Masturbation and Substance Abuse among Street Children of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract
Very few studies have been conducted that examine the complex relationship between substance abuse and masturbation among street children of Harare Central Business District. The conceptual frameworks involving the child rights and child agency perspectives were adopted in analysing the realities of these children. The substance abuse and masturbation among street children of Harare Central Business District, demonstrate these children as social actors thus agency. However, the actions could be viewed as ambiguity of agency as they clash or threaten existing societal values. Also the behaviours could be viewed as self-destructive agency. On the other hand, drawing from a child rights perspective, the behaviours involving substance abuse and masturbation of the street children highlight huge child rights violations prevalent on the streets of Harare Central Business District. The street ethnography approach and qualitative research methodology were used to generate data for this study. The paper concludes by recommending full implementation of child rights laws and policies to reduce risks associated with the complex nature of substance abuse and masturbation among these children.
Introduction
There seem to be very few studies that have been conducted to examine the intricate relationship between masturbation and substance abuse among the street children of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. Beazley (2003) observed that street children are sexual beings. Some street children of Harare Central Business District engage in masturbation (Mhizha, 2010; Ruparanganda, 2008). Scholars such as Blais, et al (2012); Tyler, et al (2013), Chikoko (2014); Chikoko et al (2016) seem to agree that the children in street situations also engage in abuse or misuse of substances. Makaruse (2010) defines substance abuse as taking too much of a drug, taking a drug too often or taking drugs or substances for wrong reasons. Houston, et al (2012); Butt et al (2011) observed that there is a close relationship between childhood sexual abuse and illicit substance abuse among people including those in street situations. Therefore, this paper examines the multi-layered or complex relationship between masturbation and substance abuse among the street children of Harare Central Business District. However, previous studies on street children by Bourdillon from 1994 up to the present, Mhizha (2015), Mella (2012), Wakatama (2007), Ruparanganda (2008), Chirwa (2007), Chirwa and Wakatama (2000) have been limited in articulating the complex or multi-dimensional relationship between masturbation and abuse of substances among street children of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. In other words, there is paucity of literature on the interrelatedness or nexus of masturbation and abuse of substances among these children.

Literature Review
This section reviews literature by situating the masturbation and substance abuse among children in street situations to global, regional and local perspectives. Idemudia, Kgokong and Kolobe, (2013); Montanez, (2011) noted that children in street situations engage in masturbation. Gigengack noted that, street girls would quietly indulge in masturbation after sniffing glue. He added that they would masturbate pretending as if they were watching television.

Mhizha and Ruparanganda observed that masturbation was common among children on the streets of Harare. Ruparanganda noted that street children of Harare referred to masturbation as *gwetengwe*. He added that there were various reasons why these children engaged in *gwetengwe* that included fear of contracting deadly HIV and AIDS, as well as being cheap and accessible.

Mhizha argued that low self-esteem was the major reason why street children engaged in masturbation. He added that some street children who had low self-esteem and who could not sustain a love relationship were known to practice masturbation. Mhizha observed that in certain instances, some male street children in the streets of Harare were involved in masturbation related competition, in full view of many people including the general public.

Drawing from the observations made by Mhizha and Ruparanganda, masturbation among street children is as a result of multiplicity of factors such as fear of contracting HIV and AIDS, low self-esteem among others. Masturbation among street children is not necessarily as a result of substance abuse but by other factors as noted by Ruparanganda and Mhizha.

The children in street situations exercise their agency through masturbation. As noted by Mhizha, Ruparanganda, some of the street children were able to meet their sexual needs through masturbation. However, the agency could be considered as ambiguous as noted by Bordonaro and Payne (2012) as it clashes with moral values in Zimbabwe. Additionally, among the Shona people, children including those in street situations are not supposed to engage in behaviours such as masturbation and abuse of substances. Such actions or

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1 *Gwetengwe* is masturbation
2 *Gwetengwe* is masturbation
behaviours could constitute abomination (Chikoko, 2017).

Masturbation among children in street situations demonstrates child rights violations as the behaviour contravenes the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare Children (1999) and national child rights laws. The Children’s Act (5:06) defines such children as those ‘in need of care’. The masturbation demonstrates that street children are vulnerable. It also shows that, the Government of Zimbabwe and other primary duty bearers were not providing enough protection services to vulnerable street children in Harare.


**Conceptual Framework**
This section discusses conceptual or theoretical frameworks used to analyse masturbation and substance abuse among the street children of Harare Central Business District. The child rights and child agency perspectives have been adopted to add value in understanding the lives of these children.

**Child Agency**
Butler (2009) observed that the new social studies of childhood as an emerging paradigm consider that childhood is socially constructed. The author also added that the child agency theory has challenged the universalisation of childhood which has dominated a number of Euro-American conceptualisation of childhood.

Davies (2008) observed that street children as social actors in a subculture have influence over their lives through creating strong group support networks. The author added that through demonstrating their agency, the street children were able to survive on the streets. Therefore agency is about the abilities, capabilities of individuals to survive or cope with their situations (Ansell, 2015; Ritzer, 1992).

According to Andrea and Godin (2014), the children in Katanga area in Democratic Republic of Congo as social actors demonstrated their agency through contributing towards household income. The authors added that the children exercised their agency in artisanal mining sector besides growing international pressure that the activities were part of the ‘worst forms of child labour.’

Tisdall and Punch (2012) also argue that thin agency is when there are limited survival options of young people in a constraining environment. Constraining environments such as street life, are characterised with harsh living conditions. The masturbation and abuse of substance could be regarded as part of the notion of thin agency. Chikoko (2017) observed that masturbation and abuse of substances among street children of Harare Central Business District constitute thin agency where the actions were only limited survival options of these children.

Bordonaro and Payne (2012) also argue that agency sometimes becomes ambiguous. The authors added that ambiguity of agency is when it clashes with societal values. For example, Chikoko (2014) observed that the behaviours or actions of street children in involved in abusing substances and also heterosexual behaviours could be regarded as ambiguity of agency. The author observed
that the behaviours are seen as threatening moral values of Zimbabwean society.

**Child Rights**

The UNCRC (1989) defines child rights into four principles namely; the best interest of the child, the right of a child to participation, non-discrimination, and the right of a child to survival and development. The Save the Children (2002) also noted that, child rights perspective recognises the relationship between the duty bearer and the rights holders. Chikoko (2014) observed that the child rights perspective could be seen as social contract that exists between the rights holders and the duty bearers.


However, a number of critics or flaws have been raised against the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989). Scholars such as Nhenga (2009), Bourdillon (2009), Morrow and Pells (2012) observed that the UNCRC is seen or viewed as a western conceptualisation of childhood. Morrow and Pells (2012: 04) noted that “the UNCRC does not contain specific rights relating to poverty and does not define the term.”

Capri (2013:34) observed that “...it became clear that North American, British and European assumptions around child sexual abuse offer an inadequate framework for understanding such abuse in South Africa.” The author added that it is misleading to assume that studies from the north are universally applicable among other critics associated with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989).


**Research Methodology**

The street ethnography that included a number of the qualitative data collection techniques such as, life history interviews, in-depth interviews, informal conversations and semi-participant observation methods were adopted to collect the data for this study.

Purposive sampling was used to select or identify eight (8) participants for the study. Specifically, four male and four female street children were recruited for the study. Scholars such as Babbie and Mouton (2012), Neuman (2011) observed that purposive sampling is suitable when working with difficult or vulnerable populations such as homeless children and street based sex workers. The authors added that through purposive sampling it becomes easy to identify and recruit the participants for the study. Similarly Mhizha (2010) also used purposive sampling in his studies with street children of Harare.

The qualitative data was analysed through thematic content analysis. The data analysis focused on themes and sub themes that emerged from the study. Some of the themes included masturbation, psycho-active substances among others. As other studies have shown, thematic content analysis is very ideal for street children (see McAlinden and Maruna 2016; Garland, Richard and Cooney 2010; Mizen & Ofosu- Kusi 2010; Mhizha 2010, 2014 & 2015; Mhizha and Muromo 2013;
Chikoko 2014; Chikoko et al 2016; Ruparanganda 2008).

**Research Findings and Discussion**

Some street children of Harare Central Business District were practising masturbation and was linked to substance abuse. During the life history interviews, one of the street boys revealed that, he engages in masturbation very often when he is drunk. He indicated that as an active agent he fantasises a lot when he is intoxicated by double punch or kachasu\(^3\). For example, when he is drunk he can have several sessions of masturbation, probably more than five times a night. He had this to say:

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\text{Kana ndakadhakwa zvangu, ndinonyatso rova gwetengwe, vadhara. Ndinoveza kana kafour chaiko. Ndinyatso tsvaga giripi yandinoda dzangu ndichinyatso yeverwa zvangu. Kuveza kuri right mudhara nokuti hakuna pressure yemari, kana zvirwere. Ndinorova five against one, ndichinyatso funga musikana wandinoda asinga waniki muno muHarare may be kuLondon kana New York. (When I’m drunk I can masturbate a lot. I do about four sessions finding a good grip whilst fantasising. Masturbation is okay elder, because you do not have pressure of paying money plus you are free of contracting diseases. I can have five against one, I fantasy on one of the most beautiful girls who cannot be found in Harare, who could be Miss World or someone special from London or New York).}
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This also illustrates that the street boys had a superior world view of western cities such as London and New York as they fantasise having sex with someone from those places. This could be as results of globalisation were many people are socialised to view westernisation with civilisation and modernity.

Additionally, during the informal conversations, one of the boys revealed that, street boys had a practise of masturbating after they were intoxicated with substances. He indicated that there were rich people, who would provide street children with intoxicating substances such as *chapomba*\(^4\). Thereafter, they would compel them to engage in masturbation session, whilst the *mhenes*\(^5\) are watching and enjoying themselves. This has been happening in secluded players or *mhenes*\(^6\) cars. The boy had this to say:

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\text{Pane dzimwe mhene zvino titengera zwapomba, tobva tadhakwa mboko. Mhene idzi dzinobva dzatifurira kuita gwetegwe, ivo vachiona vachinakidza. Zvinowanzo itika, kunzimbo dzakawanda, kana mumazi mota avo. Plus dzimwe nguva mhene inobva yati ita gwetengwe wakabata blambi dzavo (dzemhene). (There are *mhenes*\(^7\), who buy us chateau and get us heavily intoxicated. *Mhenes*\(^8\), they persuade us to practise masturbation, whilst watching us and enjoying themselves. This normally happens in secluded areas or in their cars. Sometimes we do masturbation on the *mhenes*\(^9\) penis).}
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During the in depth interview, one of the street boys also revealed that, there were some rich people who would encourage them to engage in masturbation in exchange of intoxicating substances and money. For example the *mhene*\(^10\) would persuade the street boy to masturbate on the *mhenes*\(^11\) sexual organ. The boy had this to say:

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\(^3\) Kachasu is a highly intoxicating psycho-active substance  
\(^4\) Chapomba is psycho-active substances such as chateau  
\(^5\) Mhenes are rich clients  
\(^6\) Mhene is a rich client  
\(^7\) Mhenes are rich clients  
\(^8\) Mhenes are rich clients  
\(^9\) Mhenes are rich clients  
\(^10\) Mhene is a rich client  
\(^11\) Mhene is a rich client

(Elder, it is something else, mhenes make us do some bad things. Mhene would put you in his car and they instruct you to masturbate at his penis. I would touch the mhene’s penis until he ejaculates. Most of the time, we do this when we are drunk. The mhenes buy intoxicating substances and also give us money as well).

Gigengack (1999)’s study noted that, street girls in Mexico City could engage in masturbation after sniffing substances such as glue. He noted that the girls would do masturbation quietly pretending as they were watching television. In addition, Mhizha (2010), observed that, masturbation was known as kuveza among street boys of Harare, where as Ruparanganda noted that, it was known as gwetengwe. The two scholars noted that, masturbation was common among the street boys as it was considered to be easy and cheap and also free from contracting HIV and AIDS.

On the other hand Mhizha argued that, low self esteem was the chief reason, why street children were engaging in masturbation. Mhizha observed that street children who had low self esteem and who could not sustain a love relationship were known to practise masturbation. He cited that in certain instances, some male street children in the streets of Harare were involved in masturbation related competition, particularly to see, who would ejaculate faster and more frequently. Additionally, Mhizha observed that adolescent street girls were also involved in masturbation through using bananas and some vibrators.

The use of masturbation after taking on aphrodisiac substances

It became evident that some of the street children engaged in masturbation as a result of taking an aphrodisiac substances. During the informal conversations, one of the street girls revealed that, she engages in masturbation after taking aphrodisiac substances. She added that when she took aphrodisiac substances such as ‘seven (7) hours’, she failed to get any man who could fuck her and she decided to masturbate by inserting her three fingers in her vagina. Molly also revealed that the experience was fantasising to the extent that she repeated the practice frequently.

In addition during life history interviews, one of the street boys also revealed that he was initiated to masturbation after taking aphrodisiac substances. He added that one of the Sunday evenings, he took ‘wild horse’ anticipating having sex with his girl friend. However that day the girl was having menstrual periods. As a result of the circumstances, he became stressed and bored to the extent that he took some addictive substances such as chitongo and chamba to relieve his stressful experiences. He later on succumbed to masturbation. Cosmas added that that was his first time to engage in masturbation and he enjoyed the experience. He added that, out of the gratification he has been practising the behaviours often. Cosmas also indicated that he now prefers masturbation rather than having heterosexual behaviours with street girls. He had this to say:

Mudhara ini ndakanga ndisingaiti zvokuveza izvi. Ndakatanga mumwe musi babe rangu rakanga raenda kumwedzi. Ndakanga kanwa Viagra musi uyu, ndichida kuri kwira heavy. Rakabva

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12 Mhenes are rich clients
13 Mhene is a rich client
14 Mhene is a rich client
15 Mhenes are rich clients
16 Kuveza is masturbation
17 Gwetengwe is another street lingo for masturbation
18 Chitongo is one of the highly psycho-active substances sold on the streets
19 Chamba is cannabis
randitaurira kuti riri kunwedzi
dzvakandibhowa heavy. Madhiri ose
akabva aenda musango. Saka ndakabva
ndatenga chibhodhoro changu
chechitongo ndikabhema chamba.
(Elder, I did not practise masturbation. I
only started one day, when my girl-
friend was on her menstrual periods. I
had taken on Viagra that day with a view
of a heavy fuck. When she told me that
she was experiencing menstrual periods,
I became heavily disappointed as I did
not expect that. Because of boredom and
in order to cool off the stress, I started
taking on addictive substances such as
chitongo20 and chamba21).

Ndakazodhakwa heavy, zvokuti
ndakazongoona ndava kuveza ndoka.
Ndakanakirwa heavy chibaba. Ndakaveza
kakawanda apa ndakabatwa nemadrugs.
Kubva musi uyu handisisina basa
nevaskana. Ndavakuveza ndoga zvangu,
ndinotanga ndanwa zvinodhaka.
(I became heavily intoxicated to the
extent I started masturbating. Through
the experience of masturbating I enjoyed
myself. The experience was exciting as I
was masturbating whilst drunk. From
that day I have lost interest in the girls.
Whenever I think of having sex with
girls, I first get drunk, then masturbate
later).

The above discussed narratives demonstrate
that street children of Harare Central Business
District are social actors. Masturbation after
use of aphrodisiac and psycho-active
substances could be explained with the
concept of thin agency (Tisdall and Punch,
2012), as could be the only viable options to
them. Probably the use of psycho-active
substances and masturbation were the few
available options for these children. The
behaviours could also be part of ambiguity of
agency as noted by Bordonaro and Payne
(2012) as the actions are seen as clashing with
societal values. Also, the ambiguity of agency
is in terms of threatening the well-being of the
street children who engage in masturbation
and abuse of substances. In addition, the
actions could constitute self-destructive
agency as observed by Gigengack (2006 &
2008). The self-destructive agency is also in the
context that masturbation and abuse of
substances could lead to a number of risks
such as death among others.

Drawing from a child rights perspective,
masturbation and substance abuse among
the street children of Harare Central Business
District, illustrate huge child rights violations.
The behaviours are seen as inconsistent with the
international, regional and local child
rights laws, policies and programmes. In
terms of the provisions of the United Nations
Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989), the
actions are not in the best interest of the child
principle. In terms of the Children’s Act (5:06),
the children including those on the streets
who engage in masturbation and substance
abuse are regarded as ‘in need of care’ and
the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act
(9: 23) also views such children as ‘in conflict
with the law’.

Conclusion
Drawing from the findings of the research, it is
evident that there is a multi-layered
relationship between substance abuse and
masturbation among the street children of
Harare Central Business District. For example
some of the street children were exposed to
masturbation through misuse of psycho-
active substances. Also some of the street
children succumbed to masturbation through
misuse of aphrodisiac and psycho-active
substances. Drawing from an agency theory,
the masturbation and substance abuse
among these children could be explained in the
context of ambiguity of agency
(Bordonaro and Payne, 2012; Bordonaro,
2012). The behaviours could be regarded as
clashing with the societal values (Bordonaro
and Payne, 2012). However, these actions or

20 Chitongo is one of the highly psycho-active
substances sold on the streets

21 Chamba is cannabis
behaviours of the street children could be the only viable options for them in a resource constraining environment, thus thin agency (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). The behaviours could also be explained as part of the notion of self destructive agency (Gigeganck, 2006 & 2008), as the actions have far reaching risks on the children. The masturbation and substance abuse among these children also illustrate huge child rights violations prevalent on the streets of Harare Central Business District. The behaviours are inconsistent with international, regional and local child rights laws, policies and programmes. Actually the actions or behaviours are inconsistent with the provisions of the UNCRC (1989), the ACRWC (1999), the Children’s Act (5:06), the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform Act (9: 23) among others. For example the UNCRC article three views substance abuse and masturbation as not ‘in the best interest of the child’ principles and also the Children’s Act (5:06) defines such children as ‘in need of care’.

Recommendations
The study proffers a number of recommendations to reduce the risks associated with masturbation and substance abuse among street children of Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. Some of them include the following:

- There is need for alignment of national child rights laws with regional and international laws, for example the current Children’s Act (5:06) should be aligned with the provisions of the UNCRC (1989), and the ACRWC (1999),
- There is need for full implementation of the child rights laws, policies and programmes so as to ensure the full potential of the street children of Harare Central Business District,
- There is need for raising awareness on substance abuse targeting children in street situations,
- There is need to raise awareness on reproductive health issues including masturbation among street children,
- There is need to arrest all drug or substance peddlers on the streets of Harare Central Business District,
- There is need to urgently establish substance rehabilitation centres targeting street children of Harare Central Business District and
- The substance rehabilitation centres should be manned or managed by professional social workers with skills and experiences on working with street children, substance abuse and reproductive health issues among others.

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