Research Paper

Kaginhawaan in the Context of Survival: Street Children's Struggle for Well-Being

Irene T. Gonzales[1]* iD , Lanz Daenielle T. Cordero[1] iD ,
Andrie Jann V. Akilith[1] iD , Miguel G. Madamba Jr[1] iD

[1] Laguna College of Business and Arts, Philippines

Abstract

This study examines the well-being of street children, focusing on how they navigate daily struggles and find comfort despite challenging circumstances. With an estimated 150 million street children worldwide, including 250,000 in the Philippines, these children face unstable living conditions, abuse, and limited access to basic services. Drawing on *Kaginhawaan*, a Filipino wellness theory, and using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, this research explores how social, emotional, economic, occupational, and spiritual factors shape their resilience. Through participant narratives, five key themes emerged: (1) Atypical Family, revealing broken or nontraditional family ties; (2) Street Hustles, highlighting the survival work children engage in to meet basic needs; (3) Street Struggles, addressing bullying, exploitation, and lost childhoods; (4) Burden of Survival, focusing on exhaustion, debt, and social stigma; and (5) Faith in Survival, which illustrates how spirituality provides strength, comfort, and hope. These themes reflect how children construct meaning and preserve dignity amid harsh realities. The findings affirm that even in survival mode, children draw from internal and external resources, particularly faith, social bonds, and emotional resilience, to endure. Rooted in *Kaginhawaan*, the study emphasizes the importance of nurturing environments, compassion, and holistic interventions that support both immediate needs and long-term well-being. It highlights the complexity of street children's lives and how they find comfort not in the absence of struggle, but in their response to it. Ultimately, the research calls for policies and programs grounded in empathy and cultural insight to address the multifaceted needs of this vulnerable population.

Keywords: *Kaginhawaan Theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Children on the Street, Filipino Psychology, Survival, Well-Being.*

INTRODUCTION

The well-being of the child should always be the top priority. This includes every aspect of their life to ensure safety, security, and overall development. However, various circumstances often prevent children from receiving the care and attention they truly need. Across the globe, countless children face the harsh reality of living or working on the streets. These children endure poor living conditions, mistreatment, neglect, and are often discarded and abused in urban areas and towns (Cullen, 2021) These children struggle daily to survive, with limited access to education, healthcare, and protection (Street Children: Challenges and Support Strategies, 2025a) The United Nations estimates that there are as many as 150 million street children worldwide (Street Children: Challenges and Support Strategies, 2025b) Despite their resilience, these children face significant threats, including abuse, exploitation, and arrest, simply for living on the streets (Children in Street Situations | UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, n.d.) An estimate of 250,000 street children is reported by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and local Non-Government Organizations (ChildHope Philippines Foundation, Inc., n.d.). These children are particularly vulnerable to traumatic experiences on the

streets. In fact, during former President Duterte's war on drugs, street children became targets of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, persecution, violence, and widespread human rights violations (Consortium for Street Children, 2020a)

According to Child Hope Asia Philippines (2013) as cited by Manapsal et al. (2024), there are three types of street children: (1) *Children on the Street*, who work on the streets but return home to sleep; (2) *Children of the Street*, who live on the streets and often form close bonds with other street children, creating a family-like community; and (3) *Abandoned Children*, who live on the streets and have severed ties with their biological families. This study focused specifically on *Children on the Street*, as they were the primary group whose experiences and challenges were explored.

Kaginhawaan, a Filipino concept of wellness, refers to a state in which an individual experiences both economic freedom and psycho-emotional well-being (Samaco-Zamora & Fernandez, 2016, as cited by Cervantes, 2025) To examine the lived experiences of street children, the study applied key principles from Samaco-Zamora & Fernandez's "Kaginhawaan Theory," specifically: (1) Family, which refers to categories supporting the family's functioning; (2) Good Economic Conditio, referring to financial freedom, which is the ability to afford both wants and needs, and financial security, defined as having no debts and enough money to cover necessities, are indicators of strong economic well-being; (3) Psycho-emotional, describes a state of happiness, free from problems, difficulties, and worries, characterized by contentment in life; (4) Having an Occupation, which was referred to ways in achieving financial prosperity, which helps provide a comfortable life for the family.; and (5) Spiritual, emphasizing the spiritual ways to attain kaginhawaan.

This study aims to better understand what life is like for street children by exploring their personal stories, their struggles, how they get through each day, and where they find moments of comfort. It's not just about the challenges they face, but also about how they cope, stay strong, and keep going despite everything. By listening to their voices and learning from their experiences, the study hopes to offer a deeper and more honest look at their lives. This understanding can help shape programs and policies that truly respond to their needs, not just in the short term, but in ways that support their well-being over time. While street children are often seen in our communities, their stories are rarely heard. This research hopes to change that by showing how, even in survival mode, these children find ways to hold on to hope, resilience, and a sense of self.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Street children often come from atypical family structures marked by instability, neglect, or emotional detachment, frequently caused by parental mental health challenges or socioeconomic stress. These conditions impair the ability of parents to provide consistent care, pushing children to seek refuge in the streets. Literature shows that family tensions, such as domestic violence, verbal abuse, or family conflict, are among the common reasons children leave home, viewing street life as a space of temporary freedom or escape (Bhukuth & Ballet, 2015; Abate et al., 2022) While on the street, these children often engage in informal labor and other work, such as begging or street vending, to survive, exposing them to exploitation and hazardous environments. The most common sources of income of street children in the Philippines are selling sampaguita and begging or handing out envelopes in jeepneys or to passers-by (Zuyco & Fernandez, 2023). Adjusting to street life is often fraught with physical, emotional, and psychological difficulties. Gunu et al (2021) highlighted that street children grapple with harsh living conditions, exposure to violence, and limited access to necessities, which compels them to develop coping mechanisms for survival. Reza & Bromfield (2019) conducted research that showed that street children are highly vulnerable to various forms of abuse and exploitation. Their study also identified that these children are typically

engaged in 3-D work, dirty, dangerous, and demanding jobs. In the face of these overwhelming burdens, faith becomes the final line of defense against despair. Research conducted in Ghana emphasized that homeless youth relied heavily on their faith in a higher power, which they believed guided and protected them through the uncertainties of street life (Oppong Asante et al., 2016). This sense of divine presence instilled hope, allowing them to persevere despite being exposed to violence, exploitation, and neglect.

In the Philippines, numerous studies have examined street children, recognizing them as a critical indicator of the country's prevailing poverty and socio-economic challenges (Research and Evaluation Division - Policy Development and Planning Bureau, 2020). Most prevalent in urban communities, this issue is shaped by shifting family and community contexts, with economic pressures and social stresses forcing families to adopt survival strategies such as frequent relocation and informal livelihoods, as addressed in cities like Olongapo, Davao, and Metro Manila (Porio et al., 2020). According to recent literature, there were an estimated 250,000 to 1 million street children in the Philippines, with approximately 4,000 of them being served by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as of 2022. The majority are boys between the ages of 7 and 16, often coming from "families on the streets," which comprise about 75 percent of the country's homeless population (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022; Meribole, 2020; Better Care Network, n.d).

The Consortium for Street Children (2020b) reveals that the children of the streets, or children dependent on the streets, whether living, working, or finding support there, stem from complex individual circumstances such as poverty, broken families, abuse, and discrimination, including discrimination based on their sexuality and mental health condition. The article also highlights the severe risks street children face, including violence, exploitation, legal injustices, and mental health challenges. Julien (2022) delves into the multifaceted characteristics of street children, addressing the different survival strategies such as labor, begging, and involvement in illicit activities. The study also revealed how street children develop unique social structures, behaviors, and identities to survive.

In addition, the study published by Rashid (2023) explores the various ways street children connect with their environment, including their typology and connectivity, activity-based connections, relationship-based connections, and spatial connections. Detailing the activities they engaged in and the dangers they face in the streets. Street children have been classified as one of the minorities in modern-day society, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and many other opportunities. According to Abate et al. (2022) there is an inadequate study and information about children of the streets, denying them a platform for much better opportunities. On the other hand, the article entitled Street Children: Challenges and Support Strategies (2025c) addresses the societal perception of street children and their distrust of government initiatives. This article advocates education as a key tool for the reintegration of street children.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research focused on four (4) *Children on the Street*, defined as children who have a home but choose to live on the streets to work and support their own needs as well as those of their families. The participants were aged 14 to 16 years old.

The research used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the personal experiences of the participants, aiming to uncover shared themes and better understand the key factors related to the issue (Politz, 2023) Since the participants were minors, their legal guardians were given an assent form to grant permission for the child's involvement in the study (California State University San Marcos, n.d.) Before the interviews began, the researchers took time to explain the purpose of the study to both the child and their guardian, making sure they fully

understood what the process would entail. Any questions they had were answered, and it was emphasized that participation was completely voluntary, with the freedom to pause or withdraw at any time (Voluntary Participation | Definition, 2025) To make the children feel comfortable, the interviews were structured around open-ended questions, allowing them to share their stories at their own pace and without feeling any pressure to reveal sensitive details unless they were ready to do so.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. According to Coker (2021), a phenomenological study typically requires four 4 to five 5 participants to achieve data saturation. This occurs when no `new information arises from additional data collection, usually after interviewing a small group with similar characteristics (Quantilope, 2025) Based on this, four (4) street children who met the study's criteria were selected as participants. The researchers used purposive homogeneous sampling to ensure that the participants had the necessary experiences and qualifications for the study.

Additionally, data collection was conducted using audio recordings, an essential method for carrying out the in-depth interviews required by IPA. A structured interview protocol was followed to ensure that the data collected aligned with the study's objectives (Interview Protocol Design, n.d). After the interviews, the researchers transcribed the recordings and provided participants with printed copies of the transcriptions for member checking.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The table outlines the characteristics of participants involved, such as their ages and their street-based work. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, the participants' identities were protected. Consequently, pseudonyms have been assigned for identification purposes.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Participants	Street-Based Work	Age
Street Child AAA	Trash Collector	11
Street Child BBB	Sampaguita Vendor	13
Street Child CCC	Sampaguita Vendor	13
Street Child DDD	Trash Collector and Vegetable Vendor	16

The study aimed to understand the experiences of children living on the streets, exploring the challenges they face. The research involved investigating the participants' experiences and examining similar cases through various inquiry methods. As a result, the central question guiding the research was: What is the essence of the lived experiences of Children on the Street as it pertains to Kaginhawaan?

The corollary question is addressed in the discussion below:

Corollary Question: How did the Children on the Street describe their experience as it pertained to Kaginhawaan?

Interview Question Number 1: How is your relationship with your family?

When asked about the question, Street Child AAA stated that his father goes to a place far from them and only visits their house occasionally. The participant appears to be unaware of any issues in his parents' relationship. In his own words, he said:

"My father goes home to Punta because his job is far from us. He just visits here. He comes home five times in a month... One of my siblings is with me, the other is sometimes taken to my father in Punta." Street Child AAA

When the same question was asked to Street Child BBB, she replied that she has several siblings living in different locations, some of whom are in the custody of the social welfare office. She added that there were many of them. Her response suggested that it was a normal situation for her to live apart from her siblings, especially when mentioning those in the custody of the social welfare office. It didn't seem to bother her. In her own words, she stated:

"There are many of us. Three in Majada, one in Sala, three in DSWD custody, and in Parian... there are a lot.", Street Child BBB

When looking at these findings through the lens of Kaginhawaan, it's clear that family dynamics play a huge role in a child's emotional well-being. The 2009 Stress in America survey by the American Psychological Association highlights a gap between what children experience and what parents perceive (Pedro-Carroll, 2020) For instance, in Street Child AAA's case, it seems he has not been informed about his parents' separation. He appears unaware of the situation, and while this may have been done to protect him, it's important to recognize that he still needs to process and grieve the loss of a parent, even if he's not immediately aware of it (Kemp et al., 2025)

Moreover, research also shows that children who face adversity can develop a stress response that's either too high or too low (Armstrong-Carter et al., 2024) This directly connects to how family functioning shapes a child's ability to cope with stress. In Street Child BBB's case, her reaction to being separated from her siblings seemed indifferent, suggesting emotional detachment as a coping mechanism. These findings emphasize how family dynamics can influence a child's emotional development, showing that the emotional climate within a family has a lasting impact on how children process and deal with challenges.

Interview Question Number 2: How do you earn money while on the streets, and how do you get food while on the streets?

Upon inquiry, Street Child CCC shared that she earns money by selling sampaguita flowers on the streets. She also mentioned that she collects money by handing out envelopes on jeepneys. During the interview, it was evident that Street Child CCC didn't mind having two different jobs to make ends meet. In her own words, she said:

"I sell (while pointing to the sampaguita she's holding)...we're handing envelopes in a jeepney, asking for money...", Street Child CCC.

In the case of Street Child DDD, he became quite emotional as he shared with the researchers how he took on various jobs to provide for his younger siblings. There was a sense of pain in his words, as if he felt he had no other choice but to work. In his own words, he said:

"Various sustainable jobs, anything that allowed me to earn money to provide food for my younger siblings. It wasn't much, but at least we could manage to ease our hunger, even if it meant having just one meal a day...", Street Child DDD.

Children engaged in labor often find it challenging to recognize and communicate their emotions, which can hinder the development of empathy and social skills (Child's Labour, 2025) From Street Child CCC's response, it appears she does not recognize any issue with juggling two jobs simultaneously. This reflects a lack of awareness regarding the emotional and physical toll such responsibilities may have.

Moreover, according to Pellenq et al. (2021) work can lead to negative outcomes in areas such as stress, self-esteem, emotional well-being, personal security, and a sense of mistreatment. This aligns with the struggles of Street Child DDD, who expressed difficulty in managing the responsibility of working while trying to provide for his family. These challenges highlight how labor at such a young age can undermine a child's emotional development, which connects to the Economic Condition of Kaginhawaan Theory. When families face economic instability, children are forced into labor, which limits their ability to grow emotionally and socially. In contrast, a stable economic environment supports a child's well-being, allowing them to focus on their personal growth and emotional health.

Interview Question Number 3: How would you describe the moments you have experienced while living on the streets alone?

When Street Child AAA was asked, it was evident that despite his small frame, he was determined to push through the hard work. In his own words, he said:

"At first, it was hard…", Street Child AAA.

Similarly, when asked, Street Child BBB's mood noticeably shifted. What started as a nonchalant demeanor quickly turned to sadness, especially when she shared her disappointment about being bullied by her classmates for working on the streets. In her own words, she said:

"It's tiring, sometimes it's hard because after school, I sell. It's hard…they tease me, sometimes.", Street Child BBB.

Despite his thin and frail body, Street Child AAA takes on work that is far too demanding for him. As a trash collector, he struggles under the scorching sun, often working without proper protection, which puts him at risk of injury. This type of labor places an overwhelming burden on a child, far beyond what is suitable for his age and abilities (International Labour Organization, 2024). Relating this to the Kaginhawaan Theory, especially the Psycho-emotional state, it's clear that such work can have a lasting impact on a child's emotional and psychological health. Instead of feeling safe and cared for, the child is exposed to physical exhaustion and emotional stress, making it difficult for them to experience a sense of Kaginhawaan. Children like Street Child AAA, who are forced into roles not meant for their age, miss out on the opportunity to develop in a healthy, balanced environment.

Moreover, Fadhila & Netrawati (2022) found that bullying is a common experience for street children, with indirect bullying like being ostracized or insulted often taking place. This mirrors what Street Child BBB shared, who was bullied because of her work on the streets. This kind of emotional and social rejection adds another layer of stress to their lives, preventing them from building the emotional resilience they need. The emotional and physical strain that comes with child labor and social exclusion makes it even harder for these children to feel a sense of security or happiness. It's a stark reminder that for children to truly thrive, they need both

protection from harsh work and the support of a nurturing environment.

Interview Question Number 4: How would you describe the biggest challenges you face in earning money or finding work?

When asked, Street Child BBB shared how difficult it was to work on the streets, considering the long hours spent outdoors and the added challenge of the scorching heat of the sun. In her own words, she said:

"It's hard, ate, because we're out in the heat. Then we're out the whole day, until night…", Street Child BBB.

When Street Child DDD was asked, he tearfully expressed his frustration with the world for labeling him simply because he was trying to survive. He shared that he felt powerless, as he was just a child trying to make ends meet on the streets. In his own words, he said:

"No one believed in the dreams I spoke of…", Street Child DDD.

Street children face a range of challenges and rely on various coping strategies, often engaging in dangerous daily activities and enduring difficult lives (Bodoso, 2023) In the case of Street Child BBB, it is clear that the child has been exposed to the harsh heat of the sun, which, in the context of the Philippines, can be extremely dangerous. This type of labor, which goes beyond what is suitable for a child's age, emphasizes the struggle for survival that many street children face.

Moreover, children may experience discrimination because of their status, with some members of society viewing them as a burden or a threat, leading to increased marginalization and stigmatization (Hughes, 2023) This is evident in the experience of Street Child DDD, whose dreams were dismissed by others simply because he is a street child. Despite his efforts to improve his situation through work, his status made it harder for others to believe in him. Relating this to the Kaginhawaan Theory, specifically the concept of Having Occupation, it shows how children's work, though often necessary for survival, is undervalued and stigmatized.

Interview Question Number 5: How does faith help you deal with the challenges you encounter while living on the street?

When asked, Street Child AAA expressed a strong sense of hope. It was evident that he consistently relies on his faith in the Supreme Being for everything he does. His tone brightened when responding to the question, suggesting he was genuinely happy with his answer. In his own words, he said:

"If we have dreams, we should never forget to ask for strength from the Lord. To ask guidance and strength from the Lord.", Street Child AAA

When Street Child BBB was asked, she responded in a sad tone, as if she felt that life is unfair and deeply sorrowful. Her tone conveyed a sense of longing for something that seems out of reach at the moment. In her own words, she stated:

"I pray that we're not poor anymore because it's hard when you're on the streets, then I also

tell God that life is hard.", Street Child BBB.

According to Howard (2023) spirituality is strongly associated with greater life satisfaction, improved mental and physical health, and increased resilience, even when considering factors such as age, gender, age at separation, Human Development Index scores, and childhood adversity. In the case of Street Child AAA, it is clear that his positive outlook on life is deeply influenced by his spiritual perspective. This aligns with the Kaginhawaan Theory, particularly the spirituality dimension, which emphasizes the role of spiritual well-being in achieving overall life satisfaction and resilience.

However, street-connected children often lack access to basic necessities like food, shelter, clothing, and healthcare, making them vulnerable to malnutrition, illness, and injury. This lack of essentials can push children onto the streets in search of ways to survive (Hughes, 2023b) Relating this to Street Child BBB's response, it can be inferred that she turns to her faith, seeking refuge and comfort from God in the face of her struggles. This highlights how spirituality can provide a sense of support and hope, even in the harshest of circumstances, contributing to a child's resilience and emotional well-being in alignment with the Kaginhawaan Theory.

Through analyzing the participants' responses, the researchers uncovered several key themes from the manuscript: (1) Atypical Family; (2) Street Hustles; (3) Street Struggles; (4) Burden of Survival, and (5) Faith in Survival.

Atypical Family

The first theme identified is "Atypical Family," defined as a family structure that deviates from conventional norms, often characterized by dysfunction or irregular family dynamics. This theme encompasses several subthemes: (1) *Mental Health Issues with Parents*, which refers to situations where a parent's mental health challenges impair their ability to adequately care for their child; (2) *Family Tensions*, describing familial conflicts that drive children to seek refuge on the streets as a means of escaping household strife; and (3) *Connectedness*, which examines the nature of the relationship between the street child and their family members, both in terms of positive and negative connections, as well as the extent of contact with parents and siblings, whether they cohabitate or live in distant locations. Responses from participants highlight these experiences, such as:

"My mother lost her mind…", Street Child BBB.

"She even gives us a knife and says, "Here, just stab each other.", Street Child BBB.

"Regardless of the struggles we face, we have managed to stay connected even while living apart." Street Child DDD

The reasons why some children live or work on the streets are complex and varied. Each street child has a unique story, with their circumstances differing by country, city, and individual experience (Consortium for Street Children, 2020b) Some of the common drivers of street-connected children include parental neglect, as well as violence and abuse within the home or community (Street-connected and homeless children – Humanium, 2024) These factors are clearly reflected in the experiences of the street children in this study. In particular, parental neglect was evident in the case of Street Child BBB, whose mother was unable to care for her due to mental health issues. Furthermore, emotional and physical violence were also observed within the families of Street Children BBB and DDD. This emphasizes the detrimental impact these experiences have

on the child's well-being. This situation aligns with the Kaginhawaan theory, which shows the critical role a supportive and nurturing family environment plays in overall wellness. The absence of such support in the experiences of these street children significantly contributes to their struggles, shaping their resilience and coping mechanisms in complex ways.

Street Hustles

The second theme identified is "Street Hustles," which refers to the various jobs or work that street children engage in to earn money. This theme includes two subthemes: (1) *Jobs to Fill Hunger*, which pertains to the types of work, whether physically demanding or challenging, that provide just enough income to meet the child's basic needs; and (2) *Hustle Causes*, which explores the underlying reasons driving the child to engage in hazardous street work, often out of necessity to survive or support their family. Responses from participants highlight these experiences, such as:

> *"It's for buying rice…", Street Child BBB.*

> *"Various sustainable jobs, anything that allowed me to earn money to provide food for my younger siblings. It wasn't much, but at least we could manage to ease our hunger, even if it meant having just one meal a day." Street Child DDD*

For some street children, life often involves selling peanuts in the heat, chasing vehicles for sales, begging for change, or working for little pay to support their families (World Hope International, 2023) In this study, however, it is clear that these children turn to street work as a response to poverty. According to Little (2021), poverty is a primary factor driving children to live on the streets. This aligns with the Economic Condition of the Kaginhawaan theory, which emphasizes how economic circumstances influence well-being. The responses of the street children show how they push their small bodies to work in exchange for money to meet basic needs. They take on various jobs to secure resources necessary for their survival and development. Having faced their own unique challenges, working on the streets becomes a way to meet immediate economic needs, which, in turn, affects their overall sense of well-being and stability.

Street Struggles

The third theme identified is "Street Struggles," which refers to the various difficulties and obstacles faced by children working on the streets. This theme includes several subthemes: (1) *Adjustment*, which describes the initial difficulties street children face in adapting to the hard labor associated with street work; (2) *Good Samaritans*, referring to individuals who offer help or support to street children; (3) *Class-Based Bullying*, which highlights the discrimination and bullying children face due to their status as street workers; (4) *Unchilding the Child*, which refers to the loss of childhood experiences and privileges, as the child is forced to work for survival rather than enjoy typical childhood activities; and (5) *Making Ends Meet*, which reflects the constant struggle of street children to earn just enough money to survive each day without going hungry. Responses from participants highlight these experiences, such as:

> *"At first, it was hard…", Street Child AAA.*

> *"He was fond of kids, because he discovered that we help him and we sometimes clean their car, and he sometimes gives us money…", Street Child AAA.*

"They tease me, sometimes…they said, I saw you at Halang." That's what they said. Sometimes, I answer them, but I just ignore them…", Street Child BBB.

"Come on, it's my birthday tomorrow," and I tell them, "I can't, I have to sell." They say, "Okay." Street Child BBB

"Sometimes, no one gives us anything…", Street Child CCC.

"Struggling to find food each day and coming close to begging just to survive.", Street Child DDD

The experiences of street children are deeply influenced by their socio-economic conditions and the challenges they face within their families, which are key aspects of the Kaginhawaan theory. Research by Tippett and Wolke (2014), as cited by Li et al. (2022), shows that a child's socio-economic status (SES) is linked, though somewhat weakly, to their likelihood of being bullied. For street children, growing up in poverty often means they face not only physical hardships but also social exclusion, which can hurt their mental health and overall well-being. This reflects the Kaginhawaan theory's emphasis on economic conditions and the social challenges children face. Moreover, the concept of early adultification, discussed by Schmitz and Tyler (2016) as cited by Lucas and Wade (2023), is especially relevant to street children. Many of these children are forced to take on adult responsibilities before they are emotionally ready, often due to a lack of parental support or supervision. This early burden affects their emotional and psychological growth, which is another critical element in Kaginhawaan, the importance of family support and proper caregiving for a child's well-being

The Filipino value of Awa, or compassion, also plays a role in understanding the resilience of street children. Awa encourages empathy and selflessness, especially towards those who are suffering. This value aligns with the Kaginhawaan theory's focus on social connections and emotional support. When a community shows compassion, it can provide street children with the emotional strength they need to face their challenges and improve their lives, ensuring they feel supported despite the hardships they endure.

Burden of Survival

The fourth theme identified is "Burden of Survival," which focuses on the challenges and hardships street children face in performing their work. This theme includes several subthemes: (1) *Physical Exhaustion*, which highlights the physical strain experienced by the children, whose small bodies are further burdened by the harsh conditions, such as the intense heat of the sun; (2) *Labeling*, which refers to the social isolation and exclusion street children experience due to their socio-economic status and the nature of their work; and (3) *Loan Survival*, which describes the family dynamics of street children, where financial struggles and mounting debt push the child into street labor as a means to survive. Responses from participants highlight these experiences, such as:

"It's hard, ate, because we're out in the heat. Then we're out the whole day, until night.", Street Child BBB

"Sometimes I owe debts…", Street Child BBB.

"No one believed in the dreams I spoke of…", Street Child DDD.

In the response of Street Child BBB, it was observed that she could only eat occasionally when she is in debt. Debt, particularly when it leads to food insecurity, exacerbates financial problems, which in turn negatively affect mental health. The stress caused by debt and other financial difficulties often results in feelings of depression and anxiety (Robinson & Smith, 2024)

Roberts (2020) notes that people in poverty often experience a sense of hopelessness and lack of support, feeling trapped in an endless cycle of hardship. This is evident in the experience of Street Child DDD, who views his society as a group of people who never believe in his dreams. Additionally, Fantahun and Taa (2022) highlight how street children are severely impacted by a lack of social connections, unmet basic needs, and health issues. Their exclusion from society prevents them from accessing essential rights and opportunities, leading to a broader crisis in their well-being. These challenges align with the Kaginhawaan Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social support and the fulfillment of basic needs in achieving well-being and a sense of self-fulfillment. Without intervention, the cycle of poverty and exclusion continues to harm their mental and physical health.

Faith in Survival

The fifth theme identified is "Faith in Survival," which explores the role of spirituality in helping street children navigate the challenges they face. This theme includes the subthemes: (1) *Strength and Protection*, which refers to the child's reliance on the strength and protection provided by the supreme being, believing that their faith offers them resilience in difficult times; and (2) *Seeking Comfort*, which describes how children turn to prayer or communication with a higher power for emotional solace and support. Responses from participants highlight these experiences, such as:

> *"If we have dreams, we should never forget to ask for strength from the Lord. To ask guidance and strength from the Lord...", Street Child AAA*

> *"I pray that we're not poor anymore because it's hard when you're on the streets...Then I also tell God that life is hard...", Street Child BBB.*

> *"I thought I had no one to turn to, no one to rely on, but I realized I was wrong...", Street Child DDD.*

Schwalm et al. (2021) describe resilience as the ability to bounce back or adjust to difficult situations, with spiritual and religious beliefs acting as important sources of strength during tough times. This resonates with the experience of Street Child AAA, who turns to his faith in the Lord when life gets hard, finding comfort and strength through spirituality.

In the study "Relationship Between Spirituality, Resilience, and Well-being: A Study of 529 Care Givers from 11 Nations" by Howard et al. (2023b), it is shown that spirituality plays a key role in boosting resilience and overall well-being, especially for vulnerable groups. Similarly, Street Children BBB and DDD find comfort in speaking with God, turning to their faith for guidance and support. This connects with the Kaginhawaan Theory, which highlights the role of emotional and spiritual resources in promoting well-being. In the face of adversity, these spiritual connections provide not just strength but also a sense of hope, belonging, and purpose, helping them navigate through life's challenges.

The findings of this study indicate that a complex interaction between familial instability, financial difficulty, emotional trauma, social stigma, and spiritual perseverance influences the lived experiences of street children. The Atypical Family, the central idea emphasizes how dysfunctional

relationships within families, like mental illness and neglect, sever emotional ties and pull children away from support systems. At the same time, the idea of Street Hustles highlights how children become compelled into early labor due to poverty, sacrificing their childhood in order to make ends meet. These experiences are exacerbated by street struggles, where children encounter social exclusion, bullying, and the loss of typical childhood experiences, all of which lead to early adultification and emotional detachment.

Despite these difficulties, the theme of Faith in Survival shows the significance that spirituality plays in giving children the emotional fortitude and feeling of hope they need to persevere through their situations. These results are consistent with the Kaginhawaan Theory, which holds that emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of well-being are just as important as financial demands. The experiences of the participants highlight that to achieve genuine Kaginhawaan for street children, safeguarding factors like emotional support, community engagement, and spiritual support must be strengthened while simultaneously addressing underlying reasons like poverty and family dissolution. Supporting the resilience and general well-being of children with ties to the streets requires a comprehensive strategy that incorporates psychosocial, financial, and spiritual treatments.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study offers a deep understanding of how street children navigate their daily struggles and find comfort amidst adversity. By exploring themes like "Atypical Family," "Street Hustles," and "Street Struggles," the research highlights the complex realities these children face, from unstable home environments to the harsh demands of street labor. The "Burden of Survival" theme emphasizes the constant physical and emotional toll of their work, social stigma, and financial hardships. These experiences are key to understanding the resilience these children develop as they fight to survive and make sense of their world.

Despite the many challenges, the theme of "Faith in Survival" demonstrates the vital role spirituality plays in helping these children cope. Their faith becomes a source of strength and solace, offering a sense of hope and protection in difficult times. This study underscores the importance of addressing both the practical and emotional needs of street children. By focusing on the insights provided through the lens of Kaginhawaan Theory, the research highlights how spiritual, social, and emotional resources are essential in fostering resilience and well-being, helping these children find comfort and strength even in the harshest of circumstances. The findings of this study have important implications for social work, child protection, and policymaking. Social workers should adopt trauma-informed, strengths-based approaches that focus on building trust and offering culturally sensitive support. Interventions should take into account the emotional impact of unstable family dynamics and the significant role spirituality plays in the resilience of street children. Child protection systems need to improve outreach efforts to identify and support these children, ensuring safe reporting mechanisms and prioritizing restorative approaches over criminalization. Policymakers must advocate for comprehensive strategies that address both immediate and long-term needs, including education, healthcare, and mental health services, while protecting children from state-sanctioned harm. Programs should not only provide basic needs but also incorporate psychosocial support, trauma-informed care, and spiritual guidance. Effective interventions must also consider family reintegration, community involvement, and access to safe, dignified work or educational opportunities. By addressing both survival and long-term well-being, these insights can help shape more compassionate, comprehensive support systems for street children.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings of the research, supporting street children requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both their basic needs and emotional well-being. The study revealed the many challenges these children face, such as unstable family dynamics and engaging in dangerous street work to survive. Meeting their basic needs for food, shelter, and healthcare is crucial, but emotional and psychological support is just as important. Counseling and mental health services are needed to help these children cope with trauma and mental health struggles. Spirituality also emerged as an important source of strength, with many children relying on their faith for comfort. Providing spiritual support through programs offering safe spaces for prayer or guidance could help children navigate their hardships. Additionally, creating community networks of support can help reduce isolation and foster a sense of belonging, which is essential for their well-being.

The study likewise emphasized the need to address the root causes that push children to the streets, such as family tensions and mental health issues. Programs focused on family reintegration and strengthening are essential for providing a safer environment for these children. Since many street children take on hazardous work to survive, vocational training and safer, more sustainable job opportunities are crucial. Addressing the social stigma these children face through advocacy and awareness campaigns is also necessary to challenge negative societal perceptions. Finally, ongoing research is essential to refine and adapt intervention strategies to the changing needs of street children. Future studies should combine qualitative and quantitative methods to offer a broader understanding of the issues and provide data to guide more effective interventions, ultimately improving the lives of street children.

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