BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Invisible Citizens: A Study on Challenges of Street Children in Harare, CBD

BY

Lisabel Resi (B221491B)

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Supervisor: Dr C. Muchemwa

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ABSTRACT

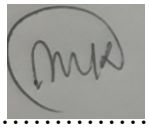
The study`s aim was to explore the lived conditions and daily experiences of street children in Harare, CBD. The research examines key issues of poverty, unequal resource distribution, exposure to violence, use of drug and substance abuse and limited healthcare services. The study also explored the social, economic, political and family factors that drive children onto the streets as well as the coping mechanisms they adopt to survive in a cruel environment in alignment with the Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994) and Structural Violence Theory (1969). The study examines the major challenges faced by street-connected children, poverty, social marginalization, inadequate social protection and exploitation. The study employed qualitative research approach, data was collected through interviews, observations and secondary sources to provide a better understanding. The findings reveal that street children face persistent marginalization and are often overlooked in policy and social support systems. The study further highlights the role of government institutions, non-governmental organizations and the community in addressing these challenges. It concludes by recommending inclusive policies, improved social services and sustainable intervention programs aimed at reintegrating street children into society. Overall, the research seeks to give a voice to street connected children who are often ignored and to promote awareness and action toward improving their well-being.

DECLARATION FORM

I, LISABEL RESI (B221491B), hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work. All sources of information used in this study have been duly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic standards. This research was conducted with integrity and in compliance with ethical guidelines. Any assistance received during the course of this study has been appropriately recognized. I take full responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be found in this work.

Student L. Resi Date 03 /09 /26

Supervisor  Date 03/ 09/26

Chairperson…… Date 08/09/26

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all street children whose lives and experience inspired this study. Their resilience, strength and courage in the face of adversity serve as a powerful reminder of the urgent need for compassion, inclusion and social justice.

I also dedicated this work to my family whose unwavering support, encouragement and belief in me made this journey possible. To my friends and loved ones, thank you for your motivation and understanding throughout this process.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all individuals and organizations working diligently to improve the lives of vulnerable children. I also hope that this research contributes in some way toward creating a better and more inclusive society for all.

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LIST OF ABBRIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBD	Central Business District
UNICEF	United Nations International Children`s Emergency Fund
ICPS	Integration Child Protection Scheme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ESAPs	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
UNDP	Nations Development Programme
CSC	Consortium for Street Children
ZNCWC	Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, the term “street children” encompasses two main categories, as defined by UNICEF, children on the street and children of the street. The phenomenon of children living and working on the streets reflects global deep-seated social, economic and political failure of state institutions and the public. In India, despite the established legal frameworks such as the Juvenile Justice Act of 2015 and programs like the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), children are still prone to streetism due to weak enforcement and under-resourced systems, especially in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata. According to the Bangladesh Survey (2022), 82% of the street children are boys between the age of 5 to 17 years resulting from poverty and family disintegration due to displacement, deaths of parents and exploitation leading to abuse and harassment from passers-by and pedestrians. Afghanistan identifies street children because of an ongoing war and economic destruction which are exacerbated by years of conflict and the Taliban`s return to power in 2021. UNESCO (2018), street children are denied access to formal education due to poverty.

In African context, street children are a manifestation of systemic failure and long-standing inequalities. Invisible citizens, this term presents a segment of the population that exists on the absolute margins of society, navigating daily realities of vulnerability, exclusion and survival. These children are stateless, they lack birth registration and national identity which hinder them from accessing fundamental rights to healthcare, education and state protection (Save the Children organization, 2022). In Kenya, street girls are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence. These

children are labeled “chokora” meaning scavengers or garbage collectors in Kiswahili. Street children are victims of sexual exploitation, forced labor and trafficking especially from the public authorities, (Consortium for Street Children, 2022). Nigeria, they are called “area boys” and the major fear of street children is police brutality as they are viewed as criminal elements not as rights-bearing citizens. This act of name calling justifies their vulnerability, exclusion and emphasizes their invisibility, (Panter-Brick, 2002).

Regional patterns reveal a shared trend of street-connected children where poverty, weak enforcement of child protection laws and limited access to basic needs such as education, healthcare, shelter and food are the driving factors to streetism, with an approximately hundred million street children. UN Committee General Comment No. 21 (2017) required states to adopt holistic, rights-based national strategies of prevention, protection and durable solutions to ease high growth rate of street-connected children, especially in developing countries. They live in abandoned buildings, sleep in pavements or under bridges, with limited access to clean water, sanitation and healthcare, exposing them to extreme weather, violent and sexual abuse and human trafficking (Gumbo, 2016).

In the Zimbabwean context, Harare CBD, street children range from 5 to 18 years. The Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs) of the 1990s**,** hyperinflation and economic decline in the 2000s, caused an increase in deindustrialization leading to unemployment and severe decline in public service delivery (Kamete, 2013). The Zimbabwean constitution holds provisions establishing child`s rights to be protected from economic and sexual exploitation, child labour and maltreatment, however, the enforcement of these laws is weak. Street children sniffy glue (guka), smoke marijuana to cope with mechanisms for hunger, cold and trauma. Zimbabwe has tried to

strengthen the child-protection framework, Children`s Amendment Act 2023, however implementation gaps persist for street-connected children.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

To examine the problems being faced by street-connected children in Harare`s CBD.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The plight of street children in Harare, CBD displays a critical yet ignored complex deep-rooted struggles and systemic inequalities. Street children are marginalized and rendered invisible in societies. They face a myriad of challenges such as healthcare, education, food and shelter. Their experiences are shaped by socio-economic factors that include poverty, displacement and family disintegration which exacerbate their vulnerability and establish exclusion from societies. According to Sweta (2000), these children have not reached adulthood and the streets have become their customary residence and source of livelihood. As a result, they often face stigmatization and criminalization from the public authorities, hindering their ability to seek support and protection. Streetism imposes significant economic costs in Zimbabwe as it represents substantial waste of human potential towards development, fundamental breakdown of traditional family structures and public health crisis. This results in a violent environment full of illiteracy, a generation of drug and substance prisoners and intergenerational poverty cycles, (Genemo, 2019).

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To identify socio-economic and structural factors leading children to the streets.
2. To analyze lived conditions of street children living in Harare, CBD.
3. To assess challenges being faced by street children.

4. To recommend policy and program options that align to Zimbabwean law and child-rights standards.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do street children survive physical, psychological trauma and perceive social inequality?
2. What are the daily living strategies of street children in Harare, CBD?
3. What are the socio-economic and structural conditions contributing to rise of street children?
4. How can the rights and welfare of street children be protected and promoted?

1.6 Assumptions of the Study

1. The growing number of street children in Harare CBD often results in stigmatization, human exploitation, criminal actions and use of drug substances.
2. The system of overlooking street children often undermines human capital development, social stability and long-term economic growth.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is important because it illuminates the overlooked intricate realities of street children in Harare, CBD. Taking into consideration their vulnerable status, it gives a voice to marginalized and invisible population whose voices are rarely heard in policy formulation due to underrepresentation, stigma and stereotyping, weak governance and policy implementation. The research is imperative as it bridges a crucial knowledge gap by offering detailed insights into the root causes of streetism such as family breakdown, economic decline and systemic failures that push children onto the streets. The research can act as a guide to government departments, NGOs

and community-based organizations in designing target interventions to improve the welfare and rights of street children.

The research provides empirical evidence of realities of connected to street children in Zimbabwe. It opens passage for future research on child rights and urban poverty while promoting advocacy for inclusive policies that recognize street-connected children as full citizens deserving of protection, dignity and education. With the aim to change lives and motivate meaningful social change.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited to the street children living and operating within Harare Central Business District, not extending to surrounding areas. It mainly focuses on street children, both girls and boys between the age of 5 to 17 years. The study is restricted to current struggles or challenges being faced by street children. The study is limited to events and data from the period of 2023 to date and will primarily draw information from street children themselves, government agencies, NGO staff and community volunteers working with street children.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

The study faced several limitations because street children are mobile, they move from place to place within the CBD, making it difficult to consistently engage with the same participants. Some street children may be unwilling to share their stories because of fear and traumatic past experiences. Also, for the researcher to interact with these children, the researcher had to give them money or food to persuade them to share their information. The study was confined to Harare CBD, thereby limiting the scope of street children`s views and insights. The

data may not be up to date, and the existing reports may be outdated, which then can affect the comparative analysis of the findings.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

1. **Invisible citizens-** are those people who are not recognized or acknowledged by the state or society and therefore denied access to basic rights and services, (Lister, 2007)
2. **Street children**- they are children who live and work on the streets, often without family support, education, healthcare and other basic services, (UNICEF, 2017).
3. **Struggles-** refers to difficulties and challenges that individuals or groups face in various aspects of life, (Hooks,2000).
4. **Socioeconomic disparities-** these are social and economic conditions that influence an individual`s or group`s quality of life, opportunities and outcomes, (WHO, 2018)

1.11 Dissertation Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one focused on the background of the study, purpose of the study, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, delimitations and limitations of the study, definition of key terms and the chapter summary.

Chapter Two: Literature review and theoretical framework

This chapter will be focusing on the theoretical framework, literature review, research gaps and scholarly views, critiques and chapter summary.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter focuses on outlining the methodology that the researcher is to apply which is the qualitative research approach, research design, target population, research sample, data collection tools, document analysis, data presentation analysis and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: Data presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The chapter will be looking at the research findings. The findings will be presented, analyzed and discussed, compared to other findings from other related studies.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusion, Recommendations and Area of Further Research

This chapter focuses on the summary of the whole project, conclusion and recommendations and areas of further research.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The chapter reviews the theoretical framework and existing literature aiming to address the research objectives. The literature review will examine the challenges of street children, analyzing the social, economic and health challenges they face as marginalized and excluded citizens from mainstream society. By analyzing existing research, this study aims to fill the knowledge gaps and provide a detailed understanding of the challenges of street children. This literature review will also discuss the theoretical framework that will be used in this study, highlighting complexities of street children`s lives and factors contributing to their invisibility.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The study will obtain two theoretical frameworks, Human Security Theory developed by (UNDP, 1994) and the Structural Violence Theory by (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 1990). These two perspectives aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges of street children in Harare, CBD.

2.2.1 Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994)

Human Security Theory was developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994) to support human development and security. The theory moves beyond the traditional notion of state security and specifically states its seven dimensions that are economic, environmental, food, personal, community, health and political security which are to promote human dignity and protection. This research focuses mainly on food, personal, health, economic

and environmental security. Human Security Theory posits that all the seven dimensions are paramount to every individual and should be promoted to alleviate chronic threats like hunger, poverty, diseases and environmental threats. The Human Development Report that was provided by UNDP, states that “Human security is freedom from fear and freedom from want”, meaning that every individual has the right to access all the domestic needs and operate freely without fear of being harassed or detained. According to Kaldor (2007), human security is threatened by diseases, natural disasters, homelessness and poverty meaning that not only wars are threat to human security rather poor governance and ignorance are also posing as risk to human security. Therefore, this theory is crucial for the study as it paves a way for a broad examination of the challenges of street children in Harare, CBD, through social exclusion, health risks and human exploitation.

2.1.2 Structural Violence Theory (Galtung, 1969)

Structural Violence Theory was first established by John Galtung in 1969. The theory explains how social structures and institutions are indirectly causing harm to individuals, especially the marginalized groups by preventing them from accessing their fundamental needs like education, shelter and healthcare. Street children often face challenges of exposure to abuse, police brutality and societal labelling because of rooted inequalities and social exclusion. The theory portrays street children as casualties of broader societal structures that perpetuate inequality and a reflection of systemic violence that is embedded in social, economic and political systems, (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 1990). In relation to street children in Harare, CBD, this theory can be employed to critically examine social exclusion of street children and its impact on human development as well as national development. The theory postulates harm that is being caused by structured economy, politics and institutions without direct physical violence. De Negri (2022),

argues that structural violence is central not only peripheral to human rights as it perpetrates poor access to basic needs, poverty, inequality and continuous social exclusion to the marginalized groups. Therefore, this theory seeks to explore ways in which violence can be alleviated to ensure equity and equality to all citizens.

Literature review explores existing research on the challenges of street children, drawing from global, continental, regional and national perspectives to acknowledge knowledge gaps.

2.2. Global, Continental and Reginal Existing Literature on Problems of Street Children.

Existing literature shows that street children are a complex issue worldwide being driven by social, economic, political and environmental factors such as civil wars, orphanhood, inequality, poverty, displacement and weak child protection laws. In most cases, race, ethnicity and national discrimination have driven people into the streets. According to UNICEF (2023), in South Asia street children engage in street vending and begging to supplement their families due to high rate of unemployment and poverty. In Morocco, reports show that twenty children can squat on a street corner for safety and to worm each other, they appear sitting on the ground with dark and scarred faces, wounds and rags. They appear aggressive to hide their great vulnerability and be able to adjust to harsh conditions of sustaining and looking after oneself. Newly street children are abused and must undergo a baptism of servitude for older street children; they face sexual and physical abuse. To sustain their livelihood, these children engage in informal labour and substance consumption, (Abebe and Golga, 2024). According to 2021 data from the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs, in Semarang, an approximate of 9,113 street children was recorded and an initiative of Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2014 was introduced aiming at assisting

street children. Globally, the triggers of increase in street children are the same as that of Harare, CBD.

Continental literature reviews, countless studies showcase challenges of street children. An Analysis of the Child`s Right to Housing Implementation for Street Children in Burundi: Case of Kirundo City (Sindayigaya, 2022) recorded that street children spend their nights on verandas, under bridges or inside unfinished buildings, begging for food in restaurants and most times, they dwindle at bus stops or marketplaces. Nasir and Khalid (2015), posits that children who are not under care of their parents are more vulnerable to a collection of vices, misinformed choices and bad influence. Ugwuadu (2017), posits that in Nigeria, street of Iwo Road of Ibadan, street children engage in pushing wheelbarrow and carrying loads, facing challenges of attacks from thieves, arrest from police, road accidents and ritual attacks. Children on the streets: The hidden plight of street children in Southern Asia indicated the vulnerability of these children as the marginalized population who experience severe violations of their rights and encounter multiple deprivations from the society and state at large such as birth certificates and identity cards. In a case study conducted in Bangladesh, it showed qualitative records of 75 child participants from the three sites in Dhaka exploring how street children engaged in financial transactions to build resilience and confidence to sustain themselves under extreme adversities. These examples identify the interconnectedness of continental experiences and that of street children in Harare, CBD.

Regional reports provide evidence of drug and substance abuse by homeless youths as a way of avoiding the existing situation of homelessness and psychological trauma they experience. A study carried out by Manomano, Nyanhoto and Gutura (2021) establishes that chances of wide spreading HIV/AIDs are very high as these children use and share needles and engage in sexual activities without protection. “The Lived Experiences of Street Children in Durban, South Africa”:

A study by Hills, Meyer-Weitz and Asante (2016) explore the experiences of street children in Durban highlighting violence, substance abuse and resilience as a day-to-day practice. Use of drugs like nyawope and cannabis has become the only way out for most street children to relieve their burdens leading to intensive creation of serial criminals, increased rate in rape cases and drug addicts. “The Quest for Survival: Street Children and the Informal Sector”, a study by Gunhidzirai (2023) highlighted the informal activities of street children in Zimbabwe showing their survival strategies, vending, begging, picking food from the garbage and stealing.

2.2.1 Existing Literature on the Challenges of Street Children in Zimbabwe

Studies within the Zimbabwean context shows multiple challenges being faced by street children, criminal acts like stealing and snatching items from people as a strategy for survival. Studies show insecurities being experienced by street children, economic insecurity, food and health insecurity, educational deprivation, legal insecurity, sexual exploitation and stigmatization from society. In Bulawayo, (Ndlovu, 2016) posits that street children are excluded from social services and always vulnerable, showcasing that they are deprived of their fundamental rights to health, food and education which cripple their future and national development. Nyathi (2024, July 11), Herald 2024 published reports on streetkids terrorizing pedestrians in Harare, CBD especially at African Unite Square and Harare Gardens like snatching food and grasping people`s legs to beg for money and sometimes they even attack people with sharp objects or beer bottles.

Street children also known as zvigunduru or masvina in Zimbabwe tend to sleep in corridors, mostly under Joina City footbridge and Harare gardens with only rags as blankets, at Mbare marketplace, they sleep in markets and spend their day lights in bins or margins of the city. Recently in Harare there was a case of the “Most Wanted” street youth at Copacabana bus terminal

who was charged of murder of Takudzwa Mombeshora killed in a quest to steal his money and cell phone along Nelson Mandela Street in January 2025, (H-Metro, 2025). Street girls are the most vulnerable and disadvantages, they are often troubled and at risk. Also, they resort to illicit means of survival, engaging in sex trade to be able to sustain themselves and the little ones under their care. Bulawayo`s lost generation: The street children crisis, a study in Bulawayo shows the struggle of a 11-year-old Nkosilathi preparing his cardboard shelter for the night, sharing the cramped space with three other boys, (Bulawayo24, 2025).

2.2.2 Related Research Conducted on Challenges of Street Children

Few reports have been published on street children in Harare, Poly-Victimisation and Health Risk Behaviors among Street Children: a study by Gunhidzirai and Patel (2024), explore how poly-victimization affects health and behavior of street children in form sexual exploitation, violence from society as well as other street kids, emotional and psychological abuse resulting to mental health issues. A study on Street Children in Zimbabwe by CSC (2018) highlight how children migrated into the street due to parental neglection, poverty and abuse leading to society perceiving them as little thieves and criminals in making drawing this perspective from their moral values and behavior which they inherited for them to cope with their living conditions. Some of these children were abandoned by their parents in a quest to look for greener pasters in countries like South Africa, Botswana and other countries, also some run away from homes due to constant abuse. Nehanda Radio (2017) reported an estimated number of 4 701 children living and working on the streets of Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare and Beitbridge.

According to Bulawayo24 News, (2025), a resident of Emthunzini testified that “most of these street children are escaping poverty, abuse from parents and close relatives and others are

driven onto the street by an idea of freedom or fast cash". Street children often face arrest from police officers for assault, robbery, vandalism, rape and substance abuse activities (Dodo & Mwale, 2018). Malnutrition in Children: a study in Chitungwiza by Nyoni (2020) explored several cases of children who have no access to good food, who are living from leftovers and food from bins. Street children are involved in drug trafficking as they are used by drug dealers to distribute illegal drugs and substances, in Mabvuku, Chitungwiza and Epworth.

2.2.3 Critical Analysis of Existing Literature on Challenges of Street Children

Several studies on street-connected children only focus on their problems, while not paying much attention to the problems they are causing and the fact that some of these children left their homes on their own due to peer pressure and the idea of freedom. Some of these street children or street adults were pushed onto the streets through urbanization and have chosen to live in the street rather than going to rural areas claiming to be looking for greener pastures. The society is being blamed of discriminating street children, however this is due to their moral values and behaviors such as snatching handbags, phones from pedestrians, committing armed robbery cases, vandalization and recently there was a case of a girl who was abducted, kept and raped for three days while being fed food from bins and leftovers in Harare Gardens by street boys. They face harassment from local authorities because of drug use, violence and use of vulgar language towards pedestrians, especially when a pedestrian refuses to give them whatever they would have asked for. For example, even when offered shelter by Child Care Institutions, some of these street children will rather live in streets because they want to remain independent and economic survival pulls them back onto the streets, however this may be because of strict rules within the institutions, lack of freedom and poor facilities, (Chinyoka, 2017). Street children are also distracting the city council from operating their clean up campaigns as they often litter around the city.

This study seeks to explore challenges of street children in Harare, CBD, giving insights to what can be exercised to combat or reduce the rising numbers of street children in the city. The research employs the human security theory to calculate the insecurities and social exclusion being experienced by street children from social services and assess how they are managing to sustain themselves, portraying their survival strategies. The studies use Human Security Theory and Structural Violence Theory to examine dimensions of food insecurity, deprivation of health care, personal growth, environmental security from the local officials, the police who often harass and detent street children, educational disparities between the poor and the rich and unemployment. Structural violence is portrayed by weak enforcement of child protection and social policy initiatives and interventions that promote social inclusion and human rights to all, including street children as stated in the Children`s Amendment Act No. 8 of 2023.

Therefore, this study is crucial especially in addressing issues of increased rate of drug and substance abuse by street children, robbery cases, HIV/AIDs and early pregnancies of young street girls, issues of street children who are killed, found dead or abused by businessmen for ritual purposes, and police brutality. The aim of this research is to initiate policy reforms to safeguard and sustain the livelihoods of street children through social inclusiveness and provide the bases for social services access.

2.2.4 Effectiveness of Current Policies and Interventions in Addressing Challenges of Street Children in Harare, CBD.

The current policies and interventions towards challenges of street children in Harare, CBD are effectively limited due to many factors like limited resources and weak law enforcements.

Zimbabwe has enacted a Children`s Act (Chapter 5:06) which was amended in 2001 and the Children`s Amendment Act No. 8 of 2023 as well as the Child Justice Bill to guard the rights and freedoms of children. However, the enforcement of these laws remains weak especially in the case of street children due to poor finances, lack of coordination between the states institutions and NGOs leading to social exclusion of street children and gaps in health care services of street children.

There is the National Orphan Care Policy, a framework that was established to support vulnerable children including street children, however its operations are being undermined by limited resources and social norms which are driving orphans, young girls into early marriages which is triggering them to flee to the street in search of freedom and safety.

Also, there is Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children (ZNCWC), offers limited services as some of the unique needs of street children are not being catered for due to limited scope of social protection to unregistered children, street children.

Limited community support towards the orphaned, abandoned and the poor, thereby exposing these children to economic hardships, health risks and psychosocial challenges surrounding street life.

Policies and interventions are failing to address these challenges due to corruption, inadequate understanding of the lived experiences of street-connected children, needs and lack of coordination efforts among stakeholders contributing to gaps in services.

2.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature of the insecurities being experienced by street children, highlighting the theoretical frameworks that are guiding the research. The theoretical framework, Human Security Theory and Structural Violence Theory have emphasized personal, food and health insecurities because of constructed barriers of economic, social and political practices in Harare, CBD. To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that includes the government agencies, communities, children themselves as well as non-governmental organizations. Thus, this research aims to contribute to the development of effective policies and interventions that prioritize and promote the well-being, dignity and rights of these children.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEACH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies the research design and methods used to explore the wonders of street children in Harare Central Business District. The chapter outlines the study design, population and sampling procedures, data-collection instruments, procedures for ensuring validity and reliability, data methods, ethical reflections and study limitations used to explore the invisibility and challenges of street-connected children. The methodological selections are guided by established research practice that provides a roadmap that shows how the research findings were achieved.

3.2 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of street children in Harare, CBD. Kothari (2014) states that qualitative approach serves as a blueprint that guides the researcher to conduct a study and maintain focus on the objectives. The research design emphasized an understanding of social reality of these children through participants` narratives, behaviors and attitudes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, the design provided detailed accounts of socio-economic conditions, public interactions and daily survival strategies and the experiences of children living and working on the streets of Harare. This design permitted investigation of complex socio-environmental factors such street economies, family breakdowns, policing and service provisions, (Patton, 2015). The research employed this approach because of its flexibility in data collection and clear contextual

understanding of all relative dimensions that shape and influence the livelihoods of street children, that is social, economic, political and cultural factors.

3.3 Research Design

Research design outlined the construction and agenda for collecting, analyzing and understanding data. The study employed descriptive approach aiming to reveal detailed appearances, forms and situations of street children`s livelihoods (Yin, 2018). This method provided crucial and significant data by allowing use of various data sources such as observations, interviews, focus groups, and document review to ample tangible information.

The design explained or viewed street children within Harare as urban and policy delinquent. The research design enabled the researcher to explore real-life challenges of street children in Harare, CBD. Unlike exploratory research design that focuses on the already made research, descriptive research design underscores an understanding of what is happening, why and how it happens.

The design is crucial as it allowed the researcher to conduct and present evidence data analysis of real-life situations and picturing the unforeseen survival strategies of street connected children. It used interviews, observations and document analysis as data collection methods, which facilitates capturing of street children`s experiences, narratives and visible damage that stands as evidence of street life struggles. Kothari (2014) posits that descriptive research aims to detail appearances, forms and conditions of street life. Hence, the flexibility of the research design makes it suitable and appropriate to use and provide a better understanding of complex issues surrounding streetism and the injustices and insecurities being experienced by street children.

3.4 Target and Sample Population

The study targeted street connected children, those who work and live in streets to earn a living or meal and return home at night. The target population also includes secondary contributors who can be or are affected by rapid growth of streetism such as key informants, social workers, police officers, NGO personnel, vendors and community leaders who interact with these children in Harare, CBD.

3.5 Sample Size

Taherdoost (2017) posits that the sample size refers to the number of applicants and reflection designated from a larger population to represent it in a research study. It articulates the scope and credibility of the research findings. In this research, a sample size of 30 participants was selected to provide a manageable yet representative range of perspectives relevant to the study. The sample specifically comprises children on the streets and of the streets, within Harare, especially those in the CBD, the key informants and outreach workers who are involved with these children regularly. The sampling approach aimed to capture a better understanding of the views and perspectives of the challenges of street children and stakeholders involved.

3.6 Sampling technique

The research employed non-probability sampling techniques such as purposive and snowball to select participants from the street children population in Harare, CBD. Patton (2015) argues that these techniques are useful for qualitative research and populations that are difficult to access such as street-connected children. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants with relevant experiences and knowledge such as social workers, vendors, NGOs and police officers. Snowball sampling was employed through referrals from peers or outreach workers (Babbie, 2016). This sampling method helped the researcher to gather information from different segments

of the population and ensure that they are all represented. Likewise, this study ensured fair representation from street-connected children, themselves, vendors and authorities to effectively understand the different experiences and perspectives related to streetism.

3.7 Data Collection

Data collection is the process of systematic information gathering. In this case, the academic aims to appreciate the realistic experiences, perceptions of street children and their anxieties.

3.7.1 Interviews

Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) argue that interviews are a qualitative data collection technique that involve face-to-face and direct discussions between the researcher and the participants with the aim to sightsee their experiences and perceptions. The interviews were conducted with individual street children and key informants to express and shade light on the experiences and perceptions of challenges of these street children. Interviews enabled the researcher to probe deeper into participants` emotions, perspectives and feelings, making them effective when studying complex topics such as lived realities of street children. The key participants in this study were the local authorities, the vendors and public and social workers who are familiar with and knowledge of the daily experiences of street children. The interview focused on the background, daily routines, sources of livelihood, relationships, experiences with the public and authorities as well as access to resources by these street children. This enabled follow-up questions, explanations of unclear responses and the opportunity to gather nuanced personal accounts. Unlike focus groups, individual interview prompt honest responses and answers and reduce peer influence.

3.7.2 Direct Observation

Direct observation is a data collection method that allows the researcher to thoroughly lookout and record behaviors, actions and events as the occur logically without manipulating the setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018) The researcher conducted non-participant observation in key street sites in Harare, CBD, such as marketplaces, bus terminals and pavements where they mostly operate and reside. Yin (2018) profoundly states that observations are essential to capture behavioral patterns, environmental conditions and group dynamics. This helped to complement interview data and provide first-hand and contextual data that participants may not have fully articulate in vocal response. This technique can contest information shared during interviews and detect imprecision.

3.7.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a systematic qualitative research method which involves the examination of the existing documented information to extract expressive material related to the research topic being studied. These documents include policy documents, legal files, institutional records, government statements, media publications and NGO reports on street children. These sources identify patterns, themes and contextual insights that are relevant to the research problem.

This method is useful as it involves vulnerable or hard to access populations, street children. In the context of this study, document analysis includes reviewing reports from organisations such as UNICEF, Labour and Social Welfare and local NGOs that work with street-connected children. These documents provide statistics, policy frameworks and past trends that may not be captured by interviews and observations alone.

Document analysis helped the researcher to improve the credibility and validity of the research being studied. It allowed the researcher to track changes time after time, verify prerogatives made by participants and position results within all contextual aspects (O`Leary, 2017). This method helped to develop the study with evidence-based insights and context. However, this method has faults also, as it provided outdated data, scarce resources and it can be difficult to access the information. Therefore, this approach needs to be supplemented by interviews and direct observations.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument, method or study correctly measures what it is projected to measure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, validity ensured that the data collected openly reflects their lived experiences. Reliability is the consistency and dependability of research instruments and procedures (Babbie,2016). It provided the aspect of trustworthiness in which the research process will be logical, traceable and clearly documented. To ensure the credibility and reliability of findings, the study employed Lincoln and Guba`s (1985) criteria of credibility and confirmability. This technique ensured that one can arrive at similar findings when using the same methods and context. Hence, ensuring reliability in the study of street children in Harare, CBD means applying interviews, observation and document analysis across all participants and settings.

3.9 Data Presentation and Analysis

Data presentation and analysis refer to regular methods of shaping, interpreting and explaining data collected. In this study, data presentation involved arranging information from interviews, observations and document analysis into coherent forms and ideas. Braun and Clarke

(2019) posit that data analysis involves examining, categorizing and interpreting the data collected to identify themes and relationships. The study employed thematic analysis to allow for identification, analyzing and reporting subjects within qualitative data such as survival strategies, abuse, social networks and interactions with authorities to reflect the lived realities of street children.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Resnik (2020) argued that ethical considerations are moral principles and professional standards that direct the conduct of research to protect the rights, well-being and dignity of the participants. The researcher ensured that the study is conducted in a manner that protects identities, dignity, respect and confidentiality of the participants. The research must ensure that the participants are well informed and should participate with their consent and should be free to withdraw at any time. Additionally, the researcher ensured that no harm comes to the participants and beneficiaries.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology and design adopted for the study. The researcher employed a qualitative method to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived realities of street children. The chapter provided detailed various data collection methods used in the study such as interviews, observation and document analysis to ensure concrete understanding of challenges of street children in Harare, CBD. The justification for choosing these methods was debated to establish the operational integrity of the study. The chapter also provides a clear and morally sound framework for addressing research questions. This chapter ensured that the next

chapter was guided by the mentioned data collected, providing understandings and results that directly respond to the research objectives and questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the qualitative data that was collected on challenges that street children face in Harare Central Business District. The chapter outlines the investigations that were carried out through interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observation to present rich and practical data. Analysis is framed by Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994) and Structural Violence Theory (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 1990). The results are organized into themes stirring from the participants` pathways onto the streets to the daily struggles for survival, their interactions with society and authorities as well as their aspirations. Direct quotations from participants are also included to provide authentic voices and ground the analysis of their daily experiences. The findings are discussed relating to the developing themes and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

4.1.2 Data Presentation

Category	**Description**
Gender	Mostly male, fewer visible females
Age range	About 10-17 years
Education	Primary school dropouts and incomplete schooling
Place of origin	High-density suburbs and rural areas

4.1.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Data was collected from an intent selected group of 20 participants to capture different perspectives on the challenges of street children in Harare, CBD. The participants included 12 street children, 7 males, reflecting broader regional trends that show an unequal number of boys on the streets (Bangladesh Survey, 2022) and 5 females between the age of 8 to 17 years, 3 social workers, 4 vendors and 1 business operator. The time spent on the streets varied differently from four mouths to over five years. Participants were identified from common gathering points including Harare Gardens, Copacabana Bus Terminals, African Unity Square and Joina City passageway. A majority of out of 13 reported having contact with their relatives, however returning home was not considered a viable option.

4.2 Data Analysis and Discussion

Data analysis presents the analysis and discussion of data collected from interviews, observations and documents. The results disclose a multifaceted web of unified factors that participants defined as pushing them away from their homes and some of them pulling them as permanent residents of the streets. The data is interpreted in relation to the study`s objectives and key themes that include economic instability and family disintegration, abuse and neglection.

4.2.1 Challenges Faced by Street Children

First research objective sought to assess challenges being faced by street-connected children in Harare, CBD. Investigations on participants' responses revealed a collection of organized challenges covering physical, psychological, economic, health and social dimensions. These findings are reliable with the Human Security Theory (UNP,1994) which suggests that

genuine security covers food, health, economic, personal, community and environmental dimensions, all of which were found to be strictly compromised for street children in Harare.

4.2.2 Food Insecurity and Nutritional Deprivation

Food insecurity emerged as one of the most pervasive and acute challenges faced by street children. Majority of participants reported going without food for days and relying on waste food, donations from concerned vendors or proceeds from begging and informal labour. Reliable with Nyoni`s (2020) study on malnutrition in Chitungwiza, this research found that children in Harare`s CBD subsist largely on leftovers and waste food from bins around the city`s markets and Fast-food outlets.

> *"We eat from dustbins or sometimes vendors give us their leftovers food at the end of the day. Some days we do not eat, especially during the week when people are busy and do not want to look at us"*

A female social worker corroborated these accounts, observing that malnutrition is visibly manifested in many children she encounters during outreach. Many children show signs of stunted growth and severe anemia which are direct consequences of chronic food deprivation. This aligns with the food security dimension of the Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994) which confirms that street children are denied the most fundamental human right of adequate nourishment.

4.2.3 Health Insecurity: Well-being, Substance Use and Sexual Exploitation

The physical and mental health of the children is strictly compromised by their living conditions. Constant exposure to elements, lack of sanitation and poor nutrition lead to chronic health problems. Respiratory infections, skin diseases and untreated injuries are commonly

observed and reported. Access to healthcare is almost non-existent due to cost, stigma and lack of documentation. A male participant said

> *"I have this cough for months and when I tried to go to the clinic at the hospital, the security guard chased me away. He says I will scare the real patients."*

They resort to substance use as a coping mechanism. They commonly use marijuana-laced tobacco product locally known as "mutoriro" or "bronco" and glue-sniffing (guka). Children described its use not just for restoration but as a tool for survival.

> *"When you smoke, you forget the cold, you forget the hunger. You forget that your mother is dead. It gives you the courage to go and beg or to fight. Without it, the street will eat you alive,"* said another participant.

This refers to the findings of Gwanzura-Ottemoller and Kesby (2019), who argue that substance use among street children in Harare is a form of self-medication for the profound psychological trauma, hunger and cold they suffer. It serves to dull the pain of their existence and provides the temporary courage needed to face the dangers of the street.

Sexual exploitation was a definite challenge for female participants and several younger male participants. Street girls reported exchanging sexual favors for food, protection and shelter, thus placing them at dangerous risks of sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and psychological trauma. The findings reflect that of Kenya and the broader African context (Consortium for Street Children, 2022) where street girls are among the most marginalized of an already marginalized group.

"When men offer you money or food, you know what they want and you have no choice as a result of going days without solid food or sleep in the cold, you will accept"

4.2.4 Violence, Police Brutality and Legal Insecurity

Street children reported frequent harassment by law enforcement officers, including force displacement during clean-up operations. This reflects the Structural Violence Theory`s conceptualization of harm as rooted not only in direct interpersonal violence but in the very institutions meant to protect citizens (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 1990). Recently, Harare Mayor Jacob Mafume enacted a phase to beautify the First Street in order to give pedestrians a cleaner and welcoming look of the area, however, the process is a disadvantage to the children off the street as they are expose to harassment and violence from the authorities and officials as they are regarded as delinquents and garbage themselves. Also, participants reported inter-gang violence from old street youths. A participant said,

"Police take our belongs and sometimes beat us".

These acts contradict Section 81 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) which guarantees children protection from any forms of abuse and maltreatment. According to Dodo and Mwale (2018), street children often face arrest for vagrancy, assault, substance abuse and robbery with no access to legal representation or child-friendly justice processes. A police officer interviewed accepted pressures, noting that street children are simultaneously victims and perpetrators of crime

"We often receive complaints from the public about these children. They snatch phones, attack vendors and pedestrians."

4.2.5 Educational Deprivation

Educational exclusion was universally reported across all children who participated. Several reported having attended school before entering the streets but described school as inaccessible due to financial constraints. This aligns with UNESCO`s (2018) result that poverty is the primary driver of educational exclusion among street children globally and reflects the educational deprivation dimension of Ndlovu`s (2016) study in Bulawayo.

> *"I went to school up to grade six. My father left home and my mother could not afford the fees, so I started working on the street to help her feed, but then she passed away. Since then, the street has been my home and school"*

A social worker that was interviewed described educational deprivation as a driver to intergenerational poverty, noting that these children will eventually lose access to formal markets and end up in informal survival economies.

4.3 Lived Conditions of Street Children

This second research objective examined the daily living conditions of street children in Harare, CBD. Results revealed deeply harsh material conditions characterized by inadequate shelter, extreme exposure to social stigma and psychosocial distress.

4.3.1 Shelter and Physical Environment

Finding a safe place to sleep is a major challenge. They described sleeping in doorways of closed shops, Joina City footbridge, Harare Gardens, bus terminuses such as Market Square and in abandoned buildings. Participants reported using cardboards boxes, torn clothing and plastic sheets to cover themselves at night. This exposes them to elements, harassment and physical

danger. Consortium for Street Children (2022) and Gumbo (2016) argue that street children live in abandoned buildings, pavements and under bridges with limited access to water, sanitation and protection from extreme weather.



> "*Sleeping is the hardest part. At night we sleep under the bridge in group. You must find a group to sleep with, otherwise you can be attacked. The police can also come at night and chase you away or take you. You can never really sleep, you just rest your eyes. In the rain season it is very bad, we get wet and sick."*

The boy`s statement reveals a state of permanent hyper-vigilance. The lack of protected shelter is a fundamental denial of their right to safety and rest, disseminating a cycle of exhaustion and vulnerability. This resonates with the concept of "spatial tactics" as described by De Certeau

(1984), cited in Mupindu and Dube (2022), where vulnerable populations carve out their own spaces and practices within a cityscape designed to exclude them. The children`s survival depends on their ability to remain mobile and ordinary.

4.3.2 Stigmatization and Social Exclusion

Street children are widely labelled criminals or delinquents, leading to discrimination and exclusion from public spaces. Panter-Brick`s (2002) argues that derogatory labelling such as the terms zvigunduru and masvina reinforces their invisibility and justifies harsh treatment they receive from pedestrians and authorities. These social attitudes challenge reintegration efforts and hinder meaningful engagement between street children and service providers.

4.3.3 Psychosocial Wellbeing and Trauma

The participants noted that they feel ashamed, not wanted, hopelessness and low self-esteem because of the kind of life they are living. They revealed repeated nightmares, depression and hypervigilance consistent with symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Reflecting with Gunhidzirai and Patel`s (2024) study on poly-victimization and health risk behaviors among street children, cumulative exposure to violence, exploitation and loss disturbs the psychological development of street children which manifest in self-destructive coping behaviors such as substance abuse.

4.4 Socio-Economic and Structural Factors Driving Children to the Streets

The third research objective sought to identify the socio-economic and structural conditions leading to the phenomenon of streetism in Harare, CBD. Results revealed that the pathway of children to the street are determined by a complex interplay of household vulnerabilities, community failures and structural insufficiencies in state institutions.

4.4.1 Instability and Family Disintegration

The investigation of this study shows that most of the children living and working on the streets are because of profound poverty and family breakdown. Several children spoke of being unable to afford school fees, which led them to drop out of school and that it was hard for them to get to eat a proper meal daily resulting in them choosing the streets more than staying home. For others, the family unit had disintegrated due to migration, divorce or death. Some participants reported that parents had migrated to Botswana, South Africa or abroad in search of work, leaving children behind. A 14 year from Market Square said,

> *"My mother died while my father was in South Africa. Since then, he never came back and none of my relatives wanted to live with me."*

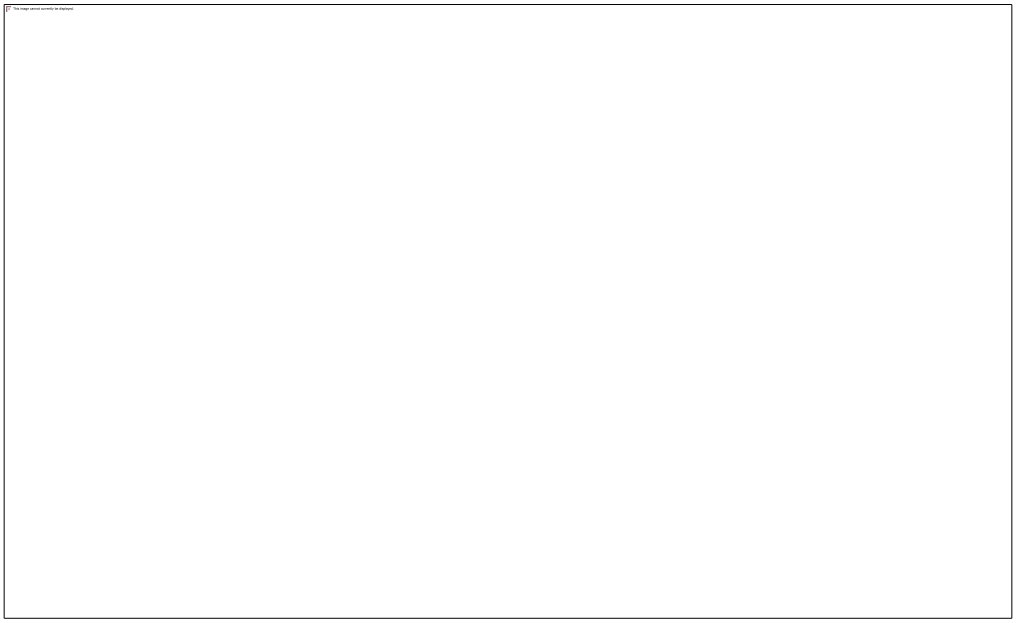
This story highlights how the absence of efficient social safety net, even within the extended family system, directly contributes to child migration to the city. This resonates the work of Bourdillon (2006) on the breakdown of traditional kinship support systems in the modern Zimbabwe.

4.4.2 Abuse and Neglect at Home

Several children, especially girls, cited physical and emotional abuse as main driver for leaving home. Despite the dangers of the street, they see it as a lesser evil compared to the violence they endured or would have endured within their homes.

> *"My aunt, who I was staying with after my parents died, used to beat me for no reason. She would say I was not related to her, that my mother had me out of wedlock and pinned me on her brother when she realized that no man could marry*

her. She could say that my mother is the one who killed her brother with HIV due to her infidelity. One day, I just ran away and never went back. On the street, I can run away from people who wants to hurt me."



This child`s experience underscores the theme of the home as a site violence and the street as a space of perceived rescue or escape. This works hand in hand with the `concept of children in conflict with the law`, children who have been failed by the very institutions meant to protect them (UNICEF, 2012).

4.4.3 Economic Decline and Structural Adjustment

Persistent household poverty was stated as a major factor that is driving children onto the street because they feel that they are a burden to their struggling families. Participants and key informants sited the growth of street children within the Zimbabwe`s broader economic trajectory. Social workers referred to the ESAPs of the 1990s and the hyperinflationary collapse of the 2000s as the macro-structural foundations of contemporary urban poverty and streetism. Kamete (2013)

postulates that these economic shocks produced widespread deindustrialization, unemployment and a huge decline in public service delivery thereby dismantling the social safety nets upon which vulnerable families had depended on.

> *"The economic decline destroyed families. Parents lost their jobs. Schools and clinics stopped functioning properly, putting children at a heightened risk."*

This analysis reflects the Structural Violence Theory`s suggestion that poverty and deprivation are not natural conditions but are produced and reproduce by political and economic structures that always disadvantage certain groups (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 1990).

> *"At home, we would go for days without eating. My stepfather would beat me for asking for food. Here in town, I can at least find something in the rubbish bins. I am not hungry here."*

This economic imperative is a dominant theme in literature on street children in sub-Saharan Africa. Mwoma (2021) argued that children often perceive the street as a site of economic opportunity, however marginal as compared to the absolute hardship they face at home. The pull of potential income from the informal activities in the active CBD of Harare acts as a powerful magnet for children in this situation.

4.4.4 Weak Enforcement of Child Protection Legislation

Despite the existence of a formal child protection framework, Children`s Act (Chapter 5:06), the Children`s Amendment Act No. 8 of 2023 and the Child Justice Bill, the enforcement of these provisions remain strictly inadequate. Key informants identified resource constraints, institutional fragmentation and corruption as primary obstacles to effective implementation. The

Zimbabwean National Council for the Welfare of Children was recognized as having limited reach, especially in relation to unregistered and undocumented children who constitute majority of street connected children in Harare, CBD. According to Chinyoka (2017) and the Consortium for Street Children (2018), Child Care Institutions are often under-resourced and unable to provide the quality of care required to meaningfully reintegrate street children.

4.5 Survival Strategies and the Informal Economy

Life on the streets is defined by a constant and exhausting struggle to meet daily needs. The participants described a daily routine centered on survival with the CBD as a unique ecosystem as it provides high concentration of people, vehicles and commercial activity that makes easy for the street children to cope with their struggles. They venture into informal trading, carrying goods, washing cars, begging and forming peer networks. Through group solidarity, they can protect and offer emotional support towards each other.

4.5.1 Survival Strategies: Economic Activities

The economic activity for boys is to carry luggage for shoppers, sell discs and guard at traffic intersections. On the other hand, girls are more involved in vending small items like sweets and bananas or begging. This is their daily routine.

> *"Every day I wake up and go to the robot at Julis Nyerere for business. If I am lucky, I can get US$2 OR $3 for the whole day. If not, maybe just 50 cents. It is not enough for food."*
>
> Another one said *"I do not like to beg, so I sell these (showing a packet of chewing gum). It is safer than what other girls do at night."*

The income generated is uncommon and insufficient, leaving them highly vulnerable to hunger. Their invisibility is illustrated here, they are present, performing a service yet their labor is largely unacknowledged, and their earnings are seen as handouts rather than legitimate income. This aligns with Gunhidzirai`s (2023) study on street children and informal sector, vending, begging and collecting waste and petty labour as survival activities in Zimbabwe.

> *"We look after each other. We help each other with food and when one of us is sick or beaten, we help also."*

These social networks provide an essential safety net and expose younger and newer street children to exploitation, coercion and criminal actions. In line with findings from Morocco (Abebe and Golga, 2024), it describes hierarchies of servitude and abuse among street children.

4.6 Discussion

The findings use Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994) to highlight how street children experience chronic insecurity beyond traditional notions of state security. The theory emphasizes freedom from fear and wants as the key dimensions of personal, health, food, economic and social security; these are absent in the lives of these children. Street children are deprived of access to economic necessities; hence they rely on informal activities like vending and carrying goods. The systematic refusal of healthcare, education, legal protection and social services is produced by structural conditions including economic collapse, institutional failure and discriminatory attitudes, thereby constituting structural violence by Galtung.

The findings extend the existing literature on street children in Zimbabwe and broader African region. Ndlovu (2016) Bulawayo study and Gunhidzirai and Patel (2024) Harare study showcases health and victimization dimensions of street children`s experiences. The present

research provides a more comprehensive integration of structural causal analysis with lived practical data. The study emphasis on gender differences, where girls are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Reliable to critical analysis of Chinyoka (2017), the study reviews that institutional responses are always insufficient.

The Herald (2024) report on street youth terrorizing pedestrians in Harare must be contextualized in this structural analysis. Some street children do engage in criminal activities, reducing the phenomenon to a law-and-order problem which is often the tendency in public discourse and police responses, thereby failing to address the root causes and risks creating cycles of criminalization, exclusion and intergenerational poverty (Genemo, 2029). Kaldor (2007) informs that when the state fails to provide security to its vulnerable citizens through adequate governance, the resulting insecurity becomes self-perpetuating.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented qualitative findings on existing certainties of street children in Harare, CBD. Through thematic analysis, the study establishes how poverty, family breakdown, violence and institutional neglection traverse to render street children “invisible citizens” The chapter grounded the results in theories and Zimbabwe`s legal frameworks, providing a basis for conclusions and recommendations in the next chapter. This chapter represented and discussed the practical findings of the study. It highlights the demographic characteristics, living conditions, challenges and coping strategies of street children in Harare also institutional responses to their plight. The findings reveal inherent structural and social factors that sustain the phenomenon of these children and call for comprehensive rights-based and coordinated interventions.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the findings, analysis and theoretical understandings developed across the preceding chapters of this study. It presents a summary of the entire study, draws practical conclusions in direct response to the four objectives and develops targeted recommendations for policy reform, institutional reinforcement and programmatic intervention. The chapter concludes by recognizing areas for further research that result from the limitations and gaps exposed by the study. The main aim of this study has been to examine, document and critically analyze the challenges of street children in Harare CBD through dual theoretical lens of Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994) and Structural Violence Theory (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 1990). The study is grounded in a qualitative case study design led by lived experiences and perspectives of street children and key informants who interact with them in Harare`s CBD.

5.2 Summary of the Study

Chapter one established the academic and background foundation of the study. It positioned the phenomenon of street children within global, continental, regional and national frameworks, signifying that streetism is not uniquely Zimbabwean problem but is rather a display of systemic failures in child protection, social welfare and economic governance that are replicated across the developing world (UNICEF, 2017; UNDP, 1994). In the Zimbabwean context, the chapter drew how the ESAPs of the 1990s, combined with hyperinflation in the 2000s, dismantled household economic flexibility and public service systems, creating the structural conditions for

escalating streetism in urban centers such as Harare (Kamete, 2013). The chapter expressed four research objectives, to assess the challenges faced by street children, to analyze their lived conditions, to identify the socio-economic and structural factors driving children to the streets and to recommend policy and programme options aligned to Zimbabwean law and child-rights standards. The significance of the study was emphasized by the determined gap between Zimbabwe`s formal child protection legislation, especially the recent Children`s Amendment Act No.8 of 2023 and its weak enforcement.

Chapter Two reviewed the theoretical framework and existing literature of the study. The Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994) provided a multidimensional framework for analyzing the denials experienced by street-connected children. The Structural Violence Theory (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 1990) complemented this by identifying the indirect, existing harm inflicted upon street children through unjust social structures, discriminatory policies and systemic neglect. The literature review produced repeated patterns of violence, exploitation, educational exclusion, health insecurity and criminalization across street-connected children in South Asia, West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa. In the Zimbabwean context, studies by Ndlovu (2016), Gunhidzirai (2023) and Gunhidzirai and Patel (2024) emphasized the multidimensional vulnerabilities of street children in Bulawayo and Harare.

Chapter Three outlined the research methodology of the study. The study adopted a qualitative case study design employing purpose and sampling to engage twenty participants. Thematic analysis and Braun and Clarke`s (2019) reflexive framework were employed to identify, analyze and report patterns within the data. Validity and reliability were ensured through triangulation across multiple data sources and adherence to Lincoln and Guba`s (1985) criteria of

credibility and confirmability. Ethical consistency was maintained in accordance with Resnik`s (2020) ethical guidelines for research with vulnerable populations.

Chapter Four presented analyzed and discussed research findings organized under four major themes, challenges being faced, lived conditions, structural drivers of streetism and survival strategies and resilience mechanisms through which street children navigate their circumstances and the dangers they entail. The analysis reliably affirmed the explanatory influence of both Human Security Theory and Structural Violence Theory in revealing the systemic roots of street children`s denials.

5.3 Conclusions

Based on the evidence gathered and analyzed in this study, the following conclusions are drawn in direct response to the four research objectives.

5.3.1 Conclusion on the Challenges Faced by Street Children

The study concludes that street children in Harare CBD face a collection of severe and interrelated challenges that undermine their human security, dignity and developmental potential. Food insecurity is an acute and chronic challenge with children depending on refuse, charitable donations and petty earnings for survival. Health insecurity is evidenced by untreated illnesses, drug and substance reliance, psychological trauma of daily violence and sexual exploitation. Legal insecurity is rooted in the universal absence of birth registration and national identification documentation among street children making them invisible to state welfare, healthcare and protection systems (Save the Children, 2022). Police brutality constitutes to institutionalized harm that street children face daily. Educational deprivation hinders their pathway to formal employment and civic participation leading to continuous poverty cycles (Genemo, 2019). These

findings connect with Ndlovu (2016) and Gunhidzirai and Patel (2024) and the Consortium for Street Children (2022) argument confirming that the experience of street children in Harare is neither incomparable nor distinctive but reflects broader patterns of systemic failure documented across the African continent.

5.3.2 Conclusion on the lived Conditions of Street Children

The study concludes that the lived conditions of street connected children in Harare CBD are characterized by extreme material deprivation, psychosocial suffering and social marginalization that constitutes a fundamental violation of children`s rights as enshrined in both the Zimbabwean Constitution and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to Panter-Brick (2002), a mechanism of exclusion reinforces the structural invisibility of street children and excludes their access to institutional support. The study concludes by resonating with the De Negri (2022) argument which states that the living conditions of street connected children are not product of individual failure but of structured social exclusion which is itself a form of violence.

5.3.3 Conclusion on Socio-Economic and Structural Drivers of Streetism

The study concludes that streetism in Harare CBD is fundamentally a structural phenomenon whose immediate causes includes family disintegration, parental death, poverty and domestic abuse and these factors are the products of deeper macro-economic and institutional failure. Zimbabwe`s protracted economic crisis which originated in the ESAPs of the 1990s and worsened through the hyperinflationary collapse of the 2000s (Kamete, 2013). The study concludes that the legal framework for child protection in Zimbabwe is only on blueprint and it is rendered largely ineffective by resource constraints, inter-agency fragmentation, corruption and a

systemic failure of political will to prioritize the welfare of the marginalized citizens. In line with Galtung`s (1969) Structural Violence Theory, the suffering of street children in Harare is not incidental rather it is structurally produced by political and economic arrangements that systematically exclude them from protection, services and voice.

5.3.4 Conclusion on Policy and Responses

The study concludes that current policy and programme responses to the challenges of street children in Harare, CBD are insufficient to the scale and density of the challenge. Zimbabwe's legislative framework including the Children Actintervention,06), the 2023 Children`s Amendment Act No. 8 and provisions of the Constitution protecting children from exploitation and abuse, provides a legally sound basis for intervention however the gap between legislative objective and implementation existence is absolute. The ZNCWC and the Department of Social Welfare operate with strictly constrained resources, limited coordination and insufficient reach especially to unregistered and undocumented children. Child Care Institutions suffer from inadequate facilities and overly rigid structures that deter street children from voluntary engagement (Chinyoka, 2017).

5.4 Recommendations

Drawing from the conclusions and the evidence produced by the study, the succeeding recommendations are for the Government of Zimbabwe, civil society organizations, local authorities and the international community.

5.4.1 Strengthening Child Protection Legislation and Enforcement

The Government of Zimbabwe should exercise full operation of the Children's Amendment Act 2023 No. 8 and Child Justice Bill through dedicated monetary allocation, training of law enforcement and social welfare personnel in child-rights principles and formation of accountability mechanisms for institutional compliance. The marginalization of street children by police officers must be formally addressed through policy reform and institutional redirection. Dedicated child protection units in the ZRP should be resourced and trained to respond to street children as vulnerable entitled people not security threats. These recommendations are reliable with General Comment No. 21 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017) which calls upon states to adopt holistic rights-based national tactics for children in street.

5.4.2 Universal Birth Registration and Documentation

The Government through the Registrar General Office and the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare should implement a targeted mobile birth registration and national identity documentation programme exactly designed to reach street-connected and undocumented children. Documentation is the foundational qualification for access to healthcare, education, social protection and legal recourse (Save the Children, 2022). NGOs and CBOs that are working with street-connected children should be formally engaged as partners in this registration initiative.

5.4.3 Expanding Access to Healthcare, Education and Social Services

The Ministry of Health and Child Care should establish mobile health outreach units with dedicated capacity to reach street-connected children with primary healthcare, mental health care, drug and substance dependency treatment and sexual and reproductive health services. The demand for documentation requirements as a qualification for basic healthcare access for children should be eliminated. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Zimbabwe should

develop non-formal and flexible education strategies that promote vocational training opportunities, tailored to the children who have been out of formal education for extended periods. UNESCO (2018), global evidence confirms that flexible, community-based educational provision is effective in re-engaging street-connected youth with learning pathways. The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare of Zimbabwe should increase funding Child Care Institutions and require that these institutions implement child-centered and participatory approaches that protect street children and initiate reintegration processes (Chinyoka, 2017).

5.4.4 Addressing Structural and Macro-Economic Root Causes

The Government should reinforce and strengthen the national social protection ground, including cash transfer programmes and food assistance schemes to ensure that families living in poverty are sustained to prevent children from going into the streets. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development must add child welfare outcomes as specific metrics within national economic planning and budget allocation processes. At the community level, investment in affordable housing, accessible healthcare and quality public education is essential to changing the structural conditions that push children into the streets (Kamete, 2013; Genemo, 2019). These recommendations are grounded in the Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994) which resolve that honest security requires addressing chronic threats such as hunger, poverty and homelessness through proactive governance, not only reactive state responses.

5.4.5 Multi-Stakeholder Coordination and Community Engagement

A national inter-agency coordination mechanism should be established under the leadership of the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare to support and integrate the efforts of government departments, local authorities, NGOs, faith-based organizations and

community-based organizations operating with street-connected children. The uneven nature of the current responses and the Consortium for Street Children (2018), significantly weakens the impact of existing interventions. Community awareness and sensitization campaigns should be employed to challenge stigmatizing methods toward street children. Panter-Brick (2002) argues that social stigma is itself a structural barrier to rehabilitation and access to services. Street children themselves should significantly engage in the implementation, evaluation and designing of programmes affecting them, in agreement with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12.

5.4.6 Strengthening Data Collection and Research Infrastructure

Zimbabwe presently lacks a reliable, national representative and regular updated database on street-connected children. The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), in partnership with the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare and civil society organizations, should establish a national street children inventory system to generate the evidence base required for effective policy planning and resource allocation. Street children should contribute to participatory assessments as co-investigators, not merely subjects, UNICEF (2017).

5.5 Areas for Further Research

While this study has generated meaningful insights into the challenges of street children in Harare CBD, several essential dimensions remain ineffectively explored and warrant further scholarly attention.

The gendered dimensions of street life in Zimbabwe merit dedicated investigation. This study identified the acute vulnerability of street girls to sexual exploitation and gender-based violence. A devoted qualitative and quantitative study focusing specifically on the experiences of

street girls in Zimbabwean urban centres would significantly advance understanding of the connection of gender, poverty and streetism.

There is currently very limited evidence within the Zimbabwean literature on the effectiveness of reintegration programmes or on the trajectories of children who leaving street life and strong longitudinal research would provide critical guidance for programme design.

The relationship between street children and organized criminal networks including drug trafficking, petty theft syndicates and commercial sexual exploitation operations warrants systematic investigation.

Relative research examining the effectiveness of different policy and programmatic models across Zimbabwean cities, Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Mutare and Beitbridge would provide a stronger empirical basis for national policy reform. A study by Ndlovu (2016) in Bulawayo and the present study in Harare suggests important unities but also potentially imperative contextual differences that a comparative design could inform.

Lastly, participatory action research involving street children as co-researchers in the design and implementation of interventions.

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APPENDIX 1: Questionnaire

My name is Lisabel Resi, a fourth-year student at Bindura University of Science Education studying a degree in Peace and Governance. I am carrying out a research in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements. I am carrying out a research on the topic, **Invisible Citizens: A Study on Challenges of Street Children in Harare, CBD.**

The information you are going to provide will be confidential and will be used for academic purposes of this study.

Key Questions

1. What major challenges are being faced by street children in Harare, CBD?
2. How do street children describe their day-to-day living conditions in Harare, CBD?
3. What factors are being identified by street children that are driving them onto the streets?
4. What support services do street children access and how effective are these services?
5. What policy or program interventions are being proposed to improve the welfare and protection of street children in alignment with Zimbabwe child-rights standards?
6. What alternative solutions are being proposed that can improve the livelihoods of street children in Harare, CBD.

APPENDIX 2: Interview Guide

My name is Lisabel Resi, a fourth-year student at Bindura University of Science Education studying a degree in Peace and Governance. I am carrying out research in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements. I am carrying out research on the topic, **Invisible Citizens: A Study on Challenges of Street Children in Harare, CBD.**

The information you are going to provide will be confidential and will be used for academic purposes of this study.

Observation Guide

1. What are the visible signs of the challenges of street children that can be observed in the CBD?
2. How is the environment and living conditions of street children, where they sleep, quality of shelter and the general cleanliness around their living spaces?
3. What are the health and hygienic indicators, physical appearance, hygiene practices and drug and substance abuse?
4. How do they interact, between themselves, with passers-by, vendors, police and city council officials?
5. What risks are they exposed too?
6. What services and support systems are accessible to them?

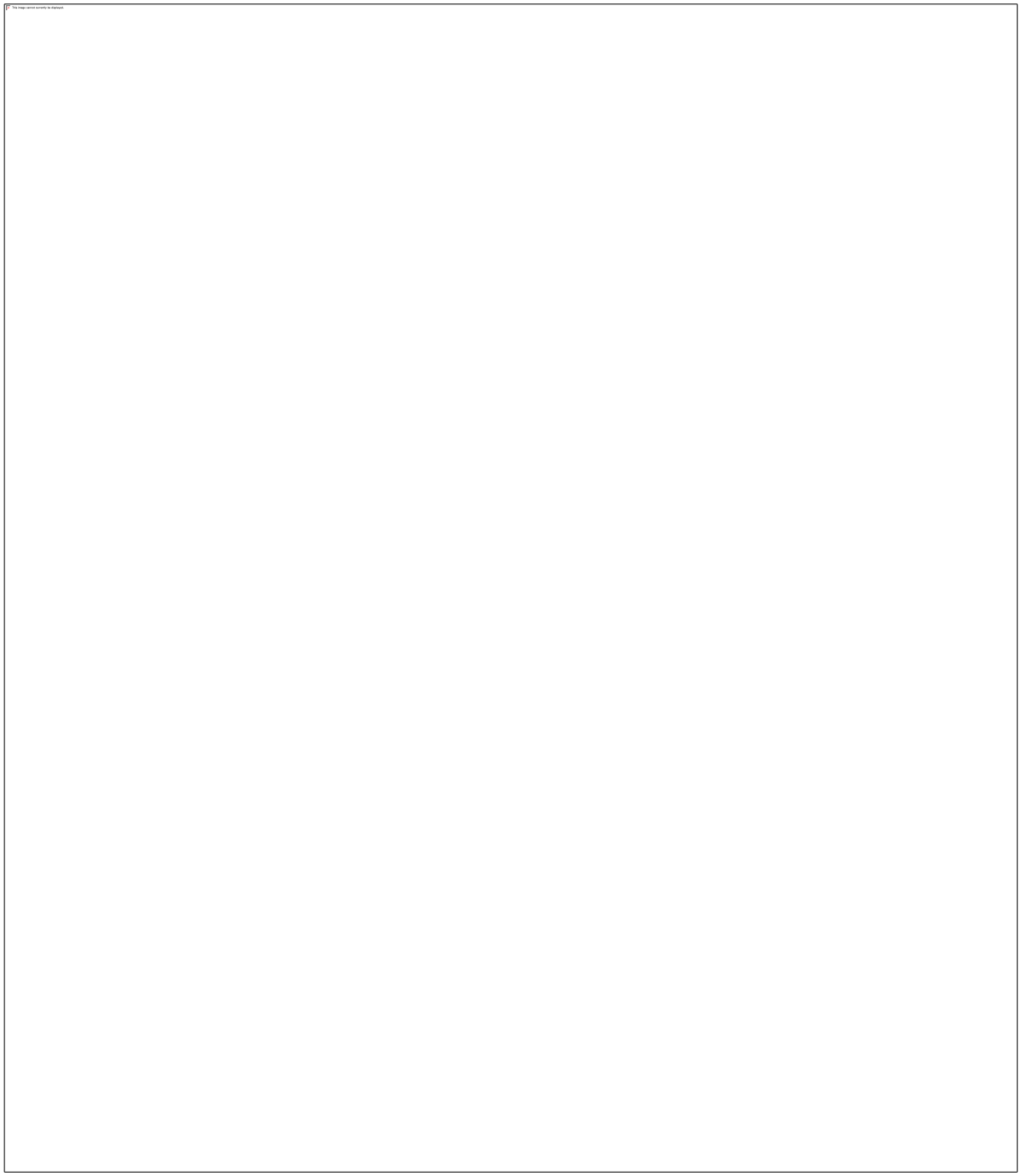
Zita rangu ndinonzi Lisabel Resi, ndiri mudzidzi wepaBindura University of Science Education, ndinodzidza dhigiri rePeace and Governance uye ndiri mugore rechina. Ndiri kuita tsvakurudzo yekuti ndiwane ruzivo pamusoro pevana vanorarama vachigara pamwe chete nekushanda mumigwagwa yedhorobha reHarare, Invisible citizens: A study on challenges of street children in Harare, CBD.

Mashoko amuchataura ndinovimbisa kuti achachengetedzwa pamwe chete nekubatwa zvakanaka.

Mibvunzo

1. Ndezvipi zvinetso zvinowanikwa nevana vanogara kana kuti vanoshanda mumigwagwa yedhorobha reHarare?
2. Vana vari mumigwagwa yedhorobha iri zvii zvamungataura pamusoro pehupenyu hwamunorara zuva nezuva mumigwagwa umu?
3. Ndeapi maitiro kana kuti zvikonzero zvinoita kana kukonzera kuti vana vapinde mumigwagwa?
4. Ndeapi mabasa kana rubatsiro ruri kupihwa kuvana ava?
5. Mitemo kana mapato ari kuita mabasa api mukuyedza kubatsira vana vemumigwagwa?
6. Mazano api emaporisi kana mapurogiramu anokurudzirwa nevana pamwe nevamwe vanoona nezvevana kuti agadziriswe zvichitevedzera mitemo yekodzero dzevana?

APPENDIX 3: Research Latter



APPENDIX 4: Approval Letter

