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# Street Children Programs in Latin America\*

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*The growing problem of street children is among the most important child welfare problems today. Estimates are that there are as many as 25 million street children in Latin America alone. This paper, which is based on over five months of fieldwork in Latin America, is a study of the problem of street children. Life on the streets is described in relation to the developmental stages of street children. The paper emphasizes the types of programs that have emerged as the countries of the region seek to ameliorate and prevent this social problem. A program typology is developed and discussed.*

One of the more pressing problems in child welfare is the growing number of children throughout the world who are working and even living on the city streets. After famine, perhaps no other global child welfare problem is as significant as the loss of human potential experienced by millions of children who are being reared outside of the institutions of family and education in the often perilous street environment.

Although the phenomenon of street children is becoming evident in many cities, including those of the industrialized nations, it is in no region more pronounced than in Latin America where millions of children support themselves by working long hours on the streets of urban centers. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has estimated that there are between 25 and 40 million children living and/or working on the streets of Latin America (Tacon, 1982; UNICEF, 1981). In Brazil, the region's largest nation, estimates are that between seven and ten million children work on the streets—many of them abandoned

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and without family support (Hoge, 1983; Tacon, 1982). In Mexico City there are approximately 650,000 children who work with no legal protection and 200,000 children whose workplace is in the streets (UNICEF, 1985). The social welfare implications of this problem are enormous as the developing nations of Latin America and other regions seek to meet existing human needs and plan for the future.

This article addresses the nature and significance of the street children phenomenon in Latin America with a focus on emerging programs and policies designed to prevent or ameliorate this pressing social problem. Brazil and Colombia are given the greatest emphasis because the problem in these two countries has been more acute and they have been pioneering new approaches to its resolution. The purpose of the paper is to describe the nature of street life and to analyze street children programs in the region.

An assumption of the paper is that the ways in which a social problem is defined by a constituency will be a major factor in determining the policies and programs which are designed to address the problem (Longres, 1981). In this sense, the programs investigated during this research are seen as rooted in varying definitions of the street children problem. Some assumed a correctional approach, others a rehabilitative, and in a few cases radical explanations prevailed. Therefore we sought to understand the underlying assumptions and perceptions of street kids by the various interested parties so as to provide a context for the analysis.

The field study was based on a combination of key informant interviews, document analysis, and direct observation. The findings of the article are based on over five months of interviews and ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, and the Dominican Republic. Other countries visited for background material and interviews on a short term basis were El Salvador, Jamaica, and Guatemala. Key informants included government officials, project staff, social workers, volunteers, church workers, sociologists, psychologists, slum dwellers, police officers, and most importantly—street children. Field observation and interviews were conducted simultaneously by two researchers to improve validity. Program and policy documents

and research reports were reviewed from public and voluntary organizations. Finally, the study relied upon extended direct observation of treatment programs, slum life, and street children as they lived and worked in the urban environment. The methodology was modeled on that of Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner* (1955) and W. F. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943) as flexibly structured interviews and field observation are among the most appropriate for understanding human behavior and sub-cultural groups in natural settings (Chadwick, Bahr, and Albrecht, 1984).

### Background

Throughout the larger Latin American cities, boys and girls can be seen working and living on the streets unsupervised by parents or other adults. They can be observed as they engage in a wide variety of economic activities such as shining shoes, selling food, stealing, washing windshields in traffic, begging, carrying groceries, and otherwise earning a living. As visible as their work are the other activities of daily living undertaken in public—sleeping, eating, playing, and bathing in park fountains.

Evident since at least the 1950's, their visibility has continued to grow with the region's rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization. Few, if any, major Latin American cities are unaffected by the problem. It is estimated that in Rio de Janeiro alone, 100 kids under three years of age are abandoned each month to street life (Brazil's wasted generation, 1978). There are possibly as many as 130,000 *gamines* (abandoned street children) in Bogota, Colombia and another 6,000 working street kids in Quito, Ecuador (UNICEF, 1985).

Statistics regarding the number of children on the street vary considerably. While UNICEF (1981) estimates the population at 25 million "de facto abandoned", the Inter-American Children's Institute of Uruguay places the figure at twice that amount (Saraiwa, 1984). In another report, a demographer approximates the street children population at 30 million (Fall, 1986). Part of the discrepancy in the figures is related to the lack of a clearly agreed upon definition of street children. For purposes of this research the United Nations' definition of a street child is used:

. . . any girl or boy . . . for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has

become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults. (ICCB, 1985)

This classification includes those children who continue to have some linkage to a family unit while working on the streets on a full- or part-time basis as well as the more hard core cases of individuals who have no family contact and reside on the street full-time. Researchers who have done fieldwork on street children in the region have found that the vast majority of the group maintain at least a tangential link to their family (Felsman, 1981a, 1981b, 1984; Conally, 1983; Pereira, 1985). In Brazil, our interviews of program coordinators and children revealed that approximately 90% had occasional or regular contact with their family. Only a small fraction, therefore, could be classified as the hard core *gamin*—the classic street urchin who by reason of abandonment or running away has been severed from the home. Given the large percentage of working street children who do retain such familial contact or even live at home, the higher estimates of the total population of street kids do not seem unrealistic.

### Life on the Streets

To reside or work on the streets as a minor is to be exposed with little or no protection to the harshest elements of the physical, social, and economic environments. Life on the streets can be characterized by hunger, violence, marginal employment, and exploitation. It also consists of a nearly complete absence of privacy, supervision, education, nurturance, and security.

Few children expose themselves to this setting by choice. In a study of hard core *gamines* who live on the streets of Bogota, Colombia, the most commonly cited reason for leaving home was poverty (36%) followed by family disintegration (27%), and physical abuse or neglect (20%) (Pineda et al. 1978). A "desire for adventure" was cited as a reason by only 10%. Those who are on the streets to work consistently cite the need for income—either for themselves or their families.

The pattern of street life varies according to the type of child. A Colombian typology (pre-gamin, gamin, and largo) classifies street children into three groups based upon the stage of their

development (Dorfman, 1984; Shifter, 1985; Escobar, 1986). A *pre-gamin* is a barrio (ghetto) child who spends at least part of his time on the streets in order to supplement income but who lives at home. These children are relatively pro-social although they may violate labor laws, use drugs, and engage in petty theft. A *gamin* is a street urchin who resides on the street at least part of the time and whose family link is declining or absent. Typically this type of child lives with other gang youth either outdoors or in a *barraco* (a shack or flat owned or rented by the kids or an adult patron). These children are school drop-outs and are self-supporting—often through illegal activity. Finally, the *largos* (older gang members) are the adolescents who have fully taken on the street life and ethic. They are enmeshed in hardcore street life, sometimes involved in violent crime, often linked to older criminals, and do not work in any conventional sense. The *largo* may have a relationship with a younger *gamin* as his simultaneous protector and exploiter.

This typology reflects the somewhat harsher experience of Colombian street youth vis-a-vis their counterparts in other Latin American nations. While this pattern of development can be seen outside of Colombia, other representations more accurately reflect the vast majority of street youth who are there primarily to work.

The Regional Director of UNICEF has grouped the youth into three broad categories: children-at-high-risk, children-in-the-street, and children-of-the-street (Pinilla, 1986). The largest category, *children-at-high-risk* is defined as boys and girls who live in absolute poverty (see Figure One). This group lives at home in a highly deprived environment without the basic necessities of life. These children generally receive inadequate parental supervision due to the "latchkey" phenomenon of working parent(s) who have no access to daycare. Most live in slums without public services, adequate local schools, or community programs.

The size of this group is substantial. To illustrate, in Brazil the GNP per capita is \$1,880 and the bottom quintile of the population earns only 2% of total household income (IBGE, 1985; World Bank, 1985). Of the 138 million people in Brazil, children under 18 make up almost half of the total population (about 60

million) and more than half of those are below the poverty level (Pereira, 1985; Riding, 1985). About 40% of Brazilian children are in need of basic health and education services, almost 12 million are without birth certificates, 7 million have dropped out of elementary school, and 17% have significantly reduced potential due to inadequate diet (UNICEF, 1985a; World Bank, 1979). In the UNICEF typology it is from this group of 36 million Brazilian children that the street kids emerge (Pinilla, 1986).

The second category, *children in the street*, consists of those boys and girls who are in the street primarily as workers. Similar to the *pre-gamin* of Colombia and often referred to in Brazil as the *tigueres* (tigers), these youngsters spend a substantial portion of their time in the street environment. They retain family contact but are not attending school regularly. Because of the distance between their home and the urban workplace, many will occasionally sleep on the streets in doorways, parks, under bridges, or in abandoned buildings. Often they work in a "remittance economy" wherein they supplement their family's income after they have covered their own expenses such as food, busfare, and job-related costs such as shoeshine wax. In some cases they are not admitted into their homes until a quota of income has been met (Larmer, 1988).

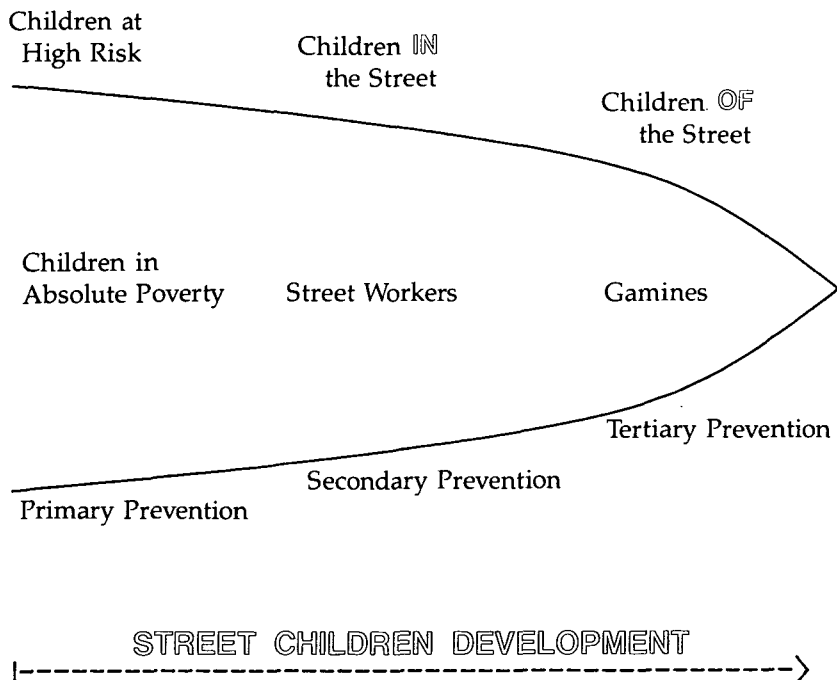
Children *in the street* can be best understood in the context of their work activity and there is very little that these young entrepreneurs cannot be seen doing to support themselves. A UNICEF study (1985b) of street children in Quito, Ecuador found that most are in food or candy sales (61%). About 15% work as *betuneros* (shoeshine boys). Also in sales work are another 14% who are hawking nonfood items. The products will vary considerably from country to country and even from one city to another given the demands of the local urban market. Goods proffered for sale are as varied as souvenirs, keychains, combs, inexpensive watches, illegal drugs, telephone tokens, and lottery tickets.

A segment of children in the street will develop toward the third category—*children of the street*. UNICEF and social workers who are involved with this group describe them in a way similar to the Colombian *gamines* (Pinilla, 1986; Pereira, 1985; Tacon, 1986). Boys and girls who are "of the street" have made the locale

their primary environment. They are the children who were either orphaned, abandoned by their parents, or more commonly have run away from their families. More than working there, the street has become their "home" and it is where their values are shaped into a "street ethic". In this context the kids are being reared utterly outside of the two most important institutions of socialization—the family and the school.

This final stage of development can be characterized by a fundamental break between the child and society. To the extent to which interactions between the children of the street and members of the larger society occur, they are usually exploitive or predatory. Nonetheless, while the larger portion of children in this group are engaged in chronic drug abuse and usually support themselves at least in part through illegal means, their behavior is still often very resilient and positively adaptive (Escobar, 1986; Pineda, 1978; Felsman, 1981a).

Figure 1. Street children development





It is important to emphasize that the "children of the streets" group represents a minority of the total street child population. In a study of street children in Cali, Colombia, Felsman (1981a) found that 61% had continued relations with their families. The remaining 39% consisted of orphans and children who had either been abandoned by parents or who had run away from home. Only 2½% had been abandoned by their parents. Boyden (1986) has estimated the total number of children who work on the streets of Lima, Peru on a full- or part-time basis at about 200,000 and the number of abandoned children who live on the streets or in institutions at only 6,000 (3%). Again, the problem of a clearly agreed upon definition clouds our interpretation of the numbers. Peter Tacon of UNICEF (1982; p. 31) sets the total number of street children in Latin America at "30 to 40 million" of whom 10% are completely abandoned. Virtually all of the key informants interviewed in the five primary countries of this study stated that the category of children of the streets, which as defined by UNICEF includes orphaned, abandoned, and run-away children who *live on the streets*, represented between only 5% and 20% of the total number of street children in their program areas.

Regardless of the typology of street children used, it must be emphasized that the street child phenomenon exists in the larger context of "street society". As in the industrial world, the cities of Latin America are occupied by millions of homeless people. While most street children come from ghetto homes, some are linked to families of street people (Pineda, 1978). In Recife, Brazil, we met with dozens of families who had migrated to the city from the drought-stricken *sertao* agricultural region after being displaced from their work as sharecroppers by repeated crop failures. Parents and children lived in plastic tents in the parks and plazas as well as in makeshift dwellings on sidewalks. In San Salvador, El Salvador, interviews were conducted with refugee families who have been displaced by the civil war in the countryside (Lusk, 1986). Thousands live perilously in shantytowns on the fringes of the capital or alongside the banks of creeks. Few are employed and so they are subsisting on food provided by Catholic Relief and other voluntary agencies. In Guatemala City, one can talk with families of street

vendors. These families are usually Native Americans from the highlands who have come into the capital for an extended stay to sell textiles, handicrafts, or street-prepared food items. Reliable estimates of the number of homeless people who are living in the cities of Latin America are difficult to obtain. What is clear, however, is that a portion of street children are linked to homeless families.

While street children generally band together in groups formed from their peers, they do not live in isolation but rather are embedded in the larger milieu of street society which consists of homeless adults, the police, street workers, gangs, and transients. It is also important to note that the types of street children do not function in isolation either. To a large degree the various subgroups of street children overlap and interact (Felsman, 1981a).

### Problems of Street Children

Street life can be hazardous. Studies of street children consistently report that the kids are exposed to physical violence from other children, older boys, the police, and adults who would exploit their vulnerability (cf. Pineda, 1978; Felsman, 1981a; Pereira, 1985; Fall, 1987). Our interviewees complained the most about police brutality. Paradoxically, given their role as child protectors, the police in Brazil and Colombia have often perceived street youth as delinquents in need of correction (Saraiya, 1986). The level of violence toward street children by the authorities reached such a level that at the First National Conference of Street Boys and Girls held in Brasilia in 1986, the children attending the conference demanded that government officials reduce police harassment and abuse. Brazilian child welfare policy under the current administration is emphasizing the education of judges and law officers on the rights of children and alternatives to institutionalization.

In addition to the perils of physical violence faced by the kids, most are exposed directly to drug abuse. Street children in most urban settings report that they use drugs varying from marijuana to inhalants such as glue or gasoline (cf. Felsman, 1981b). In a study of Bogota street children, Granados (1976, p. 35) found that 93% had used inhalants. In a later study of

Bogota *gamines*, Tyler, Tyler, and Echeverry (1986, p. 8) found that 52% of their sample admitted to illegal drug use. Although the more commonly reported drugs of choice are glue and gasoline, children in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia also smoke *coca* paste (a crude and inexpensive form of cocaine). In frontier towns such as Tingo Maria, Peru where the drug is cheap and readily available, the level of abuse has led to malnutrition and drug overdose deaths (Guillermoprieto, 1986).

Throughout the major cities of Latin America, street children can be seen using and in some cases selling illegal drugs. In San Salvador, El Salvador the level of inhalant abuse by streeturchins is such that they are referred to locally as *huelepegas* (glue-sniffers). Some children rationalize their drug use as an appetite suppressant while others openly admit to their enjoyment of the intoxicating effects. Social workers with the Bosconia Project in Bogota report that many of their newly admitted clients are seriously ill due to the effects of sleeplessness, anorexia, and reduced sensitivity to cold caused by chronic drug abuse. Workers in Bolivia, Brazil, and Colombia reported a contemporary version of Oliver Twist's plight. In what we might call the "Fagan Syndrome", children are often used by adults as thieves, purse-snatchers (*trombadinhos*), or as couriers or vendors of drugs for which they are paid cash or in-kind. Children in Cochabamba, Bolivia (often from families of displaced and unemployed tin miners) were observed selling cocaine in the city parks—reportedly they are working for adult traffickers. Child drug dependency is so common a problem that the local Catholic sponsored street children project in Cochabamba and the Bosconia Project in Bogota require de-toxification as a precursor to subsequent levels of program involvement.

Fieldwork in sections of Rio de Janeiro frequented by street children resulted in the observation that a "second shift" of child workers emerges after dark. During the day the vast majority of street children are boys engaged in shoeshining, car washing, or vending. At night the percentage of street girls and adolescents increases while the number of street families (children working with their parents) declines sharply. Solicitation for prostitution by both girls and boys is commonplace.

Street life can be illustrated by two representative cases of

boys interviewed in the heart of downtown Rio de Janeiro in a "rough" area of town called *Nova Catedral*. It is here that the Catholic Church runs an open door outreach project—the *Pastoral do Menor*. Downtown Rio, for all of its former beauty, has been changing rapidly, prompting one columnist to describe its slums, beggars, drug dealers, and street children as "Misero-polis—the Calcutta of Brazil" (Spinola, 1986).

*Sergio*, 13, is a blonde-haired, dark skinned boy whose family migrated from Nova Iguasu in the interior. He has glue stains on his cheeks. Sergio lives on the streets where he works six days a week with a small group of boys his own age. He takes a bus to visit his parents on the outskirts of Rio every Sunday. His mother and stepfather have 14 children, 11 of whom live at home. His older sister works as a live-in maid and his older brother has a job in a brewery. Sergio, the third oldest, remits part of his income to help out his family, but keeps most of it for himself to buy food and supplies. Since he was 6 he has been selling candy for a living—buying the candy directly from the factory outlet. His group of four boys rely upon each other for protection. Older adolescents have robbed him and beaten him up anyway. Sergio has never been to school and cannot read or write. He has lived on the street away from home on a full-time basis for slightly over a year. Twice he has been arrested—once for sleeping on the streets for which he spent one night in a child welfare institution (FUNABEM). A second arrest was for stealing money from a sleeping man for which he spent five days in the FUNABEM institution. Once when he was very ill with pneumomonia, church social workers took him to the hospital for treatment. When asked about what he wanted to do as an adult, he thought a while and said, "I don't know."

*Alexandre*, 15, is a very small and talkative boy who is very frank and interested in people around him. He has disfiguring scars on his face from a burn suffered working near the stove at his mother's house. He has other scars on his arms from fights with other boys. He lives on the streets full-time except for occasional weekend visits to his family's house which he describes as crowded. He has five brothers and five sisters who live at home with three nephews in a *favela* (slum) outside of Rio. Four of his older brothers work as laborers in construction and one is unemployed. His five sisters are day maids. He does not know where his father is. Alexandre sleeps and works in a movie theatre district called Cinelandia. He sleeps in front of a bar on the plaza where

he is harrassed almost nightly by police or security guards. Presently he is shining shoes for a living—he has been doing this for two months. He left home at 12 to work as a street acrobat's assistant doing tricks and stunts for tips. Alexandre dropped out of school after the first grade because he thought it was boring. He does not plan to go back. Although he is now using *cola* (industrial glue), he says he is using less—he used to spend all of his shoe-shine money on glue and begged for food. He has been arrested twice—once for hitting a man with stones, another for demanding his change from a grocer. Each arrest brought him two months in a FUNABEM institution. He is a member of a group of five boys who work, beg, and sleep together. He has been working and living on the streets for five years and does not share his income with his older siblings or his mother. He wants to be a garbageman when he grows up.

### Street Children Programs

It is easy to imagine how difficult it can be to work with this clientele. Not only are many of the children experiencing serious problems such as malnutrition, infectious disease, and mental illness, they are also suspicious of adults and those who purport to be working on their behalf. Because many of their relationships with adults have been violent or exploitive, street children are not voluntary clients in the conventional sense. Most street children programs have to use incentives such as hot meals or safe sleeping quarters to attract the kids into rehabilitative environments. Once in the treatment setting, the children can be violent, untrusting, and unwilling to relinquish the lifestyle of the streets. Whether the program is emphasizing on-the-street education or twenty-four hour residential care, each must confront a social problem that is multifaceted and often intractable.

Longres (1981) has observed that interventive strategies and programs aimed at addressing a social problem are fundamentally related to the assumptions and ideologies which shape the view of that problem. He has developed factors to identify the normative basis of social intervention. These factors were developed to describe practice norms with racial minorities, but have relevance for understanding social intervention with street children or other so-called "problem" groups (Lusk, 1984). It is argued that the analytic level and method of defining a social

problem will greatly influence the preferred strategy of intervention. The factors Longres identified can be arranged on a hierarchy of conceptual levels from the more abstract structural norms which imply social reform to the concrete individual norms which suggest individual change. The levels he identifies are: (a) macro-deficiencies such as racism or class exploitation, (b) social service issues such as access to services, (c) individual empowerment as in civil rights advocacy, (d) skills deficiencies or human capital deficits, (e) subcultural problems like the culture of poverty or self-depreciation, and (f) personal pathology.

Underlying the factors is a continuum running from a focus on "public issues" to "private troubles"—a span of analytic styles ranging from a "progressive" preoccupation with underlying social structural inadequacies to a "conservative" emphasis on personal inadequacies and adjustment problems (cf. Mills, 1959). The preferred levels of intervention for a social problem correspondingly reflect a normative and ideological bias. Longres' factor analysis of social worker's preferred intervention strategies identified a scale of five: (1) social action (e.g., legislative reform), (2) use of community resources (e.g., program improvement), (3) economic system adaptation (e.g., job training), (4) micro-environmental intervention (e.g., groupwork) and, (5) individual counseling (therapeutic or correctional).

Intervention strategies are therefore classified on a continuum from social change to social control—a span ranging from a preoccupation with adapting socio-economic systems to individuals' needs to an emphasis on adapting individuals to social system requirements. Street children program perspectives can be grouped using the Longres continuum. On the basis of understanding the social problem from a perspective of personal pathology up to macro-deficiencies, programs can be ordered: (a) the correctional approach, (b) the rehabilitative perspective, (c) outreach strategies, and (d) the preventive outlook.

### The Correctional Approach

Initially, street children were seen in Latin America as a matter for juvenile justice and youth corrections. Such kids had gone astray and turned to the "attractions" of street life: freedom from school and parents, drugs, and the romantic life of a vagabond criminal career. While many new programs and policies

are in stark contrast to this orientation, a correctional vision of the street children phenomenon still dominates the thinking of most police officers and juvenile judges who must work with street kids. It is also influential in the thinking of much of the public who perceive the children as delinquents (Saraiva, 1983, 1984, 1986; Cavalcante, 1985).

The result of this perception is that thousands of street children in Latin America are housed in institutions. In Brazil, for example, the National Foundation for Child Welfare (FUNABEM) operates twenty treatment centers and reform schools around the country for abandoned and delinquent youth. Conditions in the federal FUNABEM and state-level FEBEM institutions can be crowded, abusive, unsanitary, and dangerous (Queiroz, 1984). In response to the growing recognition that the correctional orientation can be counterproductive and even damaging to youth, the current Director of FUNABEM has been leading a campaign to reorient national policies and programs along three lines: prevention, deinstitutionalization, and decentralization (Saraiva, 1986). Working with the assistance of UNICEF, the federal government is now supporting programs to train juvenile workers and provide community-based treatment alternatives. In addition, the large centralized institutions are reducing populations through the use of regional and local treatment centers. Finally, some experimental preventive programs such as the Rural Youth Agricultural Education Project are being set up to prevent urban migration by teaching viable farming skills and improving rural incomes.

FUNABEM, founded in 1964 under the military government of Brazil, has had little in its previous history to reinforce a social services approach, but with the *abertura* (opening) of the society under recent democratic rule, social policy has been moving toward a more progressive orientation.

Using Longres' framework, the correctional approach to dealing with street children is normatively based on assumptions of personal pathology and the resulting interventive strategy has been clinical at its best and punitive at its worst.

### The Rehabilitative Approach

The influence of social workers, clergy, and sociologists on street children policy and programs has been significant enough

that a correctional perspective is now far less influential than a focus on rehabilitating street children. Professionals have been arguing for decades that street kids are not delinquents as much as they are victims of child abuse and neglect, extreme poverty, and untenable home conditions. Pineda (1978), for example, found that in the case of *gamines* who had fled their homes permanently, most cited poverty and physical abuse as their reasons for leaving. Because street children are seen by many workers as children who have been harmed by their environment, hundreds of church and voluntary programs have emerged in the region which are based on a rehabilitative approach.

No Latin American street children program has been more influential, copied, or publicized than the Bosconia Project of Bogota, Colombia (cf. Shifter, 1985). Representative of the best funded rehabilitation-type programs, the Bosconia Project incorporates a four stage, multiyear, residential treatment program. Under ideal circumstances the program is designed to transform hard core street boys into skilled, prosocial secondary vocational school graduates.

Founded by a priest from Italy, Padre Javier de Nicolo, Bosconia stresses the Salesian philosophy of creating a new person through work and values education. Well funded by international foundations and by the City of Bogota, the Bosconia Project utilizes several residential facilities and work centers to gradually phase the street child through environments in which his lifestyle becomes further removed from that of the streets. At each of the four treatment stages, the boys assume greater responsibilities. At the final stage, they live in a boys' city which is self-governed by an elected mayor and legislature. Graduates of the final stage have earned the technical high school degree and possess job skills.

The first stage of treatment is based in the heart of downtown Bogota in a district where most of the street kids are concentrated. Here at the Club de Externos, boys and girls can visit a walk-in center where they can take a shower, wash their clothes, use clean bathrooms, eat a hot lunch, play soccer, and visit with project counselors. At this stage the children are still living on the streets full-time, but have access to a safe alternative environment where social workers (all former street children themselves) can "recruit" them into enrolling in the next project stage.



A second stage is based on twenty-four hour residential treatment at one of two boys' houses and a separate center for girls. During a two month stay, the kids are involved in classroom, recreation, group discussion, and work activities. Counselors emphasize detoxification, motivation, and the elimination of street ethics and behavior. The participants, all of whom must volunteer for the program, must get used to daytime work schedules, sleeping at night, cooperation, and limited self-government.

If the children are judged by staff to have undergone a pro-social change, they can attend school full-time at La Arcadia School on a campus in the outskirts of Bogota. It is at this third stage that the link to the streets is ruptured and participants, who now live in attractive dormitories, can learn to read, write, garden, and manufacture items for sale. Instruction is learner-paced and is strongly tied to the Kohlberg model of values education (Kohlberg, 1979). For lack of funding, the third and fourth stages do not involve girls, although this is projected to change.

The final stage is based at yet another campus, the boys' city at La Florida. This is a self-governing city of 500 boys who live in 32 houses while they attend school and vocational training at Industrias Bosconia. The city has its own currency paid to all boys for required work on daily chores and project activities. The cash is redeemable at campus stores for clothes and supplies or can be exchanged for Colombian pesos at the project bank. Disciplinary problems, such as stealing or drug use, are administered by a boys' court which handles honor code referrals. Sanctions include peer pressure, withdrawal of privileges, and loss of pay as physical discipline is prohibited. Personal lockers, which are left open to instill mutual trust, are evidence of the success of the project in changing behavior.

The educational advisor of the Project, Dr. Magdalena Angel, has said that the central dilemma of Bosconia and other rehabilitative programs is that they produce competent, moral young men and women who must graduate into a society which is unjust, prejudiced, and discriminatory. Few of the graduates find jobs outside of the project community because employers reportedly distrust former street children. Those who do find

work are troubled by the employers' expectations of docility and obedience when Bosconia teaches its clients to speak out and to be fair when others are not. Many have become disillusioned and have "backslid" into former habits.

Observers at the UNICEF Regional Headquarters in Bogota and Brasilia have pointed to another dilemma of the rehabilitative programs. They note that such programs are costly and do not reach the vast majority of street kids. While one can laud the achievements of programs like Bosconia in transforming the lives of several hundred boys, the failure of rehabilitative programs is that they rarely reach out to the millions of *working* children who also call the streets their home.

Using the Longres framework, most street children rehabilitative programs are based on assumptions of personal pathology and skills deficiencies. As their own staffs have frequently noted, such programs fail to address the larger issues of working children or the social forces which produce them.

### Outreach Strategies

The institutional capacity and resources of most street children programs cannot begin to match needs within their service areas. In Sao Paulo, Brazil, for example, urban poverty is enormous with the result that the city has among the highest number of street children of any city in the region. The Archbishop of Sao Paulo's office estimates that 4½ million of the city's 12 million residents live in slums. Social workers with the Archbishop's youth project estimate that there are at least 60,000 street children in Sao Paulo, 10% of whom live on the streets full-time. In such a context the model of choice has been to provide services to street children through outreach programs.

One such effort which has received some international attention is the Archbishop's project of *educadores de rua* (street educators). Project staff think that attempts to resocialize children in residential settings are too costly and too removed from the environment in which the children have been reared (i.e., the streets). Therefore the Catholic church supports young lay workers who provide educational, counseling, and advocacy services to children in the street setting.

Working out of a small office in downtown Sao Paulo, the

street educators work 24 territories where they can get to know all or most of the children who work within a district. While there are no classrooms and the teachers have no power over the "students", the *educadores* form pedagogical relationships. Drawing from the Catholic concept of "base communities" (cf. O'Gorman, 1983), the workers seek to form pastoral groups of children who seek solutions to problems using their own resources. Project staff state that it is through "conscientization" (cf. Lusk, 1981) and the development of self-reliance that kids will find the solutions to their problems, not through conformity to an unjust society. Children, in addition to being taught basic hygiene, business skills, and literacy, are encouraged to resist injustice and degradation and to form themselves into pastoral study groups.

The methodology of the street educators closely parallels the work outlined in Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973). Dr. Freire, who has been an advisor to the Project, has advocated for an education that is proactive and liberationist wherein the student changes the world while learning about it. This revolutionary vision of education has been adapted to the children by the street educators as an alternative to "domesticating" them (FUNABEM, 1985).

Using Longres' framework for classifying interventive strategies, the street educator model of outreach programs is based on an assumption of macro deficiencies in society and on individual empowerment as the best avenue toward the remediation of social problems. However, upon close inspection the street educator model is somewhat ideological and does not provide a pragmatic method by which many of the street children's immediate physical and safety needs can be met while they are taught to pursue a more just social order.

### The Preventive Outlook

Proportionately, the number of street children is overshadowed by the number of children who are at high risk or who live in absolute poverty (see Figure One). In Colombia, for example, five million children live in what UNICEF defines as extreme poverty. Of these, 2½ million are employed as workers in urban or street settings. Of this group, about 100,000 are

estimated to be hard core *gamines* who live on the street full time as *de facto* abandoned children (UNICEF, 1985b; Pinilla, 1986). Thus, UNICEF, through its regional offices in Bogota and Brasilia has articulated a strategy that seeks to remediate the street children problem at the most fundamental level by addressing the issue of childhood poverty in Latin America.

This approach to understanding the street children issue emphasizes that the problem's origin is not in the children themselves but is linked to larger social forces. Among these is the rapid rate of migration from the rural sector to the cities—a pattern that has left the major cities of the region incapable of providing the housing, employment, or social services necessary to offset abject urban poverty. It is in the cities that the rural extended family decomposes and the support system of shared labor and subsistence farming is replaced by chronic unemployment and dependency (UNICEF, 1985b).

The family structure often breaks down under such forces. In Kingston, Jamaica, for example, 82% of all poor children live in female-headed households. Only 7% of street children in that city have two parent families (Brown, 1987). Children are forced by economic and familial factors to become supplementary breadwinners. In a study of Quito, Ecuador street children, 88% of the sample said that they were in the streets to work to help support the family (UNICEF, 1985b). Thus many policymakers are arguing that street children are only one highly visible element of a much more fundamental issue—childhood poverty.

The UNICEF regional initiative on street children exemplifies the new preventive strategy. Regional Directors for UNICEF have argued that the institutionalization of street children, abandoned youth, or child prostitutes is inappropriate and that community based alternatives having a preventive element will provide the best option (cf. UNICEF, 1986). In conjunction with the child welfare agencies of Latin American governments, UNICEF is conducting research on various community programs which may show promise. Model programs are selected and supported with seed funding and information about successful programs is disseminated through publications and consultation (cf. Medeiros, 1986).

In addition, UNICEF is conducting a major education cam-

paigned to alert policymakers to underlying causes of the street children phenomenon. Apart from fundamental causes such as high unemployment, low wages, and inadequate housing, which are the most difficult to address, considerable attention is given to the intermediate causes of child displacement such as the lack of community day care for working parents and the failure to protect the rights of working children (Pinilla, 1986).

Programs providing daytime activities, schooling, and employment for high risk children are seen as alternatives to street work, abandonment and institutionalization. Other services such as community kitchens, cooperative day care centers, artisan cooperatives, family planning clinics, or small business services support the family system in such a way as to prevent its disintegration.

UNICEF thus pursues a twofold strategy. On the one hand, the agency is providing governments in the region with technical assistance and policy advocacy. Also at the macro level, UNICEF stresses education regarding the precursors to child labor and abandonment. At the local level, UNICEF is assisting community projects that support local employment, strengthen the family, and mitigate against child street labor. Using Longres' framework, the preventive strategy is based on norms which assume that there are macro deficiencies and social service issues at the heart of the street children phenomenon which can be corrected through education, advocacy, technical assistance, and the design of community-based programs.

### Conclusion

The vast majority of street children in Latin America continue to have regular contact with their family. Most are in the street environment as workers who supplement their family's income. A small minority are abandoned or runaway youth who have lost contact with their family and are being socialized in the streets. Two emphases in program development logically grow out of the demographics of street youth. Rehabilitative and outreach programs are needed for those children who have severed their link to society's institutions and preventive programs would help those who are placed at risk by their family's socio-economic condition. A juvenile justice orientation toward the

issue is appropriate only to a very small group of hard core *gamins*. By and large, efforts to confront this social problem in Latin America will be most successful when providing social and economic supports to maintain the autonomy and integrity of families.

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