubu in Kweneng East. The target population for the study was ages 10 to 19 years old. Of the 85 children and youth interviewed, 78 (91.7%) were in the study's target population while seven (8.2%) were older than 19 years.

The study found that 88.5 % of the sample was composed of males and the remainder (11.5%) of females. The distribution of respondents in the 10-14 and 15-19 age groups was 50% in each

category and the sample mean age was 14.5 years. While almost all respondents were Botswana citizens, only half of them had formal identification numbers (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Sex, Age, Personal ID, Type of ID and Citizenship

Explanatory Variables	Frequency Score (%)	(95% Confidence Interval)
Sex (n = 78)		
Female	9 (11.5)	(6.2, 20.5)
Male	69 (88.5)	(79.5, 93.8)
Age (in years) (n = 78)		
10 - 14	39 (50.0)	(39.2, 60.8)
15 - 19	39 (50.0)	(39.2, 60.8)
Mean age (in years)	14.5 (SD: 2.7)	(13.9, 15.1)
Do you have ID? (n = 78)		
Yes	39 (50.0)	(39.2, 60.8)
No	39 (50.0)	(39.2, 60.8)
If yes, what type? (n = 39)		
Passport	6 (15.4)	(7.2, 29.3)
Birth Certificate	22 (56.4)	(41., 70.7)
Omang	11 (28.2)	(16.5, 43.8)
Country of citizenship (n = 78)		
Botswana	77 (98.7)	(93.1, 99.8)
Zimbabwe	1 (1.3)	(0.2, 6.9)

The majority of the sample population (60.5%) had living biological parents while 39.5% came from a household where one or both parents had died. Of the respondents who reported having both biological parents alive, 41.9% lived with their mothers, 29.7% lived with both parents, 23% resided with extended family, 2.7% resided with friends, and 2.7% lived by themselves. When the respondents were asked to rank their relationship with siblings and caregivers on a five level Likert scale (1 = very distant and 5 = being very close), the overall median score was four for siblings and five for caregivers.

Results also show that 76 of the respondents had a home in which to sleep at night compared with two respondents who slept and lived on the streets. For most of the respondents, the homes of their parents or relatives were where they normally spent the night.

Who Are the Street-Involved in this Study?
The study posed three questions to profile 'street children and youth' in the sample of 10-19 year olds interviewed. The questions included length of time per week, hours per day and number of years spent on the streets. Of the 78 children and youth interviewed, 54 (69.2%) were on the streets every day, most of the days or some of the days in the course of week. The results consistently found that

the 54 respondents who reported spending every day; most of the days and some days per week on the streets were the same respondents who typically spent a full day, all day and night, half of the day on the streets. The average length of time ever spent on the streets was 19.5 months (1.6 years). The remaining 24 (30.8%) respondents rarely spent time on the streets. Therefore, in this study, these children and youth were classified as non-street-involved (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Reported Time Spent on the Streets
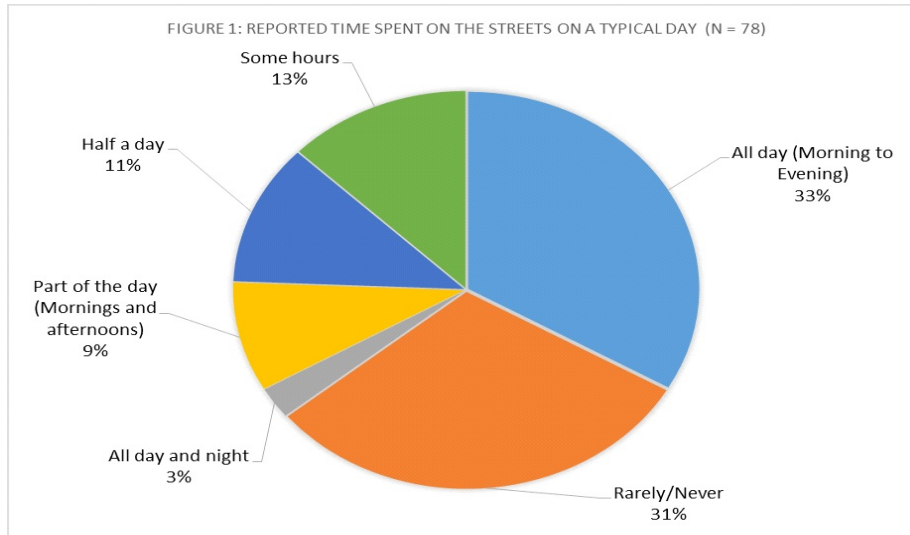
What Activities Do Street-involved Youth and Children Do on the Streets?
The study found that 62.3% of the children and youth who were profiled as street-involved were on the streets to beg, look for piece jobs, run a business and search for employment. The remaining 37.7% were on the streets to 'hang out' with friends (Figure 2).

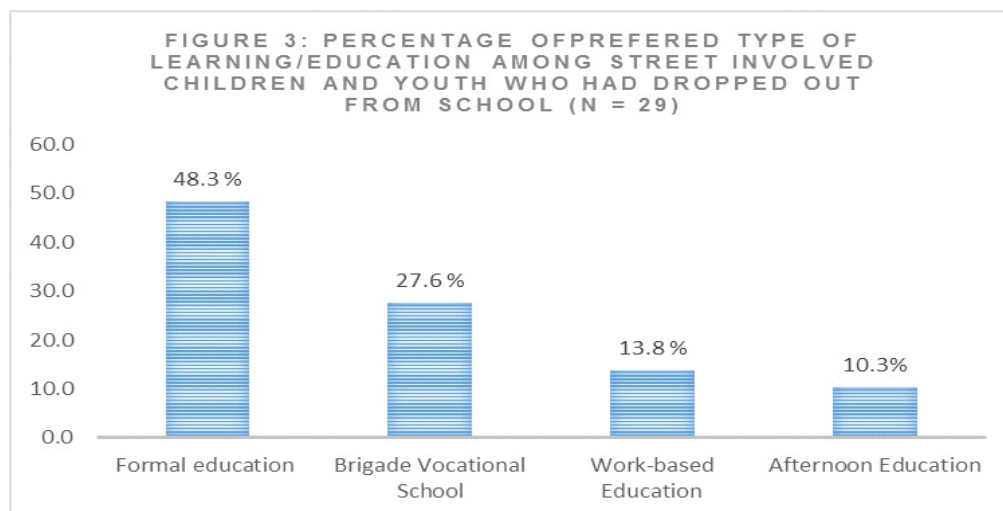Figure 2. Self-Reported Livelihood and Social Activities
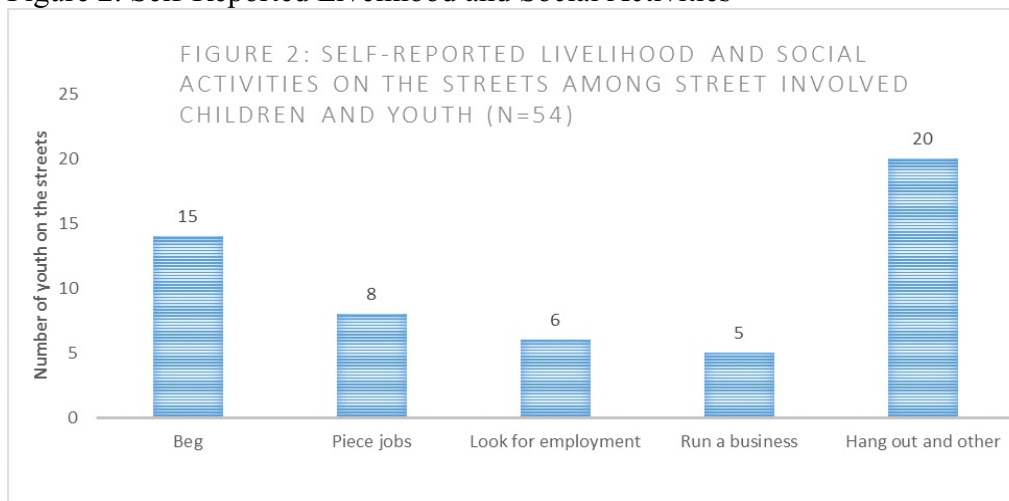
Safety and Protection Among Street-Involved Youth

The study found that four of every 10 street-involved youth had been in trouble with the police and other authorities at least once or twice. Youth who had been in trouble with the police or city authorities reported to have used illicit drugs, smoked cigarettes or consumed alcoholic beverages. The study found that more than half of these youth felt unnecessarily harassed mostly by the general public.

Education Status

Of the street-involved respondents (n = 54), 57.4% had dropped out from school. Eight in 10 school drop-outs could read and write in Setswana, but six in 10 of these respondents could not read and write in English. Of the 31 drop-outs, 93.5% (n = 29) expressed interest in returning to school if given an opportunity. Among those interested to go back to school (n = 29), 48.3% preferred formal education while 51.7% preferred non-formal education. Non-formal education in this study included brigades (vocational school), work-based education and afternoon learning (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Preferred Learning/Education

FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF PREFERED TYPE OF LEARNING/EDUCATION AMONG STREET INVOLVED CHILDREN AND YOUTH WHO HAD DROPPED OUT FROM SCHOOL (N = 29)

The study also found that, 42.6% (n = 23) street-involved youth were attending school at the time of the interview. Of these, 69.6% missed school most of the time and only 30.4% reported that they attend school regularly. More than half (65.2%) of school-going children and youth rated the quality of education as 'good' while 34.8% ranked the education system as 'poor.'

Characteristics that Differentiate Street-involved from Non-street-involved Youth

The study performed advanced statistical analyses to describe factors that differentiated street-involved youth from non-street-involved youth using binary logistic regression modelling (*dependent variable: 1 = being street-involved and 0 = being non-street-involved*). When the street-involved youth (n = 54) were compared to non-street-involved youth (n = 24), results indicated that street-involved youth had a significantly higher mean number of siblings (M = 4.5) compared with non-street-involved youth (M = 3.7). The difference was statistically significant, $p < 0.01$. The study

found that street-involved youth were eight times more likely to be males than females (Table 2).

The study also found that street-involved youth worried about their health and felt bored most of the time compared to non-street-involved youth. The adjusted odds ratio (AOR) that street-involved youth worry more about their health than non-street-involved youth was significantly high (AOR = 3.42, 95% CI: 1.03, 11.44, p < 0.01). Furthermore, street-involved youth were 72% less likely to be happier than other people compared with non-street-involved youth. Street-involved youth were 83% less likely to be optimistic about their future prospects compared to non-street youth (Table 2). However, the difference was not significant (p > 0.005).

Data suggest that street-involved youth were four times more likely to report feeling bored most of the time than non-street-involved youth (AOR = 4.29, 95% CI: 1.56, 11.77, p < 0.01). The differences between street- and non-street-involved youth was statistically significant, p < 0.05 (Table 2).

Table 2. Adjusted Binary Multivariate Logistic Model Predicting Street-Involved Youth Among the Survey Population (n = 78)

Predictor Variables	Observations (N)	Adjusted Odds Ratios	95% Confidence Interval
Sex	78	8.34	(1.20, 57.88*)
Personal identification	78	0.40	(0.09, 1.66)
Number of sisters	78	1.94	(1.05, 3.57*)
I worry about my health	78	3.42	(1.03, 11.44*)
I am as happy as other people	78	0.28	(0.09, 0.88*)
I feel bored most of the time	78	4.29	(1.56, 11.77**)
I have faith that things will turn out all right	78	0.17	(0.01, 2.16)

Notes: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
Model F Test (F 6, 9245.4) = 2.64, p<0.05

Study Limitations
The main limitation of this study was small sample size. The study did not have adequate resources to conduct a national survey with a large sample size, which would have been more informational, however, this study served the purpose it was designed to achieve. In addition, the study employed census sampling in which children and youth identified as street-involved in study areas were asked to participate due to lack ofa sampling frame or the actual population of street-involved youth. The study also used a snowballing technique to reach other youth considered as street-involved youth. Furthermore, as for most surveys there was missing data where the respondents did not want to respond to some personal and sensitive questions. The study applied multiple imputations for

variables missing $\leq$ 20% of the data.[25] Data with multiple imputations had better predictive power and were deemed important for improving validity and reliability of logistic regression modeling.

Discussion

The results of this study of street-involved children and youth in Botswana indicate that they are "mostly boys, average age 14.5 years, for whom the street has become their source of livelihood and a place for social networking; they are inadequately protected or supervised during the day, although have a home they go to at night." The profile of Botswana street-involved youth based on this study is summarized in Box 1:

Box 1: Profile of Street-Involved Youth in Botswana

- They spend every day of the week, most of the days or some of the days on the streets
- In a typical day, they are on the street all day, part of the day, half a day, or some hours of the day or day and night
- The majority of youth have homes to go to at night, i.e., they were *"youth on"* the street
- They are more likely to be males than females
- On average, they are 14.5 years of age
- They lacked supervision, protection, and guidance from a responsible adult for the most part of the day time
- The majority dropped out from school, however some attend school irregularly
- They describe their relationship with their parents/caregivers as "close"
- They are likely to come from larger families (an average of 4.5 siblings)
- They are bored, less likely to be happy than other people and less optimistic about the future
- They worry about their health
- They are less likely to have national identification numbers – hence unlikely to access essential government social services

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UNICEF's definition for 'youth *on* the street' prescribes youths' maintenance of relational connectedness with an adult who provides a home base, as well as being on the streets for economic reasons.[26] In the study, the majority of street-involved children and youth were on the streets to beg, look for employment, carry bags, clean cars and/or vend commodities. They have a home to which they go to at night and contribute some or all their earnings to their families.[27] These youth were either in school or out of school, and had a sense of belonging to a family or household.

Previous studies conducted in Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Swaziland and Namibia found that most street-involved children and youth were boys, were on the streets because of poverty and some were school drop-outs.[28] This is consistent with the findings in this study.

However, current findings significantly differ from findings of street-involved youth in major cities of South Africa where half or more are children or youth *of* the streets, i.e., they have been abandoned and have lost contact with immediate families and communities. They are largely nomadic and streets are both home and source of livelihood.[29]

The study found that six in 10 youth interviewed were unable to read or write in English. In 2005, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO) found that most of students in Botswana enter secondary school (high school) education without mastering literacy and language competencies. According to UNESCO, 70% of secondary school students in Botswana lacked adequate reading, speaking and listening skills.[30] These findings corroborate with current observations suggesting a need to strengthen quality of education.

The current study also found that nine in 10 of the school drop-outs were interested to go back to school if offered an opportunity. The non-formal education system, such as brigades, was cited as an alternative preference to formal education among respondents. According to the Botswana National Policy of Vocational Education and Training Program, the vocational program in Botswana lacks equitable access to some segments of the Botswana population and inadequately qualified teachers. The program also is fragmented and not directly linked to the formal education system. This observation calls for strengthening of the outreach and vocational programs that will cater for school drop-outs interested to continue with educational opportunities.[31]

The study found that four in 10 of street-involved youth were in trouble with the police and city authorities. In this study, being in trouble with police was associated with illicit drug use and consumption of alcohol. In a study of incarcerated youth in Botswana, the study found that use of illicit drugs was significantly related to being in trouble and incarceration of street children.[32] The current study also found that half of street-involved children and youth in Botswana were harassed by the public. A study of street-involved children and youth in South Africa found that street-involved youth were harassed, treated with apathy, called derogatory names and treated brutally by the police.[33] Street-involved youth are harassed because they are considered as thieves and drug addicts.[34] The implications for developing interventions are that families and communities where the youth live must address stigmatization and create interventions to address the plight of street-involved youth. For example, non-governmental organizations and government must develop abuse substance reduction programs to mitigate the problem.

There was strong evidence that street-involved youth were more likely to be bored and less likely to be happy compared with non-street-involved youth. Research suggests that boredom and the propensity to experience boredom is a reflection of unengaged minds. Boredom is correlated with depression, anxiety and lack of a sense of purpose in life (less optimistic about the future).[35]

Furthermore, research shows that worrying about one's health, lack of purpose in life and boredom is an aversive state characterized by displeasure, sadness, emptiness, anxiety and even anger.[36] The results suggest that street-involved youth in Botswana are not fully engaged at household levels which lead to boredom. This may be one of the reasons 37.7% of Botswana youth go to the streets to 'hang out,' i.e., look for entertainment and social networks.

The findings in this study are also consistent with Duong Kim Hong and Kenichi Ohno's paradigm of protection and investment of street-involved youth.[37] The paradigm shows correlation and dynamism between causes and the situation of street-involvedness. The Hong and Ohno paradigm of protection and investment offers three broad reasons that force children and youth to

the streets. The paradigm suggests that low parental protection and investment levels in the child's future drives them to the streets. According to Hong and Ohno, this is exacerbated by household poverty, lack of parental engagement and family disintegration due to divorce, death of one or both parents.

The paradigm states that children and youth from poor households are more likely to venture into the streets to beg, run a business and look for employment as a source of financial stability. The gains made on the streets are shared with parents and caregivers. Six in 10 of street-involved youth in this study had these characteristics, suggesting that most youth in Botswana are forced on to the streets because of poverty.

The paradigm also suggests that children and youth coming from households that lack engagement are more likely to be bored, less likely to be happy and less likely to be optimistic about the future prospects. They may be lured to the streets by friends to savour freedom and run away from boredom at home or school. This study found that four in 10 of the street-involved children and youth fit the lack of engagement profile. The study did not find evidence that children and youth on Botswana streets came from divorced households or that they were orphans. The findings suggest that existing national poverty alleviation programs such as *ipeleng* (literally translated as help yourself) be tailored towards low income households including families with street-involved children and youth.

Drawn from Hong and Ohno's paradigm, the findings also suggest that programs or interventions targeting street-involved children and youth must invest heavily in addressing health and psychosocial issues including boredom, coping mechanisms to address youths' low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. These results suggest that addressing psychosocial issues must start at household levels with caregivers and schools or social platforms where youth interact with others.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of street-involved youth is a growing social problem in sub-Saharan Africa. The study provided the Botswana contextual typology of street-involvement and used this to develop a profile of the street-involved children and youth. The study provided evidence to enhance second chance education, address the problem of household poverty, and offer families and their children psychosocial support. It indicated that street youth in the country tend to be males, a phenomenon that is consistent in global and regional studies. While the study recognized the complexity and interplay of factors that drive youth to the streets, the study suggested that the majority of the youth in Botswana are on the streets because of poverty and lack of parental engagement at household levels.

Notes

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