



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
School of Health and Welfare

Problems and Solutions when Dealing with Street Children

A qualitative study based on experiences from Social
Workers' in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

CANDIDATE THESIS

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Abstract

Based on qualitative interviews with social workers is the aim with this study to examine a social worker's perspective concerning their work and development with street children in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The interviews were analyzed thematically focusing on how social workers describe the problems and their work/strategies with street children. The result is divided in two themes; *Problems* and *Solution*. Problems refer to how the local context concerning street children in Bloemfontein are described by social workers. Solutions refer to how the social workers describe their work and which solutions that are available in Bloemfontein.

According to the participant's street children are viewed as victims, thief's and naughty by the society. The social workers stated that the main approach of effort in social work with street children are trustful-relationships, negotiation and support. Therefore, a relationship of trust must be gained before the children can receive help. The participants divided children of the street in to types, the 'manipulative' child and the 'naive' child. The social worker's tasks are to work with both types of children in order to create change and to restore trust.

The findings from the result are analyzed from one of Helen Fuchs Bach's theoretical concepts from The Exit Process. This concept is called the Turning Point and refers to that there comes a point where a change is needed which affects the former identity and role for a person. Understanding the results using the Turing Point has helped us understand the importance of creating trusting relationships and making each street child feel special in order to enable change in a street child's life.

Keywords: *Street children, South Africa, Social work, Social work process, Qualitative study, Bloemfontein*

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1. Introduction

De Brito (2014) describes street children as a major social problem in some countries and the importance to acknowledge the issue. To change global development of the problems with street children, the problem must first be highlighted. According to UNICEF (De Brito, 2014) there are tens of millions of street children all around the world. In South Africa, many children made the street their home or at least spend most time outside their homes. This study is providing knowledge about the phenomena of street children in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Giddens (2014) describe that most people in today's society see childhood in a process of becoming an adult. Childhood includes a content of social and structural positions in different communities depending on where a child is growing up. Childhood is nowadays no longer a universal social construction; it depends on the experiences a child gets in the society. The sociology has left the functional perspective of childhood and has begun to see children as active participants in constructing their own lives in society. Giddens (2014) writes that children whom is exposed to physical and physical violence at home do not have the luxury of a caretaking family. The life of a street child is a life of constantly trying to survive on the street. In other words, are street children active participants in construction their life.

Street children's living situation is filled with difficulties and often related with drug abuse, violence, crime, family disruption, abandonment, disease, prostitution, and so forth (De Brito, 2014). According to Ward and Seger (2010) is there a lack of knowledge and information about how to change street children's situation for the better especially concerning methods and strategies of how to deal with these children. Ward and Seger (2010) further describe the lack of support from the government in South Africa, which put pressure on the Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Non-profit organizations (NPOs) to handle the issues. This is the case in Bloemfontein where this study was conducted, and means that street children are usually relying on community work and often get help from non-governmental organizations. This study is based on interviews with individuals who perform social worker with street children in such circumstances in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

The aim with this study is to examine a social worker's perspective concerning their work and development with street children in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Our primarily purpose is to

gain knowledge about how the social workers describe their work in the local context with street children. Further, we will also detect methods and strategies that are utilized in the process of street children leaving the street. And how the social workers express their effort to prevent children from living on the streets in South Africa (SA). More precisely will the following questions be discussed:

1/ How do the social workers describe the local context concerning street children in Bloemfontein, SA?

2/ How do the social workers describe their work and which solutions are available in Bloemfontein, SA?

The social worker's perspective explored in the results is later on analyzed by a theoretical tool/stage called the turning point from Helen Fuchs Bach's (1988) theory The Exit Process. More precisely will a certain stage in the exit process called the Turning Point be used. The Turning Point is defined by identifying behavioral changes that are needed in order to survive, or to adjust to different environments. Understanding the results using the Turing Point will develop our understanding for the process behind the work, which is to reach a stage in a street child's life where everything changes.

2. Background

This part includes definitions of concepts that are of importance for understanding this study. The selection of the concepts is based on which terms the participants used.

2.1 Street Child

UNICEF (2001) defined a street child as any boy or girl who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street has become her or his habitual abode and/ or sources of livelihood, one who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults. What is clear from the above definition of a street child is that such a child leaves home to stay on the street and the street not only becomes the child's home but also the source of a living. Such a child assumes full responsibilities on his or her own life. Street children are further as either '*on the street*' or '*of the street*'. Children '*of the street*' live and sleep on the streets in urban areas and streets are their homes whereas children '*on the street*' have their homes and only come to the streets to beg for money during the day and return home in the evening. The former group has no contact with family while the latter lives with family (Chireshe, Jadezweni, Cekiso, et al, 2014). Our research and interviews are focused on both children '*of the street*' and children '*on the street*', as the organization's work with both.

2.2 Social Work

Social work is practiced by educated social workers with the aim of improving conditions for people suffering from social deprivation. To apply theories regarding social systems and human behavior, social work engages in the interaction between people and their environments. The principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental in order to perform social work (Hare, 2000).

2.3 Social Worker

The social work profession promotes problem-solving concerning human relationships, social change and provide liberation and empowerment to people to enhance wellbeing. The profession of a social worker practice injustices and barriers that exist in the society at an everyday basis. It utilizes a variety of skills such as different techniques and activities consistent with a holistic focus on persons and their environments. Social workers practice

counseling, clinical social work, group work, social pedagogical work, family treatment and therapy, as well as different efforts to help people obtain resources and services in the community. It also includes engaging in the social and political actions to impact the social development (Hare, 2000).

In our thesis the concept social worker will be used not only in the definition of the profession. The definition of a social worker will include social work; as volunteers and people working in care centres and NGOs.

2.4 Social Development

Johnson, Butterfield and Chisanga (2008) define social development as a strategy to improve the standard of living and well-being of people living in the community. The concept of development is a positive change in the living conditions available through the planned improvements. It may be to formulate goals and implement programs to achieve development. Without a supportive and community; it is difficult to create and establish positive conditions for people and create social development.

2.5 Community Work

The concept of community is a collection of people who interact and share common characteristics such as; interest, identification, culture, activity or location. The relevant parts to community-work and development include: *Community participation*, *community integration*, *self-help development* and *community capacity building*. Community work encompasses work done by nonprofit or community based associations. A community is helping each other in different forms of support, both from employed staff or unpaid volunteers in order to be able to establish social development and social work there is fundamental to have a functionary and supportive community (Johnson, Butterfield and Chisanga, 2008).

2.6 Non-governmental organization (NGO)

Non-governmental organization is a not-for-profit organization that is independent from governmental organizations. They are usually financed by donations or is driven by volunteers. Schmid (2003) is writing that the government is answerable for policy making

and determining the standards and quality of services. It can be described as the non-governmental organizations act as a buffer between the government and the citizens. They are directly involved in negotiation of provision of services. The non-governmental organizations are more flexible in responding to specific needs of clients. Further in the research we will use the abbreviation “NGO” for Non-governmental organizations.

2.7 Non-profit organization (NPO)

Non-profit organization does not focus on money; it has no intention of distributing extant revenue to leaders or to members. The focus is to reach the goal of the organization. Alter (2008) describes a non-profit organization as; an organization that are fairly specialized and voluntarily want to offer the highest quality to their clients.

3. Former Research

There are different aspects and views of the global issue of street children – therefore it is important to highlight previous research concerning the social worker's view and work with street children. Our choice of articles, was guided by getting closer to the research carried out earlier concerning street children in South Africa.

3.1 Children Living on the Street

Despite their cultural differences, street children represent a worldwide phenomenon. Examination of literature indicates that the backgrounds of street children are remarkably similar. Even though, there are different countries and regions that have different structures of the existing policy on street children (De Brito, 2014).

In South Africa discrimination of races is commonplace with street children. These children are seen as a threat to public safety. De Brito (2014) write that for the children to be treated respectfully, an extensive protection system that protects all people is required in every community. Because as it seems now, many fall outside the system. Organizations that deal with human rights have a strong collective recommendation of precisely that dilemma concerning street children. Therefore, De Brito (2014) writes that the organizations should have an involvement in creating a meaningful protection system.

Many street children come from structurally disadvantaged homes with poor living conditions. Parental loss through deaths or shortages of housing force children onto the streets in order to survive. According to Le Roux (w.y.) street life is an adaptive response to stress experienced by families living in poor conditions. The move onto the streets can represent a desire to take control and displace old values and habits with new ones.

According to Nikku (2012), social workers work with children in need and provide services to ensure street children's rights. They are involved on a daily basis as to how to keep the children safe and which provider in society that can give the best tools for protection. As a social worker there is a need to work strategically as a civil society appeals to the protection of human rights, especially of minorities and street children that are often ignored by the government. Children's voices go often unheard and the right to affect the decision

concerning them are ignored. Nikku (2012) mentions the importance for social workers to include the participation of children in practices, in terms of initial approaches on the street and concerning the rights of education and a place to stay.

3.2 Push-factors for Becoming a Street Child

Ward and Seager (2010) carried out a sub-study concerning children within the Human Sciences Research Council study of street children in South Africa. Three methodologies were used in the research – interviews, survey and census. In Johannesburg, twelve workers from different areas and from three programs serving homeless children were interviewed. In Cape Town, a focus group discussion was held with five directors from four service providers. These interviews assessed the service system environment. The findings in the article were that the number of children on the streets is an indicator of the number of children living in poverty in South Africa. According to Ward and Seager (2010), the issue can only be reduced through preventive initiatives – by reducing the numbers of families living in poverty and supporting families so they can raise their children safely.

Street children are a consequence of poverty, low education, abuse and lack of parenthood. Ward and Seager (2010) writes, *push-factors* such as situations of abuse, domestic violence or poor family relationships are common among street children. It can go as far as their situation within the home becomes unbearable and they choose to live on the street. Ward and Seager (2010) write that preventative work reduces the number of children living on the street, it is therefore important that organizations put in significant effort at an early stage. Also as a measurable instrument of the work and methods that are practiced by social workers.

Ward and Seager (2010) state that within the interviews with children concerning push-factors, the girls described sexual abuse by stepfathers, while boys described irritated relationships with step-parents. Another problem noted, is that most of the street children end up in city centers. According to Ward and Seager (2010) the consequences of this fact, that most of the services available are located in city centers and reach children only when they have been on the streets for some time. Because of the services location the children do not get any protection directly which could be necessary for survival. The lack of preventive work reduces the alternatives for street children, and push them involuntary to the street.

Le Roux (w.y.) research, based on interviews with colored and black street children in Pretoria, South Africa was compared and discussed with former research done on South African street children. The average age of the respondents of street children is estimated to be between 13-14 years and the agencies mentioned in the article, dealt with children within this age. According to Le Roux (w.y.) most street children have been on the streets for at least three years or longer and they cited family violence, parental alcoholism, abuse and poverty as the main motivating push-factors for leaving home. The “street children phenomenon” in South Africa is the outcome of the political system of racial segregation that took place in 1940. But there are many other factors that should be considered such as social, economic, cultural and educational realities, according to Le Roux (w.y.)

3.3 Amount and Gender

Veale and Doná (2003) write that the majority of street children are actually boys. The research discovered that the average age of the street children in South Africa was approximately 13 years of age and usually black males. The reasons why it is mostly boys depends on different elements such as socio-cultural factors connected to gender. According to findings in Le Roux (w.y), the main reason South African children often are boys indicates that it is the girl's responsibility to take care of the younger children as well as the household. It appears that girls are not abandoned when families disintegrate; the relatives and neighbors are more willing to take care of girls who are able to assist with household duties than boys who do not. One can find such factors described in the research of Veale and Doná (2003), implying the encouragement of girls to participate in helping to run the household. Veale and Doná describe an example from Kenya, where boys are taught to become independent at a young age while girls are encouraged to stay at home. Some families are also very reluctant of sending girls onto the streets because they fear that they could be sexually abused (Veale and Doná, 2003).

Cultural norms of gender were also a reason for apprehension. Veale and Doná (2003) write that in Sudan, where almost all street children are boys, it is considered inappropriate for girls to walk alone on the streets. According to a study of street children in Ethiopia, female

curfews at night were in place to avoid such confrontation considering the first experienced rape was of a mere 13-year-old.

3.4 Shelters for Street Children

Mokomane and Makaoae (2015) have done a qualitative study about shelters for street children in South Africa. They describe that shelters offer many developmental processes, such as therapeutic ones. The shelters also have recreational programs at an early intervention level. In the study it is described that children '*of the street*' live and sleep on the streets in urban areas and the streets are their homes; whereas children '*on the street*' have homes and only come to the streets to beg for money during the day and return home in the evening. Children of the streets have a home they rarely visit; the street is their main residence (Chireshe, Jadezweni, Cekiso, et al, 2014).

Mokomane and Makaoaes (2015) main findings showed that all shelters offer some form of therapeutic, developmental and recreational programs and that they are trying to reach the street children at a preventive level. The first step being when they come to the shelters is to estimate the individual's basic needs of food and clothing, then they look at the psycho-social nature, where the person is offered an accustomed consultation. The next step is to find out what stage of development the children have reached, listen to the events that have affected their lives, and focus on their family backgrounds; then one can finally assess the root of why the child has been living on the street. The causes of children living on the street has been attributed to a combination of socio-economic factors, such as high levels of unemployment, family poverty, increasing levels of union instability and dissolutions, lack of family support systems, high virus (HIV) prevalence, substance abuse and domestic violence (Mokomane & Makaoae, 2015).

3.5 Adjust Setbacks

Hills, Meyer-Weitz and Oppong Asante (2016) write a qualitative study about the perceived experience of street children from Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller. The study described a person's ability of overcome and positively adjust setbacks.

A setback can be defined as an unanticipated or abrupt change from better to worse. It can be something that happens in delaying or preventing a process in order for it to evolve. There are several factors both outside and within the individual which are combined to see the normal development and behavior patterns of the individual.

They examine three main themes to describe experiences of street children: (a) violence as an everyday experience, (b) substance abuse, and (c) psychosocial and contextual resources for resilience. What affects this is the lack of protection and shelter to all the homeless street children, because they are more likely to be victims than the general population in South Africa. Many street children have a high risk of being abused and injured because of violence. There is also evidence for drug-related violence committed by older boys on younger boys, including gang-related violence and abuse. Hills, Meyer-Weitz and Oppong Asante (2016) also write that drugs play a big part in the lives of some street children. They use drugs to handle adversity. For example, one girl in the study said:

“To cope, I smoke cigarettes because I think it helps me deal with the stress of living on the street. Me and my friends love to drink, smoke and have fun at the clubs”. (Hills, Meyer-Weitz and Oppong Asante, 2016, p.5)

4. Theoretical Tool

This part contains the theoretical tool that will be used to analyze the results. In the book called *Becoming an Ex* does the American sociologist Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) describe a theory called Exit Process which includes four stages of changing into different roles and behavior. The first definable stage of the exit process is called first doubts and occurs when a person begins to question and experience doubt about their role commitment. The doubting stage is essential for reinterpreting and redefining a situation that earlier was taken for granted. Expectations that had been defined as acceptable begin to take new meanings. First doubts involve a reinterpretation of reality, a realization that things are not what they seemed. The second stage is called seeking alternatives. After experiencing first doubts about a current role or a situation, especially under conditions of positive social support, it is followed by a period which the individual start to seeks out and evaluate alternative roles. The individual can be aware of alternatives during the doubting process, which the existence of alternatives either provoke or encourage the doubts themselves. There comes a point where the person admits dissatisfaction in a current role, alternative seeking becomes a conscious step in the exiting process.

After a period of weighing alternatives, calculating the costs and rewards of leaving a current role, it comes a point in the role-exiting process at which the individual makes a firm and definitive decision to exit. This third stage is called turning point. This firm decision to exit usually occurs in connection with some turning point in the individual's life. The whole theory, including four steps and stages will not be used here; it is only the third stage and the concept the turning point that will be used for analyzing the results. Turning Point is an event in an individual's life that mobilizes and focuses awareness that old lines of action have failed or have been disrupted or no longer provides individuals with the opportunity to do something different with their lives (Fuchs Ebaugh 1988). The third step involves identity changes in order to adjust to your new situation, such as giving up the old habits in order to process into a better self, this process is observed by social workers in Bloemfontein.

4.1 The Turning Point

The Turning Point refers to a process where people suffering from destructive lives eventually comes to a turning event or a point. This stage is our main focus in this study since social workers works with children that have left the street have observed behavioral changes among children they work with.

According to Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) there are several types of turning points that claim the time period of making a role choice important. In terms of time, a person can be gradually evolved to the point of making a firm decision about a role choice; for some people, the decision to resign a role occurred gradual over many months or even years. Others experience a more abrupt and dramatic turning point. In some cases, these turning points where major events; in many other cases the event itself was minor, but took on a great symbolic importance because the fact that it symbolized the culmination of feelings and role ambivalence.

There are five major types of events of specific turning points: (1) specific events, (2) “the straw that broke the camel’s back”, (3) time-related factors, (4) excuses and (5) either/or alternatives. Specific events are occurrences that crystallize one’s ambivalence toward a current role and place the choice to exit in bold relief. These events could for example be death in a family. A second type of specific tuning point is an event that followed gradual build-up feelings; also described as “straws that broke the camel’s back”. The specific event came at a point where the individual was ripe to make a decision. The event simply became the occasion to take a firm stand and announce an exit. A third type of event that served as a turning point related to time factors, such as different crisis related to age. A fourth type of turning point was an incident that provided excuses or justifications for the need to leave a role. Some event made it clear that an exit was necessary for the individual’s well-being.

The final type of turning point is the either/or situations that is a realization of either seeking for help or end up dead due to the circumstances in their current lives. This stage is defined by realizing that behavioral changes are needed in order to survive. It is also about adjust to different environments. The realization of change can occur after an event, after realizing the risks of a certain behavior or after reaching a point where it is impossible to go on. The

realization often occurs after a dramatic event such as fights, accidents or significant events in individuals themselves.

Behavioral or identity changes are often noticed or observed by surroundings or professionals; since it affects individuals strongly when it comes to interaction, reaction and behavior. Turning point is also characterized by a heap of strong emotions. Professionals observe heaps of different emotions from individuals reaching this step mentally, the strong emotions show that the individual have reached a point where it is impossible to act and behave like in the past. Fuchs Ebaugh (1998) believes that the emotional reactions vary depending on what kind of separations it is, what stage in life the individual is at the time and the surrounding circumstances.

Thinking in terms of a Turning Point is relevant in a context where people, or in this case children are exposed to violence or a destructive environment but manage to survive and adjust to new circumstances. The concept is useful in order to understand how social workers explain the work with children that comes from destructive circumstances and how a change is reached. Social workers are involved with the street children from the beginning and can see the differences and how these children change through the process, before and after the Turning Point. The Turning Point is therefore a useful in order to analyze the results of study.

5. Methods

Bryman (2014) write that an inductive approach means creating an understanding of reality by observing a phenomenon in the reality and understand the phenomenon in order to explain reality. The study has an inductive approach based on how the social workers explain their work with street children. The inductive approach was a preference in order to gain information from the respondents, basically because of our lack of knowledge about both the subject and South Africa. The approach made it easier to meet the social workers, learn from their statements and later create themes based on what was communicated in the interviews.

In order to study the social worker's perspective and describe the problems in the work with street children, this study contains ten interviews with social workers in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Interviews were performed focusing on which methods social workers utilized in interaction with street children, but also on how street children's lives can be affected by social work in Bloemfontein. Our main methodology was qualitative interviews with social workers or volunteers working with street children.

5.1 Sample

Data collection took place during eight week in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Our ambition was to use social workers as interviewees, but since there were few people with a social work degree working with street children in the area we had to include volunteers. The most important consideration was that the people we chose to interview had been working with street children. Therefore, we searched for not only social workers, but volunteers working with street children. Our sample consists of 10 participants; two volunteer workers, one unqualified social worker at NGOs/NPOs and seven social workers that are involved at care centers (appendix 3). Our sample was smaller than first expected since Bloemfontein had a few social workers working with street children. On the other hand, where other occupations performing social work with street children and this made it possible to get closer to the phenomenon street children on an everyday basis.

5.2 Semi-structured Interview

In order to gain knowledge about the social worker's perspectives their work with street children where qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted. The semi-structured interview is more focused on people's own perceptions and views. An emphasis is directed focused on the views of the participants, rather than on the researcher's interest. In semi-structured interviews the researcher has a list of specific themes mentioned in the interview, but the interviewees have the ability to design the answers in their own way. Questions do not need to be asked in chronological order. The researcher could therefore, easily ask questions not included in the guide if the interviewee relates to the subject that is mentioned (Bryman, 2014). We chose the semi-structures interview because it gave more opportunity for the participants to take part in the interview.

5.3 Constructing the Interview Guide

It started with brainstorming about what we already knew and what we wanted to know about social work with street children. When we constructed the interview guide, we noticed that several questions had similarities. To give some structure to the process we divided the questions we wanted to gain knowledge about in themes such as; social worker's work individually, the society, cooperation, street children as a subject, processes/methods, experiences, feelings and family relationships. Some questions lost their meaning in the process and other questions and themes grew as they were more connected to our aim and question of issue.

5.4 Collecting the Data

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) states that the qualitative interview is flexible. Our questions setup was sometimes modified at the place of the interview, we therefore used a *semi-structured* interview. As interviewers, it is important to bring forth the knowledge of the subject. All participants in the thesis were informed of the aim and the reason of the research.

In general, the interviews were structured, but there were always follow-up questions or deeper discussions about each question that did not really belong to the interview guide. We saw it as both positive and negative for our study. Positive in terms of more perspectives that

we did not think about at first, such as the children's own strategies to survive on the street, not just the help of the social workers. The negative aspect was that we got more material than necessary for our question of issue, such as long stories of experiences the social workers had experienced with street children.

In qualitative interviews, it is the respondent's perspective that is of most importance and has a central meaning. By interaction it is easy to acknowledge details that easily could disappear in a quantitative research (Karlsson, 2012). The interviewees interacted with us in a way that created a conversation instead of only keeping straight to the interview guide. Some interviews changed directions that lead to new information or depth conversations about the greater picture of the social issues of South Africa.

We believed that interviews with people who work with street children is the best way of getting knowledge about their lives on a deeper level. We wanted to describe how social workers viewed their own work and methods they used to perform social work with street children. Through semi-structured interviews, the conversation took different directions and it was a way to find out more details about the work that the social workers perform in order to change the situation.

5.5 Transcripts of Interviews

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed word by word. in order to retell the stories and answers from participant's word by word. The transcriptions were created in order to facilitate closer analysis of the material. Since our data consists of 10 interviews, each interviewee was given a number from 1-10 to encode the participants. The number explains if the interviewee was a social worker or volunteer (Appendix 3). Therefore, there is a number after each quote that comes from a certain interviewee.

5.6 Thematic Analysis

The transcribed material from the interviews was coded and categorized in themes. Many codes were identified and later grouped together based on similarities. In other words, thematised. In the search for themes, there are important concepts you should be aware of. To name a few examples we assumed, such as repetitions that are themes that return time after

time, there are also local categories, that expressions are unknown to us or are used in an unusual way. Another is, similarities and differences, this is about how the interviewees discuss various themes differently and how they differ from one another. The last one, theory-related material, which is the use of social science concepts as a basis for themes (Bryman, 2014).

Two themes emerged as more relevant than the others. These two themes were Problems and Solutions and answerers which problems there are, and which solutions that is necessary to solve the problems. These two themes and their sub-themes are presented in the result part of the study. There is an emphasis on what the participants are saying and less focus on how it is expressed (Bryman, 2014). The most significant quotes were selected to exemplify each theme. In the result, each participant is entitled by a number (1) -(10) to make the result more fluent.

5.7 Reliability and Validity

The data collection is described relatively detailed in order to adopt openness against another researcher' who wishes to do a similar study. Padgett (2008) describes that in qualitative research it is impossible to make an exact replication of a study. However, by leaving detailed audit trails of the methodological process, it creates possibility of a replication. We have described the main steps in the research process in detail in order to create an ability for another researcher to make a replica of this study again.

In qualitative studies one should seek after the subjective meanings and depth in the subject we intend to investigate. There is less focus of transferability since the subject meaning is important for the aim of the research (Bryman, 2014). Therefore, themes without relevance for the aim were deleted at an early stage of the analysis process. These efforts were made to sustain validity of the research. We as researchers kept an open mind into the conversation with every participant in order to seize every detail they wanted to share with us. A few questions were revised after the first interviews in case of relevance for the direction of the interview. The respondent's answered in the trails of what we as researchers also observed for ourselves, out in the field at the social workers' workplace, and out in the streets where the children live. Our own observations when visiting the workplace were indeed connected

to the participant's descriptions in the interviews. The conclusions are connected, which is an important matter in validity.

5.9 Ethical Considerations

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) write that we get the most knowledge when we as interviewers can affect the social relationship between us and the person we are interviewing. The person must feel free and confident enough to explain and discuss events. It requires a good balance between ethical respect for the interviewee's integrity and our interest to access valuable knowledge.

The questions were about street children in general and about the social worker's methods used when working with the street children. The questions were not asked to owe knowledge over the limit of private matters. The research was made for the purpose of outweighing the risks and could not be carried out in any other way due to concerns that the focus on the interviews was on the participant's description.

We chose to interview the social workers who work with the children in order to get their aspects of their work. By only engaging in conversation about their work with the children, there would not be any potential harm to the children or to the social workers on a private level.

The intentionality of the study is to investigate how the social workers describe the street children and to get their own perspective of their work. Without treading on any toes, we put forward our request which allowed us to obtain a deeper description of the social worker's perspective without putting the social workers at any risks, since the focus was on their experiences at work. The questions in our interview guide left little space for private matters. It was also important to have the participants consent when interviewing them. We informed them in advance what the questions were about and what we were going to do with the information. We informed them about confidentiality and that the information we obtained only would be used for our study at the University.

It is essential to inform about the content of the interviews beforehand, minimizing the risk of misunderstandings and confusion. Padgett (2008) write about basic elements of informed consent:

- Assurance that participation is voluntary and that the participant has the right to withdraw at any time without consequences or loss of services
- A guarantee of strict confidentiality

In our interviews, the interviewees agreed to the interview after we informed them that the participation is voluntary and confidential. The interviewees received the information both by email and before we inquired about taking part in an interview. The interviewee consented to the interview beforehand by email, and before we started recording the interview. We always informed the interviewees again, when we met them, that the interview is voluntary.

The information we obtained from the interviewees is strictly confidential, which means that we have not mentioned any names of the participants, or names of the organizations they work for. We have handled the data carefully and tried to clarify what every single interviewee has explained to us. Everybody has made their voice heard, our job was to present the information in a clear manner for readers to understand. The data is now stored strictly confidentially on a hard drive.

5.10 Limitations

Most people in Bloemfontein have Afrikaans as their primary language, and English as their second. Afrikaans is considered as a limitation for us to understand, which included obstacles such as misunderstandings, different definitions of conception and pronunciation. The English dialect in Bloemfontein is characterized from the Afrikaans pronunciation and is sometimes difficult to understand. Many methodological considerations had to be made due to the language limitations such as; more distinct explanations of the interview questions. A challenge was basically to select interviewees and find people we could communicate with.

Blumer (1969) write that by addressing the individual meanings that people enforce on objects, events, and behaviors. It is understood that people act accordingly based on what they believe or see, not just on what is objectively correct. Society is believed to be socially

constructed through human interpretation. People understand the behavior of others and by how they form a social bond. Social workers cannot possibly have the same perceptions and feelings as a street child. They can provide a descriptive opinion from their point of view on the differences of individual personality development and causes that put the child on the street, but never a true one from the child's perspective. That is why it is important to highlight that this thesis is from a professional's point of view, not one of the individual street child.

6. Results - Problems and Solutions

The result is divided into two themes; Problems and Solutions. The first includes a description of the local environment where social worker with street children is performed. The second, Solutions, pay attention to how the social workers describe their work and which solutions that are available concerning their work with street children.

6.1 Problems

All the interviewees expressed their view of which problems that arise with street children. This part is based on personal accounts by social workers or volunteers and is divided into the following sub-themes; Local Context, The Quick Fix, Family Relationships and Streetwise.

6.1.1 Local Context

In conversation with the social workers we talked about street children and how they perceive the issue of the phenomenon. It also appeared how the locals view street children. All interviewees agreed that street children are viewed as vulnerable by the society and that these children fit into particular profiles when it comes to their personalities, such as being extremely resilient. The interviewees describe the word “street child” in a way that can be used in order to discriminate street children. It is a concept that is undesirable to be associated with, or even talk about. These children are not any different from any other child. The following is a quote from interviewee:

You are not comfortable when talking about street children. I wish that people could change their perception. They are just children, but they are children that living on the street. We should think about, why the children are on the street. The children maybe on the street because of family problems, they don't have the same privileges as other children. Before I was a social worker I thought that these children were dangerous. But when I worked with them I saw that they are just like any other child. We are giving them power through our fear. I want all street children to be seen differently. (7)

According to several interviewees there are usually two different types of street children; there is the “manipulative” one and the “naïve” one. The naïve child is basically new to the street and does not have the experiences of the street yet. As one interviewee said:

The naïve one is the one who is mostly beaten up by the other street children, just because they don't just yet have the same skills and experience as the other children. (5)

The manipulative type is referring to the child who have been on the street for a while and knows how to adapt to the surroundings in order to get what they want. By using clever skills, they have learned by others on the street: “Street children is good at manipulate, they know what social workers wants to hear in order to get what they want” (7).

Another expressed type of street children was so called “*strollers*”, which means children who have a family and do not sleep on the streets. To describe this concept of a street child the social worker discloses that the family of the specific child knows that he or she are begging on the street, these children are ‘*on the street*’ (4) and the begging is usually the entire family's biggest income.

According to one volunteer worker, urbanization creates the issue of street children. The volunteer explains that there are varieties of reasons for being on the street. The privileges that children regularly have are taken away. The volunteer further explains that the perception of street children in the community is that they are dangerous; it brings fear to people which also indirectly gives the children power. Several social workers follow the reasoning above and explain that these children come from families or situations that eventually forces them to leave, there is nowhere else to go but the street. One interviewee, who works directly with the children said the following; “They don’t feel any sense of belonging with their families; it is mostly family and poverty that goes hand in hand for a child to become a street child” (5).

There is an illusion of freedom that these children get by living on the street. It is not a choice to leave their homes for the street but there is a conscious choice to stay on the street. One social worker (3) described how a lot of children live under bridges by the water and canals to feel safer. These places become warm because of heat from the sun. This become a shelter for the cold winters and rainy days.

The social workers that we interviewed said that the age of street children is various however it mostly begins in the early teens and continues up until the year of 20. The teens mostly get in trouble with the families, therefore, the small or youngest children are less common living on the streets. There are children that pretend to be younger or older in order to get help from social services according to one interviewee:

These children can take care of themselves in very bad circumstances. They have people skills and know exactly how to read you to get them to do what they want you to do. They are excellent readers, in a negative way, but also in a good way when they protect each other. (3)

Social workers conveyed that they have seen that mainly boys live on the street and tend to be more violent and easily get into criminal activities. When it comes to girls, these children tend to get involved with human trafficking or use their bodies in prostitution. One social worker that work daily with street children are saying:

The girls can use their bodies; they fall into prostitution and make a living easier. The boys are more dangerous - but it's easier to engage with the boys. The girls are more tricky - they know what to say and have more attitudes when they are making money on the street by selling their bodies, they don't want the help. They could in that way be more dangerous for the colleagues. It's easier to work with the boy's mindset. (6)

The social worker further explains that it all depends on what pursuit the society has. Some parts are more conservative and other places have lot of prostitution of boys. Girls tend to be more subjected to violence as a consequence of the trafficking and prostitution.

The interviewees said that street children create their own family on the street. It becomes a community. The fifth interviewee mentioned that there is another set of rules when it comes to morality and these rules are free from the pressure of the laws of society. The tough part of being a street child is to survive by yourself without any support except from the other street children. The community is created in order to protect every member of the group and it is one of the important survival strategies they use. We never saw a street child by her/his own.

They slept, walked or begged, always nearby or together with other street children. Interviewee 9 told us that the children have a rule that they must share everything; money, food or other things they collect during the day out on the street.

Another issue that is associated with the life on the street is the glue sniffing. The glue is one of the many surviving strategies that keep these children resilient to their own feelings and anxiety. One social worker explained this in the following way:

The weather is also a big factor. The winter in Bloemfontein is cold so you can die if you live on the street. It could be minus 10 outside so it's not that good to sleep outside during that time. But the glue will fix their minds, because of their anxiety and feelings - they numb themselves down. The glue is helping them numb down both the hunger and the cold. (1)

6.1.2 The Quick Fix

A social worker with rich experience of helping street children told us: “That most of these children relate to the street more than the home they once had” (4). The circumstances and environment at home could make it difficult for children to stay. It is when a child leaves home for the street, that it shows their determination and believe for this only solution. Therefore, it is extremely important to make them realize that there are rights for children that they could turn to, to gain support and eventually create a better life.

From an interview with one volunteer it was revealed that street children are perceived as an issue that people feel guilty about as well as a failure from the community. The people of the community look at the issue and believe in a “*quick fix*”. The problem with the thought about the so called “quick fix” is that:

...it’s like taking a fish out of the water and expect it to survive. To take the street away from the children for good requires approach of preparation. These children are humans and not objects, they are still children of the street, no matter how society shows to perceive them. (4)

According to most interviewees, there is a good will in Bloemfontein from the community to contribute to the work they do. Many people donate to different organizations to help the work with the children. One interviewee explained: “Most organizations wouldn't have survived for all the years if it wasn't for the good will of people” (8).

It was continued explained, that the most beneficial way for the organizations to get money is via churches, volunteers or interest from departments and businesses. Donations can also come from other countries but often within South Africa. But there are also people that give money directly to the children. In fact, several interviewees mentioned that this contributes to that the children staying on the street because when they collect money themselves and use it to buy glue or other drugs according to the social workers. In that way they do not need the organizations and the problem remains.

Think before you give a child on the street money or food or something else; think of what you are supporting. People can give the child money to feel better about themselves, they give the money because of the guilt. (10)

Another interviewee mentioned that “People should have knowledge about the fact that if you give a street child money, it enforces bad habits” (10). It is the habit of giving, that make children stay on the street and find it harder to get out of the bad situation that they are in. One of the volunteers believed that the most common reason to give street children money is that people want to feel good about themselves: “The children are visible and saying to the community that “you failed me” and the society don't want to see it in that way.” (2). It was described as; people do not want to see the problem that is in front of them. It feels better to give street children money since it creates a satisfactory feeling of an action of a good deed. One problem with this way of view the issue of street children is that: “The money does not go to food, instead it goes to drugs” (6).

6.1.3 Family Relationships

Almost all interviewees had similar answers when it came to family conditions; almost every street child has a family. Some interviewees mentioned that a few families are unable to change or to work future-oriented with: “The families are unable to see that they cannot give

the children what they need” (7). Reasons that children leave their homes was exemplified as abuse, poverty, lack of resources and education:

Most parents have not been taught the right way to take care of a child and do not make good role models. The fathers are usually absent, which creates a loss of a male role model for the boys. (9)

It was also described that, in an environment where abuse or neglect are present in different terms it eventually becomes normal for a child. This description confirms a certain fundamental mindset of the parents of these children. To state this it was expressed that the parent-child relationship is usually bad:

The children could be cold, hungry or have physical needs, but won't go back home to their family. The bad habitat of the home could be worse than the street, it mostly poverty or abuse that goes hand in hand for a child to become a street child. The things that children experience during childhood form them in the future. (7)

As this quote points out, these children have individual requirements and a need to be seen.

6.1.4 Streetwise

A social worker (2) expressed that street children are very good at using and taking advantage of the relationships with social workers or volunteers. Some of the interviewees even mentioned, that the children use skills to manipulate people in order to get what they want or need. One social worker said the following: “These children grow up faster and learn skills in order to survive. They need a strong mentality: they need to be street smart” (3). It was further explained that one of the habits is to beg for money. These children mobilize themselves to places where there are a lot of tourists, for example around the coast. Street children can show feelings of anger when they are offered food instead of money: “Some are aggressive. If people don't give, they could attack them by spitting on them or fight.” (10).

The social workers told us that there is a lot of violence in different kinds of ways on the street. There are children who have been directly exposed to violence, have been subjected to violence on different levels or witnessed violence in their communities or within the family. Violence could be experienced on both a psychological and physical level. It affects each child differently:

People take advantage of them violently or sexually - because they know they are vulnerable and the child doesn't care anymore because he gets money. They already have been subjected to violence before and therefore it doesn't matter anymore. (3)

Some interviewees told us that some of these children have a stronger resilience due to the circumstances: "They managed to create a life for themselves even if the families and environment was terrible" (5). It was further described that these children cope and take care of themselves at a young age, they are in other words skilled and know how to read people. These children are small but yet so tough. These children grew up too fast and skipped important parts of childhood: "They would kill for a blanket. They create little communities to protect each other - its survival strategies" (1).

6.2 Solutions

The second main theme that revealed itself through analysis was Solutions. This part of the result is exploring this theme and are dealing with methods and strategies that the social workers said that they used in order to get the children away from the streets. The following sub-themes will be discussed; The Organizations, Preventive Work as an Effort, The Possibility of Making a Difference, Gender Methods, Family-based Work and Strategies in Working with Street Children.

6.2.1 The Organizations

Street children are and have been a major issue in Bloemfontein. There are therefore several organizations working with the issue. As a social worker described:

A rewarding part of social work is the realization that there is more awareness of the issue now as well as the politicians are more engaged in the phenomenon of street children. Street children are an issue on the agenda or the political levels. (6)

One social worker described that: “There are many organizations who work with street children but they are often not specialized on this issue” (3). It was further on described that, there are among others, a specialized non-governmental organization that mainly focuses on crime prevention. The NGO make a variety of programs that are preventative in increase crimes at schools for examples. The NGO/NPOs work with social development, churches and there are organizations specialized in street children and organizations specialized in family problems. Services from NGO/NPOs are education, teaching them basic skills, introducing children to formal education and cultural activities such as movies, theater or even art. As one social worker mentioned: “A important event is to celebrate birthdays and holidays in the exchange of receiving rewards for good behavior” (2).

It was mentioned that the cooperation between the organizations often organize programs that are concerning activities such as Child Protection week, creating awareness of the issue and cooperation with the police about crime prevention in schools and programs for challenging bad behavior. It was further on described that:

Some activities allow the children to cooperate and play together in events as soccer tournaments and workshops in order to make people in the society change the perception of street children. It is a chance for the children to be like an ordinary child. (4)

6.2.2 Preventive Work as an Effort

The social worker described, one specific organization that works preventatively with different schools where the children are struggling: “...by measuring what the need is, it makes it easier to work from where the children are, emotionally and physically” (5). Another interviewee discloses that: “The organizations can exhort the children to not use drugs, to explain the importance of good relationships and to prevent criminal activities” (7).

To be able to find solutions for the problematic behavior that the street children often find themselves involved in, a social worker expressed: “That preventive work often occurs between the organizations by sharing favors” (10). It has been described from another interviewee that organizations could divide services: “One organization being responsible for the food while another is responsible for the shelter. Organizations also cooperate with the church and volunteers” (8). It was mentioned by several social workers that volunteers are hard to find. Since volunteers work for free they do not work for long as they also have a need to work for money to provide for themselves. It was explained to us:

The laws mostly depend of the social organizations; it’s not so much support from the government to the organizations. The organization's tries to work together in some ways, even when it is on a small scale. (7)

An interviewee also described another way to help: “Some people approach with a desire to help by being teachers” (5).

One social worker told us about a project of prevention work. It was described as a project of informing schools, and later they tried to make some children ambassadors: “...in purpose of educate other kids about the negative aspect of criminal behavior and street life” (7).

The biggest benefit out of cooperation according to the social workers: “It is easy to steer the children forward to the organization that can help the particular child to reach a for change in behavior and finding their role in society” (8). Another interviewee said that: “It is about the need of the children and these facts are what determinates the cooperation” (5). Further it was described that: “Community work at it best is when everyone starts to stand up for each other” (9). It was further mentioned that it brings problems to attention of the organizations that could help. It could also be challenging because the whole community must get involved with the prevention work to help the children:

Beneficial work is when people are working in a group. That is cost-effective - it’s more helpful than individual work. It’s better to work in groups or teams in order to provide prevention work. That's why the community work is one of the most important work with these children. (6)

Every social worker agreed that the biggest challenges are the lack of support from the government. When the support is absent, the preventive work also decreases. One interviewee expressed that: “NGO or NPO should be to focusing on the social problems. The lack of money from the government has caused a lot of organizations to think like a business instead” (6). Several interviewees expressed that, if Bloemfontein had a better cooperation between the NGOs, NPOs and the government, the pressure on the organizations could change. A social worker expressed the frustration: “I’ve got to search for money in my own pocket to be able to see the result I want” (1).

Another described challenge are the laws that seem to be depending mostly on the social organizations: “...it tends to be the organization's responsibility to keep up the law” (8). One important law, as several interviewees confirmed, is that people working with street children do not do follow-ups on cases: “There is mostly no time for it but also lack of resources” (6). This fact, is one of the biggest problems with community work. The interviewees have also mentioned that there are issues with institutional care: “...we can only concentrate on one problem at a time” (10).

6.2.3 The Possibility of Making a Difference

According to the social workers working with the children, the most meaningful part in their work is the possibility of making a difference in the street children’s lives:

It’s not always a difference as in changing everything for the better in time, it’s about the ability to have an impact on the process of the system and on the political level. (9)

Some of the interviewees mentioned that all humans need love and respect. Every child in the world has a need of love, attention and care in order to change behavior. Street children have a tendency to respond negatively to generosity and actions of love due to the lack of love in their earlier experiences. One social worker explained:

All children are challenging, every child deserves love, attention and care. As much as you give, they could respond negatively. Some children have never

received love so they don't know how to respond to it. Later on when these children become a mother, they can give that attention that their children need, just because of their own childhood. (9)

It was also described: “The most meaningful part of the work is to see children with issues later on make great role-models and become better parents for their own children” (5). Several social workers described these children as humans in need of contact with someone that cares for each of them without being aware of it. As one interviewee expressed:

These children will not ask for help from the social services however the creation of relationships with social workers is very important. It is the first step in restoring the trust in order to get to the turning point of the child’s life. (5)

The findings from the interviews concerning the choice to become a part of social work were mainly to make a difference and be able to make an impression in someone’s life:

I basically want to become a social worker to make differences. A way that create a long and lasting impression. I want to be that person who made an impression on other people and in someone's life. To be a social worker was a good platform to me. (7)

A majority of interviewees described that: “...working with street children comes along with certain feelings such as fear, anger and hopelessness” (8). It was mentioned that it requires passion and to be prepared for crises management due to the unpredictable behavior of the street children: “Social work with street children also includes a lot of effort to influence leaders and politicians in order to strengthen the laws and rights of these children” (7). It was further described that child protections systems must be exercised and that children need a support system:

The most meaningful thing about working with street children is the part of making a difference - not in a direct way but in a process such as influence the system and political levels, and to see the work you do make a difference in the long run. (7)

6.2.4 Genders Methods

The social workers expressed that the methods/processes do not look the same for boys and girls. Firstly, the boys are usually easier to find on the street and are more openly selling items or begging for money: “The children always need to come up with things to entertain people in order to get money” (10). There are specific actions on how to reach out to the girls: “...to reach out to the girls, there is first a need to make contact with the boys” (9). It was also expressed the importance of creating a trustworthy contact with the leaders (often males) of the group.

Various situations were described by social workers, where boys from the street introduced girls to the social workers, with the goal to take the girls off the street. According to interviewee: “Girls are often more vulnerable; as soon as you find a girl it is important to take her off the street right away” (5). Usually, the girls use their bodies to make money and therefore have a different strategy than boys. But also more exposed. One of the social workers described the gender differences as such:

We don't see female street children, most are boys. We often see females' prostitutes. They could be 14 years old or younger. Street children as we know it - aren't really females. In the cities there are more boys. The family that they are creating could both be girls and boys, but there are most boys in charge of the decisions. (10)

6.2.5 Family-based Work

It was brought to our attention that: “Street children usually have done everything that could have done at home in order to save themselves without any success and this leads to feelings of not being loved” (10). It is a child that takes charge of their own life and when they decide to leave their families, there is usually nothing that can make them return home: “Sometimes, when you see what they been through at home, even you as a social worker can feel that the street is a better place for them” (4).

An interviewee explained how it is crucial to find the problems in order to create better circumstances for the whole family: "...the work with families of street children is usually based on family conferences" (8). It was further explained that the conferences are about informing family members about the situation as well as how the family can create a more beneficial environment at home. There is also an intervention of therapy for the whole family, the reason is basically to involve the parents and educate them in how to create a better environment for the child:

The street is more of a home than their real home. We want to establish a better relationship between the child and the parents; our aim is for the child to leave the streets and go back home to a healthy environment. We can't change the environment the child is living in at home, but we can change their relationships and how they respond to each other. When we are educating the children in basic skills, we also educate the parents to make better people. Perhaps then the children can make better adults and parents. (8)

It was also mentioned that family-based work is about reuniting the family and keep the children away from the street, as a preventive method: "Children need a secure environment in order to develop beneficial changes" (7).

6.2.6 Strategies in the Work with Street Children

There are differences in working with street children compared to other children. A social worker described how the work with street children is different in ways of their attitudes, skill levels and education:

...compared to other children that develop from good role models and better circumstances, street children are far from a beneficial environment and come to a point where they find themselves in need for help after a certain event. (3)

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of individuality, that everyone has their own method that works for them when it comes to destructive behavior: "The staff needs to understand that there is not only the visible requirement that needs to be cared for, but also

the psychological needs” (5). Such as unconditional love and sustainability. Furthermore, there must be a will from the child to change and a readiness to move forward in the work for leaving the street: “Some children cope faster than others. Meet each child where they are and consult them” (2).

The social worker described, that these children live like one unit rather than showing their different personalities. The interviewee continued with: “That a group of children can look the same on the outside however you need get to know each child in order to identify what their particular needs are” (5). It was also described how street children have to adapt their own skills when working together in groups:

These individuals are used to live by their own rules and these do not always go together with the rules that society has made. Everyone has their own baggage that has not been dealt with and the level of skills they carry from the street is not functional in the shelter. (9)

Out-reach Work

In the out-reach work the children are allowed to visit the drop-in center. At the drop-in center certain rules are created. The rules are about to create trust: “The glue that they possess is not allowed at the center, but will be brought back to the child as soon as they leave the center” (6). With this strategy the social workers want to make the child return. After a few attempts it eventually will come to a point where the social workers invite them to the shelter. At the drop-in centre, there is an arrangement of new clothes, provision of food and laundry services and assistance with personal hygiene:

The activities are very informal, much about trusting and getting them to want to change. They must do things voluntarily. Later you can ask, do the methods work? Yes, and no, different people different methods. What might work for one child does not work with another. (5)

Furthermore, it was brought to our attention, the importance to create a positive picture for these children. To see each child as an individual and make them see themselves as something more than a child on the street. The interviewee explained this:

If you view yourself as positive and have dreams to reach for it's easier for the surroundings to look and meet you in a positive way. An example for this is play-therapy. It's a case of playing or an activity where the children relax and start to open up without them really noticing it themselves. For example, soccer can make a difference in their everyday life, to have something fun to do together and to develop together. (3)

Restored Trust

In conversation with the social worker that was mentioned several times and brought to our attention. It was the importance of trust, or more in particular restore trust. A social worker mentioned that: "The most important thing is to build and to restore trust, otherwise it is hard to work with these children" (5). Further, it is explained that instead of bringing the children the things that they need, social workers need to spend time with the child in order to make them change through free will: "There is a need of understanding the dynamics of the street children in order to restore the trust. Time needs to be invested in the child otherwise they will get lost and run away again" (5).

Another social worker described that negotiation is often the key: "There are children that are on different stages emotionally and physically that requires in-the-moment work" (7). It is important to allow the children to be in the street in order to make them leave and it is important to take advantage of their knowledge. It was described to us:

In order for a child to leave the street, you must make it the best street child and then, when the child is in the shelter, make it the best drop-in child. At last, the best child for the community. (10)

To gain the children's trust, one social worker explained that they usually do fun things together with the children: "...for example play soccer or bringing them food. As the trust grows it becomes natural and the most important thing is to not make any demands or else these children start to feel stressed out or bored by their terms" (8). Eventually, the children get comfortable and start to open up. For example, activities create distraction and distances children from the street and so the children have fun together and develop together.

The Shelter

After visiting the drop-in centers there is more setting of rules such as not to fight, not to swear, and teach them the terms of living with other people. It was described that there are many various reactions when these children become a part of the shelter: “Some children might sit in a corner or perhaps question the purpose of being there. They no longer have any use of being street wise which is all they know” (6).

The social worker said that: “Some children changes behavior and patterns after entering a shelter” (8). Another told us about the various feelings that they express, such as separation anxiety or when they act out as a reaction of not being able to cope with the situation. Some of the children become more warmhearted and caring in the work of building trust with the social workers:

As soon as these children become a part of the shelter or a safer environment, they develop skills and interest in activities such as playing with toys or showing a heap of emotions. Old children start playing with toys, that they are old but at an emotional and mentally younger age. (3)

It was described that the shelter has social work services such as therapeutic and developmental work in order to make these children see a better life for themselves: “The shelter keeps the children on track with basic needs and behaviors, for example like eating properly” (4). The shelter also gives the children access to informal and formal education but also consistency:

Our aim is to get the children back to their family. If they don't have a family, it's not easy to motivate the child to leave the street. Sometimes the families are impossible to work with - the environment is too bad. If the children don't have a family, where do we suppose to take them? Different families' different methods. (6)

According to the interviewees, the most frequent answer on which difficulties there are is: “To convince the street children to leave the street. The hard part is to convince the children that there is a way to make better lives for themselves, even though they are not yet socially

adapted” (9). It is basically about to make children to understand that the street is not a good place to be as well as, there must be a will to do something about the situation in order to change it. A social worker (10) said: “That it is crucial to get their trust while there is still a way to change their lives if you want to get a child of the street.”

Even though, the goal of social work with street children is to create change and hopefully create more stories of street children that end better. In conversation with the social workers there is stories about street children that ended good but still there is many that end badly:

There is cases of street children that have ended good. These children never become politician or rich but they make life worth living, which is all we aim at. There are also cases that ended badly, mostly in death. There are also those that keep living on the street or get to addicted to the drugs. (2)

7. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine a social worker's perspective concerning their work and development with street children in Bloemfontein, South Africa. In the conversations with the social workers there were two themes, that stood out and seem to be of importance concerning their work with street children. These were Problems and Solutions. The results of this study were organized after these themes.

The problems with street children was described by the social workers as professionals, but also as locals and a part of the community that have issues with street children. It was described how these children affect the people of Bloemfontein in terms of guilt and as a constant reminder of a failing community. Street children are seen as victims, thief's, rebels, lawbreakers and the social workers described the frustration and disgust people feel against these children. The social workers expressed the importance of street children to be viewed differently by people and use their experiences from the street as a social benefit. The situation on the street was described as a developing attempt to fit in the modern society. Le Roux (w.y.) research explained the street life as an adaptive response to stress experienced in poor families. In fact, street children are continuously trying to fit into the social life as well as in the community.

The solutions described by the social workers were methods and strategies for dealing with the problems with street children. All social workers expressed that it is impossible to work with street children without knowledge about their dynamic on the street, and without create a trustful relationship with each one of them. There is a major problem that most children eventually end up in the city centers. The consequences of this fact is that most of the services available are located in other areas and therefore reach children only when they have been on the streets for some time. This is also a problem mentioned in the research of Ward and Seger (2010). Their result shows that most organizations find that children have been on the street for a long time. In order to make work more effective do Ward and Seger (2012) indicate that it is important that organizations strive for visibility in terms of outreach work, raising awareness and more street workers. The organizations in Bloemfontein have taken this fact into their work as an effort of increasing the control of push-factors and reasons for children wanting to choose a life on the street.

Nikku (2012) express similar thought when stating the importance of the social workers approaches on the street, concerning the rights of children but also in terms of places for street children to stay. There are many children that are changed by the social worker's attempt of approaching these children or by stay at the shelter. Either, the change is within the interaction of the social workers or in the realization for a better life it is a change that eventually come. At the shelter, there is basically a lot of focus on teaching these children the opportunities in the community and to develop positive thinking within themselves. Social worker's say that they to some extent change street children's lives. Perhaps not in terms of successful carriers, but in terms of becoming a better person. The social workers encourage these children to give back to the community, for a better community and future.

The rest of this sections is divided into the following parts: Push- and Pull factors, Turning Points, Further Research and Methodology Discussion.

7.1 Push-factors and Pull-factors

Former research by Ward and Seager (2012) describe the so-called push-factors. Push-factors explain the reasons and lack of choices these children have before leaving their families for a life on the street. As mentioned earlier, push-factors are consequences of poverty, low education and lack of parenthood that pushes children onto the street. Other reasons for leaving home is because of the situations of abuse, domestic violence and poor family relationships that makes these children eventually leave their homes. In fact, most of the parents of street children have a similar childhood filled with violence or abuse and do therefore not see the risks and dangers of the street life.

Another research by Le Roux (w.y.) claims similar reasons that push children into the street. In the research it is describe that most street children have been on the streets for at least three years or longer and they quoted family violence, parental alcoholism, abuse and poverty as the main motivating factors for leaving home. The move into the street can in other words also represent a desire for control and displace old values, which brings us to other factors than earlier mentioned.

In conversation with the social workers and as have been dealt with in the results, it becomes evident that there are factors that pull children into the street. A pull-factor is an aspect or

feature which makes the street life an attractive option. Pull factors expressed by the interviewees where that street life offers an income in terms of begging, freedom, drugs such as glue-sniffing and a sense of belonging. Even if the streets are filled with danger and risks there is nothing these children have not experienced before at their own homes. The poor family relationships with violence and abuse leave the child without alternatives and the street life can in some ways be a better option. For some families in poverty the children on the street makes the only income for the entire family. The street life creates a sense of belonging for street children, they stay together, protect each other and each child fulfill a purpose in the group. Street children form groups that are resembled of small families.

Highlighting pull-factors regarding the phenomena street children is one way that this thesis is contributing to previous research. The pull-factors are the factors that draws these children onto the street. Childhood are viewed differently in South Africa, for some children the act of making an income is a part of growing up and creates freedom. Poverty in the family is constant and a limitation for the child to experience a regular childhood in terms of food, to play, shelter and freedom. Children see the street life as an opportunity to make an income for themselves and their family.

Social workers described the community and government as failing. Street children are on the political agenda, but there are no resources or methods on a structural level to prevent the phenomenon of street children. Mokomane and Makaoae (2015) describes the need for information in how to approach these children. It is knowledge-needed in all countries and communities, especially since this is a phenomenon shown in different ways. It is not basically about describing the factors that pushes children onto the street, there is also important to understand the dynamic of how street children work together and the factors that draw the children onto the street.

7.2 Turning Point

As Fuchs Ebaugh (1998) mentions, the turning point is characterized by a heap of strong emotions. Fuchs Ebaugh also referring to different specific events of turning points. By the time a child reaches a turning point it is often related to a specific event or a realization of the risks or danger of living on the street. According to the result the relationship between child

and adult are often broken. The parents are either absent or lack ability for good parenthood. In fact, this could be an explanation of why most street children find it hard to trust adults.

It was also described how the experiences of life from home affect the children's choices and ways to live, since it is the only way these children know how to live. Some social workers described scenarios mentioned by the children; where the process of first doubts can begin at an early stage at their homes. Street children are born and raised in destructive environment and poor family relationships. Since most childhood experiences have been destructive, it has for most children become a normality to continue with a destructive life. Street children leave home due to worse conditions at home in comparison to the street. As mentioned earlier, street children are exposed to trauma and violence. There are specific events in a human's life that determine which qualities that are necessary for survival. The specific turning point of either/or situation could in the case of poor family relationships explain the reason of street children's choice to leave their home. Street children that leave home could have experienced a specific event or situation followed by a realization of seeking for help, or end up dead due to the circumstances of the current life.

Even though, many street children eventually seek for help, but there are some children that end up in drugs, criminal activities or even dead. The specific events are occurrences that crystallize the child's ambivalence towards the current role and the choice to exit disappears. It is difficult to leave the street basically because of the recognition with other children and sense of belonging in a group. It was described that many children experience the same conditions in adult life as in their childhood. Social worker's actions are therefore focused on establish conditions for specific turning points, in terms to offer social services for each child.

Due to the time spent on the street, street children become streetwise. In awareness of this fact, street children change behavior and creates different strategies in order to survive on their own. The turning point, as it was expressed in the interviews, is associated with changes of behavior as a consequence of a role or a certain behavioral pattern that once were needed in the street. Two different types/roles of street children where described by the participants, the 'manipulative' and the 'naive' child. The manipulative child is defined as streetwise, sneaky, ingenious, have a way of influence the emotions and behavior of others and have a strong resilience. The naive child is described as trusting the other children on the street, innocent, inexperienced of the life on the street and are new to the street life. These different

descriptions of street children are connected to certain behavioristic traits which changes within the contact with social workers.

The social workers described the lack of skills in the different types or roles in a situation where there is less danger or exposure for the child, for instance at the shelter. Eventually, social workers introduce the shelter and make compromises to facilitate for the adaption in the child's life.

Social workers described a similar doubting process that is mentioned in the different types of specific turning points. The doubting process is where the subject, or in this case, the child begins to receive positive social support. Positive support is followed by a period of seeking alternatives and evaluation of the former role as a street child. Social workers mention the doubts that these children express in terms of developing different strategies that can require an immersion of childhood. This also include an exit of the role as a street child, instead the period is filled with evaluation and seek for alternative roles such as embrace a role of a child at the shelter. It is essential to make each child feel like the best child at the shelter, instead of the best street child which is only of importance in the initial phase.

Street children experience an illusion of freedom and an own created reality of rules and morality within the group on the street, which in fact crystallize the ambivalence towards the current role. Children from the street frequently changes behavior and patterns of living at the shelters or in contact with social workers. Each social worker has experienced anger, emptiness, crying from children, some even became silent. In fact, letting go of build-up emotions could be explained of a gradual build-up that are expressed within the interaction with social workers.

It was described that there are two different children arriving at the shelter, the street child and the child that begin to express feelings and play with toys together with others. Social workers exemplified the confusion and mixed feelings that many children experience at the shelter, this situation opens opportunities for the social workers to reach the child. The turning point is characterized of vulnerability and confusion that allows the child to develop in a different direction with support from the social workers. Eventually, the children at the shelter or in the process of rebuilding trust gain strategies and skills that is required for new situations. It is the point when the child is determined to change behavior and begin to restore

trust for adults or a social worker, which is of great importance. The specific event was when the child chooses to communicate together with others and this develops trusting relationships. The behavior of the child is turning towards a better role, and an exit for a trapped and shy behavior. Once the trust is restored, the adult-child relationship between the child and social worker create beneficial opportunities for each child's self-image and identity.

The result emphasizes that the creation of a family structure among the children from the street are maintained at the shelters. Street children maintain a family structure through collaboration, shelter, food, caring and supporting each other. The shelters are often disposed at the countryside in order to cope and deal with the heaps of emotion changes that comes after a life on the street. Referring to “the straw that broke the camel’s back” type of turning points what these children experience in terms of events are followed by gradual build-up feelings. These feelings can be one of many explanations of the extreme resilient approach of street children.

In conversation with the social workers, there were different methods and strategies to reach each child and many attempts to make the child leave the street. For instance, destructive environment and exposure to violence make these children extremely resilient. Every social worker emphasized trust as one of the most important tools/methods to reach for each child; such as play-therapy and different activities in order for the child to open up. The reason with therapy for the whole family is basically to involve the parents and educate them in how to create a better environment for the child. This method could be a vital step in the Exit process, if the child gains trust for the social worker to help. Therapy could mean that both the parents and the child need to leave a role or a system of a construction of reality. This could mean an exit for old type of actions, and a welcoming for a new mindset.

It was described that children are encountered by social workers on the street. Attempts of approaching these children can go on for months or even years. In order to make progress as a social worker, each child in the group need to be seen as an individual. Social workers described the specific events of interaction as attempts of increasing trust and as crucial for creating change in each child's life. Each child has a need to be seen and to feel like the best street child in the world. In fact, this crystallize ambivalence towards the role as a street child. This is why it is important to afterwards crystallize towards a role as the best child at the

shelter. The interaction between a social worker and a child creates possibilities for the child to change direction of behavior or pattern of living, since it arises ambivalence concerning the current role behavior. The more time that passes, the children come along with the social workers even if it might only be for a few hours. In fact, the acceptance of each street child's current role is important in order to create trust, or a change that could make each child question their current behavior and role. The visits and stay at the shelters become a habit, and later the children could end up living a different life in a shelter or in community.

The work with street children is complex and a combination of creating trusting relationships, see each child and accept failures in all kind of forms. The specific events of turning points are observed by the social workers. A lot of methods and strategies are focusing on a change of behavior. The groups of children on the street are described in terms of different roles and negotiation. It is important to see the child behind the role of a street child. Another important or even most important part of the social worker methods was to create trust.

7.3 Further research

Since the findings pay attention to pull-factors and that such factors are understudied in previous research do we suggest that forthcoming studies analyze these factors more in detail. In order to understand how to approach street children is it of interest to study the phenomena from different perspectives. Not only from the professional standpoint. Giving voices to children themselves seem to be crucial. Especially if we view them to be active agents in construction their life. We therefore welcome studies paying attention to Street children's perspective. One other proposal for further study in the subject could be to analyze visibility of the genders in the street, boys compared to girls. Also, how resources and systems can be created in order to change and detect security among children.

7.4 Methodology Discussion

The qualitative approach of this subject made it easier to come closer to the issue with street children in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The whole picture became easier to understand through the participant's descriptions and the diversity of interviewees. It was interesting and profitable to hear about the work with street children from the social worker's perspective. Their work develops both the children and the social workers at the same time. The social

workers could describe their daily work from their point of view; and also, explain how they could see the difference in the street children's behavior from start to current time. This also led to that we found that children are far more resilient and also go through identity changes.

Concerning the ethical consideration, there were differences in culture such as African-time and also the language. Otherwise, the interviewees were able to answer the questions. The interviewees could also describe different concepts that showed up in the interaction as we were speaking, which for us meant understanding the content of the answer.

8. Conclusion

To summarize, our results deal with problems and solutions of social workers work with street children. The problems that are highlighted are the local context, family relationships, streetwise children and the belief of a quick fix of the issue. The solutions are categorized in many ways such as, family-based work, the organizations, preventive work and different methods concerning genders. The conclusions of the social worker's effort are that the work must be individualized for each street child. To gain the children's trust as a social worker were also significant for the relationship to develop and move forward.

Previous research has discussed push-factors behind the problems of street children such as poverty, socio economic, educational, racial and lack of resources. This study shows that there are also pull-factors which makes the street life an attractive option for children. The street life offers an income in terms of begging, freedom, drugs such as glue-sniffing and a sense of belonging. Since many children make an income for the entire family. It is a more complex issue than mentioned in the former research. This study has also shown that it is possible to think about the phenomena street children in terms of an Exit process and especially Fuchs Ebaugh (1998) concept The Turning Point.

To practice social work in Bloemfontein there is a need of passion. Passion is the key of surviving as a social worker, without political or economic support from the government. One of few advantages of lack of support from the government is the possibilities for social work to be practiced in a more creatively way since the work is more flexible without government involvement.

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Appendix 1

The participant's occupation in chronological order:

Interviewee 1 – volunteer (1)

Interviewee 2 - social worker (2)

Interviewee 3 - unqualified social auxiliary worker (street worker) (3)

Interviewee 4 – volunteer (4)

Interviewee 5 - social worker (5)

Interviewee 6 - social worker (6)

Interviewee 7 - social worker (7)

Interviewee 8 - social worker (8)

Interviewee 9 - social worker (9)

Interviewee 10 - social worker (10)