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

Mr **Chikoko**, Witness (*University of Zimbabwe*)

Prof **Muzvidziwa**, Victor Ngonidzashe (*Midlands State University, Zimbabwe*)

Dr **Ruparanganda**, Watch (*University of Zimbabwe*)

Mrs **Chikoko**, Emelia (*Ministry of Public Services, Labour and Social Welfare, 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.

## 1 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 of 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.

## 2 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, Kgekong 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*<sup>1</sup>. He added that there were various reasons why these children engaged in *gwetengwe*<sup>1</sup> that included fear of contracting deadly HIV and AIDS, as well as being cheap and accessible.

<sup>1</sup> Gwetengwe is masturbation

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 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.

Drawing from a research methodology perspective, scholars such as Montgomery (2007) used life history interviews among other data collection tools with children involved in prostitution in Thailand. Rubenson et al (2005) used life history narratives as one of the techniques of collecting data from young sex workers in Ho Chi Minh City. Also Taft (2015) used ethnography that include in depth interviews as part of the data collection on working children in Peru. Also Godoy (1999) used in depth interviews with street children of Guatemala City. Smith (2008) also used in-depth interviews when interacting with homeless youth in the streets of Arizona. Scholars such as Chikoko (2017),

Chikoko (2014), Chikoko et al (2016), Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2010), Ruparanganda (2008) adopted in-depth interviews, informal conversations, and life history interviews to generate data from street children's lives.

### 3 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.

#### 3.1 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 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.

#### 3.2 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.

Nhenga (2008) noted that in an effort to domesticate the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989) and the African Charter on the Right and Welfare of Children (1999), the Government of Zimbabwe has enacted a number of child rights laws, policies and programmes. Chikoko (2014) also observed that some of the laws, policies and programmes included, the Children's Act (5:06), Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23) and the Multi-Sectoral Response to Child Sexual Abuse and the National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (2016-2020) among others.

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).

The vulnerability of the children is explained when some of the street children of Harare Central Business District contract sexually transmitted diseases, and abuse substances. In addition, the behaviours are seen as inconsistent with

the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (1999) and some of the national child rights laws, policies and programmes. The behaviours demonstrate huge child rights violations prevalent on the streets of Harare Central Business District.

#### 4 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).

#### 5 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*<sup>2</sup>. 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:

<sup>2</sup>Kachasu is a highly intoxicating psycho-active substance

*“Kana ndakadhakwa zvangu, ndinonyatso rova gwetengwe, vadhara. Ndinoveza kana kafour chaiko. Ndinonyatso 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.”*

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*<sup>3</sup>. Thereafter, they would compel them to engage in masturbation session, whilst the *mhenes*<sup>4</sup> are watching and enjoying themselves. This has been happening in secluded players or *mhene*’s<sup>5</sup> cars. The boy had this to say:

*“Pane dzimwe mhene zvino titengera zvapomba, tobva tadhakwa mboko. Mhene idzi dzinobva dzatifurira kuita gwetengwe, 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<sup>4</sup>, who buy us chateau and get us heavily intoxicated. Mhenes<sup>4</sup>, they persuade us to practise masturbation, whilst watching us and enjoying themselves. This*

<sup>3</sup>Chapomba is psycho-active substances such as chateau

<sup>4</sup>Mhenes are rich clients

<sup>5</sup>Mhene is a rich client

*normally happens in secluded areas or in their cars. Sometimes we do masturbation on the mhene's<sup>4</sup> penis.”).*

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*<sup>5</sup> would persuade the street boy to masturbate on the *mhene*'s<sup>5</sup> sexual organ. The boy had this to say:

*“Mudhara, mahwani, pane mhene dzinouya dzotiitisa zvisina basa. Mhene iyi inokupinza mumota yayo, yobva yoti ndibate blambi yayo. Ndinobva ndabata blambi iya kusvika mhene yatunda. Nguva zhinji tinoita izvi takadhakwa. Mhene dzinoti dhakisa, dzotipa mari futi.”*

*“Elder, it is something else, mhenes<sup>4</sup> make us do some bad things. Mhene<sup>5</sup> would put you in his car and they instruct you to masturbate at his penis. I would touch the mhene's<sup>5</sup> penis until he ejaculates. Most of the time, we do this when we are drunk. The mhenes<sup>4</sup> 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*<sup>6</sup> among street boys of Harare, where as Ruparaganda noted that, it was known as *gwetengwe*<sup>7</sup>. 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.

<sup>6</sup>Kuveza is masturbation

<sup>7</sup>Gwetengwe is another street lingo for masturbation

## 5.1 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*<sup>8</sup> and *chamba*<sup>9</sup> 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 musu babe rangurakanga raenda kumwedzi. Ndakanga kanwa Viagra musu uyu, ndichida kuri kwira heavy. Rakabva randitaurira kuti riri kumwedzi 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 girlfriend 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*

<sup>8</sup>Chitongo is one of the highly psycho-active substances sold on the streets

<sup>9</sup>Chamba is cannabis

started taking on addictive substances such as chitongo<sup>8</sup> and chamba<sup>9</sup>.”).

*“Ndakazodhakwa heavy, zvokuti ndakazon-goona ndava kuveza ndoka. Ndakanakirwa heavy chibaba. Ndakaveza kakawanda apa ndakabatwa nemadrugs. Kubva musu uyu handisisina basa nevasikana. 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’.

## 6 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 psychoactive 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 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 (Gigengack, 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’.

## 7 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 staffed and 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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