CHURCH RESPONSE TO HOUSEHOLD FACTORS CAUSING AN INCREASE TO STREET CHILDREN: A CASE OF AFRICA INLAND CHURCH MACHAKOS TOWN, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the church's response to household factors causing an increase to street children, case of Africa Inland Church (AIC) Machakos County, Kenya. The phenomenon of the street-connected children has become a great concern to different churches, from different denominations. The objective of this study was to evaluate the AIC church's response to the household factors that cause an increase in street-connected children in Machakos town, Kenya. This study took descriptive survey research design. In this study the target population was 380 respondents which included 190 street-connected children in the streets of Machakos town, 40 AIC Church pastors and 150 from the rehabilitation centre within Machakos town. The pilot study was done in Tala town, Machakos County to test the validity and reliability of the study tools before the actual research. Quantitatively, the responses were coded into the SPSS program and analyzed; they were presented using percentages, bars, tables and pie-charts. On the total target population of the study, only 30% were included in the actual study. Stratified random sampling was used to select the respondents from their respective strata where the sample size was derived randomly in which every third element was picked at random. This study concluded that the AIC Churches were doing very little in the response to the household factors causing an increase in street-connected children in Machakos town. Therefore this study recommends that the AIC Church should address with seriousness the cause of poverty, illiteracy, domestic violence and HIV/AIDS contributing to the increase in street children by providing some family related economic assistance, training, teaching and counselling through seminars, workshops and conferences with the aim of ensuring children stay at home.

Key Words: *household factors, street-connected children, violence, response, increase, poverty*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, some churches from different denominations have been responding to the household factors that are contributing to the increase of street children in the world while others are not (Mukaria & Swart, 2019). According to Rahman, Zakaria, & Monjur-Ul-Haider (2015) it is estimated that, three hundred million children in the world are subjected to domestic violence, exploitation and abuses. Westenberg (2017) points out that the Catholic Bishops' Council (CBC) in Victoria (Australia) has come up with a pastoral statement on domestic violence (which is one of the household factors contributing to the increase of street children in the world) and created parish resource kits to stir up awareness of domestic violence in local parishes in Victoria, Australia. Similarly, Hillsong church in Australia, which is affiliated with evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, has programs to respond to issues concerning domestic violence, through counselling and advocacy (Westenberg 2017). Although some churches in Australia are indirectly responding to the phenomenon of street children through addressing the issue of domestic violence, many churches don't have such programs in Australia.

In Nigeria, few churches are playing a significant role in the community, particularly with regard to the issue of poverty which is one of the household factors that are causing the increase of street children in Africa. A very good example is the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Nigeria which according to Onah et al, (2019) undertakes a twofold agenda of action for the needy and the poor in the society. The first agenda consists of the church's doctrine of apostolate, while the second one is the church's pastoral care of the poor. They add that the church's role is a divine obligation to those living in poverty as well as her care to them is not a common social ministry which others can perform, instead it is founded on the very nature of the church in the integral mission. Therefore, irrespective of the challenges churches in Nigeria are undergoing it is true that some of the churches are responding well to the household factors (such as poverty) that are contributing to the increase in street children in Nigeria. Nevertheless, more need to be done concerning the same by the Nigerian churches (Bhukuth & Jerome, 2015).

In South Africa, Molahlehi (2014) indicates that street children have retracted due to the efforts of pastoral counselling and churches' commitment to programs on the eradication of street children. Hills, Meyer-Weitz, & Oppong Asante (2016) points out that in South Africa, there are about 250,000 children and adolescents living on the street, in which most of them are black and male; poverty has been termed as one of the household factors driving them to the street. Pastoral counselling as well as prayers transformed many lives of the street children in South Africa (Molahlehi, 2014). Therefore, the church not only in South Africa but also in Africa and beyond can be of great help to the children who are suffering in the streets.

In Kenya, according to Magezi & Tenai (2017) AIC really plays a prominent role in the provision of education, healthcare services especially in the Kijabe Mission (KM) and relief outfit among the needy, the poor and the vulnerable in Kenya. Tenai (2016) points out that it is commendable that the AIC Church has on-going healthcare facilities and schools amongst different unreached communities in Kenya. However, AIC can do better response than this to the household factors (such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, illiteracy, domestic violence and many others) that continue to raise the number of street children in Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study took descriptive survey research design. According to Mugenda (2003), descriptive surveys are used to achieve data about the existing status of the aspect to describe what exists with respect to variables in a situation, by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes, behaviour or values. The descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study simply because it facilitated the researcher to describe the condition of interest of the problem which was being investigated and the relationship between the variables (Walliman, 2010).

Target Population

Target population is a set of complete individuals, cases or objects with some familiar characteristics to which the researcher wants to generalize results of the study (Igwenagu, 2016). The population of interest was street children within Machakos town, both in the streets and rehabilitation centre as well as AIC pastors. In this study the target population was 380 which included 190 street-connected children in the streets of Machakos town, 150 reformed street children in the rehabilitation centre within Machakos town and 40 AIC pastors within the study area.

Sampling Technique

Sampling is the process of picking a sample out of the given population of a particular area. In other words it stands for the entire population, helping the researcher to draw some conclusion concerning the population (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). The conclusion is generalized to the entire population of the study area. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample where 57 street children were selected and each street had the following sample, Ngulokoni 14, Mulu-Mutisya Garden 14, Kariobangi 14 and Eastleigh 15. The other sample sizes were grouped according to their sexes and these were: 45 from the rehabilitation centre and 12 AIC's pastors. Through this technique the respondents were selected from their respective strata in which the sample size was derived randomly where every third element was picked at random. This made sure that there was no bias in the sampling procedure. According to Kothari (2004), 30% sample size is acceptable for descriptive survey studies. Therefore the formula used to get the sample size in this study was 30% sampling technique.

Data Collection

The researcher used not only primary data but also secondary data. Primary data was collected using an administered questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions (Igwenagu, 2016). The questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher with the assistance of research assistants to the respondents because most of the respondents were not educated. The questionnaires were administered at convenient times to make sure maximum responses were achieved. The researcher was assisted by research assistants to administer the questionnaire to the street children and church leaders. Desk search techniques were used to collect secondary data from already existing sources and previous research studies (Mishra et al., 2017). This was done through reading relevant literature available in the library, various documents publications and reports including journals, and magazines were read all alike during the study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

In the demographic characteristics of the respondents the researcher pursued to figure out the distribution of the street-connected children as per their age, gender, religion, their current specific residence, as well as their county of birth. The researcher realized that the majority (71.9%) of the respondents in the streets of Machakos town were in the age of 15 years and above. The study also found out that those in between 11 and 14 years of age were 22.8% compared to 5.3% percent of those who were 10 years and below. Ultimately, the ages of the street-connected children were compelled to be subjective in accordance with what they believed their ages were because the researcher had no objective tool of proofing their ages. This study disagreed with the study of Kieni (2015) that states the majority of the street children in Meru municipality were aged 11-15 years contrary to Machakos town where majority were aged 15 years and above. The distribution of age in this study shows that the most vulnerable children in the study area were 15 years and above.

Concerning the gender of the respondents it was noted that the majority of the street-connected children in Machakos town were males, which was 84.2%, compared to 15.8% of the females. The gender findings of this study concurred with the study of Muna (2015) which affirmed that there are more boys in the streets than girls. Moreover, most of the girls were not seen in the day time compared to the boys who were seen in the streets during day time. Majority of the girls confessed that they mostly came in the streets during the night because they were sexual workers.

Evaluating AIC's Response on Household Factors Causing an Increase in Street Children

The study sought to evaluate the response of AIC on the household factors causing an increase in street children in Machakos town. This was done by interviewing 12 AIC pastors within Machakos town on what their churches were doing in the respond to poverty, low education, domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. In addition the study evaluated whether the above factors have been increasing street children in Machakos town or not.

The researcher asked a question to the AIC pastors on what they are doing to reduce poverty in the study area. The majority of the respondents believed that the AIC is less concerned on this issue. However there are some few churches who are making little efforts to combat the issue. It was noted that the majority (41.7%) of the respondents thought that AIC Churches are less concerned in the issue of combating poverty as a way of reducing street children in the study area. Nevertheless overcoming poverty through prayer was the highest with 25.0% compared to the education which had 16.7%. Counselling and feeding had 8.3% each. Moreover, the street children also admitted that only prayers were offered to them by some churches in the streets of Machakos town once in a while. This study agrees with Molahlehi (2014) concerning the role of pastoral

counselling, education as well as prayers which transformed many lives of the poor street children in South Africa.

With regard to parents/guardians' source of income, the researcher found out that the majority of the respondents came from a very poor background. Moreover, this study indicated that the majority of the respondents (54.4%) had parents/guardians who were not employed. Only 7% of the respondents had employed parents/guardians while 19.3% were small scale farmers. Others were small business men and women as well as hawkers who had 10.5% and 8.8% respectively. These percentages explains how poverty has really contributed to the increase of street children in Machakos town. This disagrees with the study of Friberg et al., (2017) that not all street children move to the streets as a result of poverty. Whereas, Hassens & Manus (2018) agrees with this study that the street children the majority (78.2%) of street children in Shashemene Town, in Ethiopia were reported that their parents were unemployed compared to the employed who were 21.8%. Bhukuth et al., (2015) argues that children move to the streets for different reasons among them poverty. In their study they indicated categorically that majority of the street-connected children in Colombia go to streets to look for job, run away from the family conflicts as well as leave home because of poverty.

Concerning the issue of illiteracy a question was raised to the respondents to examine what is being done by the church in promoting education to the street children in the study area. It was noted that the half (50.0%) of the respondents believed that AIC Churches were doing very little concerning the issue of promoting education to reduce street children in the study area. However those who believed AIC Churches were providing school levies to promote education were 16.7% which was the same with those providing counselling. Those who were providing school uniforms were 8.7% and those providing food were 8.3%. These percentages show very little efforts from the AIC Church on the issue of promoting education as a way of reducing the rate of street children in the study area.

In this study a question was asked to the respondents to find out their level of education. The study shows that the majority (40.4%) of street-connected children have never gone to school while 36.8% left school at the level of lower primary. It was found out that those who left school at upper primary level were 17.5%. The study also indicated that 5.3% of the street-connected children have gone to secondary school. According to the study it was realized that there were very few street-connected children who had reached secondary school. Research findings indicated that most of street-connected children in Machakos town have either never gone to school or have a very low level of education. The results of this study agrees with what Muna (2015) indicated that the majority of street- connected children in the streets have low level of education. However Alem et al (2016) disagrees with this study in that not all street children are illiterate.

Another question was asked to the respondents on what the AIC is doing to reduce domestic violence. The majority of the respondents were doing nothing in the reduction of domestic violence

according to their responses. It was realized that the majority (33.3%) of the respondents believed that the AIC Churches were doing nothing in combating domestic violence. Those AIC Churches who were providing counselling were 25.0% equal with those who were praying for the reduction of domestic violence cases. The AIC churches who were teaching on how to handle the increase of domestic violence had a percentage of 8.3 which was the same percentage with those who were creating awareness. Despite 33.3% doing nothing in the reduction of domestic violence, it was noted that prayers and counselling were the most used approaches by the AIC Churches to reduce the cases of domestic violence. This agrees with the study of Westenberg (2017) which argues that churches in Australia, which is affiliated with evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, has programs to respond to issues concerning domestic violence, through prayers, counselling and advocacy.

In order to find out whether the parents/guardians of the respondents engaged in domestic violence a question was posed to the respondents. The majority of the respondents agreed that their parents/guardians have at least engaged in domestic violence. It was noticed that the majority (54.4%) of the respondents admitted that their parents/guardians were at least engaged in domestic violence. On the other hand 45.6% denied that that their parents ever engaged in domestic violence. This reveals that domestic violence has contributed to the increase of street-connected children in Machakos town. This study agrees with the study of Aufseeser (2017) that states that street children often leave their homes and families with major levels of violence, abuse, conflict, and insecurity from their family members. Although domestic violence contributes to the increase of street children not all street children are as the result of domestic violence.

When a question was asked to the respondents concerning what the AIC was doing to combat HIV/AIDS; it was noted that the majority of the AIC Churches were doing nothing in containing HIV/AIDS within Machakos town. It was revealed that 41.7% were doing nothing in containing this infections while the AIC Churches who practiced prayers to contain HIV/AIDS were 25% while those who fought it through counselling were 16.7%. AIC Churches who were creating awareness to reduce the rate of HIV/AIDS infections were 8.3% which was the same to those who fought it through teaching. This study disagrees with Ralte (2016) on the issue that the church in the world has been on the forefront in trying to intervene and help the children left behind by the HIV/AIDS victims as well as coming up with programs to counteract this plight. Although there are churches who counsel and teach the community on the dangers of contracting this virus most of them are less concerned (Ralte, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the study was that the AIC was doing very little in the reduction of street children in Machakos town. Based on the interview result, the street children need assistance especially the basic needs. Street children are willing to have a better standards of living and quality education like any other child in the community. The AIC needs to review her programs and come up with better practical measures of assisting street children and vulnerable families to combat the increase

of street children in Machakos town. According Jamiludin et al., (2018) there are four alternative approaches for tackling phenomenon of street children. The first approach is the street-based intervention which involves dealing with street children at a personal level in the streets. The second approach is the family-based approach which involves empowering families to prevent children from moving to the streets and attracting those in the streets to come back home. The third approach is institutional-based which concentrates on institutions such as homes and centres. The fourth one is the community-based approach which involves community development structures and programs to empower community institutions as well as government institutions and non-governmental institutions. The AIC needs to come up with practical measures that cover the four approaches above in order to combat the increase of street children in Machakos town.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a great need for AIC to act by creating awareness to her members on the needs of street children as well as coming up with programs of helping street children such as feeding programs, clothing them, pastoral counselling and teaching; collaborating with the government in creating awareness on education, HIV/AIDS and domestic violence.

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