

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK INTO STREET CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN KATARAGAMA

Survey Report



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STREET CHILDREN
AND THEIR FAMILIES
IN KATARAGAMA

A Report Based on a Survey of Street Children
and their Families in Kataragama

by

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for

Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere - PEaCE

(ECPAT Sri Lanka)

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We extend our gratitude to our donors and all our stakeholders.

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INTRODUCTION

Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere

Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere (PEaCE) is a registered non-government organization dedicated to protecting children from all forms of abuse, especially child sexual abuse and exploitation. The NGO began as a mere campaign in 1991 to activate the core concepts of the End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism initiative formed by the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT) in 1990 due to the realization that tourism had a strong connection to the extreme levels of child prostitution occurring in Asia at that time.

What began as short campaign took root and blossomed into a solid non-profit organization that goes to great lengths to ensure the rights of children in Sri Lanka, while being the forerunners to bringing about change to the child rights landscape of the country. The ECPAT initiative too grew into one of the greatest networks working against child sexual abuse and exploitation around the world, boasting an ever-growing membership of over 120 members in 104 countries, with PEaCE being one of the few core founding members and being honoured with the title ECPAT Sri Lanka. Over the years the organization undertook many projects, raised awareness in tens of thousands of stakeholders, took part in many national and international child protection actions, and lobbied in many state initiatives to uphold the rights of children.

As part of the activities, PEaCE has delved into the unseen depths of Kataragama to research and survey the true situation and difficulties faced by the street children and their families in Kataragama, one of the most popular towns for sacred pilgrimages and religious activities in Sri Lanka and also one of the towns with the largest numbers of street children. This report provides our findings in a pure and organized manner. We hope they will provide a useful base for state and non-state organizations to provide future assistance.

Objectives of the study

The main goal of this survey was to document facts and figures relating to street children in Kataragama, and to share the outcomes of the survey in order to raise awareness about street children while outlining actions that need to be taken in order to address the problems they face. The objectives that were embodied by this goal were:

1. To understand the actual everyday lives and socialization problems of street children in Kataragama and its surrounding villages.
2. To examine the factors that led them to the street.
3. To understand anti-social activities that the children and their families engage in and suggest effective methods to help them change negative habits.
4. To develop future strategies and activities based on reliable information.

Methodology of the survey

Several research methods could be employed in this type of survey. However, lot of difficulties are faced when attempting to collect data on a group of people who are considered outcasts in society. The research team came across such difficulties.

01. Time allocation for the survey was limited (6 days).
02. Some challenges were experienced while travelling to remote village areas.
03. Nonavailability of research assistants required for this type of survey on social science and modern survey systems.
04. Street people perceived outsiders coming for a survey of this nature as enemies after a team of students from a university had previously failed with their survey.

However, these difficulties were overcome.

Research methods employed in this survey

Interview method

The method that was used was one that is popularly employed for this type of survey and target group, and was successfully utilised in this survey.

It was very important to build the trust and understanding of data suppliers, and develop their confidence in a potentially positive outcome through the study. Building a rapport with the marginalized group of people was immensely helpful. The fact that the two surveyors involved had previous experience in this type of survey, also helped.

The team was able to collect a large amount of information by building a rapport and establishing an equal platform with the participants. The understanding that we developed with the participants further facilitated the extraction of such secret data from participants. The team was successful to the extent that it was able to make

'*Chandi Malli*' a leading narcotics dealer who was also a notorious thug in the seven wayside stalls (*Kada hatha*) area, a key participant in the survey.

Unstructured interview method

This method was employed openly and quite efficiently especially when interviewing street children with their parents.

Observation

In social science, observation is the practical method most used in this type of survey. It enables a wider understanding of the subject. The team was able to gain deeper knowledge about the data suppliers, their behaviour and actions. In any city, street people are an especially mobilized group and observation helps to better understand their behaviour. The team witnessed ill practices in the Kirivehera compound, under the famous *nuga* tree, the seven wayside stalls (*Kada hatha*) area, at the Kataragama shrine premises and in areas beyond the places named here, including some spots within the shrine premises itself. We also observed such activities taking place in the sacred area of the shrine just before the last pooja of the day.

Questionnaire method

Even though in a survey of this type, a questionnaire method may not furnish good results, we employed this method as well in order to obtain data on children who may be living under dangerous conditions. Such dangerous conditions are listed below:

- Life is spent on the street
- Schooling has stopped or takes place in a haphazard manner
- The mother/father has abandoned the children or the family has split up
- The mother/father is addicted to some dangerous habit
- Other family members have joined the parents on the street

Definition of Street Children

According to the Consortium for Street Children, a global network that exists to ensure the rights of street children, 'street children' are children who:

1. Depend on the streets to live and / or work, either on their own, or with other children or family members; and
2. Have a strong connection to public spaces (eg. streets, markets, parks, bus or train stations) and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities. This wider group includes children who do not live or work on the street but regularly accompany other children or family members in the streets.

They also clarify that street children are not to be confused with homeless children as,

'Not all children who are homeless end up living in the open on the street. Many end up sleeping in very inappropriate but out of sight places – on the floors of friends or strangers, or sleeping in temporary accommodation like hostels.... Conversely, not all children who can be described as 'street children' are necessarily homeless. They may work, play or spend their time on the street, but may go back to sleep with their family or parents.'

<https://www.streetchildren.org/about-street-children/>

Street people are a very mobile group. As a result, obtaining data or definite information about them is a challenge.

Kataragama street children

There are a number of analyses and theories published on street children. Many problems arise when children live on the street or spend most of their time on the street. One of the main problems relates to their socialization process. Problems also surface when problems in personality arise. However, living on the street by itself gives rise to many problems in their lives.

Many researches have been done on this subject around the world, and the results published in the work *Street Corner Society* authored by W. F. Whyte reveals the mental patterns and problems faced by street children.

In the recent decades in Sri Lanka, in major cities such as Colombo, Kandy, Anuradhapura and Galle, street children have been employed in the begging profession either willingly or by force. It was perceived as a social problem especially as street children engaged in begging along with their parents or with adults posing as their parents, many pretending to have fatal diseases or heartrending disabilities. A Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, Dr. Nandasena Rathnapala once engaged in researching the lives of street children and street harlots. He published his findings in his book: *The Beggar in Sri Lanka*. He also subsequently set up a home for homeless and street children named 'Sanhinda' in Colombo, as a result of his deep engagement and studies on street children.

Although the matter of street children in the main cities of the country have not surfaced as a major issue, it remains a social problem in Sri Lanka. Even if most people would attempt to justify the situation based on the fact that such children belong to beggar families that have been excluded from mainstream Sri Lankan society, such children living in urban slum environments nevertheless experience immense difficulties in life. These difficulties are not highlighted because social workers and others from various authorities often do not visit such areas.

During our visit to the Kataragama area, we came across street children under the categories mentioned above. We were able to understand to some extent, their life style, socializing patterns, anti-social behaviour and the serious human difficulties they experienced. In addition, we met a group of children who belonged to a new category. These were children who had arrived on the street

to safeguard themselves from an imminent or continuing threat of abuse.

We were able to communicate with some of the children of this type. Most of them were on the street to earn some money. There were many reasons for them not to be at home.

Kataragama

There are many places of worship situated in Kataragama, the sacred area of the god of Kataragama, Kataragama main temple and Wedihiti Kanda are the most important among them. On the way to Kataragama, there are other significant places for people to visit or for devotees to worship, namely the Tissa Wewa reservoir, the Tissamaharama Stupa and the Sithulpawa ancient Buddhist monastery.

The devotees of Kataragama, visit the temple with many expectations. They worship the gods and pray for success in business ventures or ask for other more personal wishes to be fulfilled. While there, they purchase baskets of flowers and fruits to offer at Kirivehera and the Kataragama temple. These baskets are purchased from the lines of makeshift stalls that are set up at the main entrance of the main temple. Street children and beggars roam the area hoping for hand-outs from the visiting devotees, who enter the temples carrying baskets of flowers and fruits along with coconuts, oil and other items for worship that they spend money buying. It is a popular belief among devotees that 'offering something to them (the poor) is a sure way of getting more blessings. As a result, there is a tendency for devotees to bring money, sweets and fruits to offer the poor. To obtain these handouts street children, disabled and poor elders gather in Kataragama.

They collect their day-to-day needs in this manner. Older people in the area say that this practice has been in place since 1980 or longer. There had been a location on the bank adjoining the *Menik* river, which had been used by homeless beggars and their children as a living space.

The situation now is such that small boys join the begging profession along with their mothers, younger sisters and baby brothers in the sacred areas of Kiri Vehera and Kataragama temple. Parents of street children living in these premises need not go in search of food or money unlike in other cities. The reason is that devotees themselves supply their day-to-day needs.

The street children of Kataragama engage in various activities to make their living. The following are some of them.

1. Helping to prepare baskets that are to be offered to the gods and working as sellers.
2. Canvassing for street stalls that sell baskets to help bring in customers. The more sales, the more income the children get.
3. Supplying water for small shops
4. Selling bags of flowers

At the time of this report the price of a bag of flowers was Rs. 30. But it was being sold to devotees at Rs. 50 when sold by roaming sellers. The shop keepers employ children as roaming sellers (kind of like an agent) and give a commission of Rs. 20 per packet sold.

Basket Carriers

Sometimes a devotee has difficulty carrying a basket to offer up to the shrine. They then hire a person to carry it for them. It is often a child aged around 15-16 years that is selected for the task. The distance they will usually carry the basket of offerings, is from the entrance of the outer temple, to the entrance of the inner shrine.

Begging between the Kataragama shrine and Kiri Vehera

Generally begging takes place after 4.30 pm. More worshippers arrive during the night, to attend ceremonial offerings, and as a result the potential for earnings increase. The average income for a child per day ranges from Rs. 200/= to Rs. 500/=. This amount escalates on poya days and on days when special *poojas* are held.

Commencing from the main gate of the shrine premises and up to the entrance of the shrine, people carry offerings to the god in a procession that includes *kawadi* dancing, as a practice. It is believed that devotees received blessings when they participate in the procession. Street children take part in the procession as traditional cymbal players, dancers or simply as participants in order to earn some money. The age of participating children ranges between 10 and 16 years. The services they supply in the procession earns them about Rs. 200/= or Rs. 250/=. During weekends they get an opportunity to participate in about three such processions.

The other important fact is that the processions start after 6 pm in the evening. Processions held during the daytime are conducted on Saturdays,

Sundays and on full moon days. On such days, the opportunity for children to participate in the processions is six times higher. There are several *kawadi* dance groups in the area that employ street people. Children wait around in the basket shops until they are called for some work. A *kawadi* group charges Rs.5000/= to attend a procession and children are paid a daily wage of merely Rs. 250.-. During this period, however, the possibility of a child facing many kinds of danger is very high.

The sandy stretch of road between Kiri Vehera and the Kataragama shrine, is the most productive area for begging, for both male and female beggars. Devotees go to Kiri Vehera after they complete the session in the shrine. As the devotees are in a mind-set to offer more donations, the begging crowd gathers in this area. It is an unfortunate situation that while they beg, begging parents keep their infants on the bare hot soil in front them to show their 'hardships'. It is notable that according to the law of the country, employing children in begging is a punishable offence.

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Data associated with the study

Education eludes the street people of Kataragama and commercialization is a key element of their life.

The areas covered by this survey are Detagamuwa, Sella Kataragama, Galahitiya, Gothamigama, Samurdigama, Nagahavidiya, Koriyawa, Hirigalwatta, Wallimathagama, and Detagamuwa. Parents in these areas are not keen to provide their children an education and set up regular schooling patterns on their behalf.

The schools that are situated near the Kataragama sacred area are Gothamigama Junior School, Kataragama Maha Vidyalaya and Shashindra Rajapakse Model School. The Detagamuwa Junior School and Sella Kataragama Maha Vidyalaya are about 6 km away. But the villagers take an interest in sending their children to these schools.

Based on the data collected in this survey, children who come to collect day-to-day needs in the sacred area attend the Kataragama Gothamigama Vidyalaya. This school is less than 1 km away from Kiri Vehera and Kataragama shrine.

The offerings of day-to-day needs such as fruits, food, clothing, and money to these children by devotees, has reduced their attraction and interest in school. For a limited period, a charitable organisation arranged classes to eliminate low literacy among children living on the streets and not attending school. However, there is no established place for them to obtain the required literacy needs. The principal of Gothami Vidyalaya states the following about children dropping out of school in Kataragama: "The parents living in the villages around the Kataragama shrine and Kiri Vehera temple take no interest in schooling their children".

Some children remain absent from school for 2 - 3 months continuously without giving any reason. When children do not attend school in this manner, the teachers face severe problems. However, as this is a common problem in the area, they do not attempt to report it to the authorities or visit the home of the child to find the situation. When all the students are not at the same level, the weaker students have to be sent to another class. This situation further reduces their school attendance rate.

"There are 23 children in classes from grade 8 to 10 in my school who are not able to read or write completely. We have started a special class for them. But they do not attend class."

A grade 1 teacher of the school says that there are 21 students in the class and 15 of them have severe family problems with their mothers or fathers having left them.

There are single-parent families, where the sole responsibility is on the mother alone, while there are some that are run by the grandmother. As a result, the children face serious difficulties of which continuing their education takes the lead.

These thoughts were shared by the principal of Detagamuwa Vidyalaya who observed that parents who live close to the shrine send their own children to the street to improve their financial situation. He further said that the difficulties the children face appear to have no solution. Education is not a motivating factor for them. They do not have any understanding of the rewards they can get from obtaining a higher level of education.

Literacy levels

Number of children who are completely unable to read or write	35
Number of children who have difficulties in reading and writing	23
Number of children who have never attended a school	11
Total	69

Data indicates the following in connection with these children. As they are not able to read or write, they are rejected within the school they attend, from the class in which they study and by peers. They face various forms of abuse from society frequently.

Motivated by an eagerness to earn money, they work as beggars or helpers in flower stalls and other small stalls.

Having lived with their mothers as beggars, or as street children for long durations, the contempt and ridicule they have received from society tends to strongly impact their behaviour.

Within the Kataragama sacred zone where they have lived for a considerable amount of time, these children face various kinds of social ill treatment. As an example, they do not get invited to the Dhamma school run by a popular nearby temple. The students in the school get a uniform, lunch and tea free of charge. But the

street children do not have access to these facilities. Such conditions appear to have trained their minds to view school as an unpleasant place. They prefer to stay home rather than go to school, and their parents do not force them to either.

Reasons for dropping out of school/attending school haphazardly

No.	Reason	No. of Students
01.	Insults and scolding from teachers	08
02.	Long walking distance to school	10
03.	Engaged in begging as a profession	14
04.	Nonavailability of birth certificate	05
05.	Used to living on the street with parents	18
06.	Poor financial situation	19
07.	Sufficient work available on the street to engage together with mother/father	14
08.	Afraid of being subjected to abuse if they stay at home	07
Total		95

Education related problems

The survey indicates that the disruption of the education of these children is a fundamental problem. Their reluctance to attend school remained a key issue. There were several reasons for this condition.

01. They believe they can earn a good living in the temple premises.
02. Parents are incapable of supplying educational materials and facilities.
03. They are influenced by other children their age who are engaged in work on the street
04. The attitudes of teachers towards these children.

05. A belief that there are no benefits to being educated and a lack of trust in the education system.
06. Parents are of the view that they are better off engaged in earning a living rather than getting an education.

It was observed that these children mostly attend 3 popular schools:

01. Gothamigama Vidyalaya
02. Presidents College of Kataragama where the primary of the school is Shashindra Rajapakse Vidyalaya
03. Detagamuwa Vidyalaya

The most serious problem prevailed in the Kataragama Gothami Vidyalaya. Most of the younger children in the area attend this school

situated in Nagaha Veediya where classes for grades 1 to 5 are held. But attendance at the school is very poor.

When teachers were asked what the children did at home during their absence from school, the general answer was that they had no idea about the matter.

“Parents of most of the students, subsist on some form of work associated with the temple: working on commission basis, selling casket offerings to god, or worshipping and chanting prayers inside the shrine. As they have to engage in additional work to earn more money, they come home near dawn usually by a three-wheel taxi. As a result, they do not have the time nor opportunity to look into the education of their children. This situation greatly affects the children’s education”.

During the period of the survey from 14th to 17th October 2016, the research team visited classes from grade 1 to 6 of Gothami Vidyalaya and Nagahavidiya Vidyalaya. In many of the households, the children were at home doing nothing.

“No teaching is going on in school, the things taught are not understood by us, teachers insult us saying that our mothers are beggars. We are restricted from communicating with fellow students”.

These were the explanations given by children for irregular attendance at school. These may not be the actual reasons. However, about half the students at Detagamuwa Vidyalaya, Gothamigama Vidyalaya and Kataragama Vidyalaya are members of this outcast society.

The other main reason for them to keep away from school is their low literacy level. An example is as follows: 40 % of the children belonging to grades 6 and 7 of Gothamigama Junior School have difficulties in reading/writing. A literacy class has been arranged in school and has been running for a long time for 18 children who have poor literacy levels in grades 8 and above.

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FINDINGS

The key problems identified during the survey were:

- The population of street children and parents within Kataragama town limits is on the rise.
- Mothers along with children from Kataragama, Detagamuwa, Gothamigama and Nagahavidiya, Murungalanda, Gamudawa, Sella Kataragama and other nearby villages engage in begging as a profession.
- Children are pushed onto the street due to a number of reasons: abandonment by father/mother, problems associated with household violence, and abuse within the family.
- Children in Kataragama have a lot of opportunity to live freely. The same freedom with little to no monitoring exposes them to sexual and physical abuse
- Parents in the area give a higher priority to earning money. This causes them to use their children rather than look after them and provide them security.
- Children and their mothers are socially stigmatised at school and within society, causing a serious decline in the socialization process of the children, as well as in their security.
- Illiteracy is a serious problem among children in Kataragama.

- Relations/family members take no interest in the needs/wellbeing of the children.
- Children of both genders go into prostitution after experiencing sexual abuse by their fathers or stepfathers.
- The main reason for dropping out of school was hunger

The survey yielded the following findings:

- The number of children on the streets of Kataragama (day and night) totalled 154.
- There were 85 girls among them and the rest were boys.
- Most of them engaged in begging as a source of income, mainly around the shrine premises on Sella Kataragama Road and by the Menik river.
- Often begging was carried out along with their parents.

As explained in the previous chapter, there are several reasons that lead Kataragama children to beg at the shrine premises.

- The schooling habit of children are under threat, in the areas under survey: Gothamipura, Kihirigasyaya (slums), Thenanipura, Wallimathagama, Sella Gam Udawa Road and Murunga Landa.
- A small number attend school. Some attend school only about 10 days a month.
- Protection and affection from their parents remain at a very low level.

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HUMANITARIAN DIFFICULTIES FACED BY CHILDREN

A child can develop severe personality problems from living on the street. Difficulties faced by a child range from experiencing insulation, abuse and problems with close family. The deprivation of maternal and paternal love and attention have a serious impact on their life.

Household violence, brutal physical attacks and oppression lead to mental break downs, especially when only antagonism, depression and threat are present, in place of love and affection. Due to such conditions, they may be reluctant to engage with general society or to develop any connections with outsiders. As a result of a lack of social understanding, even when they do enter society, they may remain backward. Even within classrooms at school they may experience various kinds of abuse that may cause a tendency towards isolation.

The worst conditions are experienced by children with mental disabilities. Such children lack basic needs such as food and medical treatment in their own homes. A mother whom we met from Kihiriya village had given birth to such a child, and expressed her views as follows: “We are in deep trouble after this devil was born, no medical treatment was ever provided to him. He does not even have a birth certificate”. This statement provides insight into prevailing view about such children in this community. On another occasion we witnessed a mother with a child with deep mental disabilities looking after infants. Although there was this child with mental disabilities in the house, medical treatment was not being provided to him, instead exorcisms were being practiced to alleviate his condition.

Nature of mental disorders of children surveyed

Name of Disorder	Number of Children
Serious mental abnormality	04
Mental disorders	06
Dyslexia	05
Hyperactivity disorder	03
Separation anxiety	03
Total	21

Neglect

Neglect is often discussed as one of the major violations of the rights of children. The survey carried out in Kataragama, uncovered the very unfortunate lives some children lead²⁴

Generally, when parents go out for work, household tasks and looking after younger siblings becomes the responsibility of the eldest male/female child. Many such families were taken into account under this survey. When the

responsibility of running a household falls on a child, schooling often automatically ends. Such circumstances also cause children to live with mental pressures and other difficulties. To assert oneself to take charge and care for one’s siblings is a challenge for a child. On one occasion we witnessed a very young boy child on the roof of a house, while his slightly older sister struggled to catch the boy and get him off the roof. Neighbours showed no inclination to help them.

It was clear that the children in the survey faced a threat of being victimized by their situation. There were many reasons for this:

01. Parents gave little or no attention to their children.
02. Parents took it for granted that their children will manage their own lives.
03. Children took full opportunity of their freedom.

Children left out on a limb

Vulnerability is not unusual for street children. Living in the shrine premises and spending the whole day without their parents increases their vulnerability. The following were identified as factors that made children vulnerable.

01. Living as a street person for a long time with no security.
02. Engaged in various services/practices prevailing in the shrine and temple area.
03. A necessity exists for them to earn money and obtain young coconut, fruits and other food items from outsiders when they are away from their parents or from home. This situation in turn creates room for them to be abused.

Children face various dangers in such an environment and become easily vulnerable. Early in life, they begin to depend on others and start to believe that it is the easiest way to live. Often, they follow the habits and behaviour of their elders. They pick up habits such as consuming marijuana, beeda (a local mildly narcotic concoction of betel leaves, arecanut, tobacco, and spices), and cheap alcohol (such as arrack and moonshine). There was a related incident that was experienced by the team during the period spent in Kataragama⁰

The sacred space of Kataragama is very large. In this vast area stretching into over 60 acres, if one thinks of doing some nasty act involving a child, there is ample opportunity. Whether they are at home or on the street, the intensity of the threat to their safety is the same. Usually, during the day the mother goes to the shrine area and the father goes out for other temporary work. They have to work hard to make a living. In such circumstances, the children are alone in the house, which leaves them vulnerable. Stories about children in families with extra marital affairs are full of severe problematic situations.

04. They did not feel that schooling or studying was of great importance.
05. Children too have a money-earning mindset and are engaged in work.
06. They believe that they will have security.
07. Parents believe that food, clothing, money and other materials can be obtained in the shrine area.

The number of children facing abuse were 56, out of whom 32 were female and the rest were male. The number of children who faced possibility of serious danger is 7.

It was important to find out what these children did during the day and where they spent the night. It was a common sight to see them shouting out names of goods at shops that sell garlands, flower caskets and offerings to gods, as well as spending time in the sandy compound of the shrine with their mother or grandmother during the night. Most were with their mothers.

The other main matter effecting the security of children is the behaviour of their parents. They get up early and run to the shrine premises and return late in the evening. During this time, children are exposed to all types of abuse and other dangers. Due to their poverty such incidents of abuse can remain a secret if the victim is given some money.

Another unfortunate event is that the children go to various places in search of food. Their food supply is not only from known persons but also from persons in completely unknown places. On such occasions there is a high possibility for them to be hurt or tortured. The other lamentable matter is that during these walks in search of food they can face sexual abuse.

In this environment we were able to identify seven (7) children who were facing severe vulnerability. The root cause was insecurity within the family itself. This situation could be observed especially in the areas of Gothamigama, Nagaha Veediya, Sella Road and around Gam Udawa junction.

Children Face Uncertainty at Home

The condition of the families on the street in Kataragama, Nagahavidiya, Kadahatha, Gothamigama and Murungalanda areas is very sad.

Families considered for the survey	
Families living on the street as beggars and sellers	154
Families where mother has left the family	14
Families where father has left the family	20
Mother lives with a step father or another random male	16
Families where father has died	10
Families where mother has died	06
Total	220

The above data shows that from 204 families surveyed there were 20 families in which the father had left the family, and 14 in which the mother had left the family. Especially when the mother alone runs the family, immense financial difficulties are faced due to the lack of a proper avenue of income.

When faced with the challenges of maintaining the children and any other members of the family, and in order to obtain security and care, the mother often chooses the alternative of living with a new man and has an affair.

But often, the man the mother has an affair with is already married as well, and enters the house with the aim of victimizing the very young daughters of the mother. Child sexual abuse and/or incest takes place secretly and the most affected are teenage girls, who are left to face the music by the mother (or sometimes even forced by the mother as well) who thinks it is a fair trade-off to allow the man to abuse her children in return for some financial security⁰.

Deprivation of maternal and paternal love

The deprivation of maternal and paternal love is the most painful phenomenon for the children. Where the step father who comes into their life to fill the void left by their own father, and creates a new threat for the children, an unhealthy environment with many problems arises.

Among the families surveyed, there were no plans or expectations to provide any kind of training to the

There are some highlights noted relating to the families surveyed, which are summarised below.

01. A high number of mothers having extra marital affairs.
02. A high number of extramarital affairs.
03. Children are afraid to live with their families because the conditions they live in are very vulnerable.
04. The men who join the family as the mother's new partner, do not treat the children as their own and accordingly do not practice necessary security measures to protect or care for them.

Another unfortunate matter is that there are sub families connected to them, these families sometimes live with them in the same house. As a result of this practice, many difficulties arise. This is a strong reason for the children of the core family to leave the family complex.

children to help them become useful citizens or to enrol them in a skills development course

Parents in the villages under survey were keen to make their day-to-day earnings, and their main aim was to earn it as a team comprising the parents as well as children. They exhibited no sense of responsibility about the facilities they should supply their children.

Examples are Murungalanda and Nagahavidiya areas. These two areas are about 3 Km away from the Kataragama sacred area. Parents come to Kataragama everyday with the children on their hips to collect the day's income (this routine starts very early during holidays and on full moon days).

At the end of the day, they purchase daily needs and go home where some consume liquor as a habit. Our analysis on selected families out of the 159 surveyed indicated that the problems arose due to disorganized situations such as the following:

Particulars	No.
Families with internal family disputes	44
Families with extra marital affairs as one of the main reasons for disputes	12
Families that have problems with children	06
Families that have alcohol addiction	08
Families with sexual and mental complexities	03
Families with financial problems	05
Total	78

Based on the above data, there appears to be no way out of the prevailing situation for the victims. The conditions do not provide the children, role models who can guide them in their lives.

Their vulnerable situation has a direct impact on the personality of the children. They find it difficult to walk away from their environment and enter the vast world outside because of their parents' life style.

We can point out the situation that has erupted in the Kataragama, Kadahatha area as the best example. The line of makeshift stalls are being demolished through the Kataragama sacred area development scheme. The area cleared in this manner was where these children and their parents lived. The obvious result has been that they have

had to move into the tabernacles erected under the shade of the trees on the banks of the Menik river.

The research team was in Kataragama at the start of the monsoon rain on October 14th. To avoid rain, these street people transferred all their belongings into the constructed booths. What could be going on inside these tents? It is a questionable matter in terms of the protection of children.

Within this limited space, the children may witness abnormal sexual activities practised by their mothers and step fathers. Witnessing such happenings could scar them, ruining their childhood, and impact their lives later. This is not to mention the easy access to the children available in such close quarters for possibly abusive fathers, stepfathers or other men

7 SEXUAL ABUSE

The story of Rotha who is around the same age, is similar (to that of the Case Study 9⁰). The street people think that they can buy her for around Rs.1500/-. Rotha obtained our telephone number saying that she had a lot to tell us and would do it over the phone on a later date. She is in a situation

where living in her own house is not a viable option. Therefore, she wants to find a work place somewhere outside. During the period of the survey, we met 12 such children and were able to obtain first-hand information about their lives including the sexual abuse they had experienced.

The number of girls who had faced sexual abuse	12
The number of boys who had faced sexual abuse	05
Total Number of Children who had faced sexual abuse	17

Persons who are responsible for these acts	
Clergy	01
Neighbours	09
Step father/ father's brother	04
Father	02
Lover	01

It is unfortunate that children are vulnerable to sexual abuse and harassment by their own blood relatives including uncles and grandfathers. Incest is criminalized under Sri Lankan law under article 364 of the penal code, while the child sexual abuse involved receives a heavy penalty under article 361.

One may find many such sad examples in Kataragama. Though neighbours are often privy to such incidents taking place, many turn a blind eye and take no action.

The best example comes from *Bakala Menike*. She lives with two daughters in a house she managed to set up by the Badrakali Kovil in Nagahavidiya. She started begging as a profession in the temple premises when her children were small. Before long her two daughters were subjected to sexual abuse after they like their mother entered the field

of begging. Ultimately, all three women also engaged in prostitution.

It is not a surprise that children living on the street meet with sexual abuse. Entering street life opens avenues for abuse.

Male children on the street work in shops that sell baskets of offerings to god, making garlands and at fruit stalls. While they attempt to earn money, the possibility of them facing various kinds of harassments is high. Such incidents have become a part of their daily life. It is easy for anyone to cause harm to such children who have no security.

The most unfortunate thing about these children is that once they go through sexual abuse in their childhood, their fate becomes unpredictable. This type of mental pressure and harassment leads them to engage in disastrous acts in society. A criminal who realises the history of such a child can

push them further into an abyss. Under these circumstances they can fall into a continuous cycle of abuse, out of which it is difficult to remove them.

The ecological factors of Kataragama facilitate such patterns of abuse. There are a lot of lodges in Kataragama. More people visit the temple on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Among them also exist human vultures. It is easy to pay money to these children and take them to the many lodges in the area. Such acts do not take place openly. It

happens when such perpetrators approach brokers around the Kataragama shrine premises who supply children to customers at a charge. This is a well-known secret in the area.

It was not possible to find out details about the lodges and places outside the main area that the children were being taken to in the nights. The location was believed to be an area about a quarter of a kilometre away from the sacred area, which was well-known for such business.

8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- The right of children to live with self-respect is given minimum attention in Kataragama.
- Street children who engage in begging and other work to earn a living in Kataragama are socially stigmatized.
- These children are vulnerable to being subjected to sexual abuse.
- Sexual abuse often occurs within the family itself.

Recommendations

01. Hold compulsory meetings with the families of such vulnerable children to make them aware of the importance of basic needs including security for children.
02. The rejection these children have faced from society has struck a major blow to their self-confidence and self-respect. It is important to change this situation. A discussion needs to be held among parents of children in nearby schools, elderly members of the community and clergy up to the highest levels; and a program launched to improve the situation.
03. Awareness needs to be created on the right of every child to attend school and the responsibility of parents to make it possible. The help of the principals of the area must be sought to ensure that children attend school.
04. About 60% of children surveyed lived under very poor financial conditions in their homes. They were in need of facilities where they could have lunch, tea and a suitable environment in which they could do homework and afterschool studies. Drop-in centres for street children and adults that are in operation in some Asian countries will be good models to consider.
05. Introduce programs that will improve the financial condition of mothers of such children. The preparation of garlands for devotees only pays them a profit of Rs. 20/- or 25/- per item. But the item is sold in the market at Rs. 60/- or 70/-. Therefore, a system needs to be introduced where they could get a fair share of the profit (Possibly create a non-profit store / sales platform employing these people as garland makers, basket weavers and others, and distribute the full profit to them minus costs).
06. The children are not aware of concepts such as the rights of a child, child security, child abuse and cruelty. It will help them to be more informed about these aspects, including the responsibilities of parents.
07. A community-based rehabilitation program needs to be set up to determine a method of rehabilitation with the aid of police, business community and clergy.
08. It is important to facilitate the children to reflect on their future expectations and the importance and necessity of education.
09. The participation right of these children appear to be clearly in jeopardy. Socialization appears to be excluded from their lives. A leadership program/s can be launched and will benefit children in the following villages, Gothamipura, Nagahavidiya, Koriyawa and Samurdigama.
10. There is a strong need to organise literacy classes for children in the above-mentioned villages. This can have a direct positive impact on their future.
11. Setting up a security system for children who have experienced cruelty, mental illness and various other problems, is a necessity. This work cannot be completed by the police and

non-governmental organizations alone. Among the barriers which prevent children from going to school, the primary barrier remains poverty. It is necessary to find solutions for this core issue as soon as possible. Governmental or non-governmental organizations work with children need to look into the problems of these children.

12. Once legal means of earning a living is set up, legal action needs to be implemented to prevent parents bringing children onto the street with them.
13. Currently, the children either go to the Kataragama or Thissamaharama hospital for medical treatment in the case of a

It is felt that a holistic approach is required in order to uplift the children with the fullest support from the

sickness. The areas under the survey had no nearby facility to treat the sick. Therefore, a necessity exists for about three clinics that can operate at least on a bi monthly basis, in these areas.

14. A child counselling service is needed for children once they reach their teens (specially females) to enable them to be educated on making good decisions relating to their life and future.
15. Sets of samples were employed for the survey. In place of the sample sets, if a survey was done on the villages around the temple for god, more data would have been collected.

government, non-governmental organisations, private sector, political and religious groups.

9

APPENDICES

CASE STUDIES

Case study 1:

One of her students, Angeli Devi (13 years) is such an example. “Her father left her and her mother, to live with another family. Due to their weak financial situation, her mother migrated abroad for work. This situation led her to live with her grandfather, who later impregnated her. She no longer attends school. Anjeli’s mother returned home, and the grand father is in jail. They have now left the village. There are many similar stories in the area. Mothers rarely attend parent-teacher meetings of the school.”

Case study 2:

Two children surveyed had serious mental disorders. They could not express themselves at all. Their mother had spent most of her life on the street. She had had affairs with several men and lived with them for periods of time, and the man she was living with at the time of the survey was an alcoholic. It was routine that during the festive season, the children were taken to the street (to beg, sell, or something else) and during the other days, they were confined inside a hen coop.

We visited the house at noon. But the children had not even been given water to drink by that time. One of the children was completely naked and the other nearly naked. People in the area said that both children had faced abuse. We were able to capture them in a photograph inside the hen coop. While attempting to take the photograph, the neighbours informed us not to get too close to them as there was a possibility that they would bite. It was clear that these children were subjected to serious neglect. They were left by themselves to deal with any challenges that could arise, such as for example abuse by a stranger / random passer-by or snake bites which are common in the area.

The reason for the deep levels of aggression exhibited by these children is the ill treatment they receive from society. The neighbours do not have any form of communication with their mother or step father as they fear their wrath.

The condition was serious as the two children were not given access to education, clothing or even water to drink. They were in need of immediate mediation.

Case study 3:

In one house visited in Gothamipura, the father was in jail on charges relating to narcotics and drugs. The mother and elder daughter were in remand for engaging in prostitution. The grandmother was looking after the other children. The old lady was not in good health and was not able to carry out the day-to-day household activities.

One of the children was 13 years old and had stopped going to school as they could not bear the cost. A part of a rusted nail had been left in his foot while attempting to remove it. Although he was in pain, family members had no means to take him to the hospital. There was a serious risk of the child getting an infection that could ultimately even result in his death.

The four sisters of the boy had also dropped out of school and faced an uncertain future. It was clear that they had no support from neighbours or other relatives. They lived under a lot of pressure in terms of fulfilling their basic needs such as food and clothing. The children spent the day playing and in the alternative cycling, loitering or going begging.

Case study 4:

The team met a garland stall owner named Swarna, and the following is what she narrated:

"I have no children. I came here along with my (second) husband from Kalutara. We spent a long time here. Now we are ok. We live in Gothamipura. A boy came to me once. He had run away from the Maluwana house (Detention home for children in Hikkaduwa). There were two other boys with him. As the boy had no place to live, we gave him shelter. Now he is addicted to Babul".

Our discussion took place at about 8 pm. At the time, the boy approached Swarna and complained that he was having a strong headache. The physical pain he was experiencing after consuming the narcotic, betel leaf concoction, ganja (Cannabis), was visible. Abnormal attitudes of adults are being passed on to children as part of their socialization. According to the theories of the well-known scientist in penology, Edwin Southerland, children receive their education on crime from the society around them. Under such circumstance children learn the ill practices of their elders.

Case study 5:

The street children run to Ruhunu Bakery to purchase food when they earn some money. It is a common scene to see children run to this place. Food is supplied in exchange for money paid by the buyer or by someone else who pays for their food and covertly asks them for sexual favours in return.

While such incidents may not be considered by them as prejudicial at the outset, such matters will be stored deeply in their minds. There are many examples in this regard.

Case study 6:

Swarna is a person you can see around the shrine area every day. Her husband has chased her out of their home. As a result, she has taken up begging or selling whatever she is able to, as a means of earning a living. Her son and daughter are known to sell themselves for money. These children roam about in the Kataragama area freely, day and night. Growing up without parents in the house for long amounts of time have exposed the children to various forms of abuse from the neighbours.

Case study 7:

"My mother left me when I was small. My grandmother stayed with me and my father for some time. Later she quarrelled with my father and left us, to live in her own house. Since then, I live with my father. I get up early in the morning around 4 am. Cleaning the house and cooking in the morning, is done by me. Then father drops me at school and goes for some temporary work."

The girl who gave the seemingly innocent statement above loves her father very much. But the story is not so simple. The story is known well to the people around the area in which she lives, at Sella Kataragama.

Neighbours keep quiet, letting the girl be victimized, as they fear the father. Once this girl met with abuse inside a toilet of the Sella Kataragama School and on a later occasion, she had a similar experience with a youngster in the area. But none of the incidents were reported to the police. Instead, the wrathful villagers once caught the innocent girl alone and gave her a cudgelling.

Case Study 8:

In the first week of October 2016, two young girls aged around 16 and 17 years, whom we met at the Kataragama park, revealed that they were unable to live at home and were seeking work where lodging would also be supplied.

They had gone to such a place in Negombo. But the Negombo Police having taken action on a 119 call, had handed them over back to their mothers via the Kataragama police. As a result, they were once again in a dangerously vulnerable situation.

Case study 9:

"I do not like to stay at home and do not like to meet the step farther. He is the rascal who destroyed our family. I don't know where my father is. He left us unexpectedly. It was afterwards that my mother decided to live with another man."

His name is *Chandi Malli* and he is younger than my mother. My mother has five children and I'm the fourth. Step father looked after us well initially. Later he changed and became a different man. Two of my older sisters are married and live in Monaragala. Step father has given some trouble to my second sister. After I came to know about it, I hated him. When I was asleep, he came to me, to do something insane. As a result, my hatred for him grew. Finally, I ended up getting entangled with a married man. He has two children. His wife lives with another man now. Because of my affair, my mother and step father assaulted me and scolded me. One day I consumed poison. But luckily I survived".

The above was shared by a 16-year-old girl. Stories of the other children in Gothamipura and Nagahavidiya were similar. Although this girl is forced to come to her mother's place at the Kataragama Park, she is in severe mental depression.



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