

Reimagining Family Re-Unification: Exploring Strategies for Reintegrating Street Children in Harare, Zimbabwe

Mugove Kudenga¹ Prem Heeralal² Ntokozi Dennis Ndwandwe^{3*} 

AFFILIATIONS

^{1&2}Department of Psychology of Education,
College of Education, University of South Africa,
Pretoria, South Africa.

³Department of Educational Foundation, College
of Education, University of South Africa, Pretoria,
South Africa.

CORRESPONDENCE

Email: ndwannd@unisa.ac.za*

EDITORIAL DATES

Received: 30 April 2025

Revised: 06 October 2025

Accepted: 09 October 2025

Published: 26 October 2025

Copyright:

© The Author(s) 2025.

Published by [ERRCD Forum](#).

This is an open access article distributed under
Creative Commons Attribution ([CC BY 4.0](#))
licence.



DOI: 10.38140/ijrcs-2024.vol7.1.08

Abstract: The phenomenon of street children in Harare, Zimbabwe, presents a significant social challenge, necessitating effective family reunification strategies. This research paper explores methods to reintegrate street children in Harare into their families, using Rational Emotive Behaviour Theory as a theoretical lens. The study utilised a qualitative research approach, employing a phenomenological research design. The population comprised ten social development officers involved in integrating street children into their families of origin. A purposive sample of ten social development officers located in the Harare Metropolitan Province participated in the study. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data, which was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings underscore the critical need for innovative strategies that prioritise the effective reintegration of street children into their families. Key findings highlight the root causes of street children's homelessness and the use of several innovative strategies, such as family conferences, community engagement, psychosocial support, counselling, and providing families with resources as essential for the effective integration of street children into their original families. Based on the findings of the study, counselling and psychosocial support, community engagement, family conferences,

and addressing the underlying causes of street child homelessness are recommended. The study contributes to scholarship by deepening our understanding of the complex factors that lead to children being on the street and how addressing those factors could ensure effective integration of street children into families. It serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, social development officers, and researchers seeking to tackle the issue of child homelessness and family reintegration.

Keywords: Street children, families, reintegration, social development officers, Zimbabwe.

1. Introduction

Children residing on the street have been a persistent global phenomenon for decades, particularly worsening in many urban areas, with significant implications for their survival (Obimandi & Shabir, 2023; Ogunkan, 2024). According to Ogan and Ogan (2021), the term 'street children' refers to those who have not yet reached adulthood and for whom the street has become both home and a source of income, often resulting in minimal parental supervision and protection. It is estimated that approximately 100 to 150 million children live on the streets globally (Friberg & Martison, 2017; UNESCO, 2017). Africa has not been spared this phenomenon, with significant populations of street children in major cities across the continent, such as the "Sparrows" of Nigeria and the street-connected children of Nairobi, Kenya, where poverty, family breakdown, and urbanisation serve as key drivers (UN-Habitat, 2022; Cheserek & Kavivya, n.d.). This issue is a primary social concern for governments and stakeholders. In Zimbabwe, street children are prevalent, although accurate statistics are lacking due to the children's constant movement, as they have no permanent residence (Manjengwa et al., 2016; Ndlovu & Tigere, 2022).

How to cite this article:

Kudenga, M., Heeralal, P., & Ndwandwe, N. D. (2025). Reimagining family re-unification: Exploring strategies for reintegrating street children in Harare, Zimbabwe. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Rural and Community Studies*, 7(1), a08. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijrcs-2024.vol7.1.08>

The rising number of street children in Zimbabwe can be attributed to various push factors. Children are forced to live and work in the streets due to poverty, rape, abandonment, homelessness, and landlessness (Sitienei & Pillay, 2018). A study conducted by Ogan and Ogan (2021) revealed that boys are more prevalent on the streets compared to girls; this may be because families might make greater efforts to keep girls at home. Similarly, Muchinako et al. (2018) opine that the infiltration of traditional African cultures by Western culture has resulted in several families abandoning their values, which places the responsibility of caring for children on the entire community. Other push factors include extreme poverty at home, abuse by stepparents, and the death of parents or guardians (Alem & Laha, 2016; Nathan & Fratkin, 2018). According to Ndlovu and Tigere (2022), the HIV/AIDS epidemic has left many children vulnerable and orphaned. Consequently, Alem and Laha (2016) note that street children encounter numerous challenges, including a lack of funds to purchase essentials such as food, clothing, and toiletries. Residing outside their families, these children face many risks, such as joining gangs, stigmatisation, hazardous sexual behaviour, substance abuse, and trauma from prior experiences (Zewude et al., 2023). Furthermore, Ndlovu and Tigere (2022) found that street children resort to drug abuse as a coping strategy, which results in anti-social behaviour. The large number of street children puts the government, policymakers, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) under pressure. Previous efforts have typically focused on immediate needs such as shelter and the provision of food; however, these interventions have neglected the root causes of family disintegration.

The best practice for alleviating the plight of street children is to assist their reintegration into their original families, where they can be raised under supervision. Chartier and Blavier (2021) suggest that reintegration into their families is far preferable to institutional care or charitable intervention. In support, Kudenga et al. (2024) discourage all other forms of care for children other than that provided by the original family. Sherr et al. (2017) emphasise that the global community questions the efficacy of alternative care arrangements and advocates for the expedient integration of children into their original families. This approach recognises the child's right to family life by providing them with a sense of belonging, thus boosting their psychological and emotional development, which leads to a better chance of them becoming fully functional members of society (Zewude et al., 2023). However, intervention strategies are necessary to encourage original families to accept a former street child back into the home. Fraser et al. (2009) define an intervention as a purposeful action influencing a given behaviour.

Research into possible strategies to facilitate the reintegration of street children into their families in Harare, Zimbabwe, is limited. Studies have been conducted on the economic activities of street children in Zimbabwe (Musekiwa, 2009), the sexual and reproductive health of street children in Zimbabwe (Ngulube, 2010), the economic exploitation of street children in Harare (Mella, 2012), the efficacy of the extended family system in supporting orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe (Ringson & Chereni, 2020), Ubuntu and child welfare policy in Zimbabwe (Kurevakwesu & Chizasa, 2020), and deprivation among street children in Harare (Manjengwa et al., 2016). The limited research highlights why efforts to integrate these children into their original homes have met with minimal success. It is therefore imperative that this study investigates possible strategies to encourage members of the original family to accept children living and working on the streets. To that end, this study sought to answer the following research question:

- What innovative strategies can be developed to effectively facilitate the reintegration of street children into their families in Harare, Zimbabwe?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Grounding

A review of the theoretical framework and literature that informed the qualitative study is discussed in the ensuing sections.

2.1 Theoretical framework: Rational emotive behaviour theory

This study was guided by the Rational Emotive Behaviour Theory, propounded by Albert Ellis (1913–2007). According to Ulusoy and Duy (2013), the theory asserts that individuals' belief systems are responsible for triggering negative feelings, rather than the actual events they encounter. Ashford and LeCroy (2010) suggest that beliefs are hypothetical propositions that people hold to be true, whether or not they are verified. What an individual believes does not necessarily have to be true; however, the person who holds the belief regards it as such. In this study, members of the original family were found to hold certain beliefs about the behaviour of street children and how this behaviour might affect their family life. Najafi et al. (2012) and Adewale and Potokri (2023) reiterate that beliefs often play a vital role in an individual's life, as they determine behaviour. Beliefs can be either rational or irrational. Rational beliefs are appropriate, functional, healthy, and adaptive (Onuigbo et al., 2018). They are pragmatic, as they are empirically sound, non-extreme, flexible, and logically coherent. In contrast, irrational beliefs are illogical and dogmatic values that have become deeply held due to social conditioning and emotionally driven reasoning. Such beliefs are characterised by demandingness, awfulising, a low tolerance for frustration, and global judgments of oneself, others, and the world (Heimisson, 2011).

Demandingness consists of dogmatic, rigid, discordant, and unhealthy demands, characterised by the use of words like 'should', 'have to', 'must', and 'ought'. Individuals with irrational beliefs demand approval for whatever they do, always seeking fairness and justice and expecting to succeed in everything they undertake (Sahin & Acar, 2019). Family members sometimes set extreme demands as a condition for accepting a child back into their home. Awfulising (also known as catastrophising) (Rosner, 2011) occurs when an individual evaluates situations in an exaggerated and negative manner. Family members often regard the lives of former street children as so poor that they cannot be expected to remain in a family setting. Low frustration tolerance mainly relates to perceiving an event as intolerable and unbearable, which often leads to aggressive expressions of anger, depression, dysfunctional effects, addictive behaviours, poor social adjustment, and reduced anger control (Turner, 2016). In most instances, individuals with low frustration tolerance find it difficult to achieve their potential or handle challenging situations. Family members with low frustration tolerance struggle to express positive feelings towards street children and to accept them back into the family. A global evaluation of oneself, others, and the world (Bridges & Harnish, 2010) encompasses a tendency to label life events as bad or hopeless whenever a failure is encountered.

The Rational Emotive Behaviour Theory (REBT) is directly relevant to this study as it provides the conceptual framework for understanding the primary obstacle to reintegration: the irrational beliefs held by family members. These beliefs, such as the demandingness that a child "must" be perfectly behaved, the awfulising of their past experiences, a low frustration tolerance for the challenges of reintegration, and a global negative evaluation of the child's character, are viewed by REBT as the core drivers of negative emotions and rejection. The theory's relevance is therefore both practical and intervention-focused; it posits that successful reintegration is contingent upon identifying and restructuring these specific dysfunctional cognitions to enable families to welcome the children back.

There is a tendency to seek approval from others in nearly all situations. According to Sahin and Acar (2019), Ellis's theory demonstrates that irrational thinking patterns play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of the family integration process. Social development officers involved in the reintegration of street children into their original families must address irrational behaviours to foster a shift towards rational thinking patterns, which often help the members of the original families achieve success in the reintegration process. These officers must tackle issues related to demandingness, catastrophising, and global evaluation, ensuring that families perceive the former street child positively.

2.2 Strategies for enhancing the reintegrating of street children into their families

Various strategies for enhancing the reintegration of street children into their families are well documented. For instance, community support plays a significant role in ensuring that the integration of street children is successful. Smith and Wakia (2012) suggest that fostering strong, positive relationships between children and their caregivers should be a key component of community sensitisation. As part of the integration process, community members should be assigned tasks to encourage a sense of ownership in the programme and guard against stigmatisation. Addressing the underlying issues that initially caused the child to leave their original home to live and work on the streets is an essential strategy for integrating children into their families. Font et al. (2018) caution that reunification is likely to fail if the causes of the child's departure from their original family remain unaddressed. If the child engaged in petty theft or other misdemeanours, family members want guarantees that the child will not repeat those actions upon reintegration.

Psychosocial support in the form of information on how the child might access health services, establish links with education authorities, gain economic stability, and receive one-on-one counselling is necessary before original family members can accept a former street child (Smith & Wakia, 2012). Paul and Paul (2020) highlight the significance of social support as a transactional communication process for reintegration, as social support enhances coping skills, self-esteem, and a sense of familial connection. Therefore, it is necessary to inform the original family members of their expected duties and obligations. Families require up-to-date parenting techniques to ensure that the children in their care are safe from abuse and neglect. According to Ndlovu and Tigere (2022), training programmes for underprivileged families should develop parenting skills and promote economic independence. The likelihood of successful reintegration increases when parents are adequately prepared with the knowledge and skills to raise their children.

Assisting families with resources is another strategy to enhance the reintegration of street children into their families. Most cases of children working and living on the streets are associated with low-income households. Researchers recommend equipping the children's original families with income-generating skills to prevent recurring issues. According to Chege and Ucembe (2020), initiatives that combine income-generating and poverty-reduction strategies might help prevent child abuse and neglect—issues that drive children to the streets. Kibet (2020) states that well-trained caregivers, provided with the necessary resources, can guide, care for, and love children, preventing instances of abuse and neglect that might otherwise lead them to choose to live and work on the streets. Onyiko and Pechacova (2015) assert that an empowered family offers a secure environment for raising a child and can alleviate the pressure on financially constrained parents to give up their children. In addition to an empowerment programme, Kurevakwesu and Chizasa (2020) assert that government and private actors must actively help family members responsible for caring for reintegrated children so they do not feel burdened by the responsibility of raising the child.

Actively including original family members in the reintegration process is another essential strategy that could give them a sense of ownership. A reciprocal understanding of the child's experiences and consideration of the family members' concerns should be developed by engaging with the family members over time (Smith & Wakia, 2012). According to Frimpong-Manso et al. (2022), the child's parents should be involved in all phases of the reintegration process.

3. Methodology

The study's qualitative research methodology enabled the researchers to gain insights into the experiences of social development officers integrating street children with their original families. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research can be used to gather participants' subjective interpretations of their experiences in specific contexts. A phenomenological research design was employed to understand the subjects' perspectives regarding an event or occurrence in

their lives; thus, the philosophical framework of phenomenology was deemed essential (Qutoshi, 2020). In the process of integrating street children into their original families, the perspectives and descriptions of research participants regarding their interactions with family members are crucial for ensuring valid research.

Social development officers in the Harare Metropolitan Province, who assist in integrating street children with their biological families, made up the study population, which Kumar (2019) defines as a group of specific species that have and share identical, standard, and specific characteristics. A purposive selection process chose the study participants, as Babbie (2012) recommended. This method is employed when the researchers feel they can gain the most thorough grasp of the subject under consideration by selecting an intentional sample. Ten social development officers made up the purposive sample.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule, as described by Smith (2014), was utilised to gather research data, with the goal of gaining as much insight into the participants' social and psychological worlds as possible. The researchers endeavoured to gather data on the participants' perspectives regarding the integration of street children into their original families. The semi-structured interview schedule allowed the researchers flexibility, as they did not need to adhere strictly to the format and sequence of the questions, enabling them to probe further and ask additional questions. According to Kakilla (2021), researchers can closely and flexibly examine discussions during a semi-structured interview, confirming the participants' initial superficial answers. Additionally, Paz-Soldan et al. (2014) state that a semi-structured interview schedule allows researchers to collect data in its natural form and explore the interviewees' inner voices and thoughts. The interviews were conducted by digitally recording in-depth conversations with participants, which were later transcribed to facilitate a thorough analysis of the collected insights. The study data were analysed using a thematic approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), data analysis should involve constant coding, categorisation, chronological organisation, and recurrent reviews. The researchers arranged the data and prepared it for analysis, examining it to identify themes and the overall tone of the ideas before classifying it. Subsequently, the data were categorised into topics that aligned with the study's aim.

3.1 Ethical considerations

Strict respect for the applicable ethical guidelines was maintained throughout the investigation. The director of the ministry where the research participants worked, as well as the institution to which they are affiliated, granted approval (2021/08/11/7705166/14/AM). Participants provided written informed consent after being briefed on confidentiality, anonymity, and beneficence. Coding was employed in the findings to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality; for instance, Social Development Officer 1 (SDO P1) and Social Development Officer 2 (SDO P2).

4. Results and Discussion of Findings

Data analysis from the semi-structured interviews with the ten social development officers revealed five predominant themes regarding the strategies they employ to reintegrate street children into their original families in Harare. These themes are: (1) Family Conferences, (2) Community Engagement, (3) Mitigating Push Factors, (4) Psychosocial Support and Counselling, and (5) Providing Families with Resources.

4.1 Family conferences

The participant explained that one of their strategies is holding family conferences with relatives to address the issue of reintegrating former street children. These conferences allow everyone to share potential solutions for the child's challenges. The most convenient location for the conference is selected, enabling all participants to express their emotions and feelings freely. Participation also

provides family members with a sense of ownership over the solution. The conference serves as a forum for social development officials to discuss with family members how to manage misbehaving children, their obligations to the children, and what the children anticipate from them. These conferences function as a platform for cognitive restructuring, a core technique in REBT. By facilitating open dialogue, social workers can directly challenge the irrational beliefs and demands (e.g., 'Our child must be perfectly behaved after reintegration') that families often hold. The counselling component specifically addresses awfulising (catastrophising the child's past) and low frustration tolerance by building resilience and realistic expectations. This conclusion is emphasised in the following quote:

In order to address the issues that may have arisen from the child's departure, we have what is known as 'case conferences', to talk about the reasons that the child had to leave the house in the first place, and any potential difficulties in providing the required care. (SDO P1)

Some research participants emphasised the necessity for members of the original family to be included in finding solutions to the problem:

We do family case conferences with them. Everyone who has any connection to the kid is welcome to attend. Everyone is welcome to explain why the child could have left their original family and potential solutions for the issue. We will offer them counselling and information on the duties and obligations of various family members. (SDO P8)

Other research participants pointed out the need to address prejudices they may hold towards the child, which could be a result of street living:

We must hold a case conference to address the current issue. We must talk about the possible prejudices we may have toward the other. (SDO P10)

Findings show that it is important to involve members of the original family from the beginning of the integration process, as they will be responsible for the care of the integrated child. This makes it imperative that their views are taken seriously. According to Balsells et al. (2014), involving original family members is crucial for facilitating the integration process, as it allows them to acquire new strengths and build unity as a family. Members included in the integration process feel more committed, which guarantees its success.

4.2 Community engagement

This study found that community members from which the former street child hailed were critical to the reintegration process. Since it is within the community that stereotypes are instilled and corrected, most of the negative influences affecting the reintegration process originate from there. The majority of harmful effects arise from within the community, which is also where preconceptions must be addressed. Involving community leaders, such as kraalheads, helps to dismantle the irrational beliefs held not just by the family, but by the community at large. This reduces the social pressure and stigma that can reinforce a family's negative perceptions and resistance to reintegration. During the reintegration process, the social development officers reported involving members of child protection committees and kraalheads (Sabhukus) to provide support and moral persuasion. One participant shared his view:

We are investigating methods of integrating the child into ongoing community programmes; in instances where child protection committees exist, we incorporate the children in the events. (SDO P5)

Another research participant highlighted the need to raise awareness among other community members about the street children who require specialised community assistance. This participant said:

We include other community service providers and local leaders, such as sabhukus (kraalheads) in rural regions, to inform them that a specific child needs their help. (SDO P1)

In line with the findings, Frimpong-Manso et al. (2022) stress that community involvement bolsters the reintegration process, ensuring strong community backing committed to its success. Similarly, Smith and Wakia (2012) argue that the wider community should support such a child in collaboration with the family. Kraalheads, chiefs, religious leaders, councillors, and child protection committees should be engaged in the reintegration process. These stakeholders can provide crucial support and moral persuasion to the members of the original families, encouraging them to accept a child who once lived and worked on the streets.

4.3 Mitigating push factors

Addressing the causes of children migrating to the streets was mentioned as another possible strategy to enhance the reintegration of street children into their families. The child's behaviour before leaving home to live on the streets generally disappointed family members. Frequently, the child may have committed one or more offences. If the child wishes to return to the family, family members anticipate that he or she has changed and look to social development officers to provide such reassurance. Providing assurance of behavioural change directly counters the family's overall negative evaluation of the child. Instead of labelling the child as 'hopeless' or 'bad,' this strategy encourages a more rational, specific, and hopeful appraisal of the child's capacity for change. Most original families are prepared to welcome a child back if the pre-existing problem has been resolved. In that regard, one participant said:

We let them know that we accept the child for who he is, even if we know his difficulties, and that we recognise how much they have been through. We try to speak positively about the youngster, such as how the child has changed their behaviour since leaving home. (SDO P3)

Another participant reiterated that the social development officers assured the original family members that, although the child had changed, they might still make mistakes.

We tell them that even if the child has changed and pledged to be nice, they still will not receive a flawless child. (SDO P9)

The initial problems that caused the child to leave home for the streets should be fully addressed before reintegration. Often, members of the original family seek assurance from the social development officers that the child has changed his or her behaviour and can now live in a family environment. Font et al. (2018) concur that integration is likely to be unsuccessful when a child is reunified with the parents before the factors contributing to his or her departure are addressed. Integration is usually successful when the underlying factors that lead to street migration have been resolved. Schrader-McMillan and Herrera (2016) agree that the root problems that push children to seek refuge on the streets must be addressed, and individualised solutions and follow-up work must be completed beforehand. In support of this, Balsells et al. (2014) believe reunification is possible if the family has satisfactorily undergone a change process that enables the child to return home. There is little point in seeking to reintegrate the child if the same conditions that prevented him or her from living with the family still exist (Iannelli et al., 2013).

4.4 Psychosocial support and counselling

The study found that social development played a role in providing therapeutic, counselling, and psycho-social support to members of the original families to enhance the reintegration process. Before leaving the family, the child may have caused significant pain and strife. The varied roles and responsibilities of the family members towards the child must be evaluated. The psychological support offered by social development officers aims to empower the family to reclaim the child and equip him/her with the tools needed to grow up as a responsible member of society. As one participant confirmed:

We offer psychological assistance and counselling, talking with them about the problem of delinquency and the necessity of improving the bond between parents and children. (SDO P1)

Participants explained that, while they empathised with the family members, this was reinforced with psycho-social counselling and assurance:

We apply our expertise in probing and counselling. We let them know that we accept the child for who he is, even if we know his difficulties, and that we recognise how much they have been through. (SDO P3)

Usually, we provide basic counselling to the family members taking care of the child to help them get better, change, and realise that accepting someone else can help them change their behaviour and become better, rather than criticising them and refusing to be involved. (SDO P4)

The responses indicate that social development officers were involved in counselling the members of the original families to ensure their participation in the integration process. Smith and Wakia (2012) agree that both the child and members of the original family require one-to-one counselling, emphasising the importance of providing parental guidance to facilitate a successful integration process. The findings also align with Paul and Paul (2020), who highlight the significance of social support as a transactional communication process for reintegration and as a means of enhancing coping skills, self-esteem, and familial connection.

4.5 Providing families with resources

Most participants indicated that providing families with resources could be another strategy to enhance the reintegration of street children into their families. Family members are often reluctant to welcome back a child who has left home to live on the streets due to a lack of resources. When a family is well-resourced, the issue of a child running away to work on the streets seldom arises. The Zimbabwean government operates initiatives aimed at boosting the resources of disadvantaged community members. Social development officers assist families who take in a former street child by helping them access programmes to ease their burden. The following excerpt from a social development officer highlights this finding:

Lack of resources frequently makes family members reluctant to accept back the child who had left home to live and work on the streets. When a child runs away to live and work on the streets, resources are typically a contributing factor in the issue. We typically do not have the issue of children escaping to work on the streets when a family has adequate resources. The government undertakes various programs to lessen the resources of the community's underprivileged individuals. Children from poor backgrounds in Zimbabwe can overcome their educational challenges with the BEAM program. In addition, there is a facility that offers cash handouts and assistance with paying medical costs.

Social development officers help families enroll in state programmes to lessen their financial burden.

This view concurs with Onyiko and Pechacova (2015), who discovered that family empowerment is a crucial step in the reintegration process in Kenya. An empowered family will be able to meet all the child's needs, preventing them from leaving home for life on the streets. Sitinel and Pillay (2017) also point out that family empowerment can help family members feel appreciated and included, acquire the information and skills necessary to thrive, and build a sense of purpose and confidence in their ability to succeed. Furthermore, Onyiko and Pechacova (2015) argue that an empowered family provides a secure environment for raising a child, and additional resources can alleviate the pressure on financially constrained parents to give up their children. Ndlovu and Tigere (2022) reiterate the need for programmes specifically targeting families in distress, tailor-made to equip them with

parenting skills and economic empowerment, so they can care for the children who have been reintegrated.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The study aimed to explore innovative strategies for the effective reintegration of street children into their original families in Harare. It argued that the best practice for alleviating the plight of street children is to assist them in being raised and reintegrated into their original families, which provides children with the right to family life and a sense of belonging, and contributes to their psychological and emotional development—something that is not the case with institutional care or charitable intervention. However, the overall findings indicated that the phenomenon of street children in Harare, Zimbabwe, presents significant multifaceted challenges, including rejection and discrimination, economic hardship, lack of trust, disintegrated family structures, and the failure of families to address the push factors that lead children to the streets in the first place. These challenges necessitate the need to devise effective family reunification strategies.

Key findings derived from the study highlight the importance of understanding the root causes of street children's homelessness and the use of several innovative strategies, such as family conferences, community engagement, psychosocial support, counselling, and providing families with resources, as means for the effective integration of street children into their original families. However, less attention has been paid to research exploring innovative strategies for the effective reintegration of street children with their original families in Harare, Zimbabwe. In addition, there is limited research focusing on the voices or perceptions of those who bear the considerable responsibility for the welfare of these children, namely, the social development officers. Their firsthand experiences provide invaluable insights into the real-life challenges and opportunities related to family reunification initiatives. This paper aims to close the existing gap and contribute significantly to the body of knowledge by exploring innovative strategies that could enhance the effective reunification of street children with their families and foster durable family stability and well-being for these children.

Based on the study's findings, a multi-faceted approach is recommended to enhance the reintegration of street children into their families in Harare, Zimbabwe. A critical first step involves providing counselling and psycho-social support to members of the original families and establishing rehabilitation centres to prepare the children themselves for reintegration. Furthermore, social development officers require capacity building to equip them with dispute resolution and cognitive restructuring skills that can positively influence family attitudes. Concurrently, family members should be inducted into modern parenting skills, gaining knowledge of child development and behaviour modification to prevent the child from returning to the streets. It is also essential that these families are consulted and involved throughout the entire integration process, fostering a sense of ownership and valued contribution. To alleviate the economic pressures that often underpin this issue, reintegrating families should be connected to economic empowerment initiatives, such as micro-finance, job training, and small business start-up support. Finally, for reintegration to be sustainable, the broader push factors that drive children to the streets in the first place must be systematically addressed.

6. Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (M.K. & N.D.N.); Literature review (M.K., N.D.N. & P.H.); methodology (M.K., N.D.N., P.H.); software (N/A.); validation (M.K. & N.N.); formal analysis (M.K.); investigation (M.K.); data curation (M.K.); drafting and preparation (M.K. & N.D.N.); review and editing (M.K., N.D.N. & P.H.); supervision (N/A); project administration (M.K. & N.D.N.); funding acquisition (N/A). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

Funding: This study received no external funding.

Acknowledgements: The Authors make acknowledgements now.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Access will be granted to researchers who meet the criteria for data sharing established by the institutional review board or ethics committee.

References

- Alem, H. W., & Laha, A. (2016). Livelihood of street children and the role of social intervention: Insights from literature using meta-analysis. *Child Development Research*, 2016, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2016/3582101>
- Ashford, J. B., & LeCroy, C. W. (2010). *Human behaviour in the social environment: A multidimensional perspective*. Cengage Learning.
- Adewale, S., & Potokri, O. C. (2023). Assessment of child protection policy awareness in secondary schools. *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, 3, 20–30. <https://doi.org/10.21303/2504-5571.2023.002866>
- Babbie, E. (2012). *The practice of social research*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Balsells, M., Pastor, C., Amorós, P., Mateos, A., Ponce, C., & Navajas, A. (2014). Child welfare and successful reunification through the socio-educative process: Training needs among biological families in Spain. *Social Sciences*, 3(4), 809–826. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci3040809>
- Bridges, K. R., & Harnish, R. J. (2010). Role of irrational beliefs in depression and anxiety: A review. *Health*, 2(8). <https://doi.org/10.4236/health.2010.28130>
- Chartier, S., & Blavier, A. (2021). Should the reintegration of children in foster care into their biological families be the only goal of the legislation governing foster care? Factors influencing the relations between parents and their children living in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105741>
- Chege, N., & Ucembe, S. (2020). Kenya's over-reliance on institutionalisation as a child care and child protection model: A root-cause approach. *Social Sciences*, 9(4), 57. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9040057>
- Cheserek, S. K., & Kavivya, C. (2022). Relationship between street children and crime: A case of Nairobi City County, Kenya. *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, 9(2), 1453–1478.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Sage.
- Kudenga, M., Heeralal, P., & Ndwandwe, N. (2024). Navigating the road home: Challenges hindering the reintegration of street children with their families in Harare, Zimbabwe. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Rural and Community Studies*, 6, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijrcs-2024.vol6.07>
- Font, S. A., Sattler, K. M. P., & Gershoff, E. (2018). When home is still unsafe: From family reunification to foster care reentry. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80, 1333–1343. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12499>
- Fraser, M. W., Richman, J. M., Galinsky, M. J., & Day, S. H. (2009). *Intervention research: Developing social programs*. Oxford University Press.
- Friberg, A., & Martinsson, V. (2017). *Problems and solutions when dealing with street children: A qualitative study based on experiences from social workers in Bloemfontein, South Africa* [Master's dissertation, Jönköping University]. Jönköping University.
- Frimpong-Manso, K., Agbadi, P., & Deliege, A. (2022). Factors associated with the family reintegration stability for children with a residential care experience in Ghana. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 12(1), 56–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20436106221077699>
- Goodman, M. L., Gibson, D. C., Baker, L., & Seidel, S. E. (2020). Family-level factors to reintegrate street-involved children in low- and middle-income countries: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 109, 104664.

- Halton, L. (2022). Family reunification and child rights of children in street situations in Uganda and the Gambia. *Consortium of Street Children*. <https://www.streetchildren.org/resources/family-reunification-and-the-rights-of-children-in-street-situations-in-uganda-and-the-gambia/>
- Heimisson, G. T. (2011). *A cross-cultural adaptation of the Irrational Beliefs Inventory from English to Icelandic* [Graduate theses and dissertations, University of South Florida].
- Iannelli, A. M., Assis, S. G., & Pinto, L. W. (2013). Family reintegration of children and adolescents in foster care in Brazilian municipalities with different population sizes. *Centro Latino Americano de Estudos de Violência e Saúde, Lorge Careli, Escola Fiocruz, Av. Brazil 4036, Manginhos 21040-361*.
- Kakilla, C. (2021). Strengths and weaknesses of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research methods: A critical essay. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202106.0491.v1>
- Kakuru, R., Rukooko, A. B., & Tusabe, G. (2019). Social protection mechanisms for children living on the streets: Perspectives from Uganda. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 11(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.5897/JA2018.0523>
- Kibet, N. (2020). *Street-connected children: Experiences of reintegration programs – a case of Eldoret, Kenya*. Master's dissertation, Tampere University.
- Kuehr, M. E. (2015). Rwanda's orphan care and integration during uncertain times. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.4g>
- Kumar, R. (2019). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners in research*. Sage.
- Kurevakwesu, W., & Chizasa, S. (2020). Ubuntu and child welfare policy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the National Orphans Care Policy's six-tier system. *African Journal of Social Work*, 10(1), 89–94.
- Manjengwa, J., Matema, C., Tirivanhu, D., & Tizora, R. (2016). Deprivation among children living and working on the streets of Harare. *Development Southern Africa*, 33(1), 53–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835x.2015.1115337>
- Mella, M. (2012). *An investigation into the nature and extent of the economic exploitation of street children in Zimbabwe: A case study of Harare Central Business District* [Master's dissertation, University of Zimbabwe, Harare].
- Muchinako, G. A., Mpambela, M., & Muzingili, T. (2018). The time for reflection: Foster care as a protection model in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Social Work*, 8(2), 38–45.
- Musekiwa, M. (2009). *Working for survival: Children engaged in economic activities on the streets of Harare* (Master's dissertation). University of Zimbabwe, Harare.
- Najafi, T., Jamaluddin, S., & Lea-Baranovich, D. (2012). Effectiveness of group REBT in reducing irrational beliefs in two groups of Iranian female adolescents living in Kuala Lumpur. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 3(12), 312–322.
- Nathan, M. A., & Fratkin, E. (2018). The lives of street women and children in Hawassa, Ethiopia. *African Studies Review*, 61(1), 158–184. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.135>
- Ndlovu, E., & Tigere, R. (2022). Life in the streets, children speak out: A case of Harare Metropolitan, Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 5(1), 25–45. <https://doi.org/10.52589/ajsshr-fdxcdat2>
- Ngulube, L. (2010). *A study on the sexual and reproductive health challenges faced by adolescents participating in the Streets Ahead programmes in Harare* (Master's dissertation). University of Zimbabwe, Harare.
- Obimakinde, A. M., & Shabir, M. (2023). Recount and account of lived experience of children on the street: A phenomenology approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Research*, 2(3), 183–194. <https://doi.org/10.47540/ijqr.v2i3.756>
- Ogan, E. P. (2021). Dynamics of street children in Africa. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348539465_DYNAMICS_OF_STREET_CHILDREN_IN_AFRICA

- Ogut, M. (2020). Under the bridge: The invisible lives of street children. <https://www.mandelarhodes.org/ideas/under-the-bridge-the-invisible-lives-of-street-children/>
- Ogunkan, D. V. (2024). The dynamics of street children in Nigerian cities: The significance of age and gender. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2024.2376428>
- Onuigbo, L. N., Eseadi, C., Ugwoke, S. C., Nwobi, A. U., Anyanwu, J. I., Okeke, F. C., Agu, P. U., Oboegbulem, A. I., Chinweuba, N. H., Agundu, U. V., Ololo, K. O., Okpoko, C., Nwankwor, P. P., Eze, U. N., & Eze, P. (2018). Effect of rational emotive behaviour therapy on stress management and irrational beliefs of special education teachers in Nigerian elementary schools. *Medicine*, 97(37), e12191. <https://doi.org/10.1097/md.00000000000012191>
- Onyiko, K., & Pechacova, D. (2015). The impact of institutionalisation of street children: A case study of Nairobi County. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(8), 160–182.
- Paul, B., & Paul, V. (2020). Factors of reintegration of children in conflict with the law. *Journal of Dharma*, 45(1), 105–124.
- Paz-Soldan, V. A., Reiner, R. C., Morrison, A. C., Stoddard, S. T., Kitron, U., Scott, T. W., Elder, J. P., Halsey, E. S., Kochel, T. J., Astete, H., & Vazquez-Prokopec, G. M. (2014). Strengths and weaknesses of global positioning system (GPS) data-loggers and semi-structured interviews for capturing fine-scale human mobility: Findings from Iquitos, Peru. *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, 8(6), e2888. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0002888>
- Qutoshi, S. B. (2018). Phenomenology: A philosophy and method of inquiry. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 5(1), 215–222. <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v5i1.2154>
- Ringson, J., & Chereni, A. (2020). Efficacy of the extended family system in supporting orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe: An indigenous knowledge perspective. *African Journal of Social Work*, 10(1), 99–108.
- Rosner, R. (2011). Albert Ellis' rational-emotive behaviour therapy. *Adolescent Psychiatry*, 1(1), 82–87.
- Sahin, E. S., & Acar, N. V. (2019). Rational-emotive behaviour therapy from a new perspective. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 16(4), 894–906. <http://dx.doi:10.14687/jhs.v16i4.5821>
- Schrader-McMillan, A., & Herrera, E. (2016). The successful family reintegration of street-connected children: Application of attachment and trauma theory. *Journal of Children's Services*, 11(3), 217–232.
- Sherr, L., Roberts, K. J., & Gandhi, N. (2017). Child violence experiences in institutionalised. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 22(sup1), 31–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2016.1271951>
- Here is the list in APA 7th edition style with the necessary corrections made:
- Sitenei, E. C., & Pillay, J. (2018). Life experiences of children living on streets in Kenya: From the pot into the fire. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 12(2), 201–209. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-018-0226-8>
- Smith, J. A. (2014). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. Sage.
- Smith, K., & Wakia, J. (2012). Family reintegration for children living in the streets. <http://www.retrak.org/uploaded/Retrak%20Technical%20Brief%20Family%20reintegration%20K%20Smith%20%20J%20Wakia%20July%202012%20%28web%20version%29.pdf>
- Turner, M. J. (2016). Rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT), irrational and rational beliefs, and the mental health of athletes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1423. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01423>
- Ulusoy, Y., & Duy, B. (2013). Effectiveness of a psycho-education program on learned helplessness and irrational beliefs. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 13(3), 1440–1446. <https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2013.3.1469>
- UNESCO. (2017). *Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>

UN-Habitat. (2022). *The state of African cities 2022: Urban governance for inclusion and sustainability*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

Zewude, B., Siraw, G., Engdawork, K., & Tadele, G. (2023). Health-seeking behaviour of street-connected children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8, Article 1188746. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1188746>

Disclaimer: The views, perspectives, information, and data contained within all publications are exclusively those of the respective author(s) and contributor(s) and do not represent or reflect the positions of ERRCD Forum and/or its editor(s). ERRCD Forum and its editor(s) expressly disclaim responsibility for any damages to persons or property arising from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referenced in the content.