

# Intellectual functioning in children aged 6-18 years living in a temporary shelter for homeless children in Bangalore

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## Abstract

**Background:** Children are our hope for a better tomorrow. They are the embodiment of our dreams and aspirations as they are the citizens and leaders of the future. **Aims and Objectives:** To study Intellectual functioning in children aged 6-18 years living in a temporary shelter for homeless children in Bangalore. **Methodology:** This was a cross-sectional study of homeless children was selected from Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) shelter for homeless (Street) children. The sample was drawn from 2 shelters of the YMCA located at Murphy town and N.G.E.F. Layout in urban Bangalore. **Result:** The age of the sample ranged from 7 years to 18 years. The mean age of the homeless sample was 13.04 years, and the standard deviation from the mean was 2.76 years. Majority were adolescents. Most of the children in study hailed largely from Karnataka and 2 children had come from Tamil Nadu. Most of the children came from urban and rural Bangalore (n=45). Most children could speak 2 languages fluently enough to carry on a conversation. However, the reading and writing abilities of these 84% were more rudimentary than fluent. It was seen that the present sample consisted of 84% literates and 16% illiterates. The writing abilities of the children, who could write were equivalent to third standard level of the Indian education system. The ratio of literate to illiterates in this population was nearly 5:1. Specific Learning Disability was found 12%, Mental Retardation was found in 10%. The sample was divided as follows with respect to their ability to read and write one or more languages. **Conclusion:** It can be concluded from our study that the intellectual functioning was much poor in homeless children than the general Indian children, so they need rehabilitative services and attention for their upliftment of intellectual functioning.

**Key Words:** Homeless children, Orphan Children, Intellectual Functioning, Academic Functioning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Children are our hope for a better tomorrow. They are the embodiment of our dreams and aspirations as they are the citizens and leaders of the future. Without children there

is no future. Experiences of childhood are known to mould and shape the character and behavior of a person. What children learn during their formative years, thus, influences their entire life. Hence, it is imperative that children are raised in a caring and nurturing environment. In an ideal world every child would be loved unconditionally, protected and raised in a stable environment. Sadly, this is not true of the world we live in today, as millions of children, throughout the world live on the streets and are homeless. Homelessness is a multifaceted and a complex problem and maybe considered a relatively new problem for social and behavioral science analysis (Jones *et al*, 1991)<sup>1</sup>. It has only been a decade since systematic attention is being paid to this phenomenon. This is perhaps a reflection of the recent increase in magnitude of this problem.

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Conventional definitions of homelessness (Totter, 1983)<sup>2</sup> were based on the fact that homeless populations lacked a permanent place to live. People, who live on the streets and those in various facilities, were the population referred to as homeless. The number of street children as per estimates of the UN appears to be around 150 million. Out of these about 40% are considered permanently homeless. As per estimates more than 40 million homeless are found in Latin America, between 25-30 million are in Asia and 10 million in Africa (UNICEF-ASIA andamp; Rock 1989)<sup>3</sup>. A study by UNICEF and ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India, 1988-1992, reported a total number of around 293,989-319,189 street children. A study conducted by Philips in India, in 1993, however estimated the street children population to be 18 million. This study however, used a broad definition to define street children. The number of street children in the major cities of Mumbai, Kolkotta and Delhi has been estimated to be 1 Lakh each in 1993 (Pandey 1993). Contemporary literature on homelessness often includes estimates of prevalence of mental disorders among the homeless. Although, 173 rd of the homeless population is considered to have severe mental illness (Levine 1990), the prevalence rates of mental health problems in this population according to various studies have ranged from 2-90%. Prevalence rate of alcohol problems ranged from 4-86% and those of other drug problems ranged from 1-90% (Fisher P 1992)<sup>4</sup>. There is little literature that addresses homeless children and adolescents and their mental health problems. Western studies have indicated higher rate of psychological and behavioural disturbances in children in foster homes and institutional care during infancy and thereafter. The study of homeless children showed that homeless boys had higher rates of serious emotional and behavioural problems. Both homeless boys and girls showed more academic problems than non-homeless children (San Augustine 1999)<sup>5</sup>. Homeless children were significantly more likely than general population or comparison children (poor children who were never homeless) in stable housing to have delayed development, learning difficulties and behavioural problems. In our study we have tried to see Intellectual functioning in children aged 6-18 years living in a temporary shelter for homeless children in Bangalore.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

This was a cross-sectional study of homeless children was selected from Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) shelter for homeless (Street) children. The sample was drawn from 2 shelters of the YMCA located at Murphy town and N.G.E.F. Layout in urban Bangalore. There are a number of governmental and non-

governmental organizations, in Bangalore working to help humane causes in various areas. These organizations care for aged; are involved in rehabilitation of handicapped schizophrenics, the mentally challenged and some organizations work with the homeless. A Brief description of the organization from which the sample was selected: The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is an American non-governmental organization. The YMCA has a branch in Bangalore, which is actively working with street children in the city. The YMCA runs two 24-hour shelters and 4 outreach centres. The 24-hour shelter houses the homeless children who are recruited from the 4- outreach centres located at Sevanagar, K. R. Puram, Bagalur and Yeshwanthpur. The children are recruited to the shelters through these outreach centres. The outreach centres hold daily non formal education for street children with a mid-day meal programme. Street children in the surrounding areas are motivated not only to attend these non-formal classes conducted by social workers, but also helped to catch up with the education and rejoinschool. These centres, currently educate nearly 300 children every day. The street children who come to these non formal classes may or may not come back daily, but when they do come, are encouraged to do so. Willing children, who have no shelter or are abandoned or have no intention of reintegrating with their families, are encouraged to join the 24-hour shelters. These shelters are also home to children, who are recruited through camps held by the YMCA every 6 months, or the 1-day camps held every 1 -2 months. The 24-hour shelters are located at Murphy town and N.G.E.F Layout in Bangalore. They house children for periods of 6 months or more. These children are then trained and given non-formal education in the 6 months that they spend there. These children, once trained in a skill that helps their livelihood, such as carpentry, welding, tailoring, screen-printing and aluminium metal work are subsequently placed in jobs. They are then supported, such that they may either move back to their families or stay on their own, with a few other hostel mates, by making their own accommodation. All children aged upto 18 years staying at the YMCA shelters of Murphy town and N.G.E.F Colony. All the children, who stayed for a period greater than 3 months in the shelters, were recruited into the study. A minimum of three months stay was required because 3 months period allowed enough time for the caretakers to observe and know the children well enough. A thorough understanding of the children would make their assessment of the children more valid and reliable were included into the study while The children who were older than 18 or younger than 6 staying at the two above-mentioned Shelters, The children, whose duration of stay

at the shelter was less than 3 months at the time of the study, were excluded from the study.

## RESULT

**Table 1:** Distribution of the children as per the age

Age Group	Percentage (%)	Number(n=50)
Pre Adolescents (Till 12 years.)	36	18
Adolescents (13 andamp; Above)	64	32

The age of the sample ranged from 7 years to 18 years. The mean age of the homeless sample was 13.04 years, and the standard deviation from the mean was 2.76 years. Majority were adolescents. These ages are only approximates as exact age of the children could not be obtained; none of the children knew their exact date of birth.

**Table 2:** Distribution of the children as per the Residence

Address	Percentage (%)	Number(n=50)
Bangalore urban	6	3
Bangalore slum	50	25
Bangalore rural	34	17
Rural Karnataka	6	3
Tamil Nadu	4	2

Most of the children in study hailed largely from Karnataka and 2 children had come from Tamil Nadu. Most of the children came from urban and rural Bangalore (n=45).

**Table 3:** Distribution of the children as per the Intellectual functioning

	Percentage (%)	No.
Specific Learning Disability	12	6
Mental Retardation	10	5

Substance Alcohol abuse/Dependence was found in 24 % of the children, Specific Learning Disability was found 12 %, Mental Retardation was found in 10%.

**Table 4:** Distribution of the Children as per the Ability to speak languages

Ability to speak languages	Percentage (%)	Numbers (n=50)
Speaks 1 language mainly	12	6
Speaks 2 languages	54	27
Speaks 3 languages	28	14
Speaks 4 languages	6	3

Most children could speak 2 languages fluently enough to carry on a conversation. The sample was divided as follows with respect to their ability to read and write one or more languages. However, the reading and writing abilities of these 84% were more rudimentary than fluent.

**Table 6:** Distribution of the children as per the Language ability

Language ability	Percentage (%)	Number(n=50)
Cannot read and write	16	8
Reads and writes 1 language	80	40
Reads and writes 2 languages	4	2

It was seen that the present sample consisted of 84% literates and 16% illiterates. The writing abilities of the children, who could write were equivalent to third standard level of the Indian education system. The ratio of literate to illiterates in this population was nearly 5:1.

## DISCUSSION

Little research has focused on the educational achievement of homeless children. What has been undertaken, however, indicates that homeless children score poorly on standardized reading and mathematics tests and are often required to repeat a grade. Rafferty and Rollins (1989)<sup>8,9</sup> examined educational records of the entire population of 9,659 homeless school aged children in New York. Of the 3,805 homeless children in grades 3 through 10, who took the Degrees of Reading Power Test in 1998, 42% scored at or above grade level, compared with 68% in citywide. Results were similar for the Metropolitan Achievement Test in mathematics, which 4,203 homeless children in grade 2 to 8 took in spring 1988. Homeless students were less than half as likely to score at or above grade level as were all the students citywide (28% Vs 57% respectively) and in the three districts with the most homeless children. Several other studies found that homeless children are more likely than housed poor children to have repeated grades (Masten, 1990<sup>10</sup>; 38% Vs 24%, respectively; Wood *et al* 1989; 30% vs 18% respectively) or to be currently repeating grade (Rafferty and Rollins 1989<sup>11</sup>: 15% Vs 7% respectively). Other studies without comparison groups also found high rates of grade retention (Dumpson and Dinkins 1987<sup>11</sup>: 50%, Maza and Hall, 1988 : 30%). In contrast, Rescorla *et al* (1991) found similar rates of retention among homeless and housed children respectively (35% vs 32%, respectively). Several factors appear to mediate educational underachievement of homeless children. These include poor school attendance, lack of adequate educational services, inadequate shelter conditions and developed negative self-concepts (Hess, 1987)<sup>12</sup>. U.S Government estimates of number of homeless school aged children who do not regularly attend school range from 15% (U.S Government accounting office, 1989) to 30% (U.S department of education, 1989). In contrast, the National Coalition for the Homeless (1987 a) estimated that about 57% of the homeless school aged children do not regularly attend school. Two additional studies have evaluated the school attendance of homeless children. Homeless students in Los Angeles (Wood *et al*, 1989)<sup>13,14</sup> missed more school days in the prior 3 months than did poor housed children (8-9 Vs 5-6 respectively) and were more likely to have missed more than 1 week of school (42% Vs 22% respectively). Masten *et al* (1993)<sup>15</sup> reported more

disrupted schooling. In our study we have seen that The age of the sample ranged from 7 years to 18 years. The mean age of the homeless sample was 13.04 years, and the standard deviation from the mean was 2.76 years. Majority were adolescents. Most of the children in study hailed largely from Karnataka and 2 children had come from Tamil Nadu. Most of the children came from urban and rural Bangalore (n=45). We also found a higher number of children with specific learning disabilities (12%) and mental retardation (10%). Most children could speak 2 languages fluently enough to carry on a conversation. The sample was divided as follows with respect to their ability to read and write one or more languages. However, the reading and writing abilities of these 84% were more rudimentary than fluent. It was seen that the present sample consisted of 84% literates and 16% illiterates. The writing abilities of the children, who could write were equivalent to third standard level of the Indian education system. The ratio of literate to illiterates in this population was nearly 5:1.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from our study that the intellectual functioning was much poor in homeless children than the general Indian children, so they need rehabilitative services and attention for their upliftment of intellectual functioning.

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