UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF STREET CHILDREN AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN KUALA LUMPUR CITY AND KOTA KINABALU, SABAH

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies

November 2016

ABSTRACT

Street children have been recognized as a global issue not only in the poor countries, but also in the developing countries like Malaysia. Most of street children in Malaysia reside the urban areas such as Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. There are many factors contributing to this issue including poverty, family problem, migration, undocumented, victims of child abuse and neglect, abandonment and many others. The existence of street children is always being associated with negative connotations such as "poor", "dirty", "problematic", "social parasites" and "small criminals". Life as street children are full with challenges and difficulties—they are exposed to high risk while on the street such as bullying, starving, serious diseases, death and many others. To stay alive, their survival strategies while on the street are essential such as friendship, working and education. Notably, survival strategies of street children are argued to be different from each area due to the different situation, context, environment and cultural practices. For this reason, this study compared the survival strategies of street children between the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Qualitative method is adopted in this study through in-depth interviews (semi-structured questions and supported with observation). The findings of this study which involved 24 street children (12 street children from the city of Kuala Lumpur and 12 street children from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah) discovered that the main survival strategy of street children was "friendship", followed by "working"; and the least survival strategy recognized by street children was "education". The findings of this study also revealed that there were levels/degree of survival strategies that lead to many consequences. The levels/degrees of engaging in friendship is divided into three which were "too close to friend/s", "close to friend/s" and "distance from friend/s". Although there were several positive consequences of "too close to friend/s" such as getting protection and source of help; it also led to the a number of negative consequences which were loitering, smoking, involved in drugs, get drunk with their friends and many others. Street children who were "close to friend/s" also associated their friends as source of help and be with friends can maximize their protection. However, they were also exposed to the negative consequences including loitering, glue sniffing and fighting. "Distance from friend/s" made them at high risk and having no support while on the street. Working among street children is divided into three levels which were "hazardous/dangerous", "non-hazardous" and "parents' employment". Notably, working led to a number of negative consequences among street children, which can harm their health, exposed to diseases, being discriminated and have low educational performance. Finally, education among street children was divided into two degrees/levels which were "low involvement" and "no involvement". Majority of street children were illiterate, school dropped-out and have low knowledge; these may jeopardize their future life. Hence, this study had come out with several recommendations to urge the relevant agencies, society, community and government to effectively deal with this issue by strengthening children's rights, especially street children. Finally, the findings from in-depth interviews with key persons representing relevant agencies who deal with street children in Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah also validated the findings of survival strategies of street children—working was mostly recognized as survival strategies of street children mostly in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, followed by education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Assalamualaikum and greetings,

First of all, I am very grateful to Allah S.W.T. for the health and strength given that allow me to complete this thesis.
To my parents, I would not forget all their support and encouragement since I was kid and until now. Their strength and effort to see me as a successful person is very breathtaking and amazing. I am very grateful because Allah S.W.T. has granted me very wonderful parents in my life. Thanks a lot Ma and Abah.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude especially to my Main Supervisor, Dr. Yarina Ahmad for the support, advice, and knowledge given throughout my thesis journey. The guidance from my inspirational supervisor helped me a lot to complete my research thesis. Her patience and encouragement drive me to be completely motivated to finish my research thesis as well as my study. I have never imagined having such a wonderful mentor and advisor for my master study. My sincere also goes to my Associate Supervisor, Dr. Nor Suziwana Hj Tahir who also provide an advice and motivation although she has been newly appointed as my Associate Supervisor after 9 months I enrolled in my study. Her advice and constructive comments and critiques helped me to improve my presentation skills and deliver my ideas. I really appreciate the effort given by my supervisors.

My sincere thanks also goes to the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies for the opportunity to enroll my study in Master of Administrative Science. The Faculty helped me a lot by implementing several research programs for postgraduate students in order to improve their research thesis. Hopefully, the Faculty, with the lecturers and staff's efforts, will continue to provide a better program for postgraduate students in the future.
My special thanks also goes to the Ministry of Higher Education for an opportunity to become a Research Assistance for 17 months under the research grant entitled 'Social construction and identity formation of "street children" in a Malaysian context. My research also is a part of this two-year research grant lead by Dr. Yarina Ahmad (my Main Supervisor). I also would like to take this opportunity to thank Public Service Department (JPA) for the generosity in providing the scholarship for my one year-study. This financial assistant helped me a lot to support my study expenses and complete my thesis.

I also appreciate the strong support from my family and friends: Abd Hamid,
¯   , Fazliana, Firdaus, Fikri, Tasneem, Azim, Sumayyah, Masitah, Amalina, Mahfuzah, Izzati, Shahrizal and others. This journey would not be possible without my family and friends' support and encouragement. A lot of thanks is given to them for their heart-to-heart advice and helped me to stay sane through these difficult years.

Other than that, I would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Hjh. Shehah for her effort to provide precious critique and proofreading in order to improve my research thesis. Once again, thank you and love you all.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Even if you tell people your real name, they just call you 'street kid, street kid', and it pains us" (Human Rights Watch, interview with Andrew, 2013).

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Street children have been associated as a social issue worldwide in poor, developing and developed countries in the 21st century (Abro, 2012). The estimated population of street children around the world has reached millions of people, and the number is increasing rapidly. It is believed, the population of street children are more significant in the developing countries (Sharma & Joshi, 2013). Focusing on Asian region, the number of street children recorded as the highest; almost 11 million in India, 450,000 in Bangladesh, 300,000 in China, 50,000 in Vietnam, and 10,000 in Burma (Ahmad, Latif & Sulaiman, 2011). However, there is no specific information on the number of street children in Malaysia, as exemplified below:

> "Very little is unknown about the numbers, demographic profile and protection needs of these vulnerable children. Although a large number of street children are believed to reside particularly in Kuala Lumpur and Sabah, there is still a lack of government or civil society-led programs that seek to understand and address the root causes of children ending up on the streets" (Child Rights Coalition Malaysia, 2012).

The population of this group of children in Malaysia is difficult to quantify due to the limited study being undertaken on this issue. Thus, any number of children who are considered as street children recorded by any government agencies (i.e. Department of Social Welfare, Kuala Lumpur City Council and others) and non-governmental agencies (Chow Kit Foundation, Religion of Love and others) can only be considered as a "tip of iceberg" of the real problem.

There are a number of reasons why street children sent themselves to the street; these reasons differ according to culture and environment in a particular area and time. Among the popular contributing factors of street children around the world are poverty (Kayiranga & Mukashema, 2014; Murray et al., 2012); family factors (Sharma & Joshi, 2013; Murray et al., 2012); victims of war-thorn countries (Ball, 1994); documentation (Vanar, 2014; Aliaas, Bajunid & Abdullah, 2012); victims of abused; runaway (Lukman,