

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Leaving Home for the Streets: Voices of Youth from Ghana's Streets

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Homelessness is a social concern worldwide. In Ghana, homelessness among the youth comes as a result of several factors, the major one being rural-urban migration. Rural-Urban drift is impelled by several factors ranging from perceptions of economic opportunities in urban areas, to increasing rejection of aberrant traditional practices such as forced arranged marriages of adolescent girls to older partners. Unfortunately, the support systems in the cities are not adequate to provide for the subsistence needs of immigrating youth leading to adverse consequences. Youth homelessness has resulted in a growth of marginal employment in prostitution and instrumental crime, increase in sexually transmitted and other diseases, and loss of human resources necessary for long term economic development. Using Symbolic Interaction and Family Systems theories, this qualitative study was conducted in Ghana using in-depth interviews of 24 street youth between 15 and 17 years. The study explored how street youth perceive their decisions to leave home and subsequently end up on the streets, and their experiences on the street. Results revealed a link between

youth homelessness in Ghana and family, environmental, and cultural factors.

This research contributes to the gap in the literature on homeless youth in

Ghana because no previous studies had been conducted on this subject.

Findings further contribute by providing directions for possible policy

implications for agencies seeking to reach this population in Ghana.

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Leaving Home for the Streets: Voices of Youth from Ghana's Streets

By

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## DEDICATION

To Adams Amantana, Cephas and Ernestina Djokotoe, Dramani and Rose Amantana, Rex and Carole Parnell, Ralph and Wilma Hull, and to Elita Amantana.

## Leaving Home For the Streets: Voices of Youth from Ghana's Streets

### Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Youth who are homeless and live on the streets are a global problem (Epstein, 1996; Mufume, 2000; Raffaelli et al., 2001; Symons & Smith, 1995) with serious repercussions. Of the 300 million children estimated by the United Nations Children's Fund to be living on the streets worldwide, most are from developing countries (Beauchemin, 1999). The immediate consequences to these developing countries include a high prevalence of deaths from HIV and AIDS among youth on the streets, drug abuse, prostitution, instrumental crimes, and child labor and exploitation (Beauchemin, 1999), to name a few. In some countries such as Guatemala, government officials kill youth on the streets and their poverty is criminalized (Jahangir, 2002). Because life on the streets is linked to several negative outcomes (e.g. Baron & Hartnagel, 1998; Greene et al., 1997; Terrell, 1997), homeless youth also represent a waste of human capital necessary for these countries' efforts toward national development (Beauchemin, 1999). This research will focus on Ghana, which is typical of many developing countries.

In Ghana (Beauchemin, 1999), as in most African countries (Mufume, 2000), there are no nationwide government programs providing services to children living on the streets. Therefore there are no estimates of the number of children who currently live on the streets of Ghana. Whereas Ghana has not

had any visible presence of children living on the streets until the last ten years (Van Dinther, 2000), available statistics now place the number of street children in Accra, Ghana's capitol city alone at 17,300 (Shanahan, 2002) and predictions for an increase have been made (Beauchemin, 1999). Available data show that most of Ghana's street children who live in the urban areas migrate from the rural areas (Beauchemin, 1999). Whereas the government of Ghana recognizes the emergence of street children as a problem, it typically takes the position that these street children have chosen to leave home for no good reason and are not the responsibility of the government (Beauchemin, 1999).

This research explored perceptions that youth who leave home in Ghana, have about the experience of being young, homeless, and on the streets. The goal of the research was to contribute to a more complete understanding of the homeless youth problem in Ghana. While research on street children is rare in Ghana, some demographic data link rural underdevelopment, adventure seeking, peer pressure, parental abuse, unfavorable traditional practices in rural communities and the lure of urbanization as reasons for youth leaving home (Beauchemin, 1999). Most of these studies were conducted from an etic, or an outsider's perspective (Lancy, 1993). No studies have been done from an emic or an insider's perspective (Lancy, 1993). Conducting research from an insider's perspective provides an understanding of the complexities involved in

social interactions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). By neglecting to study street children from an insider's perspective, much of what contributes to the phenomenon in Ghana is left unstudied. In addition, previous studies on street youth in Ghana have not applied theory to the understanding of the phenomenon.

In order to effectively provide services needed by street children and to have a full understanding of the phenomenon of homeless youth anywhere, researchers need to explore the perceptions of the people who experience the streets. This shifts the understanding of street life from what researchers perceive, to how the street youth experience their own lives. By seeking these perceptions, researchers can provide street youth with a voice that forms part of the dialogue about their predicament (Diversi, 1998, Finley, 1999). Also, as foreign charities try to help with alleviating the plight of these homeless youth in Ghana, the problem can only be effectively addressed from an understanding of the whole phenomenon as it occurs in Ghana rather than just parts of it, based on western research. No studies have been conducted in Ghana exploring what meanings street children attach to their experiences of being homeless. This research seeks to fill that gap.

The study was qualitative and used interviews to reveal how homeless youth perceive their experiences of this phenomenon. Some important issues examined include, abuse at home, autonomy seeking, and adventure. Born and

raised in Ghana, I know and understand the Ghanaian culture and drew on that experience to help reveal the meanings that homeless street youth attach to the experience of their circumstances. Although I have never been homeless, I drew on my previous work experience of working directly with street youth in Ghana to help bring out the complexities involved in this subject.

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

The theories that guided this research are symbolic interaction and family systems theory. Symbolic interaction was used to explore how the youth who experience the streets understand their circumstances and the decisions they make to live on the streets. Family Systems theory was applied to study the family contexts within which these street youth make their decisions to leave home for the streets. The research also explored the rules within these families that contribute to decisions made by these street youth to leave home.

### *Symbolic Interactionist Perspective*

An assumption of symbolic interaction theory is that “Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them” (Blumer, 1969, p.2). Based on this assumption of meaning making, it follows that homeless street youth in Ghana construct their own meanings related to how they experience homelessness. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, in order to understand and interpret behavior, it will be necessary to take into

account interpretations and responses to experiences of the street (e.g. Ek & Steelman, 1998; Raffaelli et al., 2001; Schaffner, 1999).

According to Blumer (1969), "Meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things he or she encounters" (p.2). Using the interpretive process that is inherent in Blumer's assumption might lead to uncovering some information about youth homelessness from the perceptions of the youth who experience the street life. Whereas symbolic interactionism focuses on the meanings and perceptions of actors within circumstances, family systems theory examines youth homelessness from a more contextual approach.

#### *Family Systems Theory*

Family systems theory, derived from general systems theory, approaches individual issues from a contextual approach, offering a broader framework for the interpretation of individual phenomena (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993, Melson, 1995). From this perspective this research considered the decision to leave home and the family environment within which that decision was made. Such decisions may be made through a mutual influence of beliefs and actions of youths and their families (e.g. Melson, 1995; Shane, 1996). In addition families must adjust to youths' decision to leave (Lewis, Volk, & Duncan, 1989), and maintain homeostasis. This research explored the family environments that may have influenced youth in their

decision to leave home. The family systems perspective was used to consider the possibility that youth homelessness in Ghana is a response behavior to factors within their families.

According to Melson (1995) by prescribing and limiting behaviors of family members, family rules serve as a framework to define roles, actions, and consequences that form part of the family environment. The family environment is expected to influence perceptions about leaving home. The roles that children are supposed to play within the family are likely to influence their decisions to leave home and eventually end up on the streets. From a family system perspective, attempting to establish linear causation of homelessness will not make much sense (Melson, 1995; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Instead, consistent with this study, exploring the relationship between and among the contexts within which youth decide to leave is more plausible.

#### *Definition of terms*

According to Shane, 1996, "Conditions of being housed form a continuum rather than distinct categories, similar to many life conditions." (p. 4). The literature on homeless youth defines youth (Fopp, 1993) and homelessness (Symons & Smith, 1995) on a broad range that is often different for different researchers. According to Mufume (2000), the definition of youth varies for different societies. Mufume (2000) further suggests that most

definitions of street youth share three elements which include youth spending a great amount of time on the streets, making the streets into a way of life, and inadequate supervision or care from an adult.

For this study I will adopt Melson's, 1995 definition of street kids as "... long-term runaway or homeless youth who have become adept at fending for themselves "on the streets", usually by illegal activities" (p.16). I will also base my definition of youth on the United Nations organization's definition of youth to include people between the ages of 15 and 17 (Mufume, 2000). I have used the term homeless street youth to describe the population of interest in this study.

#### *Research Questions*

From a symbolic interactionist perspective of meaning making, and a family systems approach described above, this study sought to capture what meanings homeless youth in Ghana attach to their experiences of leaving home and living on the streets. The study examined this subject using participants' stories as narrated by them. From the homeless youth's perspective, the study retrospectively investigated their feelings before they decided to leave home and how they currently experience street life. Factors influencing the creation of these meanings were also explored.

The research questions guiding the study are,

1. What meanings do homeless street youth in Ghana attach to their decision to leave home?
2. What meanings do these youth create about their experience of the streets?
3. What factors influence the creation of these perceptions?

## Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Street Youth in Western Literature*

Youth running away from home has been linked to youth homelessness in studies outside Africa (e.g. Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz, 1991; Unger, Kipke, et al., 1998; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). Youth running away is linked to youth living on the streets. These studies generally examine youth running away and homelessness as related phenomena, with runaway behavior leading to youth homelessness and being on the streets. The literature further links youth runaways to several factors including parental abuse at home (e.g. Bender-Pari, 1997; Economist, 2002; Yoder, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2001) unsuitable family environments (Ek & Steelman, 1988; Patterson-Taylor, 2000; Teare & Peterson, 1994; Tyler et al., 2000; Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 1999), neglect (Patterson-Taylor, 2000; Yoder et al, 2001), or having mental health problems (Economist, 2002; Teare & Peterson, 1994). Researchers also distinguish between those street youth who run away from home voluntarily and those who are forced out of their homes by parents or guardians. They refer to those youth who are forced by the adults to leave their homes as “throwaway” youth (e.g. Economist, 2002; Patterson-Taylor, 2000).

Studies that explore homeless youth as a separate phenomenon from runaway youth cite similar reasons for youth homelessness and runaways. The

reasons attributed to youth homelessness are unfavorable home environments (e.g. Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Teare & Peterson, 1994; Unger, Kipke, et al., 1998) characterized by several types of parent or adult caretaker abuse (Cook & Birchman, 1997; Kryder-Coe, Salamon, & Molnar, 1991, Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz, 1991; Teare & Peterson, 1994; Tyler et al., 2000; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990) or neglect (e.g. Kryder-Coe, Salamon, & Molnar, 1991; Patterson-Taylor, 2000). Some researchers cite parent- child conflict (Patterson-Taylor, 2000), which leads to youth being thrown out of their homes by their parents (e.g. Patterson-Taylor, 2000; Kryder-Coe, Salamon, & Molnar, 1991; Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz, 1991).

We see from the western literature that youth living on the streets are linked to running away from home and homelessness. These phenomena have either been singly or collectively linked to youth being on the streets with no adult supervision. Hostile family environments, parental abuse and neglect, and in some instances youth mental illness have been linked to youth running away and living on the streets. These studies however are performed in western societies and can thus not necessarily be used to make conclusions for the phenomenon in Ghana.

#### *Street Youth in Africa*

In the case of Africa most researchers of youth homelessness and children living on the streets agree on the role that rural-urban migration of

youth plays in the phenomenon (e.g. Beauchemin, 1999; Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes, 2002; Shanahan, 2002). This finding, taken on the surface may appear to be consistent with youth runaway behavior documented by Western research on homeless youth (e.g. Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz, 1991; Unger, Kipke, et al., 1998; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). Contrary to these Western studies, no studies in Africa have been conducted on the family situations of youth who live on the streets (Mufume, 2000). One can therefore not make any inferences on the family situations of youth who live on African streets using conclusions from the western literature.

Although the literature on youth living on the streets in Africa is scarce, there are a few studies that capture the depth of the phenomenon of street and homeless youth within the African context (e.g. Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes, 2002; Mufume, 2000) and provide helpful suggestions for what might explain the phenomenon. It must however be noted that Africa is a very culturally heterogeneous society and different cultures may affect the phenomenon in different ways. The identified causes of homelessness and youth on the streets in Africa include poverty, which results from economic restructuring, rural underdevelopment, fosterage limitations, and a breakdown of the extended family kinship system.

Mufume (2000) showed that economic restructuring in Africa contributes to youth homelessness and living on the streets. Economic

restructuring is a product of efforts by international funding agencies to reorganize African economies since the 1970s (Mufume, 2000). As part of the restructuring, African governments instituted structural adjustment programs (Beauchemin, 1999). Whereas the program was meant to foster an integration of African economies into world markets, it also led to devastation of social welfare and increased poverty in Africa. This led poor families to depend on working or self-supporting (street) youth for a living. Mufume (2000) suggests that in Africa, street youth are a result of poverty, and being on the streets serves as a way of stating to the public that one is poor.

Parifait Eloundou-Enyegue & Shannon Stokes's (2002) theory on fosterage in Africa links the economic disparity between rural areas and urban areas in Africa to youth migration from rural areas, and subsequently to the recent trends seen in most African countries of the emergence of street children. Fosterage, a system found in most African societies (Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes, 2002; Mufume, 2000) is "the practice of sending children to live with relatives or friends for extended periods." (Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes, 2002). According to these researchers, fosterage has for a long time served to promote the economic mobility of children from rural families because educational and employment opportunities have always been concentrated in the urban areas of Africa. Rural dwellers' ties to their urban kinfolk provides a means by which remittances from urban workers are

provided to rural kinsmen, and also provides an opportunity for rural youth to get some education and hence economic mobility from the more developed urban areas. In exchange for education, rural youth provide domestic labor to their host families in the urban areas.

Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes (2002) reveal that African economies have declined since the 1980s leading to the inability to sustain the fosterage that had been a source of security for rural dwellers. The economic decline led to a reduction in incomes for urban households, making them unable to support rural migrants seeking fosterage. Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes (2002), further suggest that, "If opportunities for urban fosterage continue to decline, urban-bound children are likely to swell the population of street children, as is increasingly the case in many African cities."

Mufume (2000) has suggested that homeless street youth are a result of the breakdown of the extended family structure in Africa because of modernization. Modernization is "the process of urbanized societal change in which countries develop and use advanced industrial technology" (Mufume, 2000). The extended family system linked relatives together to serve as the economic and social unit in the rural community (Mufume, 2000). With the advent of modernization, the extended family has lost its centrality and has given way to nuclear families. Modernization has also led to the extended family system's loss of its role as the primary economic unit because family

members seek employment outside the family farm (Mufume, 2000). This has resulted in young people migrating from the rural areas to the urban areas in Africa in search of more technologically advanced jobs (Mufume, 2000). As a result of movement away from the extended family in most of Africa (Mufume, 2000), urban youth in crisis cannot call on extended family members for support and may end up on the streets.

Considering how youth end up on African streets, the reviewed studies for this research show that the factors that may be causing this phenomenon are much more contextual than what pertains to the western studies. African researchers reveal the effect of the environment within which these youth exist on leading them to the streets. African youth on the streets are mostly rural migrants to the urban areas with no support in their new urban environment. Others include problems with African economies that lead to poverty, and modernization with a resultant disparity between rural and urban opportunities, and subsequent breakdown of the extended family. Furthermore, African traditional practice of fosterage and its recent limitations in the face of economic decline has been linked to African youth on urban streets. The literature on African street youth does not address family dynamics because no studies have been conducted on the families of young people on African streets. A study on this phenomenon using a family systems approach may therefore be helpful in contributing to the gap in the literature.

*Street Youth in Ghana*

The literature on street children in Ghana is very limited since the phenomenon is understudied within the Ghanaian context. A study sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund in Ghana, reported by Beauchemin (1999) states the primary reason for youth homelessness in Ghana as rural-urban migration. Among the causes for youth migrating from the rural Ghanaian communities and eventually becoming street children, Beauchemin (1999) lists the factors that attract young rural youth to the urban areas, as well as the factors that push them out of the rural areas. According to this research, the factors that attract rural youth to the urban areas are urbanization and consumerism, parental neglect and pressure on youth to leave the villages and become successful. Others include electricity and the extension of electrical power to Ghanaian villages, relatives in the urban areas, peer pressure, and the community's expectations of rural youth during traditional rites of passage such as marriage. The factors that push Ghanaian youth from the rural areas to the urban areas include ethnic violence between tribes in the rural communities, rural underdevelopment, adventure seeking, and youth taking a chance to be successful. Beauchemin (1999) makes it clear that these factors normally are combined in contributing to youth migration from the rural areas to the urban communities.

According to Beauchemin (1999), youth in developing countries are migrating to the more developed urban cities, which are normally more westernized and much more technologically advanced than the rural areas, and provide other opportunities for employment besides the subsistence farming in the rural areas. With the advent of modernization in Ghana, youth have migrated to the metropolitan areas in Ghana, in search of employment outside the family farm (Beauchemin, 1999). Migrant youth normally leave the rural communities without a realistic idea about resources available to them in the urban areas, and become stranded once they arrive at these urban areas and end up living on the streets. This finding is consistent with the link between modernization and rural youth migration documented by Mufume's (2000) research on street children in Africa reported earlier in this paper.

Contributing to rural youth migration in Ghana is the extension of electricity to rural communities in the 1990s, which was an attempt of the government of Ghana to develop the rural communities. According to Beauchemin (1999), electricity in the rural communities led to more access to the mass media such as television and radio. An unintended consequence of the electrification of the rural communities is that rural youth were presented with images of the better life in the urban communities where all the television programming originates. This served as a tool to attract rural youngsters to the urban areas in search of the urban lifestyle and subsequently to the urban

streets. Peer pressure formed part of the motivation for rural youth to migrate from the rural areas (Beauchemin, 1999). Rural peers who return to the village on visits after having migrated may come back with items from the urban areas that may seem to attract rural youngsters to leave in search of similar fortunes.

Parents in the rural communities sometimes neglect their children, or may encourage them to leave their homes in the villages in search of better opportunities in the big cities (Beauchemin, 1999). This adds on to the pressure to leave the rural communities that rural youth face. Relatives in the urban areas also influence rural youths' decision to migrate to the urban areas (Beauchemin, 1999). According to this research, rural youth are much more likely to migrate to the urban areas if they have relatives living there than if they do not have relatives in the urban areas. Although Beauchemin does not present reasons accounting for the link between relatives in the urban areas and youth having to live on urban streets, this finding seems to be consistent with Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes's (2002) theory on fosterage in Africa as discussed earlier in this paper.

According to Beauchemin, another enticing factor to rural youth that contributes to rural youth migrating to the city in search of better opportunities is the rural society's expectations of youth during traditional rites such as marriage. Rural youngsters are expected to be able to build a home and raise their families when they marry. Youth who are not able to fulfill these

obligations are considered failures. According to Beauchemin (1999), since the rural community does not provide opportunities for acquisition of such required material possessions during these events, rural youth migrate to the cities in search of these resources. Besides rural youths' desires to seek adventure in the big cities and the desire to take a chance at succeeding in the urban areas, ethnic violence in the form of tribal wars have been linked to rural youth migrating to the urban areas for safety Beauchemin (1999).

Consistent with Beauchemin's (1999) link between rural underdevelopment and rural youth migration to the urban areas, and its subsequent link to the influx of street children on urban streets, other researchers on Ghana have documented the stark contrast in development and the availability of economic resources in the rural areas as opposed to the urban areas (Assibey-Mensah, 1998; Fentimen & Hall, 1999; Quist, 2001). Studies (e.g. Fentimen & Hall 1999; Quist, 2001) showed that education in Ghana is much more accessible in the urban areas of Ghana as opposed to the rural areas. This compels rural youth who are interested in the opportunities available only in the urban areas to migrate in search of a better quality of life.

#### *Summary of the literature*

In summary, homeless and street youth are very diverse, however as shown above, the causes linked to youth homelessness in studies conducted in western society include youth running away from home, being thrown out of

home by their parents, being abused, and having mental disorders among others. Factors contributing to youth homelessness vary from one context to another.

In African contexts the causes are much more systemic and include poverty and declining economies, rural-urban migration, and weakening extended families. The causes linked to street youth in Ghana are similar to what has been reported in the African literature, with rural to urban migration being the main cause. To further understand how youth homelessness is manifested differently in Ghana, there is a need to conduct more studies in Ghana that explore the uniqueness of the situation. Current interventions and government policies in Ghana based on western studies are problematic and do not properly address the problem of youth living on the streets.

The government of Ghana links the problem of street children to inadequate parental supervision and on street children being delinquent and hence takes a law enforcement approach to getting rid of children on the streets. Other non-governmental organizations have felt the need to provide day shelters and encourage these youth to return home without finding out why youth are unwilling to stay in their rural homes. Considering the little research done on this subject in Ghanaian context, research in Ghana that is based on the experiences and thoughts of the people who experience homelessness is important to contribute to a further understanding of this phenomenon within

the Ghanaian context. An application of theory to the phenomenon may also contribute to a broader understanding of the phenomenon in Ghana. A justification for this study is thus clearly demonstrated.

### Chapter 3 METHOD

Since this study aims at capturing the meanings that street youth attach to their experiences, a qualitative approach using their own stories was the logical method to use. Qualitative methodology is also appropriate to this study because this phenomenon in Ghana has not been studied from the perspective of the street youth, and this method will allow extensive probing into this understudied issue (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). Also, this research examined street youth as a family systems phenomenon by seeking to examine how family relations contribute to youths' decision to leave home for the street. A qualitative methodology helped to accomplish that goal. Interviews with street children were conducted in Ghana between February 2003 and April 2003 for the study. With a past working relationship with non-governmental agencies in Ghana, I had access to organizations, which helped to establish a link between the street children using day shelters and me. These organizations also provided an official link between the participants and me after interviews had been completed.

#### *Participants*

Twenty four interviews (11 females and 13 males) lasting between forty five minutes and one hour with street youth from two major cities in Ghana were obtained for the study. I interviewed youths between the ages of 15 and 17 years old to ensure that the age group of the sample was within the

United Nations Organization's standard age limit of who qualifies as youth (Mufume, 2000). The sample included only youths who currently live on the streets and have done so for six months or more. This also ensured that the youths interviewed had some experience on the street as a lifestyle and also conformed to the definition provided by UNICEF of "youth of the street", that is, youth whose ties to family or household is occasional and at best tenuous (Mufume, 2000).

### *Recruitment*

Having worked with the Catholic Action for Street Children, a non-governmental agency that serves street children in Ghana, I had experience reaching street youth in the areas where they live, and I am comfortable working with this population. In addition, having been born and raised in Ghana, I am familiar with the areas where street children congregate within the communities. At the beginning of the study, I became aware of two relatively new homeless youth day shelters in two communities in Ghana. With permission from these day shelters, I gained entry into these facilities as a way of establishing contact with these street youth and gaining their trust by meeting them at a place they considered very friendly to them. By using a day shelter rather than the other street youth programs, I had an advantage of capturing their own thoughts and dreams as opposed to goals that may have developed as a result of influences of helping agencies. The day shelters just

served as places where street youth could congregate in a safe place away from the streets during the day and be able to clean themselves and return to their lives on the streets. No special requirements apply to people who are able to use these day shelters and no counseling is provided. This makes the day shelter a safe place on the streets for streets kids to go to. On a given day, over 50 street youth may utilize the shelter, with some coming daily and others occasionally. Some youth may come only one time and never come again.

I verbally disseminated information to potential participants by going to the youth shelters and interacting with the youths who came there during the day. By talking to these teens at the shelters about who I am and what I was doing, some of them became interested in participating in the study. I engaged in further conversation with those who showed interest in the study to determine who was qualified to be included in the sample. Using this method, I was able to reach my potential participants and arrange for individual interview sessions to be conducted at their convenience at the youth shelter. About half of the participants were recruited at the shelters.

While I interviewed the participants, I began to notice a pattern of similar backgrounds and circumstances. Consequently I decided to interview other street teens who did not utilize the day shelters to find out if I was possibly talking to a self-selected group of street youths. Having interacted with these youngsters, I had become aware of the different locations at the

market place where they congregate in search of menial jobs. With this information, I was able to locate youth from other parts of the market place to add to my sample. Once I located these places at the market where these young people congregated, I talked to the traders around these areas about my research and used them as a means of disseminating information about my research to the street youth.

The market place in a Ghanaian city is an outdoor market that stretches over several city blocks, and is more than just a place to trade. The market serves as a social environment where people socialize and greet one another. Because of the level of communication that exists among traders and their customers at the market place on a daily basis, the market serves as a very efficient informal channel for disseminating information. This therefore provided me with a very effective means of disseminating information about my research to potential participants. Street children have a daily relationship with traders at the market place by providing their labor in exchange for money to buy food or for items that these street children need for their daily sustenance. As a result of this relationship between traders and children living on the streets, traders are usually very knowledgeable about where street children congregate by day, and where they sleep at night.

With the help of information from traders at the market place, I approached potential participants and verbally presented them with

information about what my research is and who I am, using the Ghanaian languages they understood. The form of identification in Ghana, which brings credibility to a person, is their family ties. I therefore introduced myself by telling potential participants that I am a Ghanaian and told them what my family links are. This was a very informal introduction of myself but one that was important to establish myself as a person they could trust. Verbal dissemination of information was an efficient way of communicating my research to potential participants because my target population does not read or write. I did not encounter any potential participants who refused to be interviewed, except that I was compelled to not include interested participants who did not qualify to participate in my study.

#### *Informed Consent*

A waiver for a signed informed consent document was requested from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I used a verbal statement (Appendix A) in place of a signed document. This is because the official Informed Consent Form, which requires signatures, is not a culturally appropriate means of seeking a person's consent within the Ghanaian culture. Seeking consent by having participants sign a paper is considered a rude and impersonal gesture and will potentially prevent any further contact by interested participants. Further, if the researcher's contact information is provided directly to the street youths, potential participants will be unable to use it since they have no means

of getting access to a phone or computer. Although the informal and more culturally appropriate informed consent document was in English, its content was verbally explained to potential participants in their native language when they are contacted. Parental consent was not sought prior to the interviews because the participants were considered emancipated juveniles.

Since street youth are not located at the same address for long periods of time, the informed consent document was verbally explained to the participants on the day of their interview. Participants who agreed to be part of the study were either interviewed right away, or arrangements were made to have an interview soon at a mutually agreed upon time and location.

Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. In addition, participants were advised about their right to skip any questions they chose not to answer and were assured of confidentiality of any information provided.

Upon recruiting participants, I explained the benefits, risks and compensation for participating in the study to potential participants. The likely risk to participating in the study was experiencing emotions that arise by having participants talk about issues in their lives that may be sensitive to them. Participants benefited from participation by being directed to community agencies for services that may help them in their current situation. The study has the potential long-term effect of influencing policy in favor of street

children in Ghana by providing data about the lives of street youth in Ghana. Street youth were excited about helping in such a study.

Youth on Ghana's streets spend their days working at the market place for money or supplies for their daily upkeep. Depending on how much work or how generous the employer is, street youth may earn either less than, enough, or more than the amount of money needed to purchase a meal. In order to provide a fair exchange for participants' time for interviews, participants were offered an amount of 4000 cedis, which is enough money for one lunch meal. This compensation is the average of what a street youth will earn within three hours. Being an average sum of money, I believe that the compensation was a fair amount of money that did not serve as coercion to partake in the research. This is because, even without partaking in the interview, street youth could work for about the same period to purchase their lunch. In addition, the lunch money was provided even if the participant chose not to complete the interview to avoid situations where they are forced to complete the interview in order to earn money for their lunch.

#### *Data Collection*

Data were collected using tape-recorded in-depth interviews that lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour at a location that was comfortable to the respondent, but relatively quiet and free from interruption for the duration of the interview. Before the interviews I read and interpreted the informed

consent document which is attached in Appendix A to each participant in order to obtain consent. None of the participants objected to being audio taped.

Participants were given the option of having someone else with them during the interview if they requested. Born, raised, and educated in Ghana, as well as having worked directly with street youth, I am fluent in eight Ghanaian dialects that are predominantly spoken in Ghana. I am also fluent in English, and in the cultures of both the mainstream and the street youth population in Ghana. This prepared me to conduct interviews comfortably in participants' native language and treat them with respect and in a culturally appropriate manner. All interviews except one were conducted in the participant's native language. One participant could communicate a little in English and insisted on speaking English. The content of the interview covered broad topics about street youth including (a) reasons for leaving home, (b) how they left home, (c) why they chose a particular destination, (d) their family's involvement in their decisions to leave, (e) their perceptions of their family back home, (f) their expectations and experiences of the streets, and (g) what they want policy makers to know in order to be able to help them. These questions were merely guiding questions to direct the interviews, with follow up questions being asked depending on how participants responded or to what they chose to respond. The two youth shelters served as a link between participants and me after interviews had been completed, in case participants needed to reach me for any

reason. The researcher's mailing address, phone number, and email address was given to staff of the shelters for that purpose. None of the participants attempted to contact me after the interviews. Twenty-four interviews (11 females and 13 males) were obtained through this process for analysis. The interview guide is attached in Appendix C.

#### *Data analysis*

The twenty-four tape-recorded interviews were translated into English and transcribed for analysis. Two Ghanaian students who are fluent in both English and the Ghanaian languages read over the printed transcripts to check for translation accuracy. Before interviews were read to check for translation consistencies, all real names were replaced by pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

After the first few interviews, some themes began to emerge and were further explored through the remaining interviews. During translation and transcription the themes and concepts in the data became more evident as additional ones emerged. Using qualitative analytical techniques (Berg, 2001), I read the twenty-four final printed interview transcripts several times over to further identify emerging themes and concepts. In addition to allowing the data to present the themes, I actively looked out for themes derived from the guiding theoretical perspectives and the research questions. I was also open to

any emergent themes that are informed by other theories that I had previously not considered.

With further reading of the transcripts, I began to reduce the data into themes by highlighting different sections of the data under different themes using different colors of markers to separate the data. I began a running list of the main themes on separate charts and began to identify appropriate quotes with page numbers to fit under the identified themes as I repeatedly read the transcripts. With each additional reading of the transcripts, the data were further reduced by cutting out the identified themes and fitting them on the different charts until the results were obtained. The data analysis process was completed through further discussions of the transcripts and subsequent themes and concepts with another person (Dr. Samuel Vuchinich) who is familiar with the entire research process.

## Chapter 4 RESULTS

### *A Case Study*

As context for the results of the study I will describe a typical street child in Ghana using a case drawn from the data. Overall the participants had very similar life circumstances to the one described in this case.

Mavis is a 17 year-old who has been living in Accra for one and half years. She came to Accra from her rural hometown with her friend who knows a food vendor in Accra. Mavis followed her friend to Accra with the goal of working for this food vendor on her friend's advice. Contrary to the agreement with her employer Mavis worked for months without being paid. After seven months of work with no pay, Mavis left her employer's home to find another way of making money and ended up on the streets. Mavis reports the events this way.

I came here with my friend. We came here to find work. My friend knew someone here in Accra who sells food at the market so she suggested that we go and work for her. I worked for the lady for about seven months selling Jollof Rice for her. The woman had agreed to pay me seven thousand cedis every day. She later on told me she would reduce that to four thousand cedis per day because she provided me with a place to sleep and some of the food to eat. After working for the woman for seven months, I had still not been paid even one cedi. So I stopped working for her.

Mavis came to Accra to work for this food vendor after she had seen and heard about other girls from her hometown who had worked for other vendors in the city. Before she left home, Mavis felt she could work for the

food vendor in the city and save money to enable her train for her goal of becoming a hairdresser. However this relationship turned exploitative and Mavis had to leave.

I thought I could work there for a while and be able to earn enough money to become a hairdresser's apprentice here in Accra. I realized from the beginning that I wanted to be engaged in commerce so I had a plan to work for money to learn hair braiding and be able to have my own business in future.

My friend had talked to me about how much I could earn working here so I thought it would be a good idea to come. My friend was working for a woman who was selling jollof rice and I saw how well she did. She invited me to come but I was sent to work for a different woman, but all the women who work there come from the same town. A lot of girls come from villages to work for her. She paid all the other girls more than she offered to pay me and yet she never paid me when I worked.

Mavis is one of two children in her family. She reports that her father left for a neighboring French country and is not in contact with the rest of the family. Mavis' mother lives in a village where the family originally comes from. Although Mavis knows that her mother still lives in the village, they have not been in touch with each other. Mavis' brother is also out on the streets in Accra and although Mavis has not seen him in the city, she has met people who have seen her brother in another part of the market and wishes she could see him more. These thoughts are reflected in the following dialogue

I: Okay, I understand. Tell me about your parents. Where do they live?

R: My dad lives in a French country outside this country, and my Mom lives in my village.

I: Do you have any siblings?

R: Yes, there are two of us

I: Where is your sibling?

R: He lives here in Accra, at a different part of town

I: What does he do? Who does he live with over there?

R: He lives on his own and he is a driver's mate.

I: Do you hear from him?

R: Sometimes some of my friends tell me they have seen him and he normally tells them to let me know he misses me, that he would like to come and visit me sometime but he does not know where to find me. I heard he was in an accident recently and was seriously injured. He was also involved in a police case and had returned briefly to our village but I don't know what has become of him or the police case he is involved in.

I: Would you have preferred to see each other more often?

R: Yes

Although Mavis' mother knows she is in Accra, she does not know what kind of life she leads in Accra and Mavis prefers that her mother not know what she does in Accra as seen in this dialogue

I: What about your mother? Do you hear from her?

R: No, I do not hear from her at all.

I: Does she know your whereabouts?

R: No. She knows I am here in Accra, but she does not know my exact location or what I am doing here. I know where she is at but I do not want to return to her until I have achieved my goal for coming here.

Before she left her village to Accra Mavis had been in a village school for a while but she did not find any future prospects for her in the village education. Mavis felt that she was going to end up on the farm just like every other graduate before her in her village school. She felt staying in the school was a waste of time and dropped out to work in Accra and pursue her goal of becoming a hairdresser as expressed here.

I: Before you left your village, tell me how your life was. Were you in school?

R: No I did not go to school.

I: So have you never been to school?

R: No.

I: Why did you not attend school?

R: I started to go to school but could not stay.

I: So there is a school in the village?

R: Yes

I: Why did you not want to go to the school?

R: Well, going to school is a waste of time because those people who went to school are still like us who do not go to school.

I: Why?

R: They do not have work to do, and they all work on the farms just like all the others.

I: So you left the village purposely to work for this woman who hired you?

R: Yes

Mavis reported that she left home without her mother's approval but she feels she had no alternative to succeeding in the future. She feels if her mother could provide a means for her to achieve her goals she would have stayed in the village and not have come to Accra. Mavis reveals this in this interview.

I: So how did your family feel about you leaving home?

R: My mom was not in favor of me leaving home but I thought this was best for my future goals.

I: Would you have stayed home if she promised to provide money for your apprenticeship?

R: Yes, I would have stayed but my Mom has no money to provide that for me so if I had stayed in my village I would have no hope of ever achieving my goal.

Seven months after living with and working for her employer in Accra, Mavis left her employer to escape exploitation and abuse and ended up living on the streets. Life on the streets for Mavis has not been easy. She lives with other street children in Accra and spends her days loitering about the market place for any opportunity to find menial jobs to provide food for herself.

I: Tell me what a typical day is like for you.

R: When I wake up I go to the market place and hang around for any opportunity to find something to do for food. I also come around here to the shelter where I am sometimes lucky to find food to eat from someone around here.

Sometimes Mavis goes to bed hungry because she is unable to find any work to provide food for herself. Asked how she feeds herself daily Mavis responded after a long pause "... hmm as for food, I eat when I am lucky to find some money, otherwise I go to sleep hungry." If Mavis falls ill, she goes to a youth shelter where she can get some first aid as seen here "When I am ill, I come here to the shelter. There is a nurse here sometimes who gives us first aid. It is a free service."

At night Mavis returns to a spot at the market place where she finds a place to sleep with other street children. Mavis talks about a street system where the older street boys secure spots in the market as safe places to rent out to other street children to sleep daily. While they sleep, the older street boys provide security against other street youth who try to steal from them or harass them. This was evident in the following dialogue.

I: So right now where do you live?

R: Well where I live is part of the market but I have a place where I sleep at night. I just pass the night there but I am here on the streets or at this shelter most of the time.

I: Tell me about your experience on these streets. What are some of your encounters?

R: As for where we live, we sleep outside but we have a safe place to sleep in front of the stores. There are older boys who keep watch over the place and will take money from us in exchange for our sleeping spots. One of them is called Van Dam. Before you sleep there you are asked to pay three thousand cedis otherwise you do not get a spot to sleep for the night. If they like you, they may let you sleep there for free.

I: So once you pay to sleep there, is your safety guaranteed for the night?

R: Yes but sometimes thieves invade the place and steal from us.

I: When thieves come there what are some of the things they do?

R: Oh no, not like armed robbers, those who come there to steal are like us. Especially the boys... They come there to steal from us when we are fast asleep. Sometimes they cut your underpants expecting that you have your money hidden there. There have been instances where they have raped some girls who did not have any money that they could take.

I: Besides that do they harass you in any other way?

R: Oh no. Not much more happens to us.

Mavis feels that she is misunderstood by the Ghanaian public as a bad person but would like people to know that she is just a person with needs. She responds this way when asked about the attitude of the public toward them.

Oh as for those people who come to the market, they see us as a bunch of vagabonds and delinquent people. Sometimes the way they stare at you. They think we do not want to work and we sleep outside so they think of us as bad people and we are not part of the human race. That makes me feel sad because if I lived at home, these people will not have the opportunity to look down on me.

She states that law enforcement officials do not harass street youth unless they engage in illegal activities. She notes when asked whether the police harass them "No, unless there is a big fight to attract the police or someone causes some kind of trouble. If we stay out of trouble the police do not bother us at all."

Mavis still hopes to find help from somebody one day to help her achieve her goal of becoming a hairdresser. She states, "My wish is to find someone here who would volunteer to help me." If that fails, Mavis will eventually return to her village even without any success in Accra. Returning home unsuccessful will bring harsh judgments of her in the village but Mavis intends to face it if that is what she eventually has to do. She said "If I do not find anyone willing to help me, I will eventually return to my village. I know it would be difficult and I would be judged very harshly but if that is my fate, I will contend with it."

#### *Demographics*

Participants' age ranged between 15 and 17 with an average age of 16 for both males and females. Thirteen of the respondents (54%) were male and 11 (46%) female. Twenty three of the respondents (96%) migrated from a rural area and only one (4%) is from an urban area. The length of time that youth had been living on the streets ranged between six months and six years with an average length of stay being 21 months. These youths came from families with the number of children ranging from two to nine children and an average of six children per family. Parents of these teens were deceased, unemployed, subsistent farmers or fishermen, petty traders, or had abandoned the family. All of the participants reported coming from families in extreme poverty.

Table 1 presents demographic information for the youth interviewed for this study and their families. The information includes pseudonyms, age and current location of each youth, the current residential location of their families, length of stay on the streets, number of siblings and parental occupation.

Table 1  
Demographics for Participants and their Families

Name, Age & Location	Home town	Period on the streets (months)	siblings	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation
Andy 17 Tamale	Rural	12	3	Deceased	Unemployed
Andre 17 Tamale	Rural	24	4	Deceased	Seamstress
Ammon 16 Tamale	Rural	12	6	Peasant Farmer	Homemaker
Ambrose 16 Tamale	Rural	24	3	Deceased	Unemployed
Albert 15 Tamale	Rural	06	6	Deceased	Left the family
Allan 15 Tamale	Rural	24	5	Unemployed	Unemployed
John 17 Accra	Rural	12	2	Repairs broken radios	Deceased
Jeff 16 Accra	Rural	72	8	Deceased	Peasant farmer
Jerry 17 Accra	Rural	36	4	Deceased	Peasant farmer
Jim 15 Accra	Urban	48	1	Unknown	Left the family
Jack 17 Accra	Rural	08	4	Left the family	Left the family
Joseph 15 Accra	Rural	07	5	Divorced and left	Petty trader
Jeremy 17 Accra	Rural	12	4	Herds cattle for a farmer	Homemaker
Rose 15 Tamale	Rural	06	6	Peasant farmer	Helps on family farm
Rita 17 Tamale	Rural	36	7	Peasant farmer	Helps on family farm
Sue 16 Tamale	Rural	12	2	Left the family	Unemployed
Rhonda 16 Tamale	Rural	06	2	Unemployed	Divorced and left
Mavis 17 Accra	Rural	18	1	Left the family	Unemployed
Marge 16 Accra	Rural	36	7	Left the family	Petty trader

Table 1, Continued

<b>Name, Age &amp; Location</b>	<b>Home town</b>	<b>Period on the streets (months)</b>	<b>siblings</b>	<b>Father's occupation</b>	<b>Mother's occupation</b>
Linda 15 Accra	Rural	36	5	Unemployed	Unemployed
Mary 15 Accra	Rural	12	5	Left the family	Disabled and unemployed
Rachel 15 Accra	Rural	12	8	Peasant farmer	Helps on family farm
Raquel 16 Accra	Rural	18	5	Fisherman	Fish monger
Ramia 16 Accra	Rural	08	7	Fisherman	Fish monger

### Life on the Streets

#### *Self Definition*

The youngsters in the study do not assume self-acknowledged identities as street kids. These street youth consider their experiences on the streets as a temporary living situation and usually plan on living a different life in the future. These young people have specific goals for different lifestyles in the future. For example Jack, a 17 year-old boy living in Accra revealed this in an interview.

I: What are your plans for the future?

R: I want to become a preacher.

I: Why is that?

R: I stole a lot as a kid to take care of my self. I will like to become a preacher so that I can atone for all the things I have stolen from people. By becoming a preacher I will lead a better life.

I: Do you think you can achieve this goal under these conditions?

R: I am sure I will be lucky enough to get a break one day.

Jeff, a 16 year-old in Accra provides another example of how these youth define their lives beyond their present street lives. When asked about how his plans for being in Accra are, Jeff responded this way.

I will really like to be able to go to school. When I am able to go to school and learn to read and write, I will then like to learn a trade. I will like to go to school before an apprenticeship so that I can learn to keep records when I become a tradesman. That is the only way I can help myself and my mother in future. Now that I have become a street kid, if I do not take care my children will be on the streets too. I don't want to have my children experience this kind of life in future so I have to learn a trade.

Rosemary is 16 years old and lives in Tamale. Rosemary reveals that her life on the streets is temporary and she has specific goals for the future that she hopes to achieve. During the interview, the following dialogue ensued.

I: What are your goals for the future?

R: I will like to learn a trade as a hairdresser.

I: So is that the kind of help you would like?

R: Yes.

I: Will you return to your village once you've learn a trade?

R: No. I will stay in the city and work.

Generally the participants did not define themselves by their lives on the streets. The youth in this study defined themselves as people going through a

period of temporal difficulty and not people who permanently live on the streets.

*What They Do*

The youngsters in this study generally work as porters at the market, engage in menial jobs for food vendors, or may even commit petty crimes for their survival. For example Ramia who is 16 years old works as a porter. She describes her work day as follows.

In the morning, when it is time to go to the market, you hear a cock crow at dawn and that shows that it is time to wake up. We wake up at dawn because that is when people are beginning to get their goods over to the market for the morning. We wake up early and walk to the market. It is quite a distance so we set out early. By the time we get to the market, it would be day break. When we go to the market, we may not even get anybody to hire us. If that happens, one will have to endure a long period of hunger. When that happens and someone calls for a porter, we all struggle to get that hire.

Sixteen year-old Raquel also works as a porter and she talked about the difficulty of her job this way,

Sometimes, someone calls for a porter and you run for it. You get there and realize it is extremely heavy stuff. Although you know that you should normally not carry this heavy load, you carry it; sometimes one may even stumble and fall with these goods and be injured chronically. For some of us, our homes may be comfortable because we get food to eat but we come here just out of necessity.

Other participants hang around truck stops for opportunities to find work. An example is the case of Ammon, who is 16 years old and lives in Tamale. He said,

Well, I just hang out here at the lorry station ...Well; this is how it works out here. The Lorries bring goods from different parts of the country. When they get here they need people to help move these goods into storage so we hang around and get hired by day to carry stuff when the need arises. You get something to eat that way.

While it is clear that some of these youth engage in very hard labor to earn a living on the streets, others reported engaging in activities that are illegal as a means of surviving. Participants reported crimes such as theft and prostitution as means of making money. Fifteen year-old Mary who lives in Accra, when asked how she manages to live on the streets said, "Okay, the truth is, I am not very proud of this but sometimes I work as a prostitute to earn some money."

Besides prostitution participants reported playing tricks on the public for money. While theft was commonly reported, 16 year old Jeff reported a very unique way of extortion as a means of making money. He told this story when asked to describe a typical day in his life on the street.

My day usually begins with my hygiene routine. I purchase some water to wash my face and to clean my teeth. After that I go with my friend (The one sitting over there) to beg for some money from passers by. My friend is very good at pretending to be disabled. Sometimes he acts as if he is blind and I pretend to be his guide on the streets. People sympathize with us and then give us some spare change. That is how we make money to eat. Sometimes when I am lucky to find someone who hires me to be a porter, I make money that way too.

These youth make money by engaging in an array of activities both legal and illegal. The study went further to explore the lifestyle of these youngsters and revealed that they lead very difficult lives on the streets. The nature of their lifestyle has been presented in the following paragraphs.

### *Exploitation*

The youth in this study revealed that their lives are characterized by constant exploitation by the people who interact with them. These participants take up any menial jobs at the market place during the day to earn money for their daily sustenance. During such business interactions with other people in the city, these youngsters become victims of exploitation. Fifteen year-old Rachel provides an instance when she was exploited by a trader in the market who hired her to move goods. She recounts,

After I settled, I remember going out one day with some of my friends to work as porters at the market. I did not know how far that market was from the bus station but my colleagues knew their way around town better than I did. A lady hired me to carry her stuff to the bus station. We had a standard charge of one thousand cedis to do that but because I could not speak the language when the lady asked how much I was going to charge for carrying her stuff, I said one hundred cedis.

Rachel Continued,

I could not speak her language so I said one hundred cedis, thinking that meant one thousand cedis. I carried her goods to the station and she gave me one hundred cedis and I said "No! I don't mean this one; I mean the note, not the coin". She replied that I had charged one hundred cedis at the beginning and I said no but she gave me the one hundred cedis and boarded the bus. I started to cry and insult her but she left. (Laughter) So she actually left. I was very angry. She knew but she cheated me on purpose. I went and complained to my friends.

While business dealings with members of the public provide opportunities for exploitation, youth were exploited by people at the market in other situations. Some of the street youth tried to build relationships with the traders they interacted with in the market and ended up victims of exploitation.

Rachel, who is 15 years old and lives in Tamale talked about her ordeal with a woman in the market she had grown to trust. She told this story during the interview,

In some instances, you see someone in the market whom you respect and consider a mother figure. It is not safe to have money where we sleep so one may decide to save one's money with a trader in the market. When it is time to go home this person may lie to you and tell you the money was stolen. You lose twice this way because one could have spent all of that wasted time with one's own family to help them. They will give you the run around until you give up on them. At that time you do not even have food to eat.

These examples reveal that these youth face exploitation in their daily dealings with the people around them.

#### *Going Without Food and Shelter*

Periods of going hungry with nothing to eat are normal occurrences in the lives of these youngsters living on the streets. In a very low and emotional tone, 16 year-old Ramia reports this situation while shaking her head by saying "As for hardships, we experience a lot of hardship out here. We experience so much hardship. Sometimes we roam around all day and even a day's meal may be very hard to come by till the sun sets." Albert, a 15 year-old participant who lives in Tamale echoed this lack of food by saying "Life out here is very difficult. If I am lucky I find food to eat but if I am not lucky, I do not find anything." Fifteen year-old Mary agrees by saying "Sometimes I scavenge for food by looking through dumpsters at the market for leftovers".

While food is difficult to find, in some instances these youth may find food to eat but they report that the food they can afford is normally not enough nor nutritious. According to 15 year-old Rachel "The food we eat is not nutritious at all. One may come across food that one would otherwise not eat but eat very quickly. One has to eat very fast in order to avoid having to share the little food one has." Food is a very scarce commodity in the lives of these youth in the study.

Besides the lack of food and adequate nutrition, the participants reported problems with lack of adequate shelter. These youngsters move from one place to another to find a place to pass the night. Some of the participants reported problems with insect bites and disrupted sleep because of unfavorable weather conditions. Fifteen year-old Albert who lives in Tamale said, "We deal with a lot of insect bites because we sleep outside. When the rains come we get wet and sleep is disrupted. For me, everyday comes with a new sleeping place. I move around from one place to another."

Others find more permanent sleeping places through informal arrangements with their peers. People who have lived on the streets for long periods find spots that they claim and put up structures which they rent out to their peers. Sixteen year-old Raquel described one of these sleeping arrangements by saying "I don't know if they are real rooms. These are wooden structures that have been put up for us to rent. They are very small

rooms but may have about thirty people or even forty sleeping in it.” Raquel describes what happens when one first joins this group arrangement,

When we first arrive here, one is a newcomer and is treated as such. When it is time to sleep, there are no mats. The other people who are already living in the room will help the newcomer to get cardboard boxes from the surrounding stores in the market. That is what one sleeps on. Even when it is time to sleep, someone yells “scoot over”, others say “it is too hot in here”, some say “don’t lie on me”, and it is basically trying to find a little room to pass the night.

Other sleeping arrangements exist where older street youth may claim a spot in front of a store in the market and charge the younger kids to sleep there while they offer security to them. This is described by 17 year-old Mavis in this statement “As for where we live, we sleep outside but we have a safe place to sleep in front of the stores. There are older boys who keep watch over the place and will take money from us in exchange for our sleeping spots.”

#### *Facing Harassment*

Generally, there were no reports of harassment from the public or from law enforcement officers. Participants felt that they are misunderstood rather than harassed by the public. Marge, a 16 year-old responded when asked about the attitude of the public toward them “Yes, they just stare at us as some deplorable objects.” Fifteen year old Linda reported “They see us as prostitutes and thieves but they do not physically manhandle us.” Speaking about their relationship with law enforcement officers, the general feeling from these youngsters is that law enforcement officers leave them alone.

The participants reported that while law enforcement officers generally do not harass them, they were arrested when they engaged in illegal activities such as drug use and theft. Sixteen year-old Ammon who lives in Tamale said when asked about police harassment "They only bother those who smoke marijuana. If you stay out of drugs, you have no problem with the police." John is a 17 year-old from Accra who reported their relationship with the police this way, "The police do not bother us but they do not protect us from the older boys either." Although the police do not harass these youngsters, they do not offer them any protection either.

The only form of harassment reported by the participants was what they face from their peers. Most of the harassment is done by the older boys to the younger boys and the girls. Generally the older boys beat, rape, and steal from the younger boys and the girls. For example 16 year-old Marge who lives in Accra said, "Well, if you have money, those boys who are stronger than you may harass you for it. Even if you tell them you do not have any money, they strip-search you to see if you are lying." She continued, "If you really do not have any money they may leave you but if you are unfortunate they may even rape you." Rachel, a 15 year-old from Tamale reported an even more serious instance as such, "We are also at risk for violence against us everyday. Once, we woke up and found one of the porters murdered. It was very scary".

Bullying and theft from the older boys is further seen here in this dialogue with 17 year-old John. Although John is 17 years old, he is much smaller than the other boys of similar age. During the interview he reported the following.

R: We face a lot of problems from the bigger boys. We have to wake up very early in order to find some work before the bigger boys come around. Otherwise they take the jobs away from us. We are all in competition for the work so sometimes the bigger boys bully the younger ones for the job.

I: So you have to compete to get these jobs?

R: Oh yes.

I: What about the money you earn?

R: Sometimes the money is stolen from us. The older boys bully us and take our money away from us. That is why we come to the shelter to get away from them.

It appeared from these interviews that the only forms of harassment these youth face on the streets are those by their peers.

#### *Difficulty Returning Home*

Though life on the streets is very difficult for these street youth, they still choose to stay rather than return to their rural homes. While it is clear that financial constraints may prevent them from returning for lack of transport, it became evident that their reasons for not returning home may be more than just financial. The study showed that returning home is stigmatizing to these youth because of expectations of their village communities for them to return

successful. When 16 year-old Ramia was asked why she will not return home she responded "It is to protect oneself for the shame". Rachel, who is 15 years old, presented her dilemma this way,

If a person goes back home with nothing, it is a very big disgrace. It shows that one did not have the discipline to work hard enough. Some people will rather resort to prostitution to make more money before going back to the village but claim they got all of that from being porters... Yes, because once the entire village knows that one has left for the city, they also expect that one will return wealthy. If one returns without wealth it becomes a disgrace to the family so the family wants one to succeed at all cost because they do not want to share in that disgrace.

Rachel further revealed that the only times it becomes acceptable to return home is when one falls very ill. She said,

When one falls ill all the people in that area pitch in with a little money and have the person choose to either be sent to the hospital or back home. It also depends on the severity of the illness. If it is one that is life-threatening the person is transported back to the village.

It became clear in this study that once these youth end up on the streets and face difficulty, they are under pressure to stay and try to succeed in order to avoid the stigma that is associated with returning as a failure.

#### *Summary of Life Experiences on the Streets*

It is clear from the preceding that once youth immigrate to the cities, there are no support systems available to provide for their needs. These youth engage in very hard menial jobs to try to make ends meet. Others also engage in petty crimes such as prostitution, theft and extortion to survive. The life experiences of these street kids are very difficult including being exploited by

the people around them, disrespect and humiliation from the public, harassment by peers and indifference from law enforcement officers about their plight. In spite of the fact that these youngsters face difficulty upon arrival in the city, they are reluctant to return to their homes for fear of being stigmatized. Once they leave their rural homes, they are expected by their rural societies to return with wealth. Going back home without having achieved their goals is a sign of failure and results in stigma.

#### *Emerging Themes*

The goal of this research was to explore street youth's perceptions of their decisions to leave home and subsequently end up on the streets. From the analysis of data, three main themes emerged as the predominant factors contributing to the youth's decisions to leave their homes and eventually settle on the streets. These themes are *family influences*, *environmental influences*, and *cultural influences*. These factors are reflected in seven concepts that emerged from the data and often work together to either push the youth from the rural communities, or pull them toward the urban areas.

The themes began to emerge during the interviews. After the first few interviews, I began to notice patterns that were very similar. Once these patterns began to appear, I purposely began to explore them further in subsequent interviews by asking participants specific questions in these areas. These emerging trends appeared so consistent among the participants in the

beginning of the interview process that I decided to move to another location in order to ensure that teens in one location were not self-selected because of their similar characteristics. However, interviewing in different locations did not produce any different trends from what I had begun to see in the beginning. During this process, the themes appeared even stronger by their presence in subsequent interviews. Interviews that followed in the north further revealed similar trends as those conducted earlier on in the south, making them consistent within the group of participants.

#### THEME: Family Influence

The theme of *family influence* was revealed in a number of ways during the interviews with these street youth. Family influences included *family poverty, youth's responsibilities within their families, and family disruption*. These factors were reflected in the interviews in a very significant way and their effects were reported by all of the participants. The participants felt that family played a very important role in their decision to leave home.

#### *Family Poverty*

Participants described poverty within their families and how that influenced them to leave their families. Participants generally had parents who were peasant farmers who worked on a small piece of land for subsistence, parents who were unemployed, petty trades' people, were deceased or had abandoned the family. All of the participants were from families that they

considered very poor. These families could not provide the basic necessities of food, shelter and clothing for their families.

Poverty in these families played a role in getting these youth out of their homes and subsequently onto the streets. Because of the poverty in the families, some youth felt they needed to leave home and find a way of rescuing their families from poverty. Andy, a 17 year old living in Northern Ghana, asked how he takes care of his family while on the streets. Andy whose father is deceased responded:

I do not make enough to help them and that worries me a lot. When I wake up at night all I do is worry about my mother and my siblings. I think about how they will make it, although I do not have enough to feed myself. I feel that, being the oldest, I have to struggle through life in order to support them but I can not bear to think what they must be going through as young as my siblings are.

Asked what his plans for the future are with respect to helping his family out, Andy said:

I will like to find a trade that will enable me support my family in future. My colleagues have made it to high school so I want to be able to fit in with them someday. I have to find something to do. I am thinking that if I get enough money, I will start my own business here at the market and build a future for myself. I need a trade that will make me employable. Having a skill will help my siblings and my own children in future.

These feelings of wanting to financially rescue their families were not restricted to youth in one geographical area. Jerry, 17 year old from Southern Ghana who had been living on the streets for three years, echoed these same

feelings about the need to help his family back in the village when asked what he was trying to save his money for:

I am trying to save enough money to be able to send some home to my mother. I have sent a little money home to my family before and even bought clothes for my younger brother. As for my mother, I have sent money home to her before, but these days I do not make enough to be able to send anything back to her and that worries me.

Although these sentiments about the need to financially rescue their families back in the village were mostly reported by the male participants, a few of the female participants reported that same goal. Mary, a 15 year old prostitute interviewed at a shelter in Southern Ghana was asked why she had not returned home to her family. Mary responded "I want to be able to find some money and some stuff that I could use when I return to the village. I will like to take something back home to my mother and my younger siblings".

Besides feelings of needing to rescue their families from poverty, youth's decisions to leave home were influenced by their families' poverty in other ways. Some of the youth felt that they could not survive under the conditions at home which had resulted from their families' poverty. These youth felt they had to leave their families to ensure their own survival. For instance, when asked what he expected to get from the streets when he decided to leave home, Allan, a 15 year old from Northern Ghana said, "I did not know that I will end up living on the streets. I was told that kids could work for food in the marketplace so I came". Allan continues in a very emotional and soft

tone of voice, "My parents are alive but they have nothing to help them take care of us... My dad is a very poor man so he goes out to glean some grain off some fields for us to use for food".

This feeling is also shared by Rita, a 17 year old from Northern Ghana. Asked about the quality of her life before she came to the streets, replied "Before I came here, I only had one meal a day at home because that was all the family could afford". She goes on to compare her life on the streets to her life at home by saying that life on the streets is "...not that great but it would not be any better at home. At least here I can work and provide for myself". These youth did not talk about needing to rescue their families from poverty, rather they talked about a need for survival in the city as a result of the circumstances they faced at home as a consequence of poverty. As seen from the above response, some of the youth felt that the streets provided more hope for survival than being home in poverty.

Other youth experienced family poverty in a different way. Although these street youth migrated from areas that are generally impoverished, some youth felt that their families' poverty contributed in making the limited available resources in the villages even more difficult to attain because their parents were poor. Some youth could not afford education in the villages because their families could not afford the attendance fees for them to be in school. As a result these youth felt that they had no career opportunities to

preserve their future because their families' poverty prevented them from being able to have opportunities such as education. Ammon, a 16 year old from Northern Ghana had this to say when asked about the possibility of going to school in his village:

Okay...you know, I went to school for a little while but you know it is all about the money. These days money is hard to come by so my family could not afford the attendance fees to have me in school so I had to drop out. I went to join my parents on the family farm but as you know that will not provide any guarantee for my future so I decided to leave the village.

This feeling is shared by Rachel, a 15 year old from Southern Ghana. When asked whether she had ever had the opportunity to attend school in her village she responds with a smile and shakes her head from one side to another:

School? Are you kidding me? Who has money to take nine children to school? Definitely not my family. My parents can never afford to put one person through school not to mention nine children. My parents' income is not enough to even feed and clothe the family.

These views reflect what majority of the participants thought about their chances of getting education in the rural areas. The street youth felt that the ability to attend school was reserved for those families who could afford to pay and not for their families who lived in poverty.

#### *Youth's Responsibility to Their Families*

Although the role of *youth's responsibility to their families* as a contributing factor to youth homelessness was not expected and has not been documented in the literature, this concept came out very strong through the

interviews. Generally the majority of the street youth interviewed felt a strong sense of commitment to their families and the need to fulfill a family role. These youth reported that it was their responsibility to step in and take care of their mothers and siblings if their fathers who were usually the breadwinners passed away in the future. This feeling was expressed by the male youth who were the oldest sibling in the family, the first male in cases where the youth was not the oldest in the family, or the oldest female in families where all the siblings were female.

Most of the youth reported that their fathers were the sole breadwinners of their families. In instances where the father was still living, the youth felt the need to prepare for the role of breadwinner for the future as in the case of Ammon, a 16 year old from Northern Ghana living on the streets:

I: Why did you decide to leave your village and your family?

R: Okay, this is how it happened. You know I already mentioned to you that my parents are subsistent farmers.

I: Yes

R: So you know, I am the oldest son of the family, so if I do not find out what my future is going to be and be able to be responsible in future, it would be a very big problem for my family if my father passes away some day.

I: So you are doing this because of your family?

R: Yes, my sisters do not have this burden because they are females and would be married off from the family. As the man, I become the breadwinner in case anything happens to my parents. It is therefore my

responsibility to find something to look forward to for my future and to prepare for that role.

This feeling was also expressed by Jeremy, a 17 year old from Southern Ghana. Jeremy reported being able to travel to the city by stealing his father's bicycle and selling it to transport himself. When asked why he did that to his family and whether he hears from them, Jeremy said:

No, they are very angry with me for leaving. They do not understand why I did what I did. You know, I figured that if I could leave the village, that gives the family a chance to have one person as the breadwinner in future. We can not just stay there in our poverty. I just wish they understood me. I may have taken what my father really cherished but I think it will be for the better in the long run. I could purchase several bicycles for him in future when I am working. I plan to go back home when I have made it and I know they will not be mad at me any longer.

John, a 17 year-old from Southern Ghana echoed these same feelings.

John lived with his father and his siblings in the village before his departure to the city. His mother had died and he felt the need to prepare to take care of his siblings in case his father passed away in future. John expressed this need to prepare for his responsibility toward his family in this interview:

I: Did you live with your parents?

R: Well, my mother is dead but my dad was the one who took care of me

I: What does your father do in the village?

R: He repairs broken radios

I: Do you have siblings?

R: Yes I have two siblings

I: Where are you in the birth order?

R: I am the oldest

I: Does your position in the family bring any responsibilities to you?

R: Because I am the oldest, my siblings look up to me to be the next provider in case anything happened to our father. My siblings expect me to be the breadwinner in my father's absence.

While Ammon, John, and Jeremy still have living fathers and only feel the need to prepare for their own roles as breadwinners in future, some of the youth had already lost their fathers who were the breadwinners of their families and were under pressure to provide for their families. Ambrose, the oldest four children and a frail 16 year-old from Northern Ghana had lost his father and had dropped out of school. Ambrose had a chronically ill mother still living in the village. During our interview, Ambrose shared his feelings about his responsibility to his family by saying:

Well I need a lot of work. I need so much help. Among my siblings, I am the only one out on my own. I will like to be able to succeed out here and rescue them some day. Now that my father is no longer alive, I have to be ready to provide for my siblings in future. I have to succeed. My mother lives in that village with his brother because she is chronically ill. I will like to be able to take care of her. You know while we were working on the farm in the village, we did not have enough land and we could not get much to take care of our family. I will really like to be able to provide for my family and provide medical care for my mother.

Jerry, a 17 year old from Southern Ghana who had lost his father also expressed the need to step into his father's role as the breadwinner and

caretaker of his family. Although not the first born, Jerry's older siblings were female and so being the first male child, he felt responsible to his family. In a very serious but very calm tone of voice, Jerry expressed the following:

I: Do you have siblings?

R: Yes. I have four siblings. Two brothers and two sisters.

I: Are you the oldest kid?

R: No, but I am the first male.

I: So what is your role in your family after your father's death?

R: There is no one else to be responsible for the family but me. When he died, I was still young so I could not assume my role as the one who should take care of the family, but my family still looked up to me to assume all the male responsibilities at home. I felt burdened after my father died. I had no money to provide for them. I heard from my friends that with hard work I could make it here in the city. I thought that by coming here I could make something of myself and be able to help my family out. I wanted to learn a trade that would fetch me some money in future.

The female participants did not share the same feelings regarding their responsibilities to their families. Of the 11 female participants, only 2 of them expressed the need to be responsible for their families' upkeep. The two who reported the feeling of responsibility to their families were the oldest siblings in families with only female children. Sue, a 16 year-old from Northern Ghana expressed this in the following dialogue during the interview:

I: Do you have siblings?

R: Yes.

I: How many?

R: Two. We are three sisters.

I: I come from a family of girls too. Are you the youngest?

R: No, I am the eldest.

I: Where are the other two?

R: The other two are home.

I: How did you end up here?

R: My mother has no job and my dad left us to find work in the city so my mom and I agreed that I come and try to find work while she stays home with my younger siblings

The other female participants felt that they did not have the responsibility to take care of their families in the future because their male siblings were expected to have that role. Even in cases where the female was the oldest sibling, she felt her younger male siblings were responsible as the future breadwinners. The females were generally not under pressure to provide for their families. For instance Rhonda, is a 16 year-old from Northern Ghana, and the oldest of three responded when asked whether her siblings looked up to her to provide for them in future as the oldest sibling "No, they do not look up to me. They are the males and so that is their responsibility."

#### *Family Disruption*

One other reason related to the family that was frequently cited for why these youth left home and became homeless was *family disruption*. Family

disruption occurred when there was a death of a parent, especially the death of a father or when there was a physical separation between the family and a parent especially fathers, as a result of divorce or abandonment. In the absence of the parent, the family was faced with disintegration and a resultant production of a street child. Although the participants regularly cited the death of a father as the reason for becoming homeless, a few reported parental relationship disruption or parental abandonment. Many of the participants felt that the absence of a parent, especially if the parent was the breadwinner, meant the family faced harder times financially and faced a dramatic reduction in their families' already limited resources.

Interestingly, whereas 7 of the 13 males reported the death of a parent as a reason for leaving home, none of the females reported the death of a parent or even had a deceased parent. Death of a parent was thus a male reported incident. For instance Andy, a 17 year-old from Northern Ghana who had reported that his father had died before his decision to leave home said:

I was finding everything difficult. Before my father died he took care of everything but after he died it was very difficult. You know how it is, when he died some people tried to help us but when you depend on someone else, they easily become annoyed with you. When my father died, I went to live with my uncle who was supposed to take care of me. He was not doing that because he also had his own children to take care of. In that case he could not take me to school but just have me work for him. That way I could make money for him but my future was hopeless. I then decided to go to the city where I could work for my own future and take care of my siblings.

Jerry, a 17 year-old from Southern Ghana, asked why he decided to leave the village and come out to the city, responded:

Okay, I was in school until my father died and I could not continue because there was nobody to pay my attendance fees after that so I had to withdraw. I did nothing after that. I saw my life wasting away just spending it on the farm so I decided to do something about it.

The death of a parent, especially a father was usually the beginning of the family disintegrating. In order for these families to cope with the limited resources now available, in some cases, each person had to begin to fend for themselves or other relatives may step in to help. In either case, the family stood a risk of disintegration because since no one relative could take over the entire family, the family had to go separate ways to get help. In other instances, youth had to drop out of school and seek employment in the city. Ambrose, a 16 year-old from Northern Ghana had lost his father and was currently living on the streets away from his mother and siblings. Asked about his mother, Ambrose said:

When my father passed away all of the kids were sent out on fosterage with my aunts because my mother could not take care of them. My mother had to move and live with her own brother. She was to take me along with her but I chose to move into the city to try to fend for myself. I came here and started to work as a shoeshine boy.

Some of the youth did not experience family disruption through the death of a parent but through abandonment. Some participants reported that their parents had left the village in search of jobs in the cities and had never returned or had left as a result of divorce. Fathers were more often reported as

having departed than mothers. Unlike the death of a parent which was largely reported by the male participants, both genders equally reported incidents of a departed parent. Talking about how his mother had abandoned the family after his father's death, Albert was very somber when he stated:

My father was working as a construction worker. When he worked, we lived in the village until he died. When he died, my older brothers were helping to take care of us but they left for the city to try to find work. I stayed with my mother in the village...She was a petty trader. When we were in the village, I was with my mother and my siblings. She told us that she was going to the city market to trade some goods and she never returned....Yes. So I decided that I had to come here and try to survive.

Sue, a 16 year-old from Northern Ghana had earlier reported that her father had left her mother in search of work in the city. She also dropped out of school and left the village and her mother in search of a job in the city, and linked her father's departure to her inability to be in school and her subsequent life on the streets. She said:

I have had a little bit of school. I dropped out after the sixth grade...I attended a school in my village...My mom has no stable job and my dad left so I had to drop out. I could not afford to continue to go to school. They asked for attendance fees and my mother could not come up with it so I was driven out of school. So that ended my education.

It is clear that the physical separation of a parent, whether through death or abandonment is a very significant event on these youth and their families. Most of the youth interviewed cited that as a predominant reason why they left home. Removal of a parental figure through death, divorce, or abandonment

was normally a trigger of other events that eventually got the youth on the street.

#### THEME: Environmental Influence

Besides factors related to the family that contribute to a youth's decision to leave home, some factors within the environments where these youth operate may play a role in their decisions to leave home and subsequently become homeless. Youth generally presented two environmental factors that influenced their decision to leave home. These conditions were found in the rural areas from where they migrated, and the urban areas to which they tended to migrate. These influences from the environment have been described below.

##### *Lack of Economic and Career Opportunities in Rural Areas*

Throughout the interview, participants overwhelmingly felt that the rural environments where they were born were not suitable for supporting their goals for the future. These youth felt that even if they were motivated to succeed and prepare to be productive adults in the future, the rural environment did not provide any real opportunities to support them. Even where there was opportunity to attend school in the village, participants felt that there were no opportunities beyond the village education. For example, Mavis, a 17 year-old from the South was asked why she did not go to school in her village, and her response was, "Well going to school in the village was a waste of time because

those who graduated from school are just like us who did not go to school.”

She continued, “They don’t have work employment, they all end up on the farm just like all of us”. Youth in the village felt very hopeless for the future because of the unavailability of opportunities, a consequence of lack of infrastructural development in rural Ghana.

Jerry, a 17 year-old from the South also shared the same view. Jerry had been on the streets for 3 years since he was 14 years old. Asked why he decided to leave his home in the village, the following dialogue ensued:

I: Why did you decide to leave your village for Accra?

R: Okay, I did not have anything to do for a living over there so I decided to come to Accra and try to find a job. When I first arrived here, I worked as a porter at the market place until I saw some of the workers from this shelter at the market place and they informed me about this shelter. Since then I have been working and coming here.

I: So did you not like any job in the village or was there no job available at all for you to do?

R: Okay, the only thing I could do was to go and work on the farm but that is not what you want to do for the rest of your life. I wanted to learn a trade which I could use for real employment.

I: What makes this place better than your village?

R: Although I suffer a lot on these streets, I at least make some money to feed myself and to occasionally provide for my family. In my village I have nothing and I have no hope of ever making it in life. On the farm, we do not even own a large enough piece of land to produce enough food. The farm is just to provide some food for the family but nothing else. It is a very small farm.

Rita, a 17 year-old girl from the North echoed these sentiments when asked whether she had considered trying anything in the village before deciding to pursue her options in the city, said, “Yes, I had the desire to work for a living but there was nothing available in the village for me so I thought this would be a better option”. These youth clearly felt that they had no opportunities in the rural areas for economic or social mobility and they felt hopeless in that environment.

*Perception of Economic and Career Opportunity in Urban Areas*

While these youth felt the rural areas were inadequate in terms of availability of opportunities, they had a perception of availability of opportunities for jobs and careers in the urban areas. As a result, whereas conditions in the rural community served to push these youth out of their homes, the urban areas provided a welcoming alternative for their intended migration. While participants cited factors within their families as the reasons why they felt they needed to leave home, 20 of the 24 participants stated that they chose to move to the city in search of career and educational or financial opportunity. Seventeen year-old Mavis had left her home in the village and had been living on the streets of Accra for about 18 months. Asked why she moved to the city she stated:

I thought I could work there for a while and be able to earn enough money to become a hairdresser’s apprentice here in the city. I realized from the beginning that I wanted to be engaged in commerce so I had a plan to work for money, to learn hair-braiding and be able to have my

own business in future. My friend had talked to me about how much I could earn working here so I thought it would be a good idea to come.

Linda, a 15 year-old girl from the south also expressed the desire for opportunity in the urban area as a reason for leaving home. She said, "I had a friend who told me about the opportunities here in the city so I came with her to this place." Rachel from the north of Ghana expressed the same view by saying "It is a long story; you know we had decided to leave for a different city and not this one. Later on we heard that there were more opportunities here for success so we decided on this one.

The two contrasting environments worked together to influence youth's decision to leave their rural homes for the urban areas with hopes of finding jobs and subsequently end up on the streets. The perception of better opportunities in the urban areas is however not realistic, leaving these youth with nowhere else to go once they begin to face difficulties in their new home. For instance Allan, a 15 year-old boy who had been living on the streets for two years was asked what his expectations of the city were before he left the village. Allan's response was "I did not know that I would be living on the streets. I was told that kids could work at the marketplace for their needs so I came". This unrealistic expectation was reported by most of the participants. Sixteen year-old Ramia, presented the resulting dilemma these youth face when she stated:

Some of us may also come out here with the goal of finding some money. Once we get here and realize that life out here is so difficult, getting out of here and going back home becomes a very difficult thing to do. One finds it difficult to make ends meet on the street but also find it difficult to seek help from one's family in the village to enable one transport oneself home.

These forces within the environment where these youth operate have been seen to act together to perpetuate youth homelessness among these youth.

#### THEME: Cultural Influence

Cultural expectations and practices of these youth were also cited as reasons why youth felt it necessary to leave their rural homes in search of opportunity in the urban areas. These rural youth reported that they are culturally expected to play important roles at the time of their marriage. They felt pressured to meet these requirements before the time came for them to be married or they wanted to leave the village in order to avoid forced marriage. Another cultural influence was reflected in a breakdown in a cultural system of fosterage. These concepts are explained below.

#### *Marriage*

Marital requirements were reported as a reason for leaving home only by females from the north of Ghana. They reported feeling forced to marry whenever their parents felt they were of age, and also the need to be prepared to fulfill their cultural requirements when they were married. Some of the youth decided to run away from what they felt was pressure from their family to be married off before they felt ready for it. Girls from the north felt that their

cultural role was to become homemakers and their families did not see the need to invest in them but just waited to have them married off. Rita, a 17 year old reported that she had never been taken to school. She had earlier on indicated that her parents had attempted to have her brothers in school but could not afford it. She stated the reason for not being in school in the following dialogue:

I: So who got to go to school?

R: Only the boys were sent to school and not the girls

I: So what would have happened if you stayed home and did nothing?

R: I would be married off to someone that I barely know.

I: Is that what happens?

R: Yes, the girls are not sent to school because they were going to be married off anyway.

Rita felt that if she had stayed home in the village with her family, she would be forced to marry someone that her family picked for her. With that in mind, she decided to run away to the city. Another example is Ramia, a 16 year-old who shared the same feeling about being married off by her family through the following dialogue:

I: Ramia, tell me how you decided to come here.

R: I had friends who had come here to work...My sister who is a year older than me just got married to a much older man she never knew and I knew it was my turn to go. I did not want to be married to a man twice my age and who may even have other wives. I knew how miserable it is to be in such a marriage and not even have utensils to feed and bathe a

baby. I decided after my sister was married that I was not going to be like her so I saved money secretly and joined a group of girls who were coming here...and they brought me along. My mom knew about it but nobody else knew.

I: Did your mother like the idea?

R: Yes, she has seen how my sister is suffering in her marriage. My father would have been very mad at her if he knew that my mother knew about my plans to leave.

A male participant from the north confirmed this role of the females in the village when he talked about his responsibility to his family. Ammon, the 16 year-old is the fifth child in his family but he had earlier reported that it was his responsibility to be his family's breadwinner when his father died. Asked why his older siblings were not the ones expected to take responsibility of the family, he responded:

... My sisters do not have this burden because they are females and would be married off from the family. As the man, I become the breadwinner in case anything happens to my parents. It is therefore my responsibility to find something to look forward to for my future and to prepare for that role.

This is evidence of the cultural expectations of the females in the north as offspring whose main role is to be married off as a homemaker.

While Rita and Ramia felt they had to escape to the city to avoid being given away to men they barely knew, others felt they had to go to the city in order to get better prepared for their cultural role in marriage when the time came. Raquel, a 16 year-old from the north when asked what she expected in

the city before she left home, brought up her future role as married women by this response:

I never went to school and there is not much I can do in my village for money... I did not want to be married off with no money so I decided to come too. There are drivers who drive to the city and they secretly help us with transportation here. We get to come here and they direct us to where the other girls from our village are. I came with a group of girls and found the others here... I would not have come here. What actually brought me here is my desire to learn how to sew. I wanted to become a seamstress so that if I got married I will not have to be dependent on my husband. I wanted a regular source of income. I came here to work and buy a sewing machine. I was not in school and all I did was to help on the farm.

Fifteen year-old Rachel also felt that the need to be prepared for marriage was her primary reason for leaving home. She also reported that the need to leave and be better prepared was even more necessary because of the stigma that they face in their villages by getting married ill-prepared. During the interview, Rachel voiced her opinion this way when asked why she chose to come to the city:

R: You know what forces us out here? It is all about marriage.

I: Marriage?

R: Yes marriage, the requirements of marriage. Nowadays when one is ready to marry, one has to have all the necessary materials to set up a home. One's parents are too poor nowadays to be able to provide such things to prepare one for marriage. Meanwhile when you tell them you want to go to the city to work for it, they do not agree to it, that is why we run away.

I: Okay, that makes sense. So what happens to those people who go into marriage without these materials you are talking about?

R: It becomes an insult and a disgrace. It labels one as a poor person and it is stigmatizing.

I: Is it possible to come across these household goods without leaving the village?

R: No. it is not possible

I: Why?

R: There are no jobs available to make that possible

From this dialogue, it is clear that while these young women accepted their cultural roles as homemakers, they felt ill-equipped to effectively perform that role. In some instances, not being well-equipped for the role was stigmatizing and also brought suffering. These youth also felt that while there was the cultural demand on them to be equipped with household items such as pots and pans to play their roles as homemakers, the rural areas did not provide them with opportunities to acquire these items. This situation forced them to leave the villages for the city with hopes of working to buy these items and ended up homeless.

#### *Breakdown of Fosterage System*

Fosterage has been cited in the literature by Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes (2002) as a contributing factor of homelessness in Africa. Fosterage, a practice of sending young relatives to more wealthy urban relatives to work in exchange for the opportunities available in the urban areas, was found as an influence among the participants. Some of the youth talked about how failed attempts at this cultural practice of fosterage had led to them choosing to live

on the streets. An example of the fosterage system in action is seen with Allan, a 15 year-old who is one of six kids in his family. Because his parents could not afford to take care of them they have been put in fosterage. Asked where his siblings were, Allan responded, "One lives with my aunt, and some live with my grandmother. I am trying to find work and go to school".

Under the fosterage system, some parents may send their children off to live and work for someone else in exchange for money which is supposed to be saved up for the child to retrieve in future. Marge, a 16 year-old who was working as a prostitute had lived with her grandmother in the village until she turned 13 and was later sent off to Accra to work for a foster family. Marge reported facing abuse in fosterage and decided to run away from her foster parent. Marge's encounter is revealed in the following dialogue which ensued when Marge was asked about her home:

R: I lived with my grandmother till I was 13 years old and my mother sent for me to work for somebody here in the city.

I: So your Mom sent for you purposely for this job?

Yes, the woman was a trader who sold a lot of stuff so I lived with her and she paid my monthly wages to my mother. My mom came to see her once a month to get the money from her.

R: Is that what you still do for a living?

As for the woman, I ran away from her a while back ago.

I: Why did you leave her?

R: The woman had some other girls with her. We used to fight all the time and the woman always abused me verbally because she said I was not very productive to her.

Other participants talked about the failures in the fosterage system. Raquel, a 16 year-old compared the success of fosterage in the past to what happens in recent times in the following statement:

Raquel: The reason why fosterage is no longer practiced in recent times is that... No. it no longer works because most people take in their rural relatives and have them stay and serve them until they are ready to go away and marry. For most people, the foster families maltreat these children in fosterage. We hear of stories where foster children are beaten and have gone without food. In some cases, foster families use these children for a long time and send them back with nothing more than the child could have worked for. Some foster families also promise to provide these things at the beginning but fail to fulfill their promises in the end.

These problems with the fosterage system in recent years have made the system unappealing to youth in the rural areas who see a better alternative in being on their own on the streets. Whereas fosterage has an intention of linking rural folks to their urban kin, it is flawed by the inherent abuses that go with it. Presented in the words of 15 year-old Rachel, "Sometimes it is better for the child to live in poverty in the village with parents than to live in wealth with others but suffer for it".

#### *Summary and interpretation of themes*

Consistent with literature on street youth in Africa (Mufume, 2000) and street youth in Ghana (Beauchemin, 1999), results of this study show a compelling link between rural urban migration and youth homelessness in

Ghana. The three themes that emerged from the research to explain this trend of rural urban migration among these street children are *family influence*, *environmental influence*, and *cultural influence*. Family influences include *family poverty*, *family disruption*, and *responsibilities of youth to their families*. The environmental influences relate to the rural environments where these youth originate and the urban environments where they end up as street youth. Cultural influences were seen in the cultural requirements of marriage, and the failures within the cultural practice of fosterage. These themes were seen to play a major role in youth's decision to leave their homes and eventually become street youth in Ghana.

Western literature on street youth have largely linked youth homelessness to runaway behavior among youth (e.g. Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz, 1991; Unger, Kipke, et al., 1998; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). These studies cite runaway behavior as the main cause of youth homelessness in Western cultures. Looking at the results of this study, homelessness among the youth is largely linked to rural urban migration in Ghana and is consistent with the literature on street youth in Africa (Beauchemin, 1999; Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes, 2002; Shanahan, 2002).

Although both migration and running away involve youth leaving their families and becoming street youth, hostile family situations like parental abuse which determine the decision to leave home in Western contexts (Ek &

Steelman, 1988; Patterson-Taylor, 2000; Teare & Peterson, 1994; Tyler et al., 2000; Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 1999) were not experienced by the participants of this study. Looking at the fact that homeless youth in Ghana tend to leave their homes in the rural communities, there is a temptation to label them as runaway youth. The term runaway youth is however not suitable for the population of this study because although they leave their homes, the reason for leaving is not necessarily to run from their families, but in some cases to save their families.

#### *Poverty, Family Disruption, and Youth Responsibility*

The first theme that emerged was family influence. Family influences include extreme poverty in the family, disruption of the family due to death of a parent, and parental divorce or abandonment. These family situations were sometimes coupled with youth's feelings of being financially responsible for their families. Whereas family poverty and family disruption have been found by previous researchers in the Ghanaian context as influencing rural urban migration in Ghana (Beauchemin, 1999) and subsequent homelessness, the role of family responsibility had not been previously identified.

Almost all of the teenagers interviewed were from extremely poor rural homes with one coming from the urban area. The majority of the participants felt that they had to leave their rural home because their families could not provide for their basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Most of these

children felt that their families' poverty denied them access to the few resources available in the rural areas, such as education. A common trend revealed in the study was to first drop out of school and wander around for a while before leaving their rural homes (e.g. Beauchemin, 1999). These youth felt that they could go to the urban areas and find jobs to sustain them. Others who reported poverty in their families felt that they needed to leave for the urban areas to find work and rescue their families out of poverty. Moving to the urban areas provided these rural youngsters hope of getting out of poverty and subsequently helping their families out of poverty.

Among rural families where these participants originate, fathers are considered the sole breadwinners of their families. Whenever the family structure is disrupted through the death of the father, divorce or abandonment (Beauchemin, 1999), it results in the source of the family's sustenance being taken away. In the absence of the father, the oldest male sibling, or the oldest female in families without male offspring reported being expected to assume the role of breadwinner. This put pressure on these rural youth to succeed financially and be able to assume their role in their families. As seen in the results of this study, most of the youth felt that the rural communities did not present them with opportunities for meeting their responsibilities to their families in the rural areas and felt they had to leave for the urban area. This

finding links this first theme of family influence to the second theme of environmental influence.

*Disparity in rural-urban development as an environmental influence*

Environmental influence was seen in two ways. Youth in the study felt that their rural environment did not provide enough opportunity for them to succeed. The lack of economic opportunities in the rural areas has been reported in previous studies on Ghana (Assibey-Mensah, 1998; Fertimen & Hall, 1999; Quist, 2001). The second concept within environmental influence is that these youth perceived the urban area as a place of abundant opportunity to support their goals and aspirations, as documented by Beauchemin, and Mufume.

Beauchemin (1999), reported that the government of Ghana had attempted to improve the rural communities by providing them with electricity. According to him, the electricity in the rural areas had an unintended consequence of providing the use of radio and television transmission to the rural areas which educated the rural folks about the glamour of the city in an unrealistic way. Consequently rural Ghanaians developed a very unrealistic view of what the urban areas could offer them. These two environmental forces work together by leading rural youth away from the rural areas, and toward the urban areas in search of opportunity.

Participants revealed that their perceptions of the opportunities in the urban areas which influenced them to leave also prevented them from returning to their families when they faced difficulty in the urban areas. The perception of the urban areas as places of opportunity is shared by all rural inhabitants including the adults. Youth who decide to seek refuge back in their rural homes once they are unsuccessful on the urban streets are faced with the stigma of being considered failures by those who remain in the village.

#### *Marriage and Fosterage as Cultural Influences*

Cultural influence is the third theme that emerged from the study. Two cultural influences on the decision of youth to leave home include marriage, and fosterage. Since these are cultural, some of its influence was limited geographically. The influence of marriage was seen only among the female participants from the North of Ghana while fosterage was reported across regions.

Although not mentioned in any of the studies conducted in Ghana, fosterage has been cited as a strong link to youth homelessness in Africa by Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes (2002). The results of this study showed that fosterage contributes to the situation in Ghana. This is a traditional practice of sending poor rural youth to live with and serve wealthier urban relatives in exchange for opportunities in the urban areas. Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes cited the decline of African economies in recent years as the reason for failures

of the fosterage system. The authors theorized that because of declining economies in Africa, urban relatives are unable to afford the extra responsibility of having their rural relatives living with them in the big cities. These economic constraints have therefore made the fosterage system unavailable and resulting in urban-bound rural youth living on the streets instead.

While this theory was revealed in the data, other reasons for the failure of fosterage were reported by the participants. Some of the youth reported that while fosterage is still a practice, that option was no longer appealing to these rural youth because foster families were abusive and exploitative. Some of the youth who had been in fosterage had run away from their host families to the streets to avoid the abuse they received in these homes. This study therefore links fosterage to street youth in Ghana for the first time.

The second concept discussed under cultural influence is marriage. Beauchemin's 1999 study of street children in Ghana listed cultural practices in rural areas as one of the reasons why youth leave the rural areas and migrate to the urban areas. In this study, marriage emerged as a factor only among the female participants from the north. A possible reason for this geographical factor in marriage as an influence could be that different cultures exist in different parts of Ghana, and marriage requirements may be different. For those participants who cited marriage as a factor in their decision to leave

home, they reported the need to leave and escape early marriage to a much older man whom they did not get to pick. This finding is consistent with Beauchemin's (1999) study which documents the effects of unfavorable traditional practices in the rural areas.

Another dimension to marriage as reported by the participants is the need to prepare for the cultural role of marriage. This was revealed for the first time in this study. Female participants from the north felt that it was their cultural responsibility to get married and live as homemakers in their marital homes. As a cultural requirement, these rural youth are expected to have all the household ware such as pots and pans needed to be good housewives at the time of their marriage. A consequence of not having the required items at the time of marriage is stigma. These youth felt that the rural area did not provide the means to procure these needed items. Also, their poor parents could not provide them with these items, and they believed that they would have the opportunity to work and acquire these items in the urban areas. Consequently, youth decided to migrate to the urban areas to prepare for this cultural role.

In Ghana, homelessness among the youth is a result of rural-urban migration. The factors that are linked to rural urban migration are summed up in three broad themes as family influence, environmental influence, and cultural influence. Youth who migrate to the urban areas end up on the streets for lack of resources in the urban areas, leading to youth settling on the streets.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the perceptions that street youth in Ghana have about their decisions to leave home and become homeless. Studies on this topic had shown a link between street youth in Ghana, and rural urban migration (Beauchemin, 1999). Those studies concluded that youth migrated from the rural areas to the urban areas where they expected to find opportunities for a better life (Shanahan, 2002). Acting on very unrealistic views of the existing opportunities in the urban areas, immigrating youth soon find out that there are no support systems available to them in their new urban environments, leading them to end up homeless and living on the streets (Beauchemin, 1999).

The findings of the present study showed this link between homeless youth and rural urban migration. The study focused on how these youth understood their decisions to leave home, and the family situations that prompted these decisions. It appears from this study that the major contributing factors to youth's decisions to migrate from their rural homes were family, environmental, and cultural factors. Consistent with findings on this phenomenon in African contexts (Mufume, 2000), the study showed that youth migrated from rural areas because they were escaping poverty from home and from their rural communities.

Lured by the prospects of economic abundance in the urban areas, these youth felt they could migrate to the cities in order to fulfill their obligations to their families and to their culture. The study also revealed that since the entire rural population shares the unrealistic expectations of what urban life provides, rural youth face a difficult challenge of being seen as failures if they returned home to the rural community when they faced difficulty an experience previously reported by Beauchemin. Immigrating youth therefore chose to live on the streets than return home to their rural homes.

Contrary to what we know about street youth in western literature (e.g. Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz, 1991; Unger, Kipke, et al., 1998; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990), this study revealed that street youth are not a product of runaway behavior in Ghana. Although youth leave their rural homes for the urban areas where they end up homeless, the study showed that Ghanaian youth typically do not leave their families in an attempt to separate themselves from their families. Most Ghanaian youth understand their departure as a necessary action that leads to making their families better, thereby fulfilling their obligations to their families.

Findings from this research also revealed differences in influences of gender and geographical location. Rural males are more influenced by the death of a father than females. Males felt an immediate responsibility for their family's upkeep when the father who was the sole breadwinner died. This

finding was not revealed among the females since they do not assume the care of their families in case of parental death. The study showed that females from the north were the only ones whose decision was influenced by marriage requirements. This is because culture plays a very important role in rites of passage such as marriage. This is more so in the north than in the south. The cultural requirements around marriage in the north put pressure on northern females in rural communities to fulfill goals that are not attainable in their communities and hence they migrate in search of opportunities elsewhere.

*Applying Symbolic Interaction and Family Systems Theory*

I approached this study from a *symbolic interactionist* and a *family systems* perspective. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, I expected that youth's understanding of why they choose to leave their homes and live on the streets may be different from the rest of the society's understanding of this action. This study revealed a perspective that these youth have about their situation.

While the Ghana government and general population believe that these youngsters are simply a product of irresponsible parenting (Beauchemin, 1999), the teens interviewed did not share in this parental blame. Also, while this population is considered runaway youth by the society and some outreach agencies in Ghana, these youth understand their actions as meeting the needs of their families, not running away from them. The study showed how

environment and cultural realities were being used by these street kids to make meaning and identity. This process influenced how they decided to live on the street. To this end, symbolic interaction theory helped an understanding of this perspective.

Family systems theory was used in an attempt to examine the circumstances within families that may be contributing to youth's decisions to leave home. The study showed that families influence youth's decisions to leave because of the roles that these youth felt they had within their families. Having these roles of oldest sibling in their families, youth do not have the resources required to fulfill these duties within their families. Consequently these youth may look elsewhere, such as in an urban area to find the resources to meet their responsibilities to their families. Suprasystem factors (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993) were also observed through the influences to these youth of the resources available to them as a result of rural underdevelopment and urban opportunities. Cultural factors influencing these youth's perceptions are also products of systems theory.

Results of this study also showed that using life course theory (Bengston & Allen, 1993) would have been beneficial in explaining youth's decisions to leave home. I found that a very important determinant of whether youth migrated to the urban area or stayed home was birth order. The concept of *family time*, a person's position within the family in life course theory

(Bengston & Allen, 1993), may be helpful in explaining the trend seen in the results with oldest siblings leaving home. Results from the study indicate that the oldest male in each family or the oldest female in an all-female family was more likely to migrate than the other children in the family. Family time helps to explain the responsibility that these youth face within their families as a result of their position held within their families. In order to fulfill their roles bestowed on them as a result of being the oldest siblings, these youth face pressure to succeed and hence decide to migrate to the city in search of opportunity.

Symbolic interaction and systems theory aided an understanding of how street youth in Ghana arrive at their decisions to leave their rural homes. While these theories helped to explain the phenomenon, life course theory (Bengston & Allen, 1993) emerged as a theory that could be of importance in a further understanding of youth homelessness in the Ghanaian context.

Family systems (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993) theory allowed me to examine the family situations within which these youth made their decision to leave home in the first place (e.g. Melson, 1995). This approach allowed the study to reveal the impact of family situations contributing to youth migration and the contextual nature of the factors affecting this phenomenon in Ghana. Symbolic Interaction theory was useful in allowing for the study to reveal how these youth perceive of their circumstance and how these meanings influence

their decision to leave home (Blumer, 1969) . These findings help to present the Ghanaian situation as unique and one that has implications for specific action in approaching this situation.

#### *Youth Policies and Programs in Ghana*

The government of Ghana has not made any attempts to actively combat this street child phenomenon and blames parents as irresponsible (Beauchemin, 1999). From this study, it is clear that the problem of street youth in Ghana reaches beyond bad parenting. Street youth who end up in delinquent acts are arrested by law enforcement (Beauchemin, 1999). The role of law enforcement in combating street youth is not effective in stopping the problem. Although the stories presented in this study represent the stories of only 24 street youth, findings may be beneficial in providing direction to policy and programs. From this study, it is clear that the best policy measure that can have the strongest impact in combating this problem is prevention. A very effective policy direction will be to target the youth before they leave their rural communities. To this end, providing affordable but good quality education, job-skills training, and jobs as part of the government's broad scheme of rural development will be helpful.

Government policy should also aim at educating rural communities about what it takes to succeed in the urban areas. This can be done by designing specific educational rallies in rural communities, or by using the

radios and televisions which misinform the rural people in the first place. If rural communities are educated about the difficulties of succeeding in the urban areas for people with no employable skills, it would not only enlighten these youth and provide them with a more realistic view of the urban areas, but it would help to take away the pressure that youth face when they are faced with the option of staying on urban streets, or returning home to their families.

Some organizations that currently work to reach out to street youth in Ghana approach the phenomenon from a western definition of the problem of street youth and design programs to target delinquency. These organizations will benefit by shifting their focus from treating these street youth as delinquent youth who need personal intervention to seeing the problem as more of a rural development phenomenon. Policies will succeed in dealing with this problem only when they target the families of these youth. Programs will be most effective if they provide rural families with the resources necessary for youth to function effectively within their own families. Majority of the participants stated that they wanted to work and be productive within their families.

#### *Limitations*

Participants for the study were obtained through a purposive sampling which limited participants to teenagers between 15 and 17 years old and to those who had experienced street life for 6 months or more. Although this

method was most appropriate for the goals of the study (Berg, 2001), it is possible that people falling outside these limits have different experiences than those in the sample. Participation in the study was voluntary, leaving a possibility that people who chose to not participate may have had different reasons for not participating. However as an exploratory study, there was the need to have a purposive sample that will help with a beginning understanding of the issues at work in leading to this understudied phenomenon.

Although, participants in the study demonstrated a very strong link between the findings and youth homelessness, further studies are needed to ensure a better understanding of this phenomenon. Interviews with family members would also be helpful. Despite these limitations, the study provides a very useful tool in helping to contribute to the dialogue of street youth in the Ghanaian context.

#### *Potential for Future Research*

The findings, if confirmed in further studies, can be very useful by contributing to a better understanding of the street youth problem within the Ghanaian context. Previous literature on the topic had a lot of unanswered questions and had not applied any theories in the study of this phenomenon. Findings from this study help by contributing additional information to enhance a further understanding of this problem.

This study was purely exploratory in an understudied area. The results show associations but do not necessarily establish causation. The study however opens up this phenomenon to more questions that can be answered through future research. With larger samples and studies conducted over longer periods of time, this study provides directions that will help to lead future research in specific ways. This area also provides an opportunity for ethnographic research to help reveal more about the phenomenon. In addition, quantitative studies with larger samples could be conducted in future to corroborate these results.

### *Conclusion*

This study demonstrates that in Ghana, homelessness among the youth comes as a result of rural-urban migration (e.g. Beauchemin, 1999; Shanahan, 2002; Van Dinther, 2000). Rural-Urban migration is triggered by several factors from attractions of urban employment, the need to be productive within their families, to increasing rejection of traditional practices such as forced marriage. Unfortunately, the support systems in the cities are not adequate enough to provide for the subsistence needs of immigrating youth with adverse consequences (Beauchemin, 1999). Some problems associated with this problem are the growth of marginal employment in prostitution and instrumental crime, increase in sexually transmitted and other diseases, and loss of human resources necessary for long term economic development.

Current government policy toward the problem has been one of inaction and blaming the situation on bad parenting (Beauchemin, 1999). As a much understudied phenomenon in the Ghanaian context, well-meaning outreach programs approach the problem from the perspective of western scholars (e.g. Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz, 1991; Unger, Kipke, et al., 1998; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990) leading to a very rapid and consistent growth in the numbers of street children on the streets.

This study provides a look into the unique circumstances that influence the growth of this problem in Ghana. I found that the situation in Ghana is a much more structural than in the west and hence calls for solutions that are different from those required in the West. In order for policies and programs to be effective, we need to understand the real causes of the problem. This study contributes to the knowledge that is missing from the discussion of this issue in Ghana, and with further research, more effective solutions can be found.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A  
***INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT***

**Project Title: Young, Homeless and on the Streets: Voices of Street Children from Ghana's Streets.**  
**Principal Investigator: Samuel Vuchinich. Department of Human Development and Family Sciences**

I am a student in the United States and I study issues related to families. I am from Ghana and that is why I am interested in learning about Ghanaian families. I am interested in talking to you because you live here on the streets by yourself, away from your family and you are between ages 15 and 17. I am interested in finding out about people like you and your experiences here on the streets. Once I am done with these interviews, the information will be used to write an article or a book that other people both here and in the United States can read about. I believe that by having the written information available to people both here and in the United States, people who can help street children in Ghana, will know the truth about your lives and may be able to provide the help needed to help people who live on the streets. If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for two to three hours. I will interview you at one about your experience before and after leaving home. I will be asking questions about why you left home, your family information, your relationship with your family and your experiences here on the streets. The interview will be audio taped, unless you object to that. In that case I will write down a summary of our conversation. If you do not object to having our conversation audio taped, you will have the option of listening to a portion of the conversation on the tape if you would like to. If you agree to be interviewed, you can choose not to answer questions that you would rather not answer, and if at anytime you decide not to continue to talk to me, you are free to go. Whatever we have talked about will still be included in the findings unless you specifically request that it be not included. You may feel uncomfortable talking about this potentially sensitive issue about your life. If during our talk you experience any difficulty emotionally you will be free to choose to discontinue with the conversation and I will be happy to direct you to an agency that can provide assistance to you. If after our conversation you feel you need assistance with emotions that you may experience, I will be happy to offer assistance in the same way if you so choose. You will be paid an amount of 4000 cedis to buy lunch for your time. Even if you choose not to complete the interview, you will still be given the lunch money. You will also be directed to appropriate resources available to you at the moment if you choose to use their services. I think that society may benefit

from our talk by becoming better informed about homeless populations on the street. I will not record your name on the tape and will assign a pseudonym to your response in order to protect your identity. The interview will be translated into English and I will have two Ghanaian students who are fluent in both languages to check to make sure our talk has been translated correctly.

If you want me to give you some time to consider whether you want to be a part of this, I will arrange to meet with you again, and if at that time you have any questions, I can answer them, otherwise thank you for your time. Let me know if you have any questions about this research. After the interviews, I will go back to the United States and you will not be able to reach me in person. I will however direct you to the Catholic Action for Street Children where the staff will be able to provide you with the necessary information for reaching me after I leave the country.

## Appendix B (IRB Approval)



OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

312 Kerr Administration Building · Corvallis, Oregon · 97331-2140

E-MAIL: [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu) · PHONE: (541) 737-3437 · FAX: (541) 737-3093

## REPORT OF REVIEW

TO: Sam Vuchinich,  
Human Development and Family Sciences

RE: Young, Homeless, and on the Streets: Voices of Street Children on Ghana's Streets (Student Researcher:  
Vivian Amantana)

Protocol No. 2090

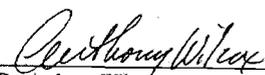
The referenced project was reviewed under the guidelines of Oregon State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has **approved** the application. This approval will expire on **1/15/2004**. This new request was reviewed at the Full Board level. A copy of this information will be provided to the full IRB committee.

Enclosed with this letter please find the original informed consent document for this project, which has received the IRB stamp. The original informed consent document has been stamped to ensure that only current, approved informed consent forms are used to enroll participants in this study. All participants must receive the IRB-stamped informed consent document. Make copies of this original as needed.

- Any proposed change to the approved protocol, informed consent form(s), or testing instrument(s) must be submitted using the MODIFICATION REQUEST FORM. Allow sufficient time for review and approval by the committee before any changes are implemented. Immediate action may be taken where necessary to eliminate apparent hazards to subjects, but this modification to the approved project must be reported immediately to the IRB.
- In the event that a human participant in this study experiences an outcome that is not expected and routine and that results in bodily injury and/or psychological, emotional, or physical harm or stress, it must be reported to the IRB Coordinator within three days of the occurrence using the ADVERSE EVENT FORM.
- If a complaint from a participant is received, you will be contacted for further information.
- Please go to the IRB web site at: <http://osu.orst.edu/research/RegulatoryCompliance/HumanSubjects.html> to access the MODIFICATION REQUEST FORM and the ADVERSE EVENT FORM as needed.

Before the expiration date noted above, a Status Report will be sent to either close or renew this project. It is imperative that the Status Report is completed and submitted by the due date indicated or the project must be suspended to be compliant with federal policies.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Coordinator at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu) or by phone at (541) 737-3437.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Anthony Wilcox  
Institutional Review Board Chair

Date: January 16, 2003

pc: 2090 file

## Appendix C

## Interview Guide

*Demographic Information*

Name

Age

City of origin

Length of stay on the street

Level of education

*Family Information*

Parents

Number of Siblings

Other family members

Parents' employment status

*Leaving Home*

When and how did you leave home?

What was your relationship with family members like when you left?

What was your motivation for leaving?

What factors contributed to your decision?

Why did you choose this particular destination?

*Experiencing the Streets*

What has been your experience on the streets?

How are you treated by other people on the street?

What is your relationship with other people who do not live on the streets?

How are you treated by law enforcement officers?

Do you have any opportunities for education?

How do you eat each day?

Do you get sick? How do you cope with sickness?

Have your expectations of the streets been met or not and why?

How do you spend your days?

How do you make a living here?

Do you have any goals for the future?

What are you doing toward meeting your future goals?

If not, what will be helpful for you to meet your goals?

*Perceptions of Family*

Did your family play a role in influencing your decision to leave?

What has been your relationship with your family since coming to the streets?

How do you feel about those still back home?

Do you contact them? If so, how often? If not why?

Is there anything you wish they knew about you now?

*Conclusion*

What would you like policy makers to know in order for them to be able to help you?

What else do you want to share with me?

What will be helpful to you?