

Reasons reported by children, youth for being on the streets

April 4 2016

Poverty was the most common reason reported by children and youth, globally, for why they were on the streets, according to an article published online by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

It is hard to estimate the number of [children](#) and youth who spend time on the streets because it is difficult to count and define this population. Street-connected children and youth are those for whom the streets play a central role in their lives. Without empirical data on the reasons why children are on the streets, policies are often developed without taking these causes into account. Children and youth who spend time on the streets suffer illness and death.

Paula Braitstein, Ph.D., of the University of Toronto, Canada, and coauthors compiled data from 49 studies representing 24 countries to analyze self-reported reasons why children and youth end up on the streets. In their review, street-connected children and youth were those who were 24 or younger and who spend a portion, or a majority, of their time living or working on the streets.

The authors' meta-analysis included 13,559 participants from 24 countries, of which 21 of those countries were developing nations.

Poverty was the most common reason reported for street involvement by children and youth, globally, with an estimated prevalence of 39 percent, according to the study analysis. Poverty was followed by family conflict and abuse as the most frequently reported reasons with estimated

prevalences of 32 percent and 26 percent, respectively.

In developing nations, street involvement was reported to be most frequently due to poverty-related reasons, while in developed countries, it was [family conflict](#) that was the most frequently reported reason, the results suggest.

Delinquency was the reason cited the least frequently for why children and youth were on the streets with an estimated prevalence of just 10 percent, according to the results.

Study limitations include use of only English language peer-reviewed studies, not all studies measured or reported the same reasons, and self-reported reasons for street involvement were subject to bias.

"Preventing street involvement and mitigating its harms are critical to helping children and youth achieve their potential. There is an urgent need for international collaborations among researchers, policy makers, stakeholders and organizations working with street-connected children and youth to formulate strategies to prevent them from turning to the streets and assist those already involved in street life," the authors conclude.

"Embleton et al have done us a great service by using the power of meta-analysis to garner a pool of more than 13,000 children and youths globally to examine their reported reasons for being homeless or street involved. What they have uncovered are two pictures, one in the developing world and one in the developed world, that are distinct but also overlapping. ... As stated by Embleton et al, stigmatizing beliefs and misconceptions lead to a lack of services to meet the needs of children and [youth](#)," writes Colette L. Auerswald, M.D., M.S., and Ariella Goldblatt, M.S., of the University of California Berkeley-University of California San Francisco Joint Medical Program, in a related editorial.

More information: *JAMA Pediatr.* Published online April 4, 2016.
[DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.0156](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.0156)

JAMA Pediatr. Published online April 4, 2016. [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.0161](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.0161)

Provided by The JAMA Network Journals

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