

Street-Working and Street-Living Children in Peru: Conditions and Current Interventions



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IREWOC, the Amsterdam-based Foundation for International Research on Working Children intends to generate more theoretically informed research on various aspects of child labour and child rights, as well as to raise awareness and to motivate action around this complex issue. IREWOC is associated with the University of Amsterdam and with the International Institute of Social History.

Note

A quantitative research study was carried out by Talinay Strehl and Anna Ensing in November 2009, in preparation for this project. This current report is mainly qualitative in nature, but often calls upon the quantitative data presented in the two unpublished reports:

“Street-Working and Street-Living Children in Peru: Quantitative Report Cusco”

“Street-Working and Street-Living Children in Peru: Quantitative Report Lima”

These two reports can be found on the IREWOC website (www.irewoc.nl)

Contents

- Acknowledgements5

- Chapter 1: Introduction.....6
 - 1.2 Research objectives8
 - 1.3 Methodology and fieldwork.....9
 - 1.4 Organisation of chapters..... 12

- Chapter 2: Background 14
 - 2.1 Children and poverty in Peru..... 14
 - 2.2 Perspectives on child care in Peru 15
 - 2.3 Local context 16

- Chapter 3: Family Background 27
 - 3.1 Family situations 27
 - 3.2 Push-factors within the household and pull-factors on the street 30

- Chapter 4: Street Life..... 40
 - 4.1 Characteristics of street-living children in Lima 40
 - 4.2 Characteristics of street-living children in Cusco 47
 - 4.3 Becoming a street child 49
 - 4.4 Income generation and expenses..... 51
 - 4.5 Family contact 59
 - 4.6 Social relations on the street 60
 - 4.7 Free time, sports and play 63

- Chapter 5: Consequences of Living on the Streets 65
 - 5.1 Weak family relationships 65
 - 5.2 Drugs 66
 - 5.3 Violence..... 68
 - 5.4 Police..... 69
 - 5.5 Discrimination and self-esteem..... 71

5.6 Education	72
5.7 Lack of birth certificate and identity card	76
5.8 Poor health	77
5.9 Dreams and Wishes	78
Chapter 6: Comparisons and Contrasts with Street-working Children.....	80
6.1 Characteristics of street-working children	80
6.2 Reasons for working	81
6.3 Consequences of street work	84
Chapter 7: Current Street Child Interventions and Policies.....	87
7.1 Child protection and legal framework for (street) children in Peru	87
7.2 The local government’s approach.....	91
7.3 Clearing the city’s streets from street children: street children and police	92
7.4 Non-governmental projects and services in Lima	97
7.5 Non-governmental projects and services in Cusco	108
7.6 Children’s ideas on street child services.....	126
Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	131
8.1 Conclusions	131
8.2 Recommendations.....	136
Resources	140

List of photos, figures and tables

Photo 1: “My past has everything to do with my mother”	10
Photo 2: “I love playing cards with my best friend on the street.”	11
Photo 3: “I made this photo because I don’t like it that parents bring their children to the streets to work. Children should be in school and parents should work.”	34
Photo 4: Street-working children from the country side in Cusco	36
Photo 5: “This is at Cine Planet. We get drinks and popcorn from the visitors of the cinema. The girl is Susana, with her baby, and Diego is always sitting with his <i>teko</i> [glue].”	42
Photo 6: Street-living girl working in prostitution in Lima - photographed here with her boyfriend. 45	
Photo 7: Street group in Cusco.....	50
Photo 8: Young street musicians posing with their instruments.....	53

Photo 9: “Because I am old now, people look angry at me while I try to make some money.”	57
Photo 10: “This is our <i>hueco</i> [hole] where we enter to sniff glue.”	67
Photo 11: “This is HonKon [in Lima], an illegal hostel where we pay 3 sols a night. I sleep there sometimes.”	77
Photo 12: “My dream is to be re-united with my family.”	79
Photo 13: Young girl from the countryside selling <i>tostaditas</i> in Cusco.	83
Photo 14: “Street educator Nica is my friend. He always comes to search for me.”	101
Photo 15: Sewing workshop in a shelter for street girls	106
Photo 16: Street children having an evening snack in the night shelter	121
Figure 1: Age of the surveyed children, according to sex (Lima)	19
Figure 2a: Activities of street children (Lima)	20
Figure 2b: Working in services (Lima).....	21
Figure 3: What do street children use most of their money for? According to sex (Lima).....	22
Figure 4: Age of surveyed children, according to sex (Cusco)	24
Figure 5a: Most common activities on the street (Cusco)	25
Figure 5b: Activities included in services (Cusco)	26
Figure 6a: Areas of Peru where street children’s mothers were born (Lima).....	28
Figure 6b: Areas of Peru where street children’s fathers were born (Lima).....	28
Figure 7: Places where streetchildren were born (Cusco).....	29
Table 1: Services for street children in Cusco.....	110
Table 2: Positive and negative aspects of street child services and strategies	128

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Being poor is itself a health hazard; worse, however, is being urban and poor. Much worse is being poor, urban and a child. But worst of all is being a street child in an urban environment [De la Barra 1998:46].

A phenomenon characterising urban areas in developing countries all over the world is the existence of deprived children that depend on the streets for their survival, the so called 'street children'. UNICEF highlights annually the difficult conditions in which these children work and live in its State of the World's Children reports. Although street children are among the most physically visible of all children, they are also among the most disadvantaged group of children. Usually they are dispossessed of almost all the rights embodied in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 [UNICEF 2005].

The Convention was the first legally binding international instrument to protect basic human rights of children and was ratified by all countries, except the United States and Somalia. It states that "children have the right to survive and develop; to be protected from violence, abuse and exploitation; and for their views to be respected and actions concerning them to be taken in their best interests" [UNICEF 2009:II]. Street children, however, are known for being excluded from almost all of these rights. The circumstances in which these children work and live put them at risk for all forms of exploitation and abuse. Most of them have no access to adequate healthcare, education, social services and (family) protection. They often work under hazardous conditions on the streets and are at risk for becoming involved in the worst forms of child labour. As Judith Ennew states, street children therefore are "society's ultimate outlaws", who are "not only outside society, they are also outside childhood" [1995].

The term 'street children' was introduced by UNESCO after World War II, but it was not until 1979, the International Year of the Child, that it became more commonly used. Street children are generally assumed to be children and adolescents who come from dysfunctional families and who chiefly live on the streets. The broad classification is imperfect and leads to misunderstandings and inefficient policy. There is in fact a range of street use, associated with a wide variance in street life. Many forms of street life are not intrinsically harmful. A valuable distinction has been made between beneficial street use, the street as a space for assumed adulthood, the street as a sign of school exclusion and a runaway place of degenerative estrangement [Williams 1993]. The latter, the category of totally abandoned children, is a minority. Many children in fact live with their families, go to school and hang around or play on the streets for a couple of hours per day. For another category of street children (the proto-adults) the street may offer the illusion of adult self-determination and liberation from the restrictions associated with normative childhood.

Because the overall term is insensitive to the differences among all the children that it attempts to categorise¹, UNICEF decided to distinguish between children *on* the street and children *of* the street [Ennew, J. 2003:410]. This categorisation is based on the level of contact the children have with their families. The first category (*on* the streets) consists of children who take to the streets for a livelihood, but who return home to their families and contribute to the household income; the latter (*of* the streets) refers to children without family support and who have come to depend entirely on the streets for survival (usually run-away children). In this report I refer to the former category as ‘street-working children’ and to the latter as ‘street-living children’.

While both groups of children have a special relation with the street, they occupy distinct categories of street children and have a different relation to street work and income generating activities. However, the group boundaries are fluid, categories overlap and children can move easily back and forth from one category to the other. Within categories the children don’t form a homogenous group at all. Therefore scholars such as Glauser [1990:142], Hecht [1998], Panter-Brick [2002a], Ennew [2003] and Gigengack [2006] reject the *of/on* the street categorisation and underline that it does not respect cultural and contextual values that may very well place children in activities and places that are not acceptable according to these categories. In reality, for example, most street-living children do have occasional family contact and even return home sometimes for certain periods of time. Besides, some scholars argue that the term ‘street children’ is a stigmatising label and therefore “inappropriate, offensive and gives an excluded message” [Dallape 1996, in Ennew, J. 2003:7]. However, since exhaustive debates on the term street children have not yet come up with a better term, I’ll use the UNICEF *on/of* the street distinction, but with an emphasis on the heterogeneity of the groups of children it refers to.

The implementation of policy should be compatible with children’s needs, which are influenced by what the children do, why they find themselves on the streets and what they are interested in. These characteristics vary between different street children and good policy should be based on knowledge about the differences between them. Although we should be aware of neither excluding nor generalising children by dividing them into different categories, I think it necessary to make some distinctions within the large and heterogeneous group of children to identify the specific problems they encounter on the street.

Reliable data on how many children work or live on the streets worldwide is not available, partially caused by the confusion of which children should be counted. The significant features of this sector, mainly its footloose character, contribute to the lack of clear statistics. Street-living and street-working children are mainly found moving within urban centres, looking for ways of survival. Nevertheless, in the mid 1990s UNICEF estimated the number to be tens of millions worldwide and 25 million in Latin America². As population growth and urbanisation continue, and implicitly social inequity between rich and poor, these numbers are expected to increase [UNICEF 2005:40-41]. In 2030 an estimated 60% of the world’s population will be living in cities, of which again 60% will be children and adolescents under the age of 18 [Thomas de Benitez et al. 2003]. Because children

¹ Children working on the streets but living at home, children helping family members on the street, children working at markets, children living with family on the street, children sleeping in night shelters, children without any family contact, children sleeping temporarily or permanently on the streets, children in youth gangs, etc.

² Earlier UNICEF reports estimated the number of street children to be as high as 100 million worldwide [UNICEF 2002b:37].

working and living on the streets make up an important part of the urban youth, in-depth research on this typically urban phenomenon is important.

1.2 Research objectives

The 1990s witnessed serious interest from Peruvian NGOs in the issue of street children and, as a result, many street child welfare services were initiated, especially in Lima. However, since that time the interest has once again waned, even though the problem has not decreased. In recent years, hardly any anthropological research with street children has been done in Peru³. Although GOs and NGOs have a lot of relevant knowledge concerning street children, this knowledge lacks actualisation and analysis to be positively used for the formulation of policy. This research will expose the reality of street children, which will enable us to understand the relation between street children and the organisations that intervene in their name. The focus will be more on the street-living than on the street-working children.

One of the central objectives of this IREWOC research therefore was to reveal the faces and voices of street children and analyse their various backgrounds, relations to the streets and their perceptions of their situation. The research results were expected to give relevant insights into the various reasons why children are in the streets, the activities in which the children engage and how they generate income and the consequences that the children experience from their working/living/being in the streets.

The anthropological outline of the lives of street children will form a basis for the second objective of this research, namely to map different policy initiatives for street children and to identify the best practices to satisfy street children's needs. Are organisations working with street children alleviating the problem or are they reproducing it, i.e. are their policies pulling children to the streets?

These research objectives have been translated to the following research questions:

- What are the street children's coping mechanisms? What labour activities or other activities do the children perform to generate income and what do they use it for?
- What consequences does living/working in the streets have for these children's lives: what are the specific problems that the various types of street children face?
- What are their urgent (self-declared) needs and what are their (perceived) aspirations?
- Which specific strategies and interventions are used by GOs and NGOs to improve the situation of street children?
- What are the effects of the different GO and NGO interventions on the street children and which strategies can be identified as most effective in improving the daily life situation and the future prospects of the street children?
- Do GOs and NGOs work in a complementary way? What are bottlenecks in cooperation?

³ The few recent qualitative studies done are studies on street-working children by Invernizzi [2003] and Steel [2008], and street-living children by Tejada Ripalda [2005]. Further two quantitative studies are done: one on street-working children in Cusco by Qosko Maki [1998] and a recent study on drug using street children in Lima [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009].

The fieldwork locations for this research were Lima and Cusco. Lima was chosen because of its urban and metropolitan character and high number of street children, and Cusco because of its tourism industry and more rural and indigenous influences.

1.3 Methodology and fieldwork

The data presented in this research is the result of several successive anthropological and sociological fieldwork periods in Peru in 2009 and 2010. In the first place, to get a better overview of urgent research questions concerning street children in the Peruvian context, in February 2009, a 1-month background mapping was conducted in Lima and Cusco, during which 27 GOs and NGOs working with street children were interviewed. All the informants agreed that there is an urgent need for an evaluation of the effectiveness of GO and NGO interventions for street children and for the formulation of concrete recommendations. Moreover, they stressed a need for research on the characteristics of contemporary street children, their various backgrounds, their relations to the streets, and their perceptions of their situation.

The following research phase was a thorough 5-month anthropological study on the streets and in street child shelters to document the views and opinions of the children, their families/caretakers and development workers. The first research was conducted in Cusco during the period July - August 2009 and the second research was conducted in Lima during the period November 2009 - January 2010.

The initial contact with street-living children was sought with the help of local organisations. I therefore spend a lot of time inside different street child shelters and often accompanied street educators of different organisations on the street. In Lima I had interviews with staff members and coordinators of 10 different GOs and NGOs and I visited 2 day shelters and 5 permanent shelters on a regular base. One of these permanent shelters was exclusively for street girls. In Cusco I had interviews with staff members and coordinators of 8 NGOs and I visited 1 open night shelter and 1 permanent shelter on a regular base.

Cooperation with organisations was useful to give me a thorough insight of how the situation of street children, in the actual context, is influenced by intervention programmes of GOs and NGOs. Staff members of the organisations provided me with information on the organisations, their strategies, difficulties, street life and the street children themselves. Observations and conversations with children in the different shelters showed the function of these places in the street children's lives. The organisations also provided me with a solid starting point for exploring street life and getting into close contact with the street children. I had many informal interviews with the children both inside as outside the institutions. It, for example, often happened that I met the same children on the street, as that I had earlier met in a children's home, before they had run away. The fact that they knew me from when they were still 'inside' facilitated the contact with them on the street.

Once trust was established with the children it was possible to meet them and their friends on the street and the places they hang out, such as the beach, illegal hostels, pinball halls and internet cafés. They introduced me to their friends on the street, so that I could include the part of the population that was not reached by interventions. I was able to join them during their work and some children took me to their parents. The experiences on the street brought me closer to my "informants" and allowed me to observe their behaviour outside the institutions. Although I did not participate in their drug taking or income generating activities, I spent as much time as possible

with them walking and hanging around on the streets. Sometimes I had lunch with them at the soup kitchen. It must be said that participant observation on the streets was much easier in Cusco than in Lima, due to the dangerous character of the latter city and the more extreme marginalisation of street children. While in Cusco I was alone with the street children most of the time, even at night; in Lima I was mostly accompanied by a street social worker or a friend for safety reasons. In addition, in Lima and Cusco I had contact with several adult ex-street children, who provided me with useful insights into their life trajectories, street life, services and how they had escaped, or had not fully escaped, street life.

Moreover, a combination of alternative playful research methods was used to attract the attention and participation of the street children and to provide deep insights into the way in which children perceive their living and working circumstances. During drawing workshops, writing assignments, individual interviews, creative story telling sessions and focus group discussions, the children were encouraged to give opinions and suggestions on services aiming to help them and on their perceptions of street life.



Photo 1: “My past has everything to do with my mother” (drawing by Irene)

Individual and group interviews were conducted with many children; sometimes these were spontaneous and sometimes planned; sometimes inside institutions and sometimes on the street. While some of the children preferred to be interviewed alone, others were more talkative when their friends were around. In total, 42 semi-formal interviews were conducted, with 30 boys and 12 girls. A lot of relevant data, however, was gathered during the dozens of informal talks I had with these children. Some of them I saw on a more regular base, while others just disappeared out of

sight from time to time. Some of the children could always be found in the same spots or in the same shelters; others just came and went.

Very useful was the participative research method of photography. In both Lima and Cusco I organised a photography workshop with disposable cameras at two open street child shelters. In total, 20 street-living children participated. They were asked to photograph their daily lives on the street, especially things they do and don't like about street life. Before taking the cameras to the streets the children made a "photo plan", in which they wrote their first ideas about what to take pictures of. These plans were a good starting point to develop a conversation about the children's perceptions of street life. Afterwards the photos were discussed with the children individually in the form of semi-structured interviews.



Photo 2: "I love playing cards with my best friend on the street" (photo and quote by Gustavo)

Another visual participative method was the 'ranking game': children were asked to put cards representing different images in order of appreciation or importance. The cards showed images of street life, work, problems, aspirations, street child services, and other issues in their lives. This method provided for interesting information on the preferences of the children and resulted in deeper talks.

In Lima a workshop was organised with a group of 15 street girls in a permanent shelter. The girls made up the whole content of a book about their own lives and dreams, through drawings, writings and told stories (which were later transcribed by the researcher). The fact that the girls felt responsible for the content of the book motivated them to show as much about their lives and feelings as possible. During 4 intensive group sessions of each 2 hours, the girls created the book "*Hay que vivir la vida bien*" ("You have to live your life the right way").

Although the main focus of this research was on the street-living children, I also had regular informal contact with different street-working children and their caretakers, in order to compare their situation with street-living children.

In addition to the NGO and street environments, I spent time in the police station, juvenile custody centres of the police and prosecution service, where I talked with detained (street) children, police officers and a juvenile judge. For comparison, I visited a restorative juvenile justice project, implemented by Terre des Hommes Lausanne, in a police station in one of Lima's poor and dangerous outskirts El Agustino⁴. Municipality employees, the juvenile Ombudsman, the Ministry of Women and Social Development (MIMDES) were also consulted.

At the end of each research period a final feedback meeting was organised with the children, in which the main results were presented and the children were asked to correct or add information.

The research also included a quantitative study that took place during 3 weeks in November 2009 in Lima and Cusco and was coordinated by an IREWOC researcher. Cooperation was established with two local universities, the San Marcos University in Lima and Universidad Andina in Cusco, and the NGO Qosqo Maki, who facilitated the 1 week workshop on research methodology to the local enquirers prior to the survey. In Lima 12 enquirers distributed questionnaires among 828 street-working and street-living children, aged between 5 and 17, in different parts of Lima. In Cusco, 6 enquirers distributed questionnaires among a total of 343 street-working and street-living children, aged between 5 and 17. The enquirers responsible for approaching and interviewing the children were all Peruvians living in Lima and Cusco. Most of them had experience in working with street children or working children.

The questionnaire was designed for this research specifically and contained 34 questions related to the child's background, the current situation of the child, the consequences of his or her presence on the street, the reasons for being on the street and his or her needs and wishes. The surveys represent a sample of the towns and their street child population, but cannot give exact numbers of street children.

The enquirers always informed the child about the research and its purpose before questioning, and they respected the choice of children who preferred not to participate. When children didn't want to participate it was mostly due to a lack of confidence, either from the child or from the parents. Other children didn't want to be involved because it would distract them from working. Some questionnaires were only partly filled in, and a small number of the questionnaires were taken out of the sample because they didn't fulfil the general requirements.

Most data gathered during the quantitative research is integrated with the qualitative data in this research report, but two separate quantitative reports are also available. All respondent names have been changed in order to preserve confidentiality.

1.4 Organisation of chapters

This report is divided into eight chapters. In the second the situation of street children, child labour and the perspectives on child care in Peru is described, followed by a description of the local research contexts and the research population in Lima and Cusco. Chapter 3 gives an outline of the various family backgrounds and family situations of street children and tries to understand the factors pushing and pulling children to the streets. Chapter 4 analyses the characteristics of street-living children and street life in Lima and Cusco and the various ways of income generation and

⁴ This was the first pilot project in Peru searching for alternatives for incarceration through educational and social measures that stimulate integration in family and society.

social networks. In Chapter 5 the specific problems of street-living children are discussed, followed by a short description of the dreams and wishes of street children. Chapter 6 compares the situation of street-working children with the situation of street-living children. Chapter 7 starts with a discussion on the role of the government in child protection and the legal framework on (street) children in Peru, followed by a description on the conflictive relation between police and street children and a discussion on the services of non-governmental and welfare organisations that work with street-living children in Lima and Cusco. The report ends with concluding remarks and recommendations.

Chapter 2

Background

Both street-working and street-living children are engaged in informal economic activities on the streets, as this is essential for their own or their family's survival. The types of income generating activities can take many forms, ranging from light work to hazardous forms of child labour. Before giving an introduction to different perspectives on childcare and the characteristics of the local research contexts and research population, this chapter starts with some general data on the situation of children, child labour and poverty in Peru.

2.1 Children and poverty in Peru

The UNICEF report *State of Peruvian Children 2002* reckons the situation in which children are growing up in Peru among Latin America's most critical. This is directly related to poverty, which affects children more than adults [UNICEF 2002a:10]. Some consequences of poverty in Peru are for example a high child mortality rate, inaccessibility of healthcare for 50% of children from poor families [UNICEF 2002a] and low school attendance. In Peru 41% of all school children between 6 and 17 years old don't attend school due to economic reasons [INEI & OIT 2002:23].

Moreover, UNICEF showed that there is a clear relation between the high amount of working children and poverty in Peru. Of all children in Peru below 18 years (about 10.5 million), 6.5 million (65%) live below the poverty line [INEI & OIT 2002]. According to UNICEF "two out of every ten children live in circumstances that can be labelled as extreme poverty", 39% of the working children come from extremely poor families and 22% come from poor families [UNICEF 2002a:10]. Although Peru has committed itself to the total elimination of child labour by signing ILO conventions 138⁵ and 182⁶, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, more than one quarter of the Peruvian children below the age of 18 were involved in economic activities in 2001 [INEI 2002]. Between 1993 and 2001 the amount of working children almost tripled. Especially the economic activities of children between 6 and 11 years increased significantly [CPETI & MTPE 2005, referring to INEI & OIT 2002]. According to the IPEC, 26% of children between 6 and 13 years old works and 35% of children between 14 and 17 years old [2003].

Most working children perform activities related to their households. In rural areas this is mostly on the land; in urban areas mainly in family businesses. Around 70% of all working children are found in

⁵ Convention 138 of the ILO requires states to design and apply national policies to ensure the effective abolition of all forms of child labour and to set the minimum age of employment at 14.

⁶ Convention 182 defines 2 categories of the worst forms of child labour: the Unconditional Worst Forms (including slave labour, prostitution and pornography, participants in armed conflicts and illicit traders) and the Hazardous Worst Forms, which are all sorts of work that expose children to danger and jeopardise their physical and moral health, and all forms of work conducted by any child under 18 years of age that equals or exceeds 43 hours a week.

the rural areas of Peru, especially in the highland regions called *La Sierra*. The regions Cajamarca, Puno and Cusco have the majority of working children under the legal working age of 14.

It is important to note that not all forms of child work are per definition harmful. The ILO therefore states that millions of children and adolescents perform work that is “in accordance with their age and maturity. While working, they learn certain responsibilities, skills, help their families and contribute to the families wellbeing and income” [ILO 2002:9]. According to the ILO and the Convention of the Rights of the Child work is acceptable if it does not harm the child’s education, or his/her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Work can be dangerous either due to the *nature* of the activity or due to the *conditions* in which it is performed. According to the National Committee for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour in Peru (CEPTI), street work can be considered a worst form of child labour when performed under conditions that put the wellbeing of children and adolescents at risk [CPETI & MTPE 2005].

21% of all children between 6 and 17 years old combine work with school attendance and only 5.4% of all children between 6 and 17 years old don’t attend school, but only work [INEI & OIT 2002:22]. However, it is alarming that 9% of all working children and adolescents in Peru never entered the regular educational system and that 18% of the working adolescents didn’t conclude primary education [INEI & OIT 2002:42]. Moreover, according to the ENAHO of 1999, half of the working adolescents had an educational delay [CPETI & MTPE 2005:19].

2.2 Perspectives on child care in Peru

In the debate on child labour in Peru, there are two opposing schools of thought: the *regulacionistas* and the *abolicionistas*. The former believe that children should have the right to work and that work is a part of life in many cultures. According to them, the focus should be on improving working conditions instead of eliminating all forms of child labour, which is exactly what the latter propose [Van den Berge 2007:17]. The majority of child centred NGOs that work with street-working or street-living children in Peru are also somehow involved in the debate between the *regulacionistas* and *abolicionistas*. The latter stance is supported by the ILO, UNICEF and the Peruvian state.

Besides specific child labour issues, the debate is also on the role that is given to children within the organisations. The *regulacionistas* emphasise children’s participation, while the *abolicionistas* take a more protectionist stance in which adults decide what is best for the children. *Regulacionistas* treat children as “social subjects with the capacity to participate in society and to transform it” [Liebel 2000]. They consider the dominance of adults in programme design and implementation a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and prefer to let children participate and decide on issues that concern them.

In addition, three other ideological approaches can be distinguished that guide strategies of (street) child care interventions and services: the reactive, the protective, and the rights-based approach [Thomas de Benitez 2003]. It is important to stress that in practice these approaches are complementary and that no single approach addresses the needs of the entire group of street children. In street child interventions in Peru the three approaches are therefore often combined, depending on the types of street children they focus on.

In the reactive approach street children are principally seen as a (potential) threat to society and public order because of their homelessness and supposed delinquent behaviour. To clear the streets and re-establish communal safety, street children are put away and ‘corrected’ in juvenile justice

centres. Related to this approach is the tendency to criminalise street children for characteristics connected with their homeless status, like vagrancy, sleeping on the street and using drugs. Police round-ups, imprisonment and punitive methods are used to frighten children away from the streets and reduce criminality. Street children are sent by judges to closed children's homes or custodial institutions, after they are picked up from the streets by the police. The 'closed doors' strategies of these institutions imply that the children have no liberty to leave the institutions. Within the (custodial) institutions the focus is often on the rehabilitation and education of the street children to avoid that children return to the streets after imprisonment [Thomas de Benitez 2003].

In the protective approach, which best coincides with the viewpoint of the *abolicionistas*, children are perceived to be vulnerable and 'incomplete' human beings that have to be protected from potential social evils by adults. Within this approach street child interventions focus on the rehabilitation of street children and their re-integration in society. Integrating street children in formal education, withdrawing them from work, providing healthcare and vocational training, and re-establishing family contacts, are key elements of the types of interventions within the protective approach [Thomas de Benitez 2003]. GO and NGO policies include temporary and permanent shelters, like state orphanages and children's homes.

Within the organisations offering shelters there is also a differentiation in strategy and policy design, ranging from the 'open doors' approach to the 'semi-open doors' approach. The first category consists of shelters in which children participate completely voluntarily; they are free to come and go whenever they like (although this can be according to prearranged hours). The second category consists of shelters to which children can turn voluntarily, but that aim for a total incorporation of the child in the institution, where the child has to follow the rules, goes to school, and eats and sleeps.

Additionally, the rights-based approach, which coincides most with the *regulacionistas* perspective, focuses on prevention programmes and outreach strategies to ensure the legal protection of children's rights. The well-being of children is promoted through a range of economic, social, cultural and educational measures that allow children to take control over their own lives. Children are encouraged to participate in and have opinions about policy design and decisions concerning them. Thus, within this context, children are given the right to choose whether to return home or live in a shelter; they participate in formal or non-formal schooling and may choose to work under certain (acceptable) circumstances. Street education programmes are an important tool to make street children aware of their rights and empower them [Thomas de Benitez 2003].

2.3 Local context

In the second half of the twentieth century Peru witnessed a rapid growth of its urban areas due to a massive migration stream from the rural areas to the cities, consisting of people in search of work or protection from the political violence in the countryside of the 1980s and 1990s. In 2007 over 75% of the Peruvian population lived in cities, while this was only 47% in 1961 [Valenzuela et al. 2007:35]. This urbanisation has resulted in a growing informal sector, poverty and street migration.

2.3.1 The informal sector and street-working children in Peru

The rapid population growth in urban areas caused a shortage of jobs on the labour market in the cities. Many new city inhabitants were not able to find a formal job and consequently opted for low quality jobs in the informal sector. As a result of this trend, nowadays the Peruvian economy is characterised by a predominantly informal employment. Approximately 60% of the economically active population in Peru makes a living in low productive jobs outside of the formal sector, most of them working independently in services or commerce [Velazco 2004]. The majority of these jobs fail to comply with regulations, resulting in poor labour conditions such as low salaries, risk of job loss or an unsafe work environment. Workers in the informal economy in Peru are excluded from social securities like health insurance, minimum wages or retirement payment. The absence of protection and social securities makes informal workers vulnerable and socially excluded from society. This vulnerability is related to their impoverishment: because they are poor they enter the informal sector, here they become even more vulnerable to risks and social exclusion, which aggravates their poverty and lessens their chances to enter the formal economy [Espinoza & Rios 2006:9-11]. Only 10% of the informal workers has finished secondary education [Velazco 2004].

Besides poor adults, children from poor families are also found in the informal sector. About 30% of all working children in Peru⁷ work in the cities [Cesip 2007], of which many opt for the street as their work environment because of its easy accessibility for children and youngsters. On the streets they mainly work as (ambulatory) street sellers, porters, shoe shiners, or car/windscreen washers. Although Peruvian law states that children below 14 are not allowed to work formally and that adolescents between 14 and 18 may only work for a short number of hours, many children opt for the streets, or are sent out to the streets by their parents, to contribute to the household economy.

Although reasons for living on the streets are diverse, there is a relation between poor families sending their children to the streets as breadwinners and the permanent transfer of the child from home to street. When children work on the streets, either accompanied by family members or alone, their income successes or failures often become the centre of their parents' positive recognition or disapproval. Parents put a lot of financial responsibilities on the shoulders of their children and are disappointed or become angry when their expectations are not fulfilled. Children feel pressured and will become more hesitant about going home after an "unsuccessful" day of work. As they start spending a lot of time on the streets, children also start to compare advantages of street life with disadvantages of their home situation, with the possibility of finally replacing home with the street [L. Tejada Ripalda 2005:51-64]. Especially if the child encounters family problems and punishments at home, the decision to not return home after a long day of street work is quickly made. Some of the advantages of the street, that make children decide not to go home, are the lack of rules, freedom, independence, earning money and having control of their money and expenses. These characteristics contrast the authority, rules, poverty, punishments and problems the child encounters at home.

According to a street worker in Lima the *callejización* (street migration) consists of different stages in which the child becomes more and more alienated from home. "In the first stage the child for example stays a couple of days on the street, spending his nights in the park, goes back home and returns again to the street. After a while he returns home less and less frequent and makes the street more and more his living environment".

⁷ According to the Peruvian Institute of Statistics and Informatics, INEI, Peru counts more than 2 million working children and adolescents [2006].

2.3.2 Lima, a fast growing city

Within the era of urbanisation the capital of Lima was the fastest growing city, housing nowadays almost one third of the Peruvian population. Due to a lack of infrastructure and housing space for the fast growing population, many migrants resorted to the city's outskirts where they constructed illegal squatter settlements, the so called *barriadas*, which later grew into residential communities, called *pueblos jóvenes*. These expanding outskirts to the north, south and east were called Cono Norte, Cono Sur and Cono Este⁸. Lima's slums witnessed a rapid growth, between 1961 and 1993 in particular, doubling the percentage of the population living in slums from 17% to 34%. Since 1993 the quick growth of new settlements on the outskirts of the city has slowed down, due to the fact that most inhabitants of these areas were born there and stayed there [Valenzuela et al. 2007:36-37]. Lima's contemporary youth consists mainly of these second generation migrants from Peru's countryside.

Together with the growth of Lima's outskirts its socio-economic problems, such as poor housing, lack of basic facilities, bad infrastructure, short-coming social services and unemployment, also grew. While middle class families nowadays occupy the parts of the outskirts closest to the centre of Lima, the neighbourhood's exteriors, climbing up the dusty mountains around Lima, house poor and extremely poor families. In 2008 an approximated 20% of the Limenian population lived in poverty and 0.7% in extreme poverty, among which forty thousand children and adolescents [INEI 2008b]. The result of this can hardly be ignored: daily thousands of people, among them many children, travel long distances in mini buses to the city centre, commercial areas and market places to make a living in the informal sector. In 1994 Lima counted 185 thousand ambulatory street vendors [Aliaga Linares 2002:22].

Lima has approximately 1.6 million children and adolescents between 6 and 16 years, of whom an estimated 3.7% works. A recent INEI survey shows that 32,129 of these children work in the informal sector, of which approximately 6,550 on Lima's streets as ambulatory vendors, acrobats, musicians, guides, shoe shiners and other street jobs [INEI 2008a]⁹. All over Lima examples can be seen of young boys and girls making music in buses, acrobats on traffic intersections and children cleaning car windows or selling sweets on the sidewalk. A social worker in Lima explained why this street migration, caused by impoverished living conditions at home, can result in a growing population of street-living children: "Have you seen the places they come from? For some children there's hardly any difference between living on the street and sleeping on a cold floor with eight family members, without electricity or water. Especially if the child encounters family problems at home, the choice not to return home after a long day of street work is quickly made".

The IREWOC quantitative survey found that there is a strong relation between family composition and the need for a child to work on the streets, because more than half of the street-working children (62%) don't live with their complete nuclear family. A quarter of the children live with only their mother, 12% sleeps in the house of other relatives and 4% in a house with their father only. It

⁸ Peru is divided into 195 provinces, which are grouped into 25 regions. Lima province is the only province not belonging to a larger region. The Lima Metropolitan Area is a conurbation comprising Lima Province and the Callao region. Lima Metropolitan Area has 43 districts.

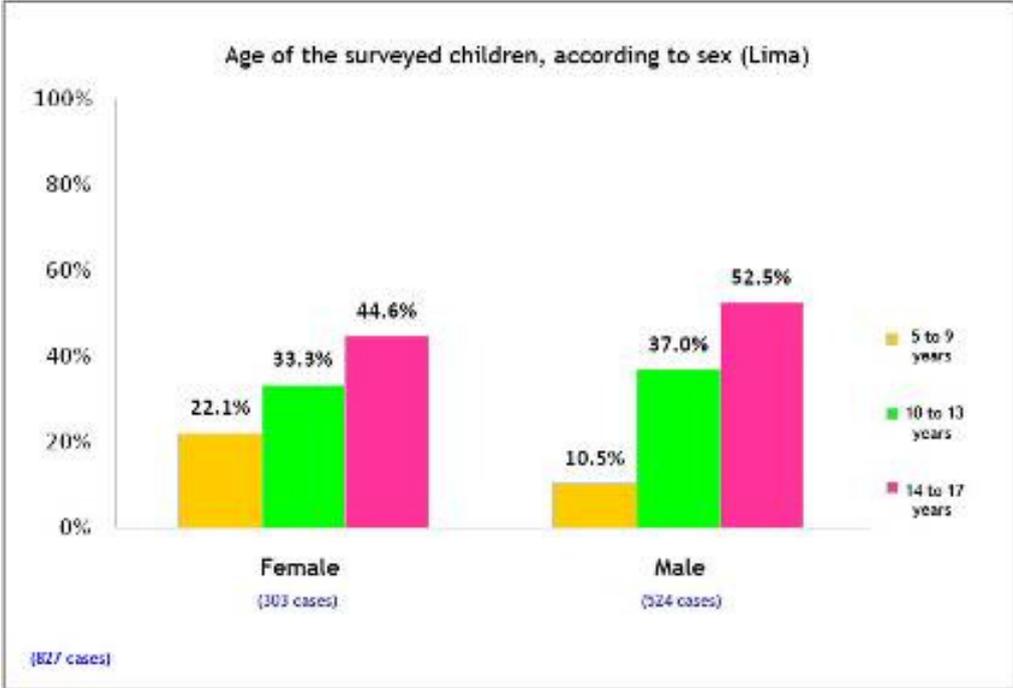
⁹ It should be taken in account that these numbers are at a rough estimate and should not be taken as exact numbers. The amount of children working in the informal sector or on the street can deviate because of the sector's footloose character. For example, during holidays more children work on the street than during school periods. Besides, children in the informal sector are hard to find, because they are not officially registered, and move around within, looking for ways of survival.

is important to mention that, given the many broken families in Lima, many children live in a rebuilt family, in which a step-parent is present.

In the survey 182 children were included that don't live with adult relatives, but in hostels, rented rooms, outside, in parks, on the streets, in shelters or empty buildings. They can be considered street-living children. However, this number doesn't represent the total number of street-living children in Lima, since only a selection of neighbourhoods was included and because children of the street are generally harder to contact than children *working on* the street. Comparing this number with a census done in 2008 by street educators in Lima [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009], together with our qualitative observations and information from street workers, we estimate the number of street-living children in Lima to be around 700¹⁰.

In Lima there are many more boys than girls working or living on the streets, respectively 63% and 37%. Only in the youngest age group of street-working children, were girls in the majority. Within the population of street-living children the age difference is bigger: 89% are boys, while just 11% are girls¹¹. The majority are adolescents. Almost half of all interviewed street-working children were adolescents between 14 and 17 years old; 36% were between 10 and 13 years and only 15% between 5 and 9 years old.

Figure 1: Age of the surveyed children, according to sex (Lima)



¹⁰ Earlier studies in the 1990s estimated the amount of street children in Lima between 500 and 1500 while others believed that the whole of Peru counted 1500 street children. From our own findings we expect the latter to be more credible [Rios Céspedes and Ordóñez in: Tejada Ripalda 2005:37].

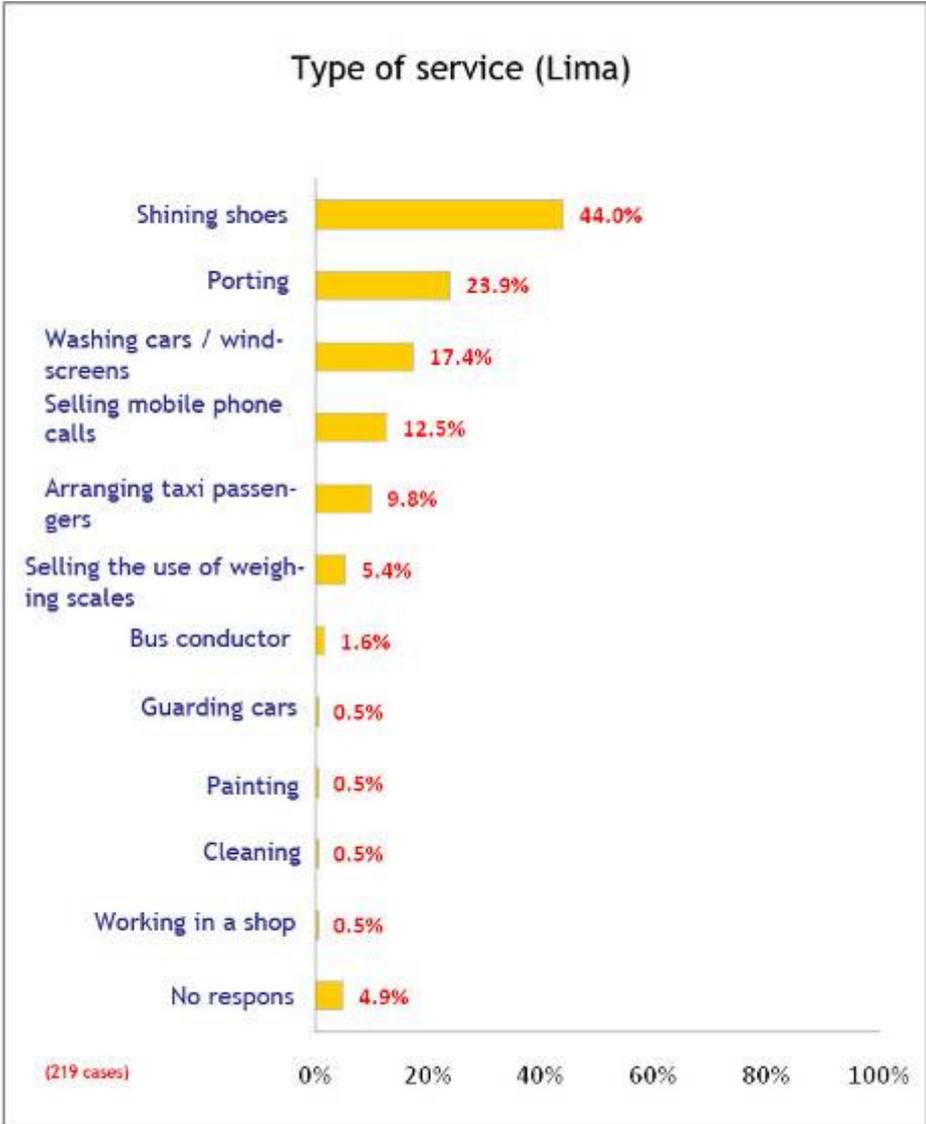
¹¹ A quantitative study in 2001 done by a network of street educators called REDENAC, showed that of all street-living children in Lima 77% was male and 23% female [Vara Horna 2001, 2002]. A street child census in 2008 done by street educators showed a similar relation, 80% was male and 20% was female [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009:37].

Among all street-working and street-living children included in the surveys in Lima, the most common activities are selling sweets, drinks, food, souvenirs etc (57%) and working in services (26%), including shoe shining, porting, washing cars/windcreens, selling mobile phone calls, arranging (collective) taxi passengers, or selling the use of weighing scales. Other economic activities include playing music or singing on streets, in restaurants and in city buses (especially boys), street acrobatics (especially boys), recycling of waste material, begging or stealing and prostitution. Girls work much more in sales (73% of the girls versus 48% of the boys), while boys are more involved in services (36% of the boys versus 10% of the girls). More boys than girls are engaged in begging and stealing, while more girls than boys work in prostitution.

Figure 2a: Activities of street children (Lima)



Figure 2b: Working in services (Lima)

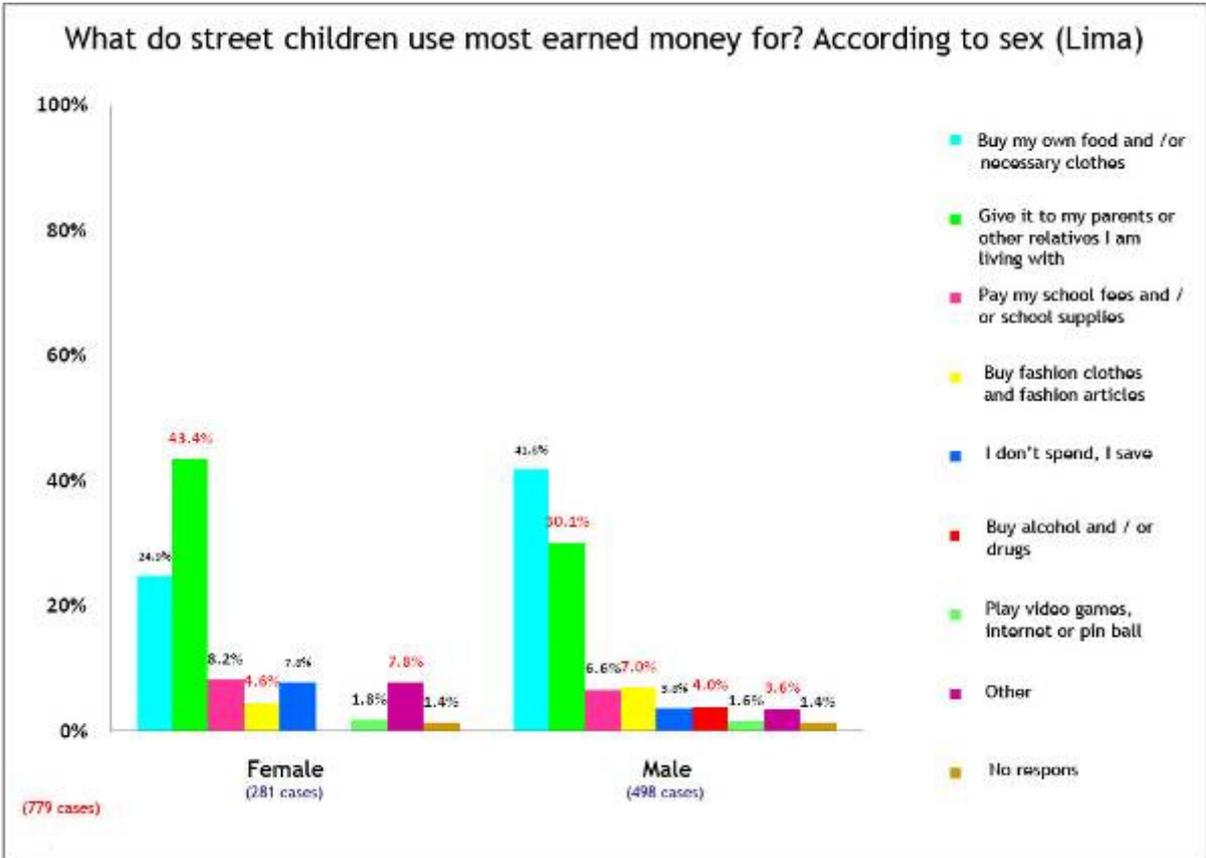


A considerable 35% of all questioned children in Lima said to spend between 10 to 24 hours on the street. Many of these children, sometimes even younger than 12, can be seen in the streets working overnight. Especially around cafés and discotheques many young children work at night, selling cigarettes and sweets to drunken men and women. On average, boys spend somewhat more hours than girls on the streets. Their reason for working is mostly a combination of the parents asking children to help and the child’s feeling of responsibility for the family. Interestingly, 8% of the children do not work or spend time on the streets because of necessity, but because he or she doesn’t like to be at home.

The majority of all street-working and street-living children (40%) earn between 11 and 25 sol per day (between 3 and 6 euro). 33% earn less than 11 sol per day; 22% earn between 25 and 50 sol a day and only 2% earn more than 50 sol. Spending patterns differ between boys and girls. Boys clearly spend most of their money on their own basic needs, while girls give most of their money to parents or caretakers. None of the girls mentioned spending most of her money on drugs or alcohol,

while 4% of the boys did. On the other hand, more girls than boys claim to save their money and more boys than girls spend money on fashion articles such as mp3 players or mobile phones. Thus, boys seem to be much more self dependent than girls, which corresponds with the fact that the majority of street-living children are boys.

Figure 3: What do street children use most of their money for? According to sex (Lima)



2.3.3 Cusco, South America’s tourist capital

The Andean mountain town of Cusco has also seen its outskirts expand rapidly during the previous decades with migrants from the countryside in search of work. This ‘archaeological capital of America’, and thus tourist hub, annually receives more tourists than there are residents.¹² With its steep narrow streets, restored Inca ruins and colonial buildings, a visit to the town of Cusco is supposed to give every visitor an unforgettable glimpse of Peru’s glorious past. Everything on the Main Square and its surrounding street blocks seems to be designed to suit the tourists’ needs and the municipality invests a lot of money to keep this historic centre clean, safe and attractive. However, despite the rapidly growing tourism sector, Cusco still belongs to the Peruvian department with the highest number of people living in poverty and extreme poverty [INEI 2008b]. In Cusco an

¹² Since the beginning of the 1990s, when the activities of the violent Maoist guerrilla-movement *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) were brought to a halt, Cusco’s tourist sector has been growing rapidly. During the last two decades more than 500.000 tourists visit Cusco annually [Steel 2008:40].

estimated 75% of the inhabitants live below the poverty line and the infant mortality rate is the highest of the country.

Under the vigilance of the municipalities' security and municipal agents, coupled with the presence of several hidden cameras, every day hundreds of tourists explore Cusco's historic heart. They barely notice the dozens of young children and adolescents who search for different means of existence, both within and outside the city centre, on a daily basis. Most of these children originate from the dusty and underdeveloped *pueblos jóvenes* on the outskirts that are mostly inhabited by first or second generation Quechua speaking migrants from rural areas. In the 1980s and 1990s the main reasons for these families to migrate was the political violence in the countryside. The present reason for the migration to Cusco is, with very few exceptions, the lack of work in rural areas. The families hope to find better employment opportunities in this bursting tourist city.

In their attempt to develop and protect the city centre and archaeological sites in and around Cusco, the local government seems almost to forget about the basic needs of its local population. For this reason Griet Steel calls this provincial town a 'schizophrenic city' in which the luxury and safety that attracts dozens of tourists daily stands in sharp contrast with the reality of poverty and violence many of its inhabitants face [2008:34].

According to INEI and UNICEF 61% of the children and adolescents in the department of Cusco live in poverty and 29% live in extreme poverty [2008]. The precarious living conditions, lack of water and electricity facilities and the infrastructural deficiencies in the marginal neighbourhoods, force them and their families into the city centre every day to find ways in which to benefit from the rapid economic development their city is experiencing. Most of them end up working in the informal sector, often in ambulatory jobs on the street and market places. Their presence in the tourist hotspots is, however, not appreciated by the local government and police¹³, who try to hide the street vendors, beggars and street children from the tourists' gaze by expelling them out of the city centre, taking away their merchandise or arresting them. It is this context of a booming tourist industry coupled with a state policy of social cleansing of the city centre in which we should understand the dynamics of the street-living and street-working children in Cusco.

A study done in 1996 by the NGO Qosqo Maki estimated a number of 3130 street-working children, including children that work on local buses, between 6 and 17 years old in the districts Cusco, Wanchaq and Santiago [Baufumé, I. R. & Astete 1998]. A census of INEI states that in 2007 the total number of children between 6 and 16 years old in the city of Cusco¹⁴ was 77630, of which almost 4% worked in the informal sector on the street.

In our quantitative survey we found that only 47% of the children working on the streets sleep at home with both parents; 22% lives at home with a mother; 5% with a father and 12% with other adult relatives, such as uncles, grandparents or older brothers or sisters. Thus, half of the street-working children don't sleep with their complete nuclear family. The survey included 45 children that sleep in hostels, in a shelter for street children, in dilapidated buildings or outside. However, we expect the real number of children within this group to be twice as high; it is especially these

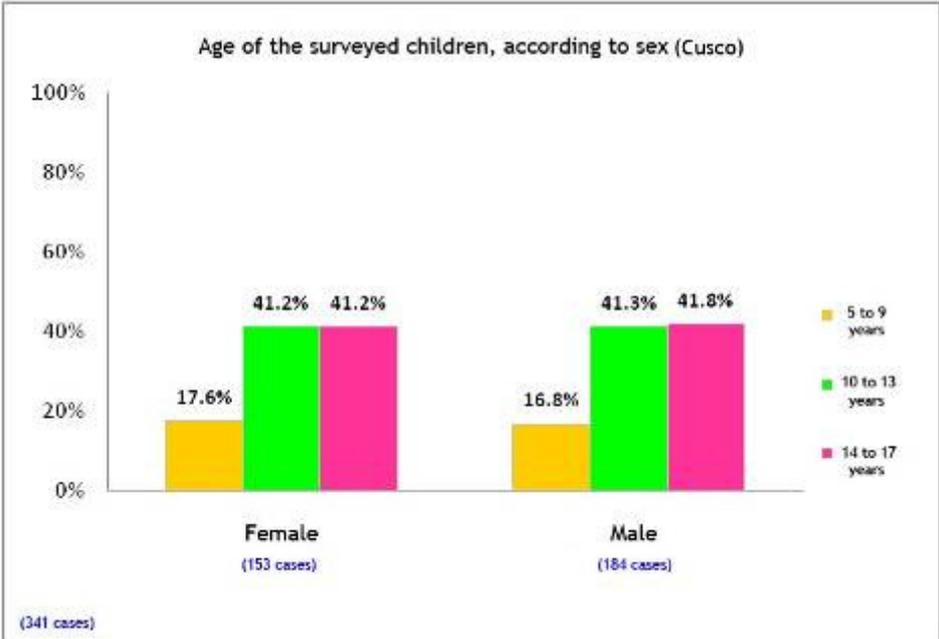
¹³ In an interview that Steel conducted in 2000, the Municipality of Cusco argued that street vendors (and street children) are "causing congestion, immobility, public disorder, noise and pollution from solid waste disposal" [Steel 2008:47].

¹⁴ This number includes only the districts Cusco, San Jeronimo, San Sebastian, Santiago en Wanchaq.

children who were hard to reach during the survey¹⁵. In 2009 Cusco’s shelter for street-living children and street-working children, Qosqo Maki, received 179 individual children, ranging from 5 to 17 years old. Most of these children stayed only for a short time, or at intervals. This shows the fluidity of the street child population.

Compared to Lima the difference between the number of boys and girls working on Cusco’s streets is relatively small. Of all children who were surveyed, 45% were girls and 55% were boys. However, within the population of street-living children this difference was bigger: 82% were boys and 18% girls. Most street-living children are adolescents, but of all children working or sleeping on the street 17% were between 5 and 9 years old, 41% between 10 and 14 years old and 41% between 15 and 17 years old.

Figure 4: Age of surveyed children, according to sex (Cusco)



Among all children included in the surveys in Cusco, the most common activities are selling sweets, drinks, food, souvenirs etc (54%). The second most common activity for street children is to work in services (24%), including selling mobile phone calls (51% of all children work in services), washing cars/windcreens (27%) and shoe shining (20%). Other economic activities include playing music or singing on streets, in restaurants and in city buses (especially boys), street acrobatics (especially boys) and posing for photos in traditional clothing with tourists. A considerable 28% said to spend between 10 to 24 hours on the street. Especially on the tourist hot spot Plaza de Armas many young children work at night, selling cigarettes and sweets to drunken tourists. On average, boys spend somewhat more hours than girls on the streets.

¹⁵ Reasons for the difficult inclusion of ‘children of the street’ in the survey could be their relative invisibility in the city because of the stigmatisation and discrimination of street children by government authorities, the police and the public, and their relative lack of confidence in others.

The majority of working children (36%) earns between 11 and 25 sol a day (between 2.50 and 6 euros). Earnings clearly increase with age. Among all children who earn money on the street, more than half of them hand it over to (one of) their parents. The remaining children spend most of their earnings on their own basic needs (24%), on (fashion) clothes or (luxury) articles that are not basic needs (4%), on school articles (4%), videogames, pinball games or internet (2%), drugs or alcohol (1%) or they save their money (9%). Fewer boys give money to their parents than girls.

Figure 5a: Most common activities on the street (Cusco)

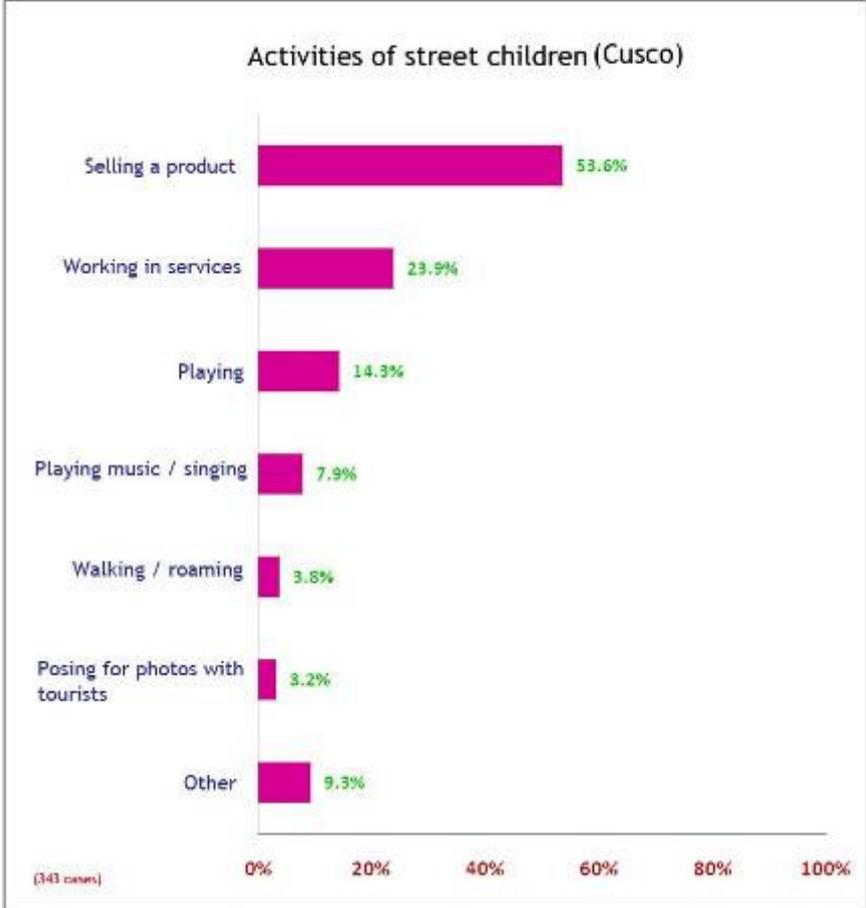
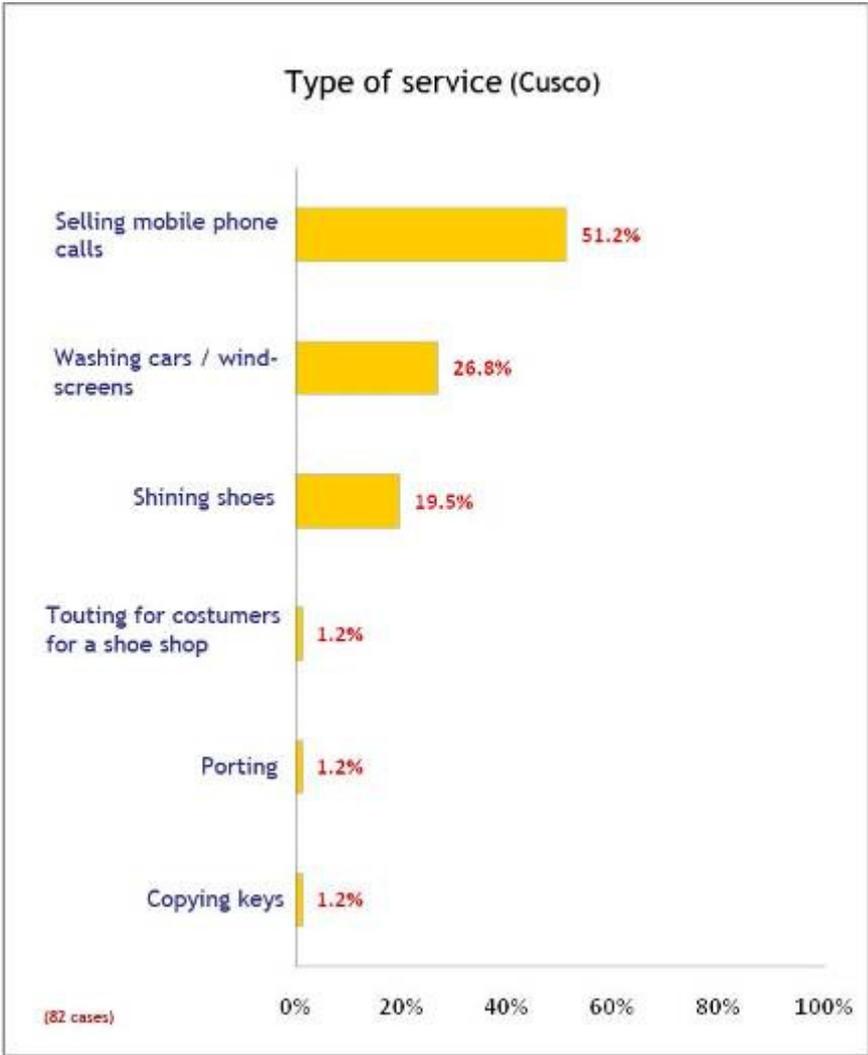


Figure 5b: Activities included in services (Cusco)



Chapter 3

Family Background

3.1 Family situations

Most street-working and street-living children come from poor families, in which the parents are either first or second generation migrants. Sometimes the children themselves are first generation migrants and still have parents living in the countryside. In many cases the parents are poorly educated or illiterate. Especially in Cusco it was often the case that (one of) the parents didn't speak Spanish, but only Quechua.

3.1.1 Lima

Our census on street-living and street-working children in Lima shows that although 57% of the children were born in the city, a significant number of children (29%) were born in la Sierra, the central highlands of Peru, which is also the poorest part of the country. The three departments where most children (not originally from Lima) originate from are Junin, Huancavelica and Huanuco. The second and third departments are the two poorest departments of Peru [INEI 2002]. 8% of the children were born in la Costa, the coastal area, and 6% in la Selva, the Amazon region of Peru. This means that a relatively large portion of the children migrated to Lima. Some migration took place decades ago, but others arrived more recently; of all interviewed children, 17% migrated less than two years ago, 15% between two and six years ago and 10% between 7 and 14 years ago.

When we looked at the origin of the children's parents, we again found that la Sierra is overrepresented. More than half of the children's fathers and mothers come from la Sierra, compared to only one fifth of both mothers and fathers who are born in Lima. We can conclude, thus, that most street-working and street-living children in Lima are either migrants themselves or second generation migrants from Peru's countryside.

At the moment of the survey, most mothers (79%) lived in Lima, and had probably migrated with their children. One fifth of all children had their mother living outside Lima; of whom 14% lived in la Sierra. Of all children with a father, 57% had their father living in Lima. Of the others, the father lived somewhere else, mainly in la Sierra (15%). Moreover, the death of a father or mother is relatively high: 3% of the children in Lima had lost their mother and 8% had lost their father (these percentages include the children who had lost both parents).

In addition, street-working and street-living children come from families with a relatively high number of children. The average number of children per family is 5. However, it is possible that half-siblings and step-siblings of the streetchildren are included in these numbers. In Lima we encountered several third generation street children: children whose parents and grandparents also lived on the streets. According to street workers in Lima, this is a phenomenon seen increasingly frequent in this fast growing city.

Figure 6a: Areas of Peru where street children's mothers were born (Lima)

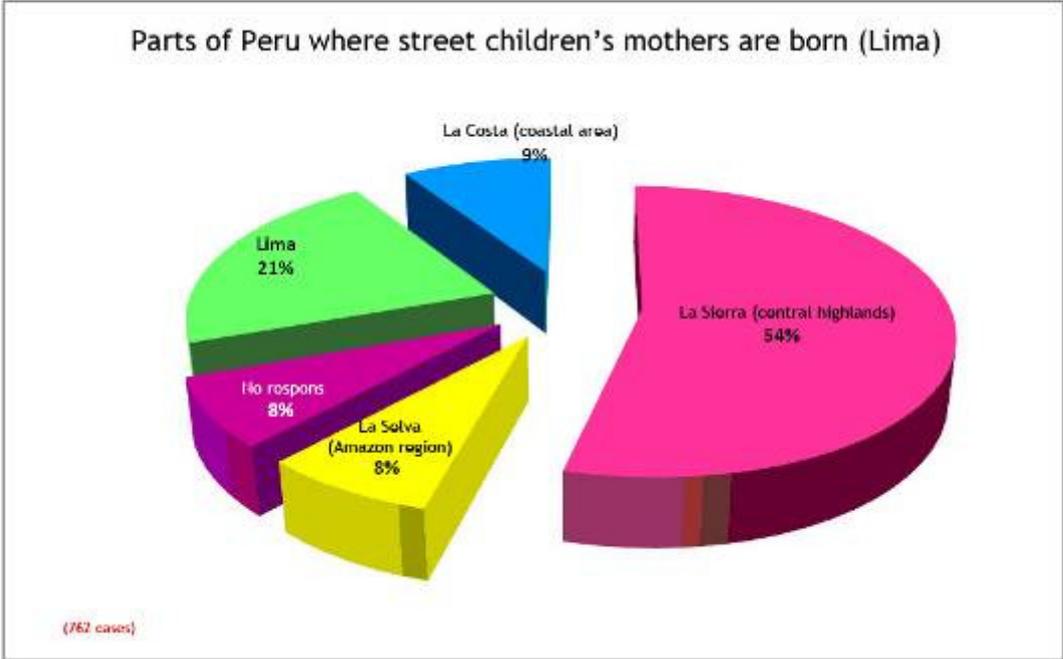
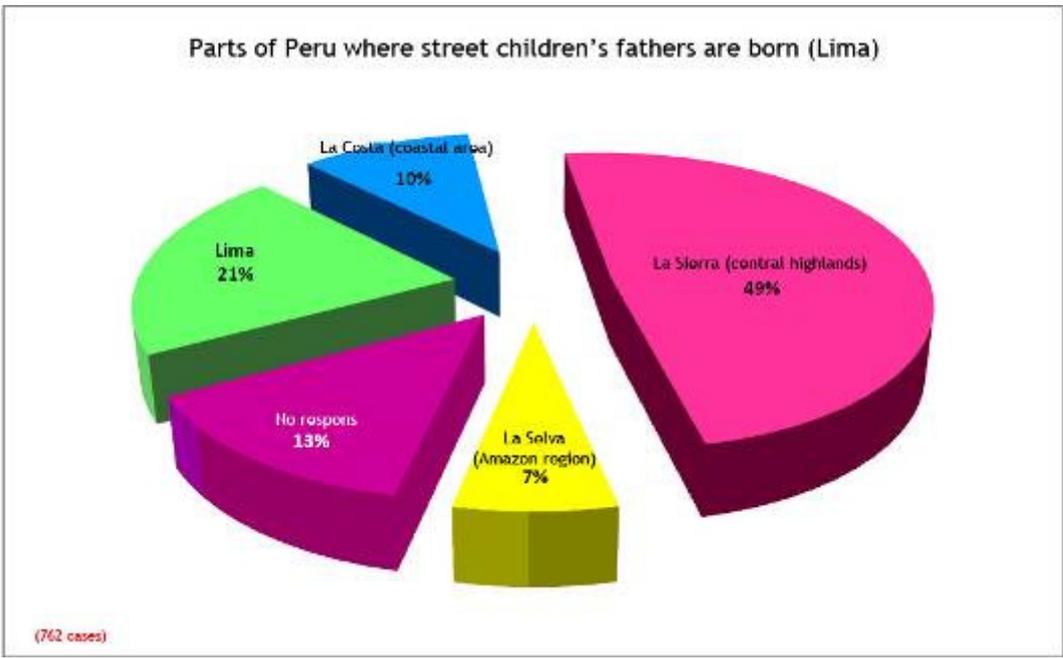


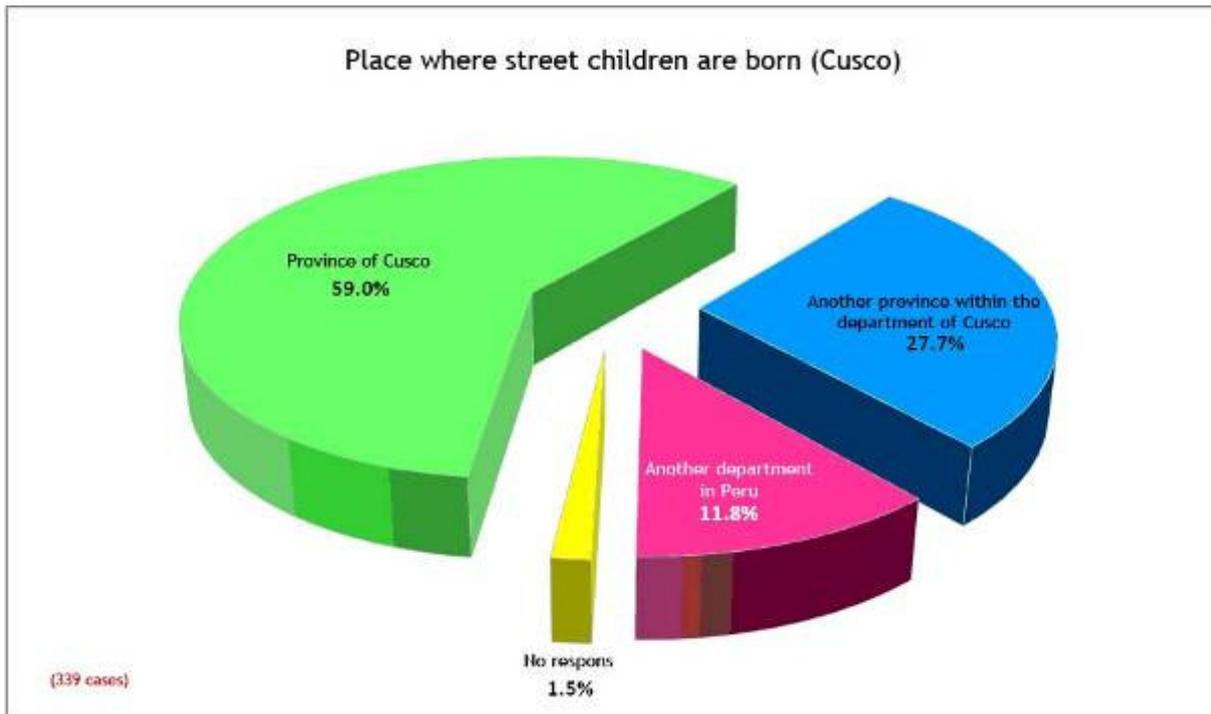
Figure 6b: Areas of Peru where street children's fathers were born (Lima)



3.1.2 Cusco

Almost 60% of the surveyed street-working and street-living children in Cusco were born in the province of Cusco, while 40% have migrated to Cusco, either alone or with their parents. Of the latter, 28% was born in another province within the department of Cusco and 12% was born outside of the Cusco department. Some of the children (4%) still migrate to Cusco occasionally to work or join a relative on the street.

Figure 7: Places where streetchildren were born (Cusco)



When looking at the origin of the children's parents we see that most parents were born in another province within the department of Cusco (52% of the mothers and 46% of the fathers); some in the province of Cusco itself (28% of the mothers and 26% of the fathers) and a small part outside the department of Cusco.

Among street-working and street-living children, the death of a father or mother is relatively high: 6% of the children had lost their mother and 10% had lost their father (these percentages include the children who had lost both parents). Separation for reasons other than death, for example work or poverty, is also quite common. Only 75% of the street children with a mother have their mother living with them; only 63% of the fathers live in the province of Cusco.

The average number of children in the families of the surveyed street-working and street-living children is 4. Some children, however, come from families with up to 12 brothers and sisters. Here we should keep in mind that, as a result of broken families, many children have half-siblings or step-siblings. In the survey these siblings may or may not have been considered. Some of these siblings may live with the child's family and others may not; thus it is not immediately apparent how many dependents some families actually have.

3.2 Push-factors within the household and pull-factors on the street

This paragraph will focus mainly on the group of street-living children. To understand why children leave their homes to live on the street we have to look at the different family situations they come from. Normally it is a combination of various factors that cause children to live on the streets; these factors can be divided into so-called push and pull factors. The push-factors are negative factors within the child's household that push the child out of his or her home into street life. These factors include, among others, domestic violence, parental alcoholism, low family income or unstable family income (children are sent to work to supplement the family's income), neglect and abuse, a poorly functioning school system, high tuition fees, poorly educated parents and the loss of parents [Volpi 2002; Dybicz 2005].

The pull-factors are aspects of street life that children experience as positive and a way to escape the negative factors at home. In other words, the pull-factors make the children opt for the streets, considering it a better option than living at home. Pull-factors, among others, include freedom, (economic) independence, friendship and love among (street) peers, opportunities to earn income, drugs, attraction to the city and the (social) entertainment in the city (e.g. internet cafés and game rooms). This doesn't mean that street life is always an attractive alternative. The choice to turn to street life is for most children the last option in response to poverty, exploitation and abuse at home. "Running away from home is an act of resistance and an expression of absolute frustration with life circumstances. It is the strongest possible response to poverty and abuse that children in circumstances of deprivation and vulnerability can exercise" [Schimmel 2006:212].

Our quantitative survey showed that the majority of street-living children in Lima left their homes because of family problems (67%); they either didn't get along with (one of the) parents or they didn't like staying at home. In Cusco, however, the main reason for not sharing a house with relatives in Cusco was the fact that 41% of the street-living children have no family in Cusco; others prefer to meet friends at alternative sleeping places (24%). An analysis of the children's personal histories, and visits with some of their parents¹⁶ and other family members, showed how the reasons for the children ending up on the streets are diverse. What these children have in common, though, is that many come from economically poor families living on the outskirts of Lima and Cusco in neighbourhoods popular among migrants.

Surprisingly, the explanation of the parent(s) sometimes didn't correspond with the explanation of the child; the stories often contradicted each other and showed a different interpretation or memory of the situation. In many cases violence and abusive family relations, coupled with a feeling to have nowhere to turn to, seemed to be on the centre of the children's testimonies, while the parents' testimonies underlined the situation of poverty in which they lived and their children's bad and uncontrollable behaviour as the main factor.

First of all, a distinction can be made between the children that have been abandoned by their parents, the so-called thrown-away children, and the children that broke away from their families themselves, the so-called run-away children. Our observations found that far more children belonged to the latter category. Although street children are often believed to be orphans, in reality the number of street children who have lost both parents is relatively small.

¹⁶ Often it seemed to be difficult or impossible to meet their parents, because the parents had died, the children had no idea where their parents were, or the children didn't want me to meet their parents because of traumatic experiences in the past, shame, indifference or anxiety. In some cases I talked with other family members, like older brothers/sisters or aunts.

3.2.1 “Thrown-away children”

The main reasons for parents (or other family members) to abandon their children include poverty and a lack of economic resources, divorce, a single-parent family, a step-parent that doesn't want to take care of the child, and parental alcoholism and drug abuse. Often a combination of these factors leads to the expulsion of the child. Sometimes the child is handed over into the care of a third person or a children's home. In these cases pull-factors to the street play a lesser role, because it was not the child's decision to leave home.

An example is Diego (15), a middle child in a big and poor family. His family moved ten years before from the high mountain town of Puno to the outskirts of Cusco in search for work. Diego has lived on the streets since he was 8 years old. Diego told of the beatings he used to receive from his father. His parents separated and his mother was living in an economically poor situation, with 8 children to take care of and an insecure informal job. Every day she travelled to the streets in the city centre to sell food on the sidewalks, from early in the morning till late in the night. When she came home she used to bring her lovers. According to Diego he started to leave for the streets because he didn't feel any love at home:

My father even stopped me from going to school, he wanted me to work and give him my money. My mother didn't care, I think she even hated me. She always brought home her boyfriends from the market, these dirty pigs! Yes, I saw it sometimes; they were having fun while we were trying to sleep. Our house was so small, just one room. I started to spend my days on the street, I hated it at home. There was no love. On the street I felt free, different than at home.

Although Diego was still living at home, he already felt attracted to street life because it made him feel liberated from the problems at home. He saw children on the streets with nicer clothes. To earn money he started to steal things from the house that he sold on the black market 'El Baratillo'. He also felt bored at home, where he was mostly alone during daytime. On the street he got to know other street boys, who taught him to sniff glue. Diego told of his mother's anger when she discovered he was stealing and using drugs: “My mother became really fed up with me, she said I was a criminal and that I better stay there [on the street]. So she evicted me. I am the black sheep, that's what they say. I am the only one living the street life. For me my family doesn't exist; I don't have family.”

When I visited his mother, an indigenous woman with long braids, who looked in poor health, she told me her side of the story. Although at first she showed little interest in talking about her son, after some insisting she explained that she could not take care of him because of his “lazy character”:

My son is a loafer, a liar. He never wanted to work or help us in the house. He was just passing his days on the street, doing really nothing, while we were starving. We are a big family and all of us are working to make a living, but he's a lazy fool. He's the only one from our family that's like that. I am a single mother, how can I feed all my sons? They have to help me, but Diego never wanted to. How can I take care of him?

From this case-study it seems that a combination of poverty, cramped housing, domestic violence, the divorce of the parents and a feeling of emotional neglect from the boy's part, led to a situation in which Diego developed an, for his mother, unacceptable lifestyle that made her throw him out of

the house. Problems at home pushed the boy into drug use as a way to escape these problems. Drugs can be considered in this case as a pull-factor to the street. But when the mother discovered the drug use of her son, problems got even worse at home and led to a situation of a definitive departure from home. Within a context of poverty and material deprivation the mother blamed her middle-son, at that time only 8 years old, of her disability as a single-mother to take care of all her children.

The children we met often came from poor or abandoned single-parent families, mostly female-headed, in which the parent either didn't manage to take care of the child because of economic restrictions, because of emotional and psychological instability or because of the introduction of a step-parent¹⁷. Often the child was abandoned after the establishment of a new family unit, in which the step-parent refused to care for a child from another father or mother.

Juana (13) was found to have been living on the streets of Cusco for the previous 2 years. Her parents also grew up on the streets and had met each other in the same drop-in shelter as where Juana spends her nights. She told me that after the loss of her father, who died of a drug-overdose, her alcoholic mother married another man:

I didn't get along with my step-father. He used to hit me with an iron pole on my head. He was like my father; he liked to drink. But my father was a good man, he didn't hit me (...) My step-father doesn't want me or my younger brothers to live at home. He will leave my mother if we stay. My mother is pregnant now; I think she has no choice. That's why my brothers live in a children's home and I live on the street. My mother loves that drunken guy more than she loves me. It makes me sad sometimes.

When Sharon (16) was 8 years old her father landed in jail after killing the husband of his ex-wife. When her mother remarried, Sharon and her younger sister were not allowed to say 'mummy' anymore, instead they had to call their mother 'auntie'. Her mother felt ashamed for the fact that she had been married before and her new husband wasn't interested in caring for them. "He said that he didn't want to look after the children of another man, that we were not his problem". Finally, Sharon's mother rented a small room in the centre of Cusco for her daughters to live in and disappeared with her new husband. The girls couldn't manage to pay the rent though, and ended up living on the streets.

Jeremy (14) was abandoned by his (extremely) young mother when his father died. Because his mother didn't have the economic means to take care of him, she brought her 4-year-old son to his grandmother's house, and disappeared. When Jeremy was 8 years old his grandmother died and he had no other place to go but the street. He told us: "I hate my mother and I bear her a grudge, because she never wanted to know me".

In some cases the single parent was forced to abandon his/her child because of obtaining a far-away job or a job in which she/he had to travel a lot. This happened to Paul (11), whose mother died and whose father was a truck driver. He left his son with an aunt in Cusco to be able to earn money. According to Paul he ran away from his auntie's house because she always punished him for robberies he had not done. Situations similar to Paul's are not uncommon: children living with other relatives than their parents, or children living with the new family of their father or mother, are

¹⁷ A study in Peru in 1999 by Ordoñez showed that 90% of street children come from single-parent families or rebuilt families (with a step-mother or step-father), or from rural families that have sent their children to live with other people (mostly relatives) in the city [Consortium for Street Children 1999:26].

often given a subordinate place in the family. They often seem to bear the brunt and experience more exploitation, abuse and maltreatment compared to the other children.

3.2.2 “Run-away children”

It is much more common for a child to run away from home, than for the parents (relatives) to kick out a child. The main reasons the children mentioned for running away were economic exploitation, sexual or psychological abuse, parental alcoholism, and neglect or mistreatment by relatives. Several children mentioned a lack of daily routine and interest from adults as a reason for their unhappiness. Again there is a frequency of single-parent households, or rebuilt families, within a context of extreme poverty. Instead of finding security, love and encouragement, the home becomes a place of discomfort or even fear. Households in the outskirts of Lima and Cusco have a high incidence of domestic violence, which is often related to poverty, alcohol abuse and machismo.

Another aspect that relates to poverty and the alienation of children from their home is child work on the streets. Many street-living children’s testimonies show that the experiences children had with street work at a young age were instrumental for them starting to live on the street. Having insufficient resources to meet household needs for food and services such as healthcare and education, some parents make use of their children. Parents send them to the streets to work, for example selling goods or washing windscreens, mostly for long hours¹⁸.

As mentioned earlier, in a situation in which children work or help their parents on the street, they run a risk to move into street life: ambulatory selling in the street can result in the replacement of home for street. By spending a lot of their time on the street, children can become used to the ‘freedom’ and independence that street life offers them, e.g. “being able to keep the money”, “having no rules”, “playing”, “not having to travel long distances” and “being able to steal and buy nice clothes”. Some children explained that they befriended children living on the streets, while working on the same spots, and that these street children taught them to use inhalants, mostly *Terokal* (glue), and to play videogames. The working children became addicted to these vices and no longer wanted to return home, where angry parents were probably waiting for them. The same applies to children coming to Lima and Cusco from the countryside in the weekends and school vacations to earn money for home. Earlier IREWOC research in Lima also relates child work and children hanging around in the streets to “the risk of children getting on the wrong track” and “cross over onto the criminal path” [Ensing 2008].

From the archives of the street-child shelter Generacion in Lima, it appears that the majority of the street-living children started their permanent street life as ambulatory vendors. The average age at which the children started to work was 8.4 years [Generacion 2002 in Tejada Ripalda 2005:55]. These numbers confirm the testimonies of the children in our research.

Jaimer (14) from Lima explained how street-work resulted in street-life for him:

My street life actually started after my mother died. Before my mother died, she always took good care. When I was alone with my father it all changed. He didn’t want to pay anything. He was never at home. My older sister said “Jaime, you better work because otherwise we’ll

¹⁸ An article on street children in Brazil claims that one third of the youngsters mentioned work as their first motivation to move to the street, either with a parent or alone [Rizzini & Butler 2003].

have nothing to eat.” That’s when I went to the street to sell sweets; I was only 11 years old. On the Avenida Iquitos I met a group of street boys and I really liked how they dressed. I felt like a loser, wearing my crappy clothes. I started to befriend them and wanted to be like them. That’s when I tried *Terokal* [glue]. It made me forget my problems at home. After a while I decided to stay with them on the street and I started to sleep on the porch of a church. Drugs have brought me many bad things, they made me leave home. Now it’s too late to go back.

Jaimer also disapproved of the fact that many parents in Lima send their children to work: “They should work themselves and the children should stay at home to study. But here in Lima many parents are bad and want their children to earn the money. They don’t see the consequences.”



Photo 3: “I made this photo because I don’t like it that parents bring their children to the streets to work. Children should be in school and parents should work.” (photo and quote by Jaimer, in Lima)

Most young children working on the streets are supervised by their parent(s) or older brothers and sisters. Older family members keep an eye on the younger ones, preventing them from getting involved with drug-use or criminal street children. However, also in this case the process of street migration can take place if the child feels his or her work is not appreciated by the parents or the child encounters problems at home. An example is Sandra (15), who sold goods on the Plaza de Armas in Cusco with her mother ever since she was 5 years old. When she turned 13 she started to withdraw from her mother:

Sometimes I stayed 3 or 4 days on the street, waking up on the Plaza. The street has really messed me up, because I didn’t want to go home anymore after work. I befriended many

pirañas [street kids] on the Plaza and I wanted to stay with them. I started to like stealing and buying myself new clothes. At home we suffered a lot and I had to give all the money to my mum. I wanted to keep my own money ... I was afraid that my mother would hit me because I spent the money on clothes. That's why I hardly returned home anymore.

Although Sandra mostly worked under the supervision of her mother, she nevertheless entered the process of street migration.

Another common situation is that parents living in the countryside send their children to live with other people (mostly relatives) in bigger cities, like Lima or Cusco, hoping the child will have better prospects. Underlying causes for this decision are chronic impoverishment and a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas. Either the child is sent to the city to earn a living for himself, or the child is sent to contribute to the family income, as was the case with Raphael (9) in Cusco: "My parents are separated and mother sent me to work here for one year, because she is working too; I have to work too to help her." Expectations, from both parents and children, of "the good life in the city", with better working and educational opportunities, pull rural children to Lima's and Cusco's streets.

Often, life in the city turns out to be much more difficult than expected, or relatives already there refuse or are not able to support them. We met children as young as 5 or 6, mostly accompanied by older siblings, walking the streets of Lima and Cusco selling *caramelos* (sweets) and *tostaditas* (dried seeds) to be able to pay for a room at a cheap hostel for the night. The family members they came to live with either hadn't accepted them or had exploited or mistreated them, resulting in the children living on the streets. Although their migration to the city did not turn out as they expected, i.e. they were not able to go to school or to save money, they did not return home because of shame, unattractive living conditions in their home villages, and the habituation to city and street life. For these reasons, a large portion of street-living children claimed to have no family to live with (Lima 25%, Cusco 41%).

In the case of Wilmer, a 13-year-old boy from a small Quechua village in the Andahuaylas province, the story is slightly different. He explained how he was already used to stealing and 'street life' while he was living in his village:

My parents are farmers; they work on the *chacra* (field). We didn't have a TV or radio! My father drinks and sometimes he behaved strange and started to cry. Most of my uncles are *rateros* (thieves) and I and my little brother always joined them to the other side of the mountain to steal cows, horses and chickens. Sometimes we were away for months; sometimes I went alone with my brother. When the people in the village found out that we were the ones stealing, they didn't allow us to live there anymore.

In addition to their bad reputation, Wilmer's mother explained how poor living conditions in the village and a bad rural school system made her decide to send her sons to Cusco. "In the village my sons hardly attended school, because often the teachers didn't come to class; instead they were getting drunk in the bar!" In the hope of getting her sons back on the right track, Wilmer's mother sent her sons to a Catholic children's home in Cusco. She hoped they would get good food, a severe upbringing and better education. Wilmer, though, couldn't adapt to the strict rules in the orphanage, walked away and stayed on the streets.

A lack of household resources appears to often lead to strained relationships in the home, causing a lot of stress for parents and children alike. Some children explained, for example, that they were

tired of always having to look after their younger siblings and having to manage the house while their mothers were out at work all day. The overbearing responsibilities in the household and the lack of basic needs, like food, love, attention and diversion resulted in the children leaving for the streets in search of independence, material satisfaction and social bonding with peers. Mostly these kids come from income-poor households in poor, often violent neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Lima and Cusco, or from deprived rural areas, both with limited access to basic services. The streets, coupled with the existence of shelters, will tempt children living in material deprivation (especially compared to the majority of society) with the illusion of freedom and relief from problems at home. Filipo (11) had arrived in Cusco from the countryside, with his cousin, two months previously:

I was so bored at home; I was always alone with my younger brothers and sisters. My mother wanted me to wash their clothes and cook our food. We were living in an *adobe* (loam stone) house, just one room! If I was not helping in the house, I had to look after our cattle, waking up at 3 o'clock. Ai! My mother never cared about how I felt and she liked to command. When my cousin Braulio told me he was going to earn a lot of money in Cusco, I didn't hesitate to accompany him. Now I keep my own money and buy new shoes. I already got used to it. My parents? They don't know.

Cusco's tourism sector can be identified as another pull-factor. Many children explained how they had the idea before coming to Cusco that it would be easy to make money here, because "*los pavos*¹⁹ spend their money easily". By migrating to Cusco the children, just like many adults, hope to get a slice of Cusco's tourist pie by working informal jobs on the street.



Photo 4: Street-working children from the country side in Cusco

¹⁹ Literally this means 'turkeys', but in street dialect the term is used for 'tourists'.

However, child work is definitely not the only reason for children to land on the streets. In some cases not poverty, but the lack of love, affection and security, were the problems at home. A big share of interviewed street children claimed to not sleep at home because of family problems. Maltreatment and alcoholism were two of the main reasons for not liking it at home. An example is David (14). He explained how he comes from a middle-class family. He never knew his mother, but his father was a well-earning and educated professional. The problem, though, was that his father used to hit him so badly that he developed a tumour in his neck: "The doctor told me it was cancer and that it was the result of my father beating me up time and again". After treatment in the hospital, and recovering from the illness, he couldn't bear the mistreatment at home anymore and left. According to David he feels safer on the streets than in his home. Although he is not living with his father, his father still buys him new clothes and pays the contribution fee for David's football training.

Juan (17) left home when he was only 5 years old for similar reasons, i.e. maltreatment, parental alcoholism and neglect:

I left home because my parents were alcoholics. Most of the time I was alone with my sister, but she beat me up all day. Sometimes she put me for hours in the cold water. Also my father beat me when he was drunk. One day my mother tried to poison me and I had to go to the hospital. She didn't want to have us; many of my brothers died. From 9 brothers, only 4 are still alive. Nobody came to the hospital to visit me, so when I was healthy, they [the hospital staff] just kicked me out on the streets. There I got to know drugs.

After living on the streets for a couple of months the police captured him and placed him in a children's home. Juan never learned to adapt to life in the home with all its rules, and strict authoritarian staff, so he walked away. He explained that if you are already used to the freedom of the street, or as he says "having no roof, feeling the sun on your face and walking wherever you want, whenever you want and how you want", it's hard to become used to life "in a place with walls".

Also extreme domestic violence between parents/siblings was sometimes mentioned by the children as a reason to have negative feelings towards home, as is the case of Jaime (13). He regularly saw his father maltreating his mother and older brothers: "My mother was screaming and hiding under the bed, her skin red with blood and a torn dress, but I couldn't do anything, as my father went on hitting her with the chair". Last year Jaime's father died and his mother had to go out for work all day to be able to feed her children. When Jaime's best friend Jon (12), who was maltreated by his alcoholic mother, decided to leave his house, Jaime did the same. His reasons for choosing street life are various: "I wanted to forget about my father and actually it was also boring in the house, we have no TV, not even light, and there's nothing to do." Like with many other street children, Jaime already befriended other street children before he left his house, which he mentioned as a decisive pull-factor to street life. After living for one year on the street he went back to his mother's house for a couple of months, but he couldn't get used to it: "My mother was always pressuring me to help her with her work in the canteen, waking up at 4 'o clock, no, no, I said, I prefer to live on the street then." When we visited his mother's small loam-stone house, the neighbour explained how she wasn't surprised that Jaime was on the streets, because "that woman is never at home, always working; how can you raise your children like that?" The absence of parents at home, mostly due to work, often results in the children doing whatever they want; for example, hanging on the streets or in internet cafés with friends instead of going to school. Little by little the children are

introduced to street life, come into contact with children that use drugs and become accustomed to the freedom of the streets.

In Lima some of the interviewed children mentioned violence and gang culture in their neighbourhoods as one of the reasons that they landed on the streets. Many poor neighbourhoods of Lima are ruled by violent gangs or *pandillas* (affiliated with the major football teams of Lima). Many street children were in contact with these gangs during their youth, either through their own family members or as members themselves. Several children said that the first contact they had with drugs was through gang members in their neighbourhood. The gang members were seen as role models. Problems at home pushed children into the street gangs in the neighbourhood, which were often the start of the transition to street life. The gangs introduced the children to street life, drugs, crime and sometimes even prostitution.

Livia's (12) father is one of the gang leaders in Campoy, a neighbourhood of El Augustino in Lima. He is known for cutting other people's faces and according to Livia most people are afraid of him. Livia too was afraid of him and joined a gang when she was 10 years old:

My father is called the "face cutter". People paid him for example 80 sols to cut someone else's face. He is the only one from my family that knows how to cut faces, how to fight and how to drink. He killed many people. He was always walking with my auntie. She too drinks a lot and she slept with all the guys of the neighbourhood. She has 4 children. Me too, I was always walking on the streets with the boys of the gang. They were the ones giving me alcohol and *Terokal*. I got to know them through my friend Ingrid, who was the girlfriend of one of them. My father didn't want me to be with the gang and every time he saw me walking with them he beat me up. He said he wanted to cut my face too. That's why I didn't want to go home anymore. My father is a *piraña*, he gave me bad advice. He told me for example to cut the face of a friend I had a fight with. I didn't want to do this, so I walked away from home. I went to discothèques, casinos and hung around on the street. That's why I am addicted now.

Also John (17), who has a 4 year old child, started street life in a street gang. He's from a violent neighbourhood in Callao, Lima, but now lives on the streets of the city centre:

I was *pandillero* [gang member] since I was 11 years old. My father was a drunkard and abused me a lot. My mother was gone to Campoy. That's why I joined the gang. My uncle was already a member of the gang. In the gang I learned how to smoke marihuana and when I was 12 I learned how to operate a revolver. When I was 14 years I entered Maranga [youth prison], because I had killed another *pandillero* with a bullet. Nowadays I don't kill anymore, I play music in buses.

The transformation from home-life to street-life is a complex process, with multiple factors involved in each individual case. When working with street children it's useful to recognise this complexity of causes. Poverty, for example, in itself doesn't drive children to the streets; many children living in extremely poor households stay with their families their whole childhood. However, poverty and material deprivation can be a major factor exacerbating stress on vulnerable families and putting children at risk, for example, by sending them on to the streets to work [Thomas de Benítez 2007]. Although not all street-working children necessarily end up as street-living children, most street-living children did start out as street-working children. Research from the World Health Organisation has shown links between concentrated poverty, high unemployment

levels, single parent families, low educated parents, household overcrowding and child abuse [WHO 2002:67-68].

At the same time, as the case of David (14) shows, even children from well-off families can end up living on the streets. In many children's accounts not the lack of money, but non-material factors, such as aggressive family relationships and the lack of love, are fundamental in their final decision to leave the house. Also a lack of communication or an exuberance of rules and parent's authority are named by the children as making them feel imprisoned and uncomfortable at home. According to the children that decided to leave their homes themselves, the street offered them an attractive alternative, where they found the love and protection of friends, where they could be independent, where they could keep their own money and where they could enjoy freedom.

Concluding, various immediate and underlying causes are indicated in the street children's histories of leaving home. Immediate causes include: a drop in family income, the death of a family member, child abuse and domestic violence, parental alcoholism, and the loss of parent(s). Among the underlying causes, which form the context in which the immediate causes take place, we identified chronic impoverishment and violence in the cities' outskirts, boredom in rural areas, lack of employment opportunities and poverty in rural areas, machismo and the overall acceptance of violent and authoritarian child rearing practices in Peru and a malfunctioning education system. On the broader level the ILO has identified structural causes such as development shocks, structural adjustment, regional inequalities and social exclusion [ILO 2002 in Ennew, J & Swart-Kruger 2003].

Chapter 4

Street Life

Street children seem to be on a constant search for the best possible opportunities of income generation, emotional conditions (affection) and access to resources, as is also shown in various studies around the world [see for example Wolch & Rowe 1993; Ruddick 1996; Wolseth 2010]. What most street children have in common is that the street is their main residence where they fulfil their economic needs and needs of affection, protection, friendship, play and nourishment. The fact that most of the children within this group have only unstable, sporadic or no family contact and that therefore the street more than their family environment has become their main residence (dwelling) and place of socialisation, is what binds these children together.

We have to keep in mind, however, as said earlier, that “children move fluidly on and off the streets and that the streets does not represent the sum total of their social networks and experiences” [Panter-Brick, C 2002b:148]. Some children in this research experience a constant flux in their lives between street and home. They, for instance, have regular contact with their parents or occasionally return home. Actually, it is hard to find children that totally and at all times fit within the category of street-living children, because daily changes in lifestyles and activities is what most characterises them. Being a street-living child is, as to say, a picture at a given moment in time. So, the street children that I encountered during my fieldwork shared the specific characteristic of not living in their home, and living on the street at that given moment. But even during the fieldwork period I saw children returning home after living a long time on the street, moving to family members in other places or to children’s homes in search for a stable life. Mostly, however, at some point they returned to street life again.

This chapter analyses different characteristics of street-living children in Lima and Cusco and shows the variety within the street child population. What do they do on the street? Which function does the street have in their lives? How do they manage to survive? These are some central questions that form the basis of our anthropological approach to understanding the children’s lives.

4.1 Characteristics of street-living children in Lima

Most street-living children in Lima are male and adolescent (10-17). However, in many cases the process of street migration starts at an earlier age. Sometimes children from 7 or 8 years old already occasionally join other street children. Mostly this happens while they are working on the street to contribute to their family’s household. Slowly they become acquainted with street life, but still return home regularly. Walter Alarcon showed that generally it is not till their thirteenth or fourteenth year that these children reside to the street and are totally adapted to street life and street culture [1994:54]. According to the study of Voces in Lima a large number of the street children enter the process of street migration much faster: 20% of the interviewed children started to permanently live on the street the same year in which they had their first contact with juvenile

street groups [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009:51]. In general Lima has more young street children than Cusco.

The street plays a central role in the lives of these children and is used, among others, for earning money (i.e. working, begging, stealing), buying or stealing food, eating, meeting friends, hanging around and passing their time, playing, learning, using drugs and in some cases for sleeping. Many children also spend part of their time inside, for example, in day care centres for street children, internet cafés, videogame arcades and cheap restaurants or markets. Most kids switch between activities several times a day.

Street children in Lima are characterised by their high drug consumption. Whereas in Cusco some street children consume drugs and others don't, the majority of street children in Lima consumes drugs or has a history of severe consumption. The IREWOC survey showed that drug use is correlated with school life and family ties. In Lima, of all drug-using children, only 25% is enrolled in education; of all school-going children, only 9% uses any type of drugs or alcohol. Most children who live with their family (84%) don't use any drugs while 62% of the children without family do use drugs or alcohol. It is this group of children that runs most risks: they live without family, don't go to school and use drugs.

The regularity of the consumption among Limenian street kids is very high and compulsive. The most common drugs are alcohol (58%) and the glue *Terokal* (47%). At all times of the day street-living children can be seen inhaling glue, although consumption is highest in the evenings and night time. *Terokal* is mainly inhaled from plastic bags hidden in sleeves or even openly, although some children also use plastic bottles. Other popular drugs are marijuana (20%), and cocaine-based paste (*pasta*) (19%), which is either smoked pure, with marijuana (*mixto*) or with tobacco. Especially *pasta* is known for the severe physical and psychological harm it causes in children. Also Diazepam, a drug to treat insomnia or anxiety, is regularly used by street children in Lima because it gives them a high and suppresses feelings of shame during "humiliating work".

The Voces study shows that 60% of the street children in Lima develop a severe addiction to *Terokal* within a year of first contact with the drug. 30% become addicted to the drug in the same year they start to live on the streets [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009:52-53]. These percentages not only show the addictive character of *Terokal*, but illustrate also that a child's drug consumption is a criterion of acceptance in street groups in Lima. Group pressure to consume drugs is high.

An important difference between drug consumption in Lima and Cusco is that in the former city it has become an accepted activity among street-living children in daily street life. The lack of shame about drug consumption among these children is remarkable. Contrary to children in Cusco, most street children in Lima continue inhaling *Terokal* in front of outsiders and street educators. In general, addicted children aren't interested in advice from street educators, which makes interventions for addicted street children difficult. However, those children who have only recently moved to the streets seem to still be more ashamed of their consumption; they hide the drugs in their sleeves or proclaim they don't use drugs when approached by street educators. Thus, interventions and street workers should focus more on children in the first stages of street life, with moderate and less incorporated drug consumption. The more addicted and adapted a child is to drugs and street life, the harder it is to offer adequate help and get the child off the streets.

Street children reside in different locations in different neighbourhoods of Lima, mostly around commercial areas and markets, and stay by and large with the same group of children, called

mancha or *battería*. Within their own location they move around a lot, but generally without leaving the area. The specific location where a child resides becomes part of his identity and contact between children from different areas is rare. While in the eighties and nineties street children were mainly found in the city centre around the main squares and on the river banks of the river Rímac, in the last decade commercial areas in the outskirts of the city, the *conos*, also saw a growing street child population. Nowadays, street children can be found throughout the whole of Lima. Possible reasons for this displacement include police oppression in the city centre and economic and commercial growth in the outskirts resulting in the establishment of commercial centres and entertainment areas in Lima's *conos*. Most street-living children that reside in one of the *conos* originate from poor neighbourhoods in the same *cono*. Some of the main street child locations in Lima are described below.²⁰

Lima Centre:

Grau, El Río Rímac, Barrio Chino and Jirón de La Unión (approx. 170 children). This area is where the majority of street children concentrate and therefore also the main focus area of NGO interventions. The police presence in the area is high and therefore hang-out and sleeping locations of the children change often.



Photo 5: “This is at Cine Planet. We get drinks and popcorn from the visitors of the cinema. The girl is Susana, with her baby, and Diego is always sitting with his *teko* [glue].” (photo and quote by Kevin)

While Plaza San Martín, Parque Universitario and the riverbanks of Rímac were popular places a couple of years ago, nowadays the children move to more obscure places like the prostitution zone of Avenida Grau and Iquitos, a dark alley near the shopping street Jirón de La Unión, called “Cine

²⁰ These locations were also our main research areas.

Planet” because of the cinema’s exit here, and passages around the big traffic street of Abancay. However, despite the heavy police oppression in the River Rímac area a small group of adolescents and youngsters still live here²¹, among them are the most deteriorated and addicted street children with signs of dementia and schizophrenia.

Some children sleep in porches, parks and dark alleys, others transfer to bridges over River Rímac and viaducts at night. Nevertheless, most street children nowadays sleep in unofficial illegal hostels²², where a bed costs a few sols per night. In general, these hostels are dirty cramped places where children mingle with (street) adults, drug use is high, sexual abuse is common and diseases like tuberculosis and STD are spread easily.

Grau lies in both Lima Centre and La Victoria. Depending on police raids in one of the two districts the children strategically move back and forth from one side of the border to the other. The presence of child street prostitutes in Grau is high. Most of them (boys and girls) are adolescents and youngsters between 16 and 20 years old, but some are no older than 10. A relatively high number of the prostitutes are addicted teenage mothers.

La Victoria:

Grau, La Parada (approx. 80 children). The area around Lima’s biggest wholesale markets, called La Parada, is characterised by the presence of delinquency, sale and consumption of drugs, clandestine prostitution, street gangs and violence. After market hours this area becomes one of the most dangerous places of Lima. For this reason the area is hardly visited by street educators or street child organisations and therefore the street-living children in this area are among the most deteriorated and forgotten group of children. Continuous drug use, abandonment and a violent environment cause high levels of malnourishment and mental and physical illnesses among the children. Besides street work like cleaning windscreens, rag picking, and porting, some children in this area make a living with prostitution, drug dealing, begging, theft, and organised crime.

Cono Norte:

Puente Nuevo, La Hacienda, Los Olivos and La Pascana (approx. 95 children). In these locations solid street child groups are found that, by and large, live isolated from other street child groups. Children that stay around Puente Nuevo have created a sleeping place under the bridge with several mattresses. The average age of the children is relatively high, 15 years and above with a few exceptions of younger children. Also several young adults reside here.

Children that stay around commercial areas in San Juan de Lurigancho, Los Olivos and Comas are much younger, between 9 and 18 years old. Although most street children in these areas sleep on the street and in parks, some of them, especially girls, sleep in unofficial hostels. Most of these girls earn their money in prostitution. In La Hacienda sometimes street-working girls consort with street-living boys at night time, running the risk of becoming street-living girls. While Puente Nuevo is

²¹ A couple of years ago the police set fire to the whole area where the street children sleep at River Rímac, leaving some children with severe burns.

²² In summer time more children sleep in the street and parks, while in winter time the majority retreats into abandoned buildings and hostels.

frequently visited by street educators and charity organisations, the other areas are not reached by interventions, except for sporadic visits by street educators.

Cono Este:

Ceres, La Molina, Santa Anita and Huaycan (approx. 45 children). Ceres is an area of commercial activity, formal as well as informal, and houses a great number of street gangs, which mingle with street-living children. Some adult delinquents in this area (sexually) exploit the children and corrupt them into delinquency.

In general the street children in La Molina and Santa Anita started to only recently live on the streets and are in the first stages of street migration. Therefore, it is important that more street educators visit these locations, because the shorter a child lives on the street the easier it is to get him/her off the street. Huaycan is also known as a transition area for street children, before they move to more central zones such as Puente Nuevo and Grau. The majority of the street children here come from the same district of Huaycan, which is one of the poorest of Lima [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009].

Cono Sur:

San Juan de Miraflores (approx. 10 children). The hectic zone of Ciudad de Dios, the commercial area of the district San Juan the Miraflores, has a small group of street-living children. However, drug consumption and deterioration is high within this group. Some of the children are as young as 9 years old. The presence of street gangs produces a lot of violence in the area and street-living girls often mingle with gang members. Most children here make a living with minor theft, making music or washing windscreens.

Callao:

(Approx. 35 children) Due to the presence of violent street gangs this district is one of the most dangerous of the city. Most street children in this area have family members, often fathers or older brothers, who belong to street gangs. These children are acquainted with gang culture and have sometimes been forced to commit violent acts, like liquidations, during their younger years. Sometimes gang members use street children for drug trafficking or assaults. Street child organisations or street educators are absent in this area because of its dangerous character.

4.1.1 The specific situation of street girls in Lima

In Lima there is, compared to Cusco, a relatively high number of street-living girls visible on the streets, especially in street prostitution on the Avenida Grau and Iquitos. In contrast to street boys, there are just very few girls that really sleep on the street. Although they spend a lot of time on the street with other street children and street gangs, many of these girls sleep in hostels, at friend's houses or with family members. There are also rumours of adult "friends" that let the girls stay in their homes in exchange for sex or prostitution work. Some of the youngest street girls are 11 years old and at this age they sometimes already work in prostitution.

Street girls also spend a lot of time with friends in discotheques and so called *antros* (obscure nightclubs). Here they drink alcohol, dance *reggaeton* and pick up (older) guys. Whereas street girls that don't work in prostitution generally wear dirty oversized clothes, girls that prostitute themselves are dressed in sexy and tight outfits, often have piercings and tattoos and wear a lot of make-up. To attract customers they have to dress well, which requires money, which they earn with more prostitution or theft.



Photo 6: Street-living girl working in prostitution in Lima - photographed here with her boyfriend.

Although reliable data on the numbers of underage girl prostitutes are absent, NGO and GO workers estimate the problem to be growing. At the end of the 1990s Lima had about 240 prostitutes between 13 and 17 years old [ILO & IPEC 2007].

In general, street-living girls come into contact with prostitution through other girls living on the streets. Sex work is often promoted by street friends or relatives as an easy way to earn money. For instance, Naomi (12), who escaped from her alcoholic mother and has lived on the streets for the past two years, explained:

My cousin, who is 16, was already working in prostitution and one day she asked me to join her. I was 11 then. She said it is very easy and that we can earn a lot. Well, in that time I was already using drugs, like marihuana, cocaine, *pasta* [cocaine based paste], *mixto* [smoking *pasta* with marihuana] and *bembos* [smoking cocaine with marihuana]. I wanted money to buy more drugs and I had to pay for my room. We charged 100 sols each time. I didn't like the job, but in 15 minutes I earned more than other friends did in a week! I feel ashamed to talk about it.

In many cases street girls are forced into prostitution by their street boyfriends to earn quick money in exchange for protection and affection. Some street educators talked about an organised criminal group active in Lima that controls many of the girl prostitutes. A study on street children in 2006 also mentioned the presence of a criminal organisation consisting of women who recruited young girls and then forcing them into prostitution [Mayuntupa 2006]. Although child prostitution is strictly forbidden by Peruvian law, according to street educators police rarely intervene, either because of inability or unwillingness.

Relations between boys and girls on the street are very *machista*: girls are seen as inferior and boys dominate the girls. Street girls are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, maltreatment, sexual abuse and (gang) rapes. Therefore they search for protection among the street boys, who in many cases demand sexual favours in exchange. Girls will also sometimes have sexual relations with boys in exchange for (more) drugs or clothes, which they don't consider prostitution. Street girls often have several boyfriends at a time and switch regularly between them. In their need for affection and protection they will sometimes tell one or several street boys that they are pregnant, so as to trap them into a relationship. The risks of their active sexual lives, often starting at a young age and without preventive measures, are unwanted pregnancies, STDs and HIV/AIDS. Many street children lack the knowledge about protection.

For these reasons there are many adolescent mothers on Lima's streets. Although in some cases the street girls accommodate their children with adult family members, others keep their babies and small children on the streets with them. This way a second and sometimes even third generation of street children is bred. Some mothers will continue their drug consumption during pregnancy or consume glue in presence of their babies. As a result some little children on the streets already show signs of brain damage or are malnourished and neglected. Other mothers, on the contrary, stay clear of drugs once they know they are pregnant. It is important that more information on preventive measures and consequences of drug use during pregnancies reaches street girls.

Although Lima has more street girls than Cusco, girls are still a minority on the streets. One of the explanations is that girls are more resilient than boys and will cope with problems at home for a longer time, even when they are abused or maltreated. Besides, girls generally feel more emotionally connected to family members and feel more responsible to help. Several street girls, for example, mentioned they wanted to get out of street life and finish their studies with the aim of being able to care for their mother or siblings. Like many girls, Claudia (16 years) explained that she wants to rehabilitate off the drugs so she can help her family:

I want to become the pride of my family. I want to quit street life and leave my bad habits. I want to finish my studies and find a good job. I want to buy my mother a big house and provide her with everything we never had. I will help her to run away from my abusive stepfather. He always hits her and my younger sisters. I often feel sad thinking about it. My perfect day I would spend with my family. I miss them a lot.

Even after girls leave home, they generally find family contact more important than boys do. The most common problems street girls mentioned were not having regular contact with their family, having let their family down, or feeling neglected and abandoned by family members. Street child organisations find it easier to mend family contact with street girls than with street boys, because girls usually show more family affection and desire for family contact.

4.2 Characteristics of street-living children in Cusco

The majority of the street-living children in Cusco spend an estimated 12 to 19 hours on the street per day, mostly returning to a municipal dormitory, cheap hostel, rented room, internet café or abandoned house at night. Compared to Lima there are few children that regularly spend the whole night on the street²³.

As in Lima, street children in Cusco are highly mobile, both in their (labour) activities and in their locations. This mobility doesn't stop at the city borders as most children have travelled at some time in their life to other places in Peru, in search for work. Cusquenian street children have often travelled to Puerto Maldonado, because of the supposedly high wages and job opportunities in the gold mines; and Arequipa, because of its extended criminal network. The idea that life will be better somewhere else and the desire to escape problems in their living environment, "to start all over again", is eminent in their lives. However, many children returned within a short time, mostly because they missed their friends or girlfriends.

In addition to roaming the streets for income generating activities and leisure, most of these children also spend a couple of hours per day in internet cafés, videogame arcades and pinball halls. They regularly switch between these different activities. Of all street-living children 63% use drugs, compared to 5% of children who sleep at home or at relatives' homes. Thus, like in Lima, in Cusco drugs are especially consumed by children who sleep in places away from their family.

The different locations where the children are to be found in Cusco relate strongly with the type of activity the children do. Children who sell handicrafts and souvenirs or who work as shoe shiners and postcard sellers are mostly to be found in the tourist-heavy historic centre of Cusco, around the Plaza de Armas, because their service is aimed at tourists. However, it's just a small portion of the street child population that spends time in this tourist-heavy area, because of the presence of municipal and tourist police officers. Popular places among street children are commercial areas and entertainment centres outside the historic centre, like in and around markets, shopping streets and areas with a high density of restaurants and bars catering for Peruvians. The traffic intersection adjacent to the large Confraternidad market at the southern end of the city attracts children that make a living with washing windscreens and performing acrobatics. The Almudena cemetery in the western neighbourhood of Zarzuela is visited by street children who work as *limpialápidas* (washing tombstones).

The children will roam a lot during the day. For example, they will walk from the night shelter or cheap hostel in the north-west of the city to the busy San Pedro market, where many *Cusqueños* have breakfast, then around 11am they will continue further down, passing through the commercial

²³ An explanation for the fact that fewer children in Cusco sleep on the street than in Lima can be the climate difference: while Cusco experiences freezing cold nights, Lima has a moderate climate with warm summers. Also the presence of the dormitory Qosqo Maki in Cusco, a type of intervention not found in Lima, contributes to this trend.

street Bélen with its many shops and eateries, arriving around midday in the neighbourhood around the National University San Antonio de Abad, called *La U* or *Universidad*. The last-named area is an important working and hang-out spot for street children, due to its many crowded restaurants around lunchtime where the children can earn money or be invited to a meal. Moreover, there are a lot of internet cafés, and video arcades. The absence of police officers and the close-by Wanchaq market with its illicit *Terokal* selling points attract street-living children.

Most children working in this area sell candies, sing and play music with small shells, *zampoña* (pan-flute), guitar or *bombo* (drum) in the restaurants. Others make a living with pick-pocketing, bag snatching or stealing car mirrors, which they sell at nearby garages. The many cars that are parked around the hospital and sports centre also offer income opportunities: the children either work there as *cuidacarros* (guarding cars), *lavacarros* (washing cars) or they steal car mirrors and other small car parts.

After lunch time, when the area around *Universidad* becomes deserted, some children move on to other commercial places like the Molino market in the south of Wanchaq district, the eateries in San Jeronimo or back downtown to Plaza de Armas and the streets around Bélen, San Fransisco square and San Pedro market. In the evening these areas are crowded with Peruvian families in search of an evening meal. Other children, however, stay in *Universidad* the whole afternoon to spend their money on internet, videogames or pinball or they move to more hidden places like empty alleys, abandoned houses, drainage canals and the hills around Cusco to use drugs with their street friends. Some children that work on Plaza the Armas get together to use drugs and alcohol in a narrow alley, where they sit on the rooftops and have a first class view of approaching police officers, tourists and street vendors on the Plaza.

According to street-living children in Cusco it is not hard to find a place to sleep because of the many unofficial hostels in the city. Although these hostels are very cheap, they are also dangerous places. David (14): “These places, often run by elderly people, are very dirty and you are not safe there. You have to be always alert, because many thieves, criminals and homosexuals sleep there too. They often harass us, because we are young and can’t do anything.”

Children also sleep in the municipal’s dormitory or rarely in internet cafés, dilapidated buildings, in the hills around Cusco, under bridges or on the pavements.

4.2.1 The specific situation of street girls in Cusco

Compared to Lima there are few street-living girls to be found in Cusco. During our study we encountered only 4 girls, aged 12-16. The probable reason for this gender bias is cultural, namely local expectations about boyhood and girlhood.

... the streets are considered a detrimental work place, disruptive to what is morally acceptable for girls. Female adolescents are supposed to be at home, and in cases that they are working in the streets anyway, they are often associated with prostitution [Steel 2008:72].

Girls are expected to stay at home with their parents, in the private space, while the streets are an already accepted domain for boys. Lancy [2010] writes: “Street kids are more likely to be male, because girls are both more useful and valued at home and, simultaneously more vulnerable and likely to become ‘damaged’ in the street”. The street girl’s vulnerability for dangers such as sexual

abuse and violence makes more girls than boys afraid to walk away from home. In the case of extreme problems at home more girls opt for a life in a children's or girls' home instead of the street. An additional explanation for the low number of street girls in Cusco could be their 'invisibility' on the streets, for example, because of their employment in more hidden sectors like prostitution in brothels.

4.3 Becoming a street child

Each child arriving on the street tries to become part of a particular group of street kids, called *battería* (gang), as a means of survival. However, the process of becoming a street child is a gradual one, involving various stages. In these stages a newbie enters the process of replacing his home ties with street ties and he starts to affiliate with others on the street. Slowly he learns the appropriate behaviour and skills to become accepted as a member of a street group. For example, in the beginning the child only roams the streets during the day and returns home at night. After a while he starts to extend his time on the street, spending more and more nights there and returning home less and less. During each stage of the process the child gets more habituated to street life [Visano 1990; Rizzini & Butler 2003]. Persy (14) from Lima explained how he was integrated into street life:

At first it was difficult; I didn't know anything about the street. But after 2 or 3 days I got to know other street kids. Their attitudes were different from mine; they acted more like gangsters. Then I started to wash cars and even beg for money. Later on I learned how to play instruments and how to steal. I started to take drugs and drunk a lot. I learned how to speak *jerga* (slang). Once you know street slang, you only speak slang.

Becoming part of a street group is not easy though and a child first has to 'prove' that he really belongs to the street. Besides spending time on the street, the child also has to become acquainted with the "subculture of the streets". By watching and participating in street life, new children learn to cope with and adapt to their new environment. Jeremy (14) explained how he became part of a street gang in Cusco, to get protection and friendship:

I joined the gang because I felt very lonely on the street, without father, without mother. I had nobody. That's why I wanted to join. I didn't know whether they were good or bad, but I felt I needed to be with them. There is one boss, *el jefe*, and he told me to first rob a purse from a girl, before I could enter the gang. I had to prove that I was not a wimp and I had to give the loot to the others. Being with them I felt more secure than being alone; we treated each other as best friends. Guys of all different ages were part of the gang, minors and adults. I was the youngest of the group and the others treated me with a lot of love; they gave me food and clothes. Whenever I was detained in the *comisaria* (police station), the older ones would come to get me out, saying they were my brothers and paying some hush money.

Within the group of street children a delicate social distinction is made based on the level to which the child has adapted to street life and street culture; this distinction defines his place in the street hierarchy. For example, if you don't know how to steal, survive, defend yourself or talk in street slang, you will not be considered by the other street children as one of them, which can result in exclusion or, even worse, in bullying and (sexual) abuse.

If you don't take care of yourself, wear rags or dirty clothes, you will be called a *piraña*, a term that is used by outsiders for street kids, but has a negative connotations within the group of street children. For them this term means a 'loser' and 'the dregs of society'. By calling another street child a *piraña*, however, children express differences between them and others, making themselves feel/look better. Interestingly, even though certain behaviour is expected before acceptance occurs among street children (such as stealing and drug use), this is also often the behaviour that will cause some street children to call others a *piraña*. So, in some instances the children have to exhibit "undesirable" behaviour just to be accepted, whilst in other situations it is the exact same behaviour that can lead some street children to turn on one of "their own". For instance, Carlos (16) differentiates himself from the *pirañas*: "I'm not a bag snatcher, I don't place my hand in someone else's pocket, no, I work, selling candies and shining shoes". He adds that he hates it that other people generalise street children, although there are so many differences between them: "Even if I wear my clean clothes people call me *piraña*, just because they have seen other boys in clean clothes snatching bags and stealing car mirrors".



Photo 7: Street group in Cusco.

So, the way you dress and even the way you walk and talk can be decisive for your social status on the street. Being accepted on the street, and becoming affiliated with a certain street group, is about knowing the rules and habits that characterise street life. For example, Wilmer (13) lives on the streets of Cusco:

When I first met Wilmer he was shyly standing in front of a restaurant, playing uneasily with his *conchas* (shells that are used as a music instrument). His clothes were dirty and one sleeve of his sweater was torn. My first impression was that of a 'real' street child, referring to his poor appearance. When I asked the other street boys I was walking with, if Wilmer was also a street boy, they started to laugh: "This *zonzo* (idiot)? Do you really think he's from the

street? He doesn't even dare to enter [the restaurant]. And look at his clothes, nobody will take him serious!" It was clear that my (stereotypical) idea of a street child didn't match theirs. It turned out that the boys were right; Wilmer had only been living on the streets for two weeks.

A couple of weeks later I saw a different kind of Wilmer. He was wearing a flashy red hat, new sneakers and he was accompanied by the same boys I had been walking with that first day. Proudly Wilmer showed me his catch of the day: 2 stolen car mirrors, worth 10 sols each. I was surprised to hear Wilmer ask the boys later that day: "why don't we go for a *vuelo* [a trip on glue]." It was clear he was showing off his new knowledge of how things work on the streets. The boys seemed to have accepted Wilmer; he had shown his interest in street culture and was helping them with their robberies.

This example shows that becoming a street child, and being accepted as such, is a process in which other street children, often the most experienced, play the role of 'teachers'. In Lima many street groups require the placement of tattoos or piercings. Many children in Lima Centre, for example, have a tear tattooed on their face. This tear is generally a symbol for a difficult period in their life.

As has also been shown in research from Brazil and the Dominican Republic, for many street children the first experience with drug use is the moment of initiation and acceptance into a peer group and street life [Rizzini & Butler 2003; Wolseth 2010]. Peer pressure is strong and relations between street children are hierarchical. The most tough and experienced boys, "those who don't know fear", stand on top and play a leading role in group decisions. Being a good thief, using drugs and dressing well, are highly valued characteristics. These characteristics are related; if you know how to get the 'quick money' through stealing, you are able to buy (expensive) drugs and nice clothes. The wish to be "the biggest *ratero* (villain) in town" was often expressed.

4.4 Income generation and expenses

Most street-living children use the street for income generation, as they work independently on the squares, main roads, sidewalks and alleys of Lima and Cusco. Just a few of them perform wage labour, and are employed by a third party. Some of the children, however, mentioned that at some stage in their life they had been employed, for example, in a restaurant, bar, shop or in the industrial sectors of brick production, metal work, mining or agriculture.

When asked why the street children opt for informal, unstable, often socially undesirable work on the streets, instead of a regular paid job in service of a boss, most of them replied that it is for the "freedom of being your own boss", "defining your own work schedule" and "the lack of skills to apply for a regular job". Besides, some children explained how they had left their former jobs because they were abused by their employers, they were underpaid and exploited or they had never received any pay. Other children told how they had been fired because they failed to show up sometimes, they were accused of stealing things from the company or they couldn't comply with the rules. Most of the reasons for these children not wanting or not being able to be employed are related to characteristics typical to street children, i.e. having a lack of structure in their life, little persistence in difficult situations, non-compliance to rules and being an easy target for exploitation.

Jaime (13) explained that he lost his job in the University canteen, because he didn't show up for 3 days during a public transport strike. Arturo (15), who worked at a construction site, also got fired

because he failed to show up: “I was visiting my drunken mother who was throwing glasses all over the place”, he explained. That same evening he was, also drunk, selling sweets in the street again.

As already mentioned, street-living children have different strategies for making a living on the streets, ranging from labour activities, such as shining shoes, to illicit activities, such as stealing and drug trafficking. A typical characteristic of the entrepreneurial strategies of street children are that they are often improvised; for example, selling low value products, like candies and postcards, demands little starting capital and earnings do not have to be reinvested in new merchandise. Other popular jobs among newcomers are shoe shining and playing music on *zampoña* (pan-flute), *charango* (stringed instrument), *cajon* (Afro-Peruvian drum) and *güiro* (small percussion instrument). Less experienced children use *conchas* (shells) or a can and comb to accompany their singing in restaurants or buses. Other economic activities include acrobatic performances and windscreen cleaning at traffic junctions, washing cars, guarding cars, cleaning tombstones at the cemetery, begging or stealing.

Sex work is another activity street children can engage in. This activity takes on different forms, such as sex-for-commodity relationships with tourists, known as *bricherismo*²⁴; sex-for-money with Peruvians and tourists in hidden alleyways, closed markets or hotel rooms; clandestine street prostitution and street girls offering sex to street boys in exchange for food, small gifts and drugs. The last-named activity was the most openly practised, although not considered sex-work by the children themselves. As mentioned earlier, street prostitution of young girls is especially visible in Lima, while in Cusco data is lacking.

The vulnerability of street children makes them prone to different kinds of (sexual) exploitation and abuse. For both street boys and street girls it is common to maintain (sexual) relationships with adults in exchange for care, protection and sometimes commodities. In Lima centre, for example, several street children claimed to be “friends” with an adult who gives them food, a place to sleep and care in exchange for sexual favours. However, the children never call this prostitution or talk openly about the homosexual relationships they have. The ambivalent relation between the boys and the adult is shown in Jaimer’s (14) description: “He always helps me. He protects me, so other boys will not hit me. He gives me food whenever I am hungry. When I am tired he lets me sleep in his bed. Sometimes he wants me to be his girlfriend. That’s okay, because he is my only friend.”

The type of labour activity often depends on the child’s talent and preferences and on what their friends are doing, as children learn from each other about the most effective ways of income generation and the most lucrative locations. In most cases street children combine different strategies or switch regularly between legal and illegal income generating activities. Jherson (17), a boy who has lived on Cusco’s streets since he was 7 years old, explained:

When I was small we always used to beg for money and food in the restaurants, sometimes we also washed cars or I did acrobatics; when I grew older I learned how to earn money in a quicker way; I started to steal mirrors. Sometimes I also shined shoes on the Plaza and later on I sold paintings to tourists too.

²⁴*Bricheros* look for tourists to become their (temporary) partners with the intention of receiving money, commodities, drinks etc. This act especially takes place in *tragotecas* and discotheques in the touristic centre of Cusco, like at the Plaza de Armas, Plateros, Pasaje Procuradores, Bélen, Av. El Sol, Plaza San Francisco [ILO & IPEC 2007].

William, a 13-year-old postcard vendor, also explained how he combines legal and illegal activities for his income generation: “If I don’t sell enough postcards to buy myself a meal, I’ll try to earn some money in a different way; sometimes pick-pocketing a tourist while I pretend to chat with him.” Jeremy (14) explained how his shift from legal to illegal activities was related to drug addiction:

After my grandmother died my street life started. I saw another kid singing in restaurants so I imitated him to earn some money. After one month I got to know a place where street children sleep. I befriended them and they brought me in contact with *Terokal*. Then I started to drink. That’s when I started to steal cell phones, to be able to buy my drugs.

However, the choice for a certain kind of job also depends on the child’s talent and preferences. In Lima, for example, there is a group of street children who enjoy their jobs as street musicians. For them making music is something to be proud of, something they are talented in and something that distracts them from problems on the streets. Their feelings were evident from their request to be photographed with their instruments and from the fact that they liked to play music in their free time without earning money.



Photo 8: Young street musicians posing with their instruments.

On the other hand, some children said that singing makes them ashamed and shy. Freddy (14) explained:

Because I don’t have money to buy candies to sell, I have to make music now. I don’t like it. People think badly about you if you sing; they won’t help you. They say: “run, you are a big

boy now, you have hands to work with.” Maybe they give you 10 cents, and sometimes their girlfriends would even say “no, no, we don’t have money.”

Although the children have not enjoyed all their money-making activities on the streets, they seemed to agree that they were better than employment with a boss. Street boy Antonio, for instance, revealed that he likes polishing shoes “because I can quit work whenever I want to play soccer with the other street workers and not only on Sundays like most people”. Children also claimed to like their street work because, “I am doing something I am good at”, “with my friends”, “cannot be exploited”, “independent and free”, “earning my own money”, “learning languages and about other countries”, “learning maths”, “learning to negotiate, not to be shy and sell my products” and “becoming friends with tourists”. On the other hand, children also admitted that they would probably not like to be doing this kind of informal work their whole lives, because it has a bad reputation and is insecure. Hector (16) explained: “For now I like to make music in bars, but in a couple of years I hope to get a formal job, something stable. I would not like that people are still looking at me like ‘look that *vago* [idle person]’, no, I prefer to do something more dignified, like being an engineer.”

According to a social worker in Cusco the feelings of shame that street children have in relation to their work is a new development of recent years. Especially the generation of street children that is now between 12 and 15 years old seems to be extremely conscious about its appearance and social stigma. They will, for example, hide their shoeshine boxes in plastic bags when walking outside Plaza de Armas, or find a place outside the city-centre to shine shoes. The social worker explained: “They feel ashamed, because of prejudices, of being perceived as *piraña*.”

Most jobs performed by street children have the lowest place in the social hierarchy of street work. Griet Steel [2008:86] shows that shoe shiners, postcard sellers and sweets sellers are the lowest on the social ladder of street vendors in Cusco. Non-vending activities such as singing, car washing or guarding cars are considered even lower, because no start-up costs are needed. Children who do these jobs are often seen as slackers involved in drugs and petty crime by other street vendors and passers-by. Generally, street-working children and adults consider these low-value jobs the same as begging. Carla (25), a seller of aquarelle paintings in Cusco, said: “I don’t think these *pirañas* really work, actually they just sing a song and then ask for money to spend on drugs”.

Street-living children have the lowest social status among all people that work on the street, because of the jobs do, especially if they have reached adolescence. They are often associated with delinquency and drug use and therefore they face discrimination and disrespect. Jaime (15): “If you are young it’s still accepted that you sing or do acrobatics; people even find you cute and give money. But if you are grown-up, like I am, people will just laugh. They think that you are really a loser in life; that you’re not educated and good for nothing.”

The average income of a street-living child lies between 10 sols (2 euro) and 50 sols (12 euro) a day. Generally they earn more than street-working children, although their income is insecure and varies per day: one day a child could be lucky because of a generous gift and the next he could end the day without earning a thing. For example, in Lima only 2% of the street-living children earn less than 4 sol a day, compared to 17% of the street-working children who live with relatives. In Cusco 14% of all street-living children earn less than 10 sol per day, compared to half of the street-working children living with family members. A reason for this could be that street-living children have more earnings from illicit activities, like stealing and drug dealing. Moreover, street-living children mainly

work for their own basic needs and are mostly their own bosses. This gives them the freedom to decide how to schedule their days, when to work and when to play and rest.

How much a child earns depends on his personal ability to sell, his appearance, his mood and his performance. Street children are very inventive in finding ways to earn money. In their work they use their talents in the best possible ways, i.e. their talent in convincing people, in looking needy, in making music or in acrobatics.

To convince others to buy or donate, the children play on the emotions of possible clients. They are conscious that people give money more easily when they play the role of 'hungry street child'. Adolescent street kids making music in restaurants often prefer to play with a younger cute looking street child. Charly (9), for example, was a popular companion for older boys to work with. They would address the audience before starting a song with:

Good afternoon present audience. The ones talking to you are some guys, trying to make a living with music. I want you to meet my little brother, he's just 9 years old and orphan already. Look at him, he's starving of hunger. Our life is miserable, our uncles are drunkards. By playing music we try to maintain ourselves and little brothers. Instead of stealing we make a living in a humble way. My brother will pass by for contributions, knocking the doors of your hearts. Thanks in advance!

In reality they were neither brothers, nor orphans, nor hungry at that moment. Afterwards they share the money and either spend it on drugs or recreational activities. Other successful strategies, to name just a few, are: "being nice to tourists by making jokes and talking English", "insisting when clients deny", "being cute" and "wearing clean clothes". "When working it's important to look clean, so that people will not think badly about you and say 'look what a dirty boy'. If you look clean, people will more easily collaborate; they'll help you."

Sometimes children approach restaurant customers and try to be invited a meal. Other children ask restaurant owners for a free meal in exchange for washing dishes.

Knowing how to approach and befriend tourists is another survival strategy. Several children spoke of foreign "friends" that had given them large tips, invitations for dinners or valuable presents like new shoes. Angelo (14), for example, spoke of a "good American friend", a tourist that visits Cusco yearly, and takes him to expensive hotels or on sightseeing trips around Cusco. Carlos, a 16 year old shoe shiner, described his strategy of getting tourists to pay high prices for his services: "I always let the tourist decide what to pay; I'll say '*a su voluntad*', and sometimes they give 30 or 40 sols!" The tourists' lack of knowledge about local prices means they often donate/tip more than expected. Juan (17) explained how he has "betrayed" tourists while begging on the streets: "I was sitting on the sidewalk holding my hand in the air. I said 'one sol for my hunger'. I took off my shoes and said 'one sol for my shoes'. *Gringos* pitied me and gave me their change. They didn't know I would spend all money on drugs."

Another popular way of income generation for street-living children is petty thievery²⁵. Besides pick-pocketing (purses, watches and cell-phones) and bag snatching, especially the theft of exterior car mirrors is popular in Cusco. Children mostly work in groups of two to four companions. While some of them are busy removing the car mirror the others will act as *campana* (keeping watch), in most

²⁵ In Cusco I have not directly heard of cases in which severe violence was used in thieving. In Lima the use of violence in robberies is more common.

cases girls or novices. The car mirrors, worth 10 to 20 sols each, are afterwards sold to garage holders near the Wanchaq market, which is a risky and stressful activity due to the presence of police officers near the garages. If you know how to steal a car mirror with *orega* (ear), which means including the mirror stand, you can even earn as much as one *ferro* (100 sols).

As is the case with other jobs street children do, also in petty theft a lot of proficiency is involved. Newcomers learn the needed skills from more experienced children. Jaime explained the tricks of mirror stealing: “Well, you have to be really careful, the best is to do it in a deserted street; you time the right moment and then with a firm push at the back of the lower [mirror] part, you pull with the other hand and then ‘clack’, it gets loose and you run.”

Stealing is discussed as a dangerous activity, because there is a risk to be detained in a youth prison if caught; but it is also considered to be highly exciting. Boys often show off with stories about thrilling escapes from angry car owners or police officers. Once, for example, Ricardo (12) boasted about the escape from an angry car owner: “I was running with Jon, like hell, we were running and the owner was following us. He wanted to kill us. Then I got the idea to try to lift the trunk of a parked car and it opened! So we jumped in and stayed in the trunk for like 10 minutes, till it was safe to get out again.”

Some boys are more successful in stealing than others, which in turn affects their social status within the street group. A number of the experienced boys prefer to operate alone; although it’s more dangerous, the gains are higher. Once a child is used to earning ‘easy money’ and buying whatever he/she wants, it’s hard to kick the habit of stealing. The thrill of stealing seems to be addictive; some children described stealing as just another vice like gaming and drugs.

Even a specialised vocabulary has developed around the practices of stealing, indicating the commonness of this economic strategy. A local slang term for boys that are proficient in stealing mirrors is *espejero*, and a *fighter* means a pick-pocket. Within street culture stealing is seen as work; they use the word *laburar* to refer to stealing, but it literally means ‘to work’. Another word used for stealing is *cobrar*, which means in Spanish ‘to charge someone’, indicating that street children feel they have the right to the belongings of someone else. Notions of inequality in society and the lack of other options for income generation are at the core of their justifications of thieving activities. Julio commented: “I just steal from rich people. They have everything and we have nothing. You can recognise a rich person by the way he walks and dresses; they move around in cars and eat in restaurants.”

However, not only the “easy money”²⁶ pushes children into delinquency, also the shame, public humiliation and stigmatisation that children encounter during street work play a role. It is simply socially unacceptable and looked-down-upon that adolescent children still earn their living with low-value jobs on the streets. Jeremy (14) explained:

I felt ashamed when I was singing in a *cevichería*, people look at you as if you’re a *ratero*. You can even hear them think ‘bastard’ and they say ‘fuck off’ if you pass by for some collaboration. And if I tried to talk with them, telling them that I can’t pay my studies, they screamed at me even more. You know, if you get older, people don’t accept it that you still do these kinds of jobs. I don’t want to be called a *piraña* anymore, that’s why I learned to steal car mirrors.

²⁶ One car mirror is worth 20 sols and the total act of stealing and selling will take a maximum of half an hour, while the earnings of a whole day of hard street work aren’t more than 10 to 15 sols.

Antonio (16) expressed the same problems: “I sung because that was the only thing I knew. My friends taught me how to sing, but I always felt ashamed to ask people for money after the song. People say many bad words to you; they say that you’re a loafer and a beggar. Therefore singing makes me feel sad.”

Paradoxically, many children feel they have no other option than to steal, because outsiders treat them like delinquents when they try to earn money honestly. Because stealing is a secret and a hidden form of income generation, street children feel less ashamed and discriminated in this activity. Diego (15) explained, ironically, that “people oblige you to steal, because if you sell



sweets people tell you to go away, if you ask them for money they won’t give it, and if you steal their purse they’ll ask ‘why didn’t you just ask me to help you?’” According to him it’s their own fault for becoming the targets of theft, because they were not willing to help street children.

Photo 9: “Because I am old now, people look angry at me while I try to make some money.” (photo and quote by Axel)

Ricardo (12) had a similar belief: “When I am stealing, people tell me to go and work. When I am working, selling candies, the police confiscate my merchandise. How am I going to work if the police won’t let me? My only option is to *laburar* [steal], so I can afford a bed for the night.”

What’s more, to avoid being called a *piraña* street-living children attach importance to their appearance. “If a child is walking in rags and dirty clothes, outsiders will immediately recognise the child as a street child and associate him with all the evil things in the world”, according to an ex-street child. Money is needed to buy new clothes though, and this can only be achieved through illicit means.

So, discrimination of street children appears to lead to more illegal and criminal activities. It must be mentioned, however, that although thieving is a common economic strategy not all street children agree with it. Some children said that they still prefer low status jobs to immoral and illegal activities. Hector (16) commented:

If you steal, you harm other people. You take their money and valuables in a second, while they have been working a long time to achieve it. Before, I stole purses, cell-phones and

mp3s with my friends. Now I have a more humble job. I make music and feel better about myself.

Another reason to opt for a career change is the danger of imprisonment in a youth prison. After having been caught many times for minor crimes, children run a high risk of being detained for up to a couple of years. To avoid this, they sometimes switch back to jobs in the legal sector.

Besides stealing from outsiders, street children also steal from each other. It's common in street culture that the older boys steal money and clothes from the younger ones. Either they openly command the youngsters to give them their money, or things are stolen in a more secret manner. Frequently the children will find their shoes stolen after a night's sleep in the park; unattended items like glasses and caps often disappear mysteriously. Ideas about property seem to be flexible and children often interchange clothes and fashion items. Although children sometimes complained about the theft, it is an accepted part of street culture.

Many street children said not to have any savings, because they spend their earned money immediately on food, drugs, new (fashion) clothes or internet and videogames. The most named reasons for this were the lack of a secure place to save money, the danger that the money would be stolen by other street children and the temptations of spending their money right away. Although some drop-in shelters offer the facility of deposit boxes to keep money safely, very few street children mentioned having considerable savings for long-term investments or future financial security. This correlates with street children's pattern of living from day to day. Drug addicted children claim to spend their money only on drugs, because, as Jeremy said, "you don't need anything else; you don't care about hunger or sleep, as long as you can get high". Non-addicted children spend most of their money on daily necessities, like food, drinks and accommodation.

Contrary to the stereotypical image of street-living children, these children appear to live relatively luxuriously, especially compared to street-working children: they often buy food, candies and soft drinks; they regularly buy new fashionable clothes and sometimes they can even afford accommodation. They keep all their money themselves, which makes them financially better-off than their street-working peers who have to hand over most of their money to their relatives.

Street children often just have one set of clothes at any one time, due to the lack of a place to store another set. Instead of washing these clothes, they have the habit of wearing them till they are dirty and worn out, then they throw them away and buy a new set of clothes. This habit correlates with the lack of a communal washing place and the absence of other clothes to wear while the washed clothes are still wet.

Children mostly spend all their earned money immediately on expensive food, a new pair of fashionable shoes or videogames, ending the day without any money for food or a sleeping place. Children appeared to make all spending decisions spontaneously, without taking into account necessary future expenses. They don't seem to attach a lot of value to money and adjust their living standard to their daily income: if they have it they'll spend it immediately on luxury products, drugs or food and clothes for their friends. But if they don't have it, they'll just eat the leftovers in restaurants or sleep on the street.

The insecure life situation and economic vulnerability of street children is clear in Carlos's statement: "sometimes it happens that I don't earn in the morning, I don't earn in the afternoon and I don't earn at night, well, then I just endure till the next day and I'll try to recover." Because of fluctuating earnings, street children face both situations of poverty as well as situations of relative wealth. An example of a regular spending scheme of a non-addicted street child is: 5 to 10

sols on food and sweets, 5 sols on internet and videogames (more or less for 5 hours of playing) and once in a while, if the income was good, 20 to 50 sols on a new pair of shoes, trousers or a sweater. A drug-addicted child will spend around 10 sols on *Terokal*, which costs 3 sols per can, and, if any money is left, 3 to 10 sols to rent a cheap room in a hostel where he's able to continue sniffing glue the whole night.

There are significant differences in the spending patterns of children who live with their relatives and children who live on the street. While in Lima 44% and in Cusco 53% of the children living with relatives hand most of their money over to their family, only 3% in Lima and 2% in Cusco of the street-living children do the same. For almost three-quarters of the street-living children, buying food, clothes and other basic needs for themselves is the main spending post, while this is the main spending post for only one-fifth of the children living with family. Children living with relatives spend more on fashion clothes or articles and school articles, or they save the money. Another interesting difference in Cusco is that 8% of the street-living children spends most money on videogames and internet, compared to only 0.3% of the children living with their relatives.

Moreover, it's important to mention that street children in Cusco generally look better groomed than children in Lima. In Lima more street children are severely addicted to drugs. Therefore they spend more money on drugs and care less about their appearance.

It must be noted that the day to day spending behaviour doesn't apply to all street children. Some adolescents in Lima and Cusco are involved in *pandero*: an informal collective saving mechanism used by street vendors. *Pandero* is like a game in which street vendors collect all their daily earnings and redistribute the total gain by rotation [see also Aliaga Linares 2002; Steel 2008]. However, the majority of street children are excluded from this system; most children either don't have the minimum deposit or are denied access because they are perceived as untrustworthy by other street vendors.

4.5 Family contact

Although street children are characterised by the lack of regular family contact, many of them have sporadic contact with parents or relatives. Most children in this research claimed to go home every now and then, generally every 2 or 3 months. Especially around Christmas many children expressed the desire to be with their family. At this time of year they were more motivated to save money, look tidy and bring home savings and presents for relatives.

Even though friends replace family on the streets, the children still continue to choose family over friends when asked who is more important. From a survey in Lima in 2002, done by the street educator network REDENAC, it resulted that 82% of the street girls and 62% of the street boys expresses the desire to maintain family contact [in Tejada Ripalda 2005:87]. However, many children are too embarrassed or stressed to visit home. They are often afraid that family members won't accept them or disapprove of them and that they will be punished for having been away for so long. For example, Dani (14), who lives in Lima Centre and wanted to return home at Christmas after not seeing his family for a few years, spent a whole week trying to find a way to buy shoes to wear home. Returning home with only sandals, for Peruvians a symbol of poverty, was out of the question. He asked passers-by, street educators and tourists for help, but didn't manage to get new shoes. He never went home for Christmas, and was terribly sad about it.

Whenever street children do return home, they only stay a couple of days on average, before returning to the streets again. In most cases they immediately encounter the same problems that made them run away in the first place, and often they have become so adapted to street life that they can't feel comfortable with living between four walls anymore. Many children, however, expressed the desire to "one day again be united with family members".

Some children are actually still much attached to their family, as was the case of Juana (13). Although she can't live at home, because her step-father doesn't accept her, she tries to visit her mother every day and regularly yields some of her money to her mother for the care of her newborn half sister. Also Arturo (15) visits his family regularly and feels responsible for the care of his alcoholic mother: "I often walk her home after she has been in a *chicheria* [local corn beer pub], because otherwise she starts fighting with people on the street. I never sleep at home however; I don't like it there and the place is too small." Jaime (13) returns home every now and then "to have a good sleep, and cook a meal", but only when he knows that his mother is not at home.

Sometimes children even return home for a couple of weeks or months and temporarily re-establish their relationship with family members. This is often the case when children have severe problems with their health or are prosecuted by police. Fabian (13), for example, returned home for a couple of weeks when the police were threatening him with a forced stay in the juvenile detention centre. Diego (15), who lost family contact when he was 8 years old, re-established contact with his mother after he had broken his hand. Returning home was the only option, he argued, because with one hand he could not earn a living. As soon as he was better he left for the streets again.

In general, the mother is the family member most idealised and admired by street children. In cases where the children still have family contact it is mostly the mother they see the most. Even when children admitted to their mothers' violent behaviour, many spoke about them as valued persons in their lives. For example, Felix (13), who lived a short while in a rehabilitation centre for drug addicted street children in Lima: "I love my mother a lot. I really hope she will come to visit me at Christmas. She is a really good and nice person." Later I heard from educators that Felix was a severely traumatised child, because his mother used to tie him up on the bed for several days as a way of punishment.

Also Naomi (12) idealised her mother: "She is really cool. She looks beautiful and I feel sad that I have let her down by running away from home. Why did I run away? Well, she had a alcohol problem and every time she came home drunk she used to hit me. Our past was very difficult, but someday we will be united."

4.6 Social relations on the street

Social relations on the street play an important role for street children. Having friends and being part of a group is important for reasons of affection, understanding and safety. Besides giving protection and support, friendships are important to street children because they provide a feeling of social belonging that was generally absent in their former family relationships. The street group and street friends are often spoken of as a kind of family. Children refer to their friends as "brothers and sisters" or "uncles" and solidarity between them is high. Juan (17) shows how far street solidarity and loyalty goes: "On the street you don't have revulsion of your brothers; we all eat with the same spoon and sleep side by side. No matter if someone has tuberculosis or even AIDS, we are not averse to this person."

Ramon (14) explained the importance of his best friend: “He is like my brother; we respect each other a lot. He never hits me. Whenever he has money he gives it to me, to buy new shoes. He gives me good advice and helps me if policemen are chasing me.”

Social networks of street children can also include adults living on the street or non street-living people like shop keepers, market vendors or game hall owners. They can provide children with food and drinks, protection or good advice. Carmen (14) mentioned, for example, a woman who sells mobile phone calls on the street: “She always helps me and gives me advice. She tells me not to smoke *Teko* and she asks me about my well-being. That’s why I almost consider her my mother. I don’t know her name.”

Chala (14) talks about a video arcade owner who always lets them hide during police raids, and Gustavo (15) is always given the leftovers from a certain restaurant owner. Especially in Cusco, street children try to include foreigners and volunteers at street child organisations in their social network. This way they often obtain new clothes, food, and sometimes even structural (financial) help from abroad.

Friends on the street function as a substitute family, giving attention and affection children didn’t get from their own families at home. Jherson (17) commented about his friend:

I have known Antonio since we worked together in the bakery of Qosqo Maki. We are fighting a lot, but at the end we always give each other a hand. We have to do that, because we live together day and night. We are each other’s only help, because our parents have forgotten about us. We help each other, because we are alone, without family. We live the same disastrous life.

However, friendships on the street can be complicated too, as Jherson explained above. Arguments and fights between friends are common and are mostly related to girlfriends, money or drugs. Juan (17), for example, explained that the big scar on his face, leading from his mouth to his ear, is a result of his best friend cutting him with glass because of a fight about a can of *Terokal*. Several children even prefer to be alone on the street, although in reality they are always with a street group. Being part of a street group thus seems a necessity, but children can clearly identify its negative sides. They mentioned that their friends sometimes maltreat them, steal their money or have a bad influence on them. Freddy (14) explained:

If you are alone you have fewer problems. What you earn is just for yourself. If you work with friends you have to divide the money. I haven’t found a good friend yet, someone who tells you to study and to work instead of stealing. Who tells you that it’s not too late to become someone in life. A friend who is like your father or mother. The friends I have at the moment insult me, and hit me. But I am the same; I also say many bad things to them.

Children often blame their friends for preventing them to change or to quit the drugs. Diego (15): “Sometimes I don’t like my friends; they push me into bad things. They say ‘come for a *flight* [trip]’ and if I don’t join them they will bully me, so I join them.” Hector (15) added: “I also have many bad friends, they steal and use drugs. If I tell them ‘look, I have changed’, they make fun of me and say ‘look at this saint’”. Peer pressure is high and is an important aspect that makes it difficult for children to leave street life. Children who have the desire to enter a children’s home are sometimes stopped by their friends. To overcome a drug addiction and to get out of street life it’s important that the child feels supported by his street friends or girlfriend/boyfriend. To make interventions

with street children successful it is therefore important to not only work with one specific child, but to involve also his close social environment in the rehabilitation process.

Jherson (17, Cusco): “Since I know her, she wanted me to change. And that’s why I really wanted to change, because now I have a real motive to improve in life. I want to show her that I can be a good father, that I can have a family with her. I want to give my sons what my parents have never given to me.”

Moreover, to get rid of the whole lifestyle on the street, at the end a total change of the social and physical environment of the child is necessary. It seems to be almost impossible for a child to maintain his new lifestyle, without drugs and with an education, while still roaming around with the same street friends. Manu (28), an ex-street boy in Lima, explained that it was only possible to make a total lifestyle change once he found a formal job at the municipality hall and started to share an apartment with his new colleagues:

I have seen all kinds of rehabilitation centres and prisons in my life, but every time I returned to friends on the street. There was no alternative. Even if I stopped with drugs, I still had to earn my money on the street. So many temptations I couldn’t resist. The problem is that if you’re with street friends you can’t say no. I said ‘no, no, I am not like that anymore’ and my friends said ‘oh, come on, you’re not a wimp, let’s have some fun!’ and five minutes later I was high and stealing again. Four years ago a women, from the municipality, fell in love with me and arranged a job for me there. That was really my rescue, because there I got to know many people that had nothing to do with the street. They taught me to live a normal life. What has made me change were these friendships with people from a totally different environment: persons that didn’t use drugs. I had to leave all my street friends behind to be able to change.

Like friendships, romantic relations between boys and girls, are also problematic. On one hand, having a girlfriend is the main motivation for street boys to quit with drugs and step out of street life, on the other hand, a break-up with a girl is often an immediate cause for a severe relapse. A psychologist in a street child centre explains the intensity of love among street children as a result of lacking other affective relations: “Because of a lack of love in their lives they fall totally upon their girlfriends and depend a lot on them.” The case of Diego (15) shows this:

Two years ago I met Gaby. She lives with her father and goes to high school. With her help I managed to quit drugs. She helped me to go back to school, she motivated me. For her I would do anything. I want her to be proud of me. She was my reason to move forward. In the beginning I was still a *piraña*, but she asked me to leave the drugs, so I did. Otherwise she would leave me, she said. But every time we had fights, I returned to use drugs. Two weeks ago I saw her with another guy. For me nothing counts and life has no meaning anymore.

Since the break-up with his girlfriend Diego’s situation has worsened; he takes more drugs than ever, stopped with school and cuts his arms regularly²⁷. Similar stories are present in the lives of many street boys.

²⁷ Body mutilation, such as cutting arms and legs, is a common habit among street children. Scars on the children’s arms and hands are often visible. Sometimes children draw hearts or girl’s names in their skin with a knife. Some say it’s to remember and to honour certain people, others cut to forget traumatic events in the past or because of sadness and loneliness.

Within street child groups sexual relations between boys are not exceptional and are often a form of power expression. Older boys in a group abuse younger boys to stamp their authority over them. Other explanations of (forced) sexual relations between street children are their search for affection and the fact that many of them have been abused in their early childhood, either at home or on the street. Children hardly talk about this secret part of street culture, so precise data on this subject is absent. However, jokes between friends about this subject were often heard, like “you look like you’ve just been raped” or “this guy sometimes is *mujercita* [a little lady].” Street educators mentioned that the spread of STDs is high because of this tradition in street culture. Sex education to street children should therefore also focus on the health risks of sexual relations and fight the taboo of homosexuality in Peruvian society. Besides, further policy attention should be paid to homosexual street children, who, according to street educators, mostly work in prostitution and are rejected access to street child institutions. They are even more excluded from society than heterosexual street children.

Besides, as mentioned earlier, street girls often have several boyfriends at a time and are principally in search of protection and material satisfaction from boys; boys are more in search of affection and attention from girls. As shown in this paragraph, girls can (unwillingly) have both a positive and a negative effect on a boy’s rehabilitation process.

4.7 Free time, sports and play

Sports and play occupy an important part of the children’s daily lives. The streets are not only an environment to work in, but are also seen as a venue for entertainment and fun. Street children are often seen playing cards on the sidewalks, running after each other on the squares, playing soccer games in parks and football pitches or simply just “hanging out” (*‘hacer hora’*, literally: “waiting for the right time”), which involves fooling around with friends, teasing each other, telling each other exciting episodes about robberies and thrilling persecutions, having fun and sometimes also taking drugs.

This hanging around and playing on the streets are important factors to the sensation of freedom that street children experience. In the summer time Lima’s beaches are also an important space for leisure and attract large groups of street children. They travel to the beach while making money on the buses with music making. The green hills that surround Cusco are also attractive, and offer limitless opportunities of fun. Diego (15) explained: “That day I went with Juan and Hector to the hills. We were running! Almost flying! And the wind was so nice on our skin. We felt really like free. There is no police in the hills. And you know what we did? We felt so hot from running that we removed all our clothes! Wow!”

Street children also spend a considerable amount of time in dance halls and clubs, especially at parties where *reggaeton*, *chicha* or *cumbia* is played²⁸. Also cinemas, swimming pools and leisure parks are popular hangout spots. These spaces give street children the ability to interact with people from varied social backgrounds.

²⁸ *Reggaeton* is a mix between rap, reggae and dancehall and is characterised by its erotic lyrics and dance style. Most of the songs refer to criminality, sex, gang/street life and love. *Chicha* is a Peruvian type of *cumbia* and associated with the lower uneducated classes of Peru.

In general street children in Lima and Cusco spend several hours per day in cyber cafes, video arcades and pinball rooms. The popularity of internet among street children is a new phenomenon. Especially social network sites such as Hi5, chat programmes like MSN, music videos on YouTube, games and pornographic pictures and movies are popular. Through chatting online children communicate with their friends about where to meet and what to do. Although still unexplored by street educators, using new technology to befriend street children, have personal talks and give them advice and a listening ear seems very useful. During this research, chatting with children through the internet worked as a way of deepening trust between the child and researcher and a considerable amount of valuable information was gathered during chat sessions. Often children open up more easily through internet, their location is easier to trace, i.e. most log in every day around the same time, and they feel freer to ask and answer “shameful questions”, for instance regarding sexual habits and diseases or drugs. Street child interventions should make more use of this modern element that has become part of street life.

Internet also brings some dangers with it. Besides being very addictive (children sometimes spend up to five hours behind the computer) it is an uncontrolled space in which young children have access to pornographic images, or are exposed to the sexual advances of predator adults. Terre des Hommes has identified chat rooms in Peru as potentially dangerous spaces that facilitate child traffickers in their hunt for victims of forced prostitution and labour. Contact is made and confidence is gained with vulnerable children via chat rooms [Terre des Hommes Netherlands 2010].

Chapter 5

Consequences of Living on the Streets

This chapter will present specific problems street-living children face as a result of being on the streets. A special focus will be on those problems mentioned by the children themselves, thus highlighting the issues for which the children need help from institutions and which changes in their situation could improve their quality of life.

Once a street-working child starts to live on the streets permanently, his working conditions worsen and he encounters more hazards like violence, sexual abuse, drug addiction, health problems and social exclusion. Overall, it is not so much the work itself that is hazardous, but the conditions in which the work is done, caused by the lack of a healthy and safe living environment.

Therefore street-living children experience more problems on the street than street-working children living with family/relatives. The quantitative IREWOC survey shows that 90% of the street-living children in Lima and 84% in Cusco experience problems in the streets. Among street-working children these percentages are evidently lower (respectively 79% and 63%). The needs that street-living children express are not so much related to material needs, but more to emotional needs. They feel that society does not accept them as they are and that they are therefore always discriminated against. They miss belonging to a family, of having someone that really cares about them. Furthermore, street children barely mentioned working, or not having a house, as their main problem, but emphasised drug-addiction, lack of education, a lack of positive prospects, discrimination, violence and police, as their main problems on the streets.

5.1 Weak family relationships

As shown in the previous chapter most children attach importance to family. However, interactions with family normally lead to conflict and do not correspond with the children's dreams of how a family should be. Jaimer (14), for example, stated that good parents should not send their children to work on the street. Naomi (12) thinks a good mother should not drink alcohol and beat her children. Lucia (15) says that parents should give love and attention to their children and not go to parties every day. The children often expressed the wish to grow up in a united and peaceful family, but felt this was not an option for them. Many children related street life with loneliness. Like Josue (12), when he talked about his favourite animal: "My favourite animal is a parrot. He gives you company whenever you feel lonely. In the street you always feel lonely, yes, I am really lonely."

Deteriorating family relations is another problem street-living children referred to as a consequence of street life. When talking about family, street children regularly switched between blaming weak family relationships for their need to live on the streets, to blaming their street life for the poor relationships with their families. They mostly told of the horrible things their parents had done, leading to their escape, but occasionally would express their desire for their family's presence and the guilt they felt over leaving home. Lucia (15, Lima):

Since I have been living on the streets, family problems affect me a lot. Since I left home my family lost all their trust in me and that makes me sad. It will never be the same and the problems at home have increased. My family is ashamed of me and my sister; they don't want to know us anymore. They see us as liars. That is what I most regret. It's easy to lose their trust, but difficult to restore it.

Once children have run away from home it becomes difficult for them to restore family relationships. They feel ashamed of their lifestyle, drug use or criminal acts and avoid family contact, even though they simultaneously express the desire for family contact. They are often afraid that family members won't accept them or disapprove of them and that they will be punished for having been away for so long.

Juan (17), for example, didn't dare to visit his parents house in the outskirts of Cusco, because he was still "simply a pan flute player". He often expressed sadness because his family never came to visit him when he was detained in the juvenile prison: "They really don't care about me; even if I was dead they wouldn't cry. The other boys got visits, but I didn't". Children often mentioned having been hurt by their parents and that they missed the love and attention of a family.

Freddy (14):

To feel the love of your family is something beautiful. A mother who shows you her love and that you can ask your father interesting questions. But with my parents I never felt love. They fight a lot and my mother hits her sons. It has always been like that; a lack of understanding.

Also Jeremy (14), abandoned at a young age by his mother, felt hurt because his mother never wanted him. Lisandro (15) despises his parents for never giving him attention: "My parents are like strangers, because they didn't show me their love when I needed it most. Living on the street when you are a boy of 7 or 8 years old is not easy. Those days I needed their warmth, but now it's too late."

Also children that were living in a children's home and rehabilitation centre sometimes identified not having (regular) contact with their parents as the main problem. Especially girls attach a lot of importance to their parent's visits. In a girls home we visited in Lima, the girls were frequently upset, depressed or sad because their parents hadn't come on visiting day or because they had been sanctioned and therefore not allowed to go on a family visit. In the same girls home, during a group discussion about what a perfect day would be, all girls expressed the wish to "be united with the family". Although boys in general are less explicit in talking about family, in informal talks they articulated the desire to be able to return home some day.

5.2 Drugs

One of the factors that exacerbate the children's exclusion from society is their drug addiction. Drugs are therefore unanimously mentioned by street-living children in Lima and Cusco as a problem related to street life. A study of street workers in Lima showed that almost all interviewed street children has or had the wish to kick their drug addiction. 98% said to have considered stopping with drugs during their street life; 86% stated to have stopped drug consumption at least once in their life and 60% has managed to stop for more than a week [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009:57].

Most children are very much aware of the consequences that drug addiction has on their health and future prospects. In a discussion with a group of street boys in Lima they pointed out that drug use, especially *Terokal* and *pasta*, “destroys your lungs”, “makes you crazy”, “makes you forget all what’s important”, “makes you do bad things” and “is a vice you can’t get rid of”. They learned about the negative effects of drugs mostly through street educators or other street children. Many children can name examples of former friends who have died because of drugs. Jherson (17, Cusco):

Terokal made holes in my lungs. For instance, if ever I would like to be a soccer player, I have to get my lungs operated. My lungs hurt a lot and whenever I play soccer I can hardly breathe. After smoking *Terokal* my head hurts. That’s why I want to smoke more and therefore I can’t live without it anymore. My body asks for it. I know that it harms me. After smoking I feel like I am God, but in reality I know that I am nothing.

Besides the negative effects drugs have on someone’s health, children also estimated that drugs were the core cause of bad habits like stealing, fighting, prostituting and being unfriendly to other people. Gustavo (15, Lima):

Since I got addicted I started to steal. Drugs brought me all bad things, because I do everything to get money for my trip. Once I almost killed someone with a knife, just to get his pesos. I felt really stressed because I had no money for a can of *teko* [glue] and I totally freaked out. That’s why I say that drugs are bad. It’s a vice, but I can’t help it.



Photo 10: “This is our *hueco* [hole] where we enter to sniff glue.” (photo and quote by Diego, in Cusco)

Despite their disapproval of drugs, most children are not able to resist its temptation and become addicted quickly. This often amplifies the negative image a child has of her/himself. Some children literally described themselves as “drug addicted losers”. Even children that didn’t use drugs considered the drug use of their friends to be a problem. Jaime (13): “Every time I see Jon smoking

Terokal I start to cry; *Terokal* makes you another person.” Peer pressure, curiosity and hardships of street life play a role in becoming addicted to drugs.

Children often exclaimed that they don’t know how to get rid of their drug addiction. Carlos (16, Cusco): “I have already used *Terokal* since I was 10 years old. I tried so many times to quit and I even went to a rehab, but every time I start again.” Children often referred to the symptoms they felt after drug withdrawal as *dengue*: the physical reaction of a drug addicted body to a sudden stop of consumption. Lucia (15), who lives in a girl’s home in Lima:

Two weeks have passed since I had my last trip and sometimes I feel this *dengue*. I feel that I want to hit someone, scream, do something, and leave to the street again. I feel that I want to do something bad and that makes me nervous. That’s why once started with drugs it seems impossible to get rid of it ever. I am not sure if I will manage.

The fact that the majority of street children sees drug addiction as a big problem and that they are conscious about the negative effects of drugs, shows the importance of adequate programmes for drug rehabilitation. Carlos (16, Cusco): “I like institutions that help us stop using drugs, because doing that alone is a long and lonely road.”

5.3 Violence

Violence is an often mentioned consequence of street life. The vulnerability of street children makes them prone to different kinds of (sexual) exploitation and abuse. Street-living children experience more physical violence than street-working children (20% versus 8% in Lima and 14% versus 6% in Cusco). For the former group, this creates, together with verbal violence (20% in Lima and 26% in Cusco), the most problems on the streets. While street-living children in Lima experience more physical violence, in Cusco more children experience verbal violence.

Most children have big scars on their bodies as a result of violence. They lack the social safety net of a family or neighbourhood, which makes them vulnerable to threats from each other and outsiders. Many children describe fights between themselves and other street-living peers as being very violent and harmful. These fights were mostly the result of being robbed or related to drugs. Although all street children are subject to violence, it is the emotionally and physically weaker who bear the brunt. Jaimer (14, Lima), for instance, a boy with a soft and girlish character, regularly cried in our presence: “The other boys beat me up time and again. I can’t handle it anymore. They always steal my money too. Yes, they always take me as their victim, because they know that I am too cowardly to fight back. I just don’t know how to fight. They think I am a wimp.”

Perpetrators of violence are street gangs, adult junkies, police, other street children or angry victims of the children’s thefts. Especially children that make a living with stealing car parts are often caught by the car owner, resulting in a rough punishment.

Also sexual violence was reported, both by boys and girls. Street girls said to be approached by adult men who whisper sexual things, touch their private parts or even attempt to rape them. This is probably caused by the image in Peruvian society of street girls as prostitutes, even when they are not working as such. Street girls also mentioned being bothered by gang members or street boys, pushing or forcing them to have sex. Several educators in Lima mentioned the habit of street boys to supply street girls with drugs until they are high and almost unconscious, to be able to sexually abuse them.

Street boys are also the victims of gang rapes and sexual abuse, used as a means of expressing power within a street group. Older boys in a group (sexually) abuse younger boys to dominate them. Other explanations for (forced) sexual relations between street children are their search for affection and the fact that many of them have been abused in their early childhood, either at home or on the streets.

Although it's known that street boys encounter sexual violence, i.e. (gang) rapes by other street children or adults, they rarely mentioned it as a problem of street life. However, episodes about sexual violence against street boys were present in the children's life stories. Tom (19, Cusco), an ex-street child:

There is a lot of sexual abuse on the street. The older ones abuse the younger ones. This really ruins your mind. The problem of street life is that they violate you or even kill you. When I was young I always slept under the market stalls at San Pedro. But this market converted into a place for adult homosexuals and transvestites at night. They asked us for our arse and because we were young and needed money - most children said 'okay, *pe*'. One day, while I was sleeping, a homosexual wanted to abuse me too. He was entering when I woke up and I gave him a punch. My friend also woke up and started to hit the guy with a pointed stick. Then I took a knife and cut him. We almost killed that homosexual; he was bleeding all over. We escaped to the Plaza the Armas. Yes, in the street many strange things happen.

Street educators mentioned that the spread of STDs is rampant because of this aspect of street culture.

5.4 Police

When asked who the main perpetrators of violence are on the streets, the majority of street children pointed at police, municipal guards and other security forces (around 42% of all street children in Lima and Cusco). The relation that street children have with police on the streets is obviously confrontational and problematic. Children often complained that the police don't allow them to work, chase after them, detain them, maltreat them, insult them or snatch their money. Street-living children have, in general, more problems with police than street-working children, because of the illicit activities they engage in, their drug-use and their social stigma of theft and delinquency.

Police officers are central figures in the daily lives of street children, because of the regular contact they have with them. Peruvian law prohibits children from vending, begging or sleeping on the street²⁹. However, the police are overly aggressive and oppressive towards the children and their stories are full of angry and fearful stories of police officers that humiliated and harmed them.

²⁹ One of the laws police officers often refer to is Law 28190 *Ley que protege a los menores de edad a la mendicidad*, which is supposed to protect minors from begging on the street. Officially, police officers are allowed to detain any child that is found on the street at night time without parental supervision, that is using drugs or that is begging - the argument is that these are obviously children who have been abandoned and who are in need of help.

Ricardo (12, Cusco):

One day I was doing acrobatics at the traffic intersection and two police officers approached me. “Hey you, *Terokalero!* I’ll teach you a lesson!”, one of them said. So I said that I was just earning a living, but not using *Terokal*. Then he grabbed me and took all my money. They walked away, saying they would be back soon for some more. Well, do you understand now why I don’t like the police? Sometimes they even beat the shit out of us or take us to the *comisaria* [police station].

Street girls claimed to be regularly sexually intimidated by police officers and sometimes even touched sexually or raped. Nina (15, Lima):

The *batida* [police raid] got me and a bunch of police men were pulling me in the car. They called me *puta* [whore] and *perra de mierda* [bitch of shit]. While in the car one of the officers touched between my legs: “let’s see if this whore is still virgin”, he said. “If you don’t sleep with me I’ll call your mother to tell her that you’re a prostitute”. So I said: “you dirty bastard, you’re trying to manipulate me, *concha de tu madre* [motherfucker]”. And he hit me. Pack! And again pack! That’s how police are: dirty dogs who want to abuse us.

Police and street watchmen are not seen as protectors; street children generally talk about them as their biggest enemies and the number one violators against them³⁰.

Besides, police are perceived as very unjust. “They blame street children for everything that gets stolen, although we were not even near the incident”, explained Jan-Carlos (14). “They always blame us, because they know we don’t have family or someone to defend us.” Many children feel that every time something is stolen from a passer-by or in a shop, fingers are pointed at them. Juan (17, Cusco):

I just got released from eight months in a juvenile detention centre. They accused me of stealing a purse, but I haven’t even seen that purse! Later they found the purse in that woman’s home. But still they wouldn’t believe me. What could I do? When you live on the street you don’t have any rights. Nobody cares about you and they rather lock you up.

Because they have a low status in society, no financial means, no family support, and a lack of knowledge about their rights, they are an easy target for police officers to accuse. Also during round-ups of the national police street children are usually picked up. According to police officers they do this to protect ‘abandoned children’ from dangers in the street, and from becoming delinquents; but according to the children their detention is done in the municipal’s interest of cleansing the street of their presence. Street children claimed to have often been detained for things they were not guilty of.

Bribery within the police system is also considered to be a major problem. Sometimes the policemen let the children pay a certain amount of money in exchange for not detaining them. Lucho (14) told how he was approached by police officers who forced him to give them his money:

³⁰ Police interactions with street children were apparently even more violent in the 1990s when street children were regularly shot to death, or murdered in other ways by military or paramilitary groups [Tejada Ripalda 2005:167].

That day I had earned 20 sols with washing and guarding cars, when *los tombos* [the police] interrupted me and took all my money. They don't have the right, but they do it anyway. They told me: "We'll take you to the police station if you don't give your money". So I paid. I didn't want to go to the station. Whatever they ask I would pay for not going there.

David (14) also spoke about encounters with corrupt policemen who had approached him when he was younger to buy them *ceviche* (fish cocktail) or to give them his money. Not only in the street, but also within the police station, there is corruption. Street children complained about having to pay "fines" to be released. If they don't have the money, as is mostly the case, they are sent to the street to earn enough for their release. As Arturo (15) explained, this situation seems contrary, because "first they detain you for stealing a car mirror, and then they say 'bring me 20 sols!', so you have to go and steal again a mirror, because how can you get this money otherwise?"

5.5 Discrimination and self-esteem

As in most places in the world, street children are not perceived positively by society in Lima and Cusco either. They exhibit behaviour that doesn't agree with the general image of the "good child" in society, including the belief that a child should be with his family, should go to school, should not use drugs, should not steal, should not be violent and should not hang around on the streets. Therefore, many street-living children mentioned discrimination as a major problem. Street children in Lima and Cusco are very much aware of their social exclusion and stigma of being, among others, "drug addicts", "thieves", "dirty", "dangerous" and "spoilt". The stigma of street children is reflected in the nicknames they are given in Peruvian society: *ratones* (rats), *pirañas* (piranha) and *fumones* (smokers of drugs). The first two names refer to the way in which street children in large groups rob passers-by, tourists and market vendors. The last name refers to the drug use of street children. Many street children complained about being given these names, because they themselves don't agree with them. While discrimination was barely mentioned by street-working children as a problem, street-living children most definitely experience it. They feel that people are scared of them and perceive them as "little thieves". Jaimer (14, Lima):

We always wait at the exit of Cine Planet. People give us their popcorn and soft drinks. Because we look dirty people get scared, they think we want to rob them. They press their purses onto their bodies when they see us. And if they have a cell phone they keep it firmly in their hands. They don't say a word and give us their popcorn right away, because they are scared that we get close to them. That's why we always wait in front of the Cine Planet.

Prejudices about street children are sometimes used strategically to obtain resources for survival from passers-by. Nevertheless, they find these social prejudices unjust and express a strong wish to be treated just like anyone else in society and to be accepted. Gustavo (15, Lima):

Most of the time people don't want to help me. If I ask them for food they won't give it to me. They say "go to work *piraña*, *fumon!*" That's not fair, because we are not like that. Well, maybe drug addicts we are, but a *piraña* is a thief who assaults people, and I never do that. They just call us these names because we live on the street. But I am also a human being, just like them.

Jherson (17, Cusco):

I don't like it that people look at me as if I were a really nasty person. Because they don't know me, they think I am spoiled and that I want to assault them. Even my own sister says that kind of things to me. She told me "you *piraña*, *Terokalero*". Can you imagine, my own sister!

In general, the older a street child is, the more he or she is, or feels, discriminated against. Young street children are mostly seen as poor victims that have to be helped by society, while adolescent street children are mostly categorised as delinquents and drug addicts. That's one of the reasons, as explained in a previous chapter, that older children care more about a neat appearance and feel more ashamed about street work.

Once a child lands on the streets s/he has to integrate into street culture to be able to survive. To be accepted by a street group and obtain protection and respect from other street children, the child has to adapt to street habits that are despised by society at large, such as poor vocabulary (slang), being tough/violent and using drugs. The more a child internalises these habits, the more excluded and disrespected by society he becomes, the more he is stigmatised and the more he becomes dependant on his social network on the streets. The child's chances to enter the formal labour market or educational system decrease once he enters the process, and slowly he is pushed into delinquency. This again deepens the social stigma of the street child and makes him even more excluded, disrespected and loathed by society.

During conversations the children often pointed out the differences between themselves and other children, estimating that the latter had all and they had nothing. Basically all street children in this research stated that they were being discriminated against by other people, the state, police, other children and society in general. They feel blamed for everything, although they are innocent. The feeling of being excluded by others in society results in a low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. In a survey on street children in Lima more than 60% felt to be "worth nothing as a person" [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009:46]. Hector (15):

I don't love myself, because I do many bad things. I think it would be better if I would go to school. But my brain is already damaged. I take drugs, I have so many vices. Who wants to talk with a boy like me? I didn't study, I have no money. I have never done anything useful in life. I was never loved by someone. For me - my life is worth nothing.

They often reflect on themselves as victims of society, deprived of the possibility to achieve goals in life and escape the street environment.

5.6 Education

Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has a right to education. However, one of the main characteristics of street children is that the majority does not follow any form of schooling. Most of them have gone to school at some point in their lives but dropped out before, or since, they started living on the streets. From the children who don't live with their family only 16% in Lima and 22% in Cusco go to school. Of children working on the streets, but living with their relatives, these percentages are clearly much higher: respectively 77% and 86%. None of the interviewed street-living children had finished secondary education. The result is that

many street children are illiterate or have difficulties with reading and writing. The main reason for not going to school is the lack of mental, emotional and economic support and the fact that most street children have to work full-time to survive. Jherson (17) explained: “Since I left my sister’s house I had to take care of myself, get myself lunch and buy my own clothes. I had to work the whole day, so going to school was not a possibility anymore. I still hope to finish education some day. I think education is important.”

Some children stopped going to school once they were on the streets, but others had already stopped while they were living at home. The parents either had no money to pay for school or preferred their child to work instead of going to school. Street-living children generally come from families in which the educational level is low. Their parents are unlikely to value education and are less able to support their children in their educational progress. If school is fully abandoned this negatively affects future prospects of the child: the child will spend more time working or hanging on the streets and therefore runs a bigger risk of landing on the streets permanently and becoming more excluded from society and the formal labour market.

The majority of street-living children in Lima and Cusco all seemed to agree that school is very important and the only way of “improving in life” and escaping the marginalised situation they are in. They therefore identified the lack of education as a problem of street life. Diego (15, Cusco) dropped out during his first year of secondary school: “I really want to go back to school some day, because what will become of me in five years? I can’t be a shoe shiner my whole life. No, I want to be someone in life, a professional!”

Carmen (14, Cusco), dropped out after she escaped a children’s home the previous year: “Attending school is important, because otherwise we can never get a good and respectable job. Without school we can neither read, nor think properly. If you finish school you can present your papers at a job and they will accept you. Without papers you are nothing.”

Jherson (13, Lima), dropped out in third grade of primary school:

School is important for your future, because every day of your life will be even harder. Someone who didn’t study is not even contracted to wash dishes in a restaurant! Some people can exploit you if you don’t know how to read or write and decide everything for you. Because you don’t know anything about your rights, you will accept all kinds of work. You will do everything because you need to eat and you need a roof above your head. If you are still small, like me, it’s okay to walk around dirty, but if you’re grown up people will look at you and say: “look at this dirty guy”.

Livia (12, Lima), lives in a rehabilitation centre and will start school soon: “I want to finish my education, so I can become someone in life, like an administrator or maybe even president. You never know. School is important because it will make your parents proud of you. I would like to be the first in my family with a real profession.”

However, street-living children are basically excluded from formal education, because of their educational delay. When (or if) they do go back to school, they are mostly enrolled in alternative educational institutes, such as private education or special schools for working children, such as EBA³¹. EBA offers free regular basic education at alternative times, including evenings or weekends.

³¹ Educación Básica Alternativa (EBA) consists of a Programme for Children and Adolescents (PEBANA), a Programme for Youth and Adults (PEBAJA), and a Literacy Programme [Peru Ministerio de Educación 2004] .

People of all ages attend EBA classes, so children study together with adolescents or even adults. This makes it suitable for street children, who generally have severe educational delays, and need to combine work with school. Yet, as many educators in Lima and Cusco stressed, EBA provides low quality education and has few hours of education on offer. Besides, teaching students of all different ages at the same time is basically impossible for teachers because these students have different learning processes and need different levels of attention. This is especially the case with street children who often have violent and combative characters, little patience or perseverance, and a low self-esteem.

In general, street children who attempt to return to school don't manage to stay there longer than a couple of days or weeks. They face many difficulties when going back to school after dropping out and few children manage to study with the help of street child organisations³². The reasons for this low success rate are, among others, a lack of parental (mental, emotional and economic) support, a lack of discipline and structure, group pressure, drug addiction, low self-esteem, shame, discrimination in school, and poor quality education. After living on the streets and becoming adapted to street life, where timetables, strict rules and daily structure are basically absent, it is difficult for street children to keep up with fixed school schedules. This is especially the case if the child still sleeps on the streets, or in unofficial hostels, while trying to attend school. Street children work till late at night or use drugs all night long, so they end up oversleeping, missing school, angering teachers and being suspended.

Peer pressure also plays a role, both negative and positive. For example, the dropout of other street friends at school pressures a child to also stop going to school. Friends motivate the child to do things that are much "cooler" than going to school, like playing football or using drugs. On the other hand, a child can be more motivated to go to school when his friends are also motivated. Often the return to school occurs with a friend. Solidarity and group dependence among street children is high. Fabian (13, Cusco):

I was enrolled in school through the dormitory of Qosqo Maki. In the beginning it was fun. Jaime, Ramon, Juana and Ricardo also started with school. We all got our notebooks and went there together. After one week Jaime and Ramon already stopped, they had other things on their mind, drugs you know. Then Juana got suspended. I am in love with her. I rather joined my friends on the street; the other kids at school were so boring.

The majority of street children agreed with the assumption that it's impossible to do well at school and attend classes when addicted to drugs. Drugs make it, according to them, impossible to pay attention during classes: "you don't care about going to school; you lose all your dreams, because the only thing on your mind is *Terokal* and how to get high."

Other important factors influencing school attendance of street children are their low self-esteem and perceived discrimination at school. Because street children often have a low self-esteem, they think they are not talented or intelligent enough. In general, this is what they have been "taught" their whole lives. Many street children showed signs of fear of failure when talking about school or (vocational) training. Hector (15) had been enrolled in Pro Joven for just one week (a programme that provides training and work placements for disadvantaged youth): "I don't want to go anymore. It's a long time ago that I did something like that and I don't think I am able to do it. I think it's

³² School enrolment and attendance in public schools in Peru is free. However, costs for a uniform and school supplies must be covered by the students themselves.

better not to go, because what will people think if I fail. Maybe I am not going to be able to answer even one of the questions of the exam.”

Moreover, age differences in classes are coupled with feelings of shame and “being different”. Street children have often been out of school for a couple of years and are therefore older than the other children in their class. They feel ashamed for being a street child, having no parental support and being much older than the others. Diego (15):

When I was in fourth grade of primary school with my 15 years, all others in my class were babies, children of 10 years old! My classmates teased me, they said: “you should be in secondary already, what are you doing here?” and they laughed. I almost wanted to kill them! They were very different than me and I wanted to be with boys that are the same, that speak the same, dress the same and have the same problems as me.

The same discrimination children encounter in their daily lives on the street they also experience at school, both from teachers and from classmates. Just like on the street, in school they also have to cope with the stigma of being a street child. In general, teachers in formal schools are seemingly not able to cope with the special situation and history of street children. This can be explained by the lack of knowledge or specialised training. Most qualified teachers don’t have the required social skills to work with children in street situations. Prejudices about the nature of street children (being lazy or criminal) often influence how street children are treated by both their teachers and their classmates. Freddy (14):

I left school because if they know that you are from the street they discriminate you a lot. The teacher always said to me “why don’t you come to classes?”, but I always went to my classes! They will tell you bad things because they know that you don’t have parents to protect you. One teacher even called me *Terokalero!* They don’t say that to other children; I was the only one being discriminated.

Ricardo (12) added:

I don’t want to go to school anymore because everybody there looks at you as if you are a criminal. If something was missing, like a cell phone, they pointed immediately at me. That’s why I got discouraged to continue with school. Nobody trusts you because of your history; that’s what makes it hard to make up a delay at school.

Moreover, basic education in Peru is generally of poor quality. Salaries of teachers in Peru are extremely low, and therefore their performances at school are often unsatisfactory. Teachers often have more than one job just to make ends meet and are held responsible for overcrowded classes. In general they don’t have time to give special attention to problematic children. Many children complained about boring homework, overcrowded classes, insecurity, authoritarian teaching methods, teacher absences and corporal punishment in school. Several children mentioned regular beatings by classmates or even teachers because of being a street child. Although obviously not all school teachers are bad people or educators, many street children associate school with negative feelings and oppression. Julio (17, Cusco):

Education is really bad in public school. Teachers don’t show up, yes, it’s a total failure. Although public school is free, it’s not motivating to go. Homework consists only of copying things, so boring. Teachers are bad too; they often punish me with their belt, even if I didn’t

do anything. Private school is better. At least they arrange a substitute teacher if someone is sick. However, private school is expensive and organisations can't pay for this.

Often street children are reinserted into school without proper preparation or specialised guidance. Teachers in general don't take into account the (educational) delays of street children, developed through an unsatisfactory upbringing and neurological brain damage from drug-use. Many street children feel misunderstood at school and become frustrated because of difficulties in keeping up with the other children.

A social worker in Lima stated that traumatic experiences in the past, like abuses and maltreatment at home, violence in the street and prostitution, also make it difficult for a street child to concentrate on school and homework:

I often see that schools and organisations working with street children don't take into account that the child should first process his trauma, before he can concentrate on other things. The child for example has first to accept the family break-up he experienced or the fact that he was abandoned by his mother, before there's space for new information in his head. Reintegration in school should thus always be coupled with adequate psychological assistance for the child.

Problems at school coupled with the lack of psychological support and a feeling that "nobody cares" make it almost impossible for a street child to continue with school. Organisations working with street children should therefore pay more attention to the proper preparation of a street child for reintegration into school, and more intensive tutorial support outside school.

5.7 Lack of birth certificate and identity card

Article 7 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child should be registered immediately after birth and has the right to an identity. Nevertheless, the majority of street-living children have no birth certificate or identity card, or *Documento Nacional de Identidad* (DNI). Many poor parents in Peru don't register their newborn children and are sometimes not even registered themselves. In the whole of Peru an estimated 300.000 children under 17 years have no birth certificate, of which 63.000 live in Lima Metropolitana [World Bank 2009]. In Cusco 5% of the children below 5 are unregistered [UNICEF 2007]. Reasons for parents not to register their children are various, i.e. a lack of knowledge, high costs involved in transportation and registration, large distances to registration offices (RENIEC), or distrust regarding the government.

Although street children didn't specify the lack of identity papers as a main problem, many of the problems of street life are related to this. The lack of a birth certificate brings along many disadvantages, such as no access to the government's social programmes, education, free healthcare and the formal labour market. Schools don't accept children without a birth certificate and without an ID it's basically impossible to get out of the informal labour market. An ID can only be obtained with a birth certificate.

For children who have lost almost all contact with their parents or for children whose parents lack identification it's difficult to get registered at RENIEC and get a birth certificate. Sometimes children don't know their exact birth date or even family name. If the parents are not documented this has to be done first before the child can be registered. If this is not possible, the help of a judge is needed and a complicated, time consuming and expensive procedure has to be followed.

For this reason many street children stay undocumented and are bound to a life of illegality and marginalisation.

5.8 Poor health

The majority of street children in Lima and Cusco suffer from health problems related to environmental pollution, drug consumption, poverty, the cold and promiscuity. Health workers and street educators list respiratory problems, such as bronchitis and tuberculosis, skin infections, malnutrition, diarrhoea, structural injuries, bad teeth and psychological defects as the most frequent health problems of street children. A lack of hygiene in daily street life causes parasites and skin problems. Children mostly have no basic sanitary facilities, and sleep in humid, filthy and cramped illegal hostels or abandoned buildings, surrounded by drug waste, rubbish and excrement. Children who sleep out in the open have particular problems caused by the cold, such as backaches and chest infections. Children sleeping in muggy and polluted spaces without ventilation are especially vulnerable for tuberculosis, skin diseases and infections.

Malnutrition and diarrhoea are the result of a poor diet and the cheap fast-food or waste-food street children eat. Injuries from fights, traffic accidents and violence on the street are also common. Children often have open wounds on their bodies after fighting with other street kids, the police or theft victims. These wounds easily become infected in the street environment. Continuous drug consumption, especially the sniffing of *Terokal*, often results in respiratory problems, chest infections, stomach aches, low resistance and psychological problems such as schizophrenia, anxiety, depression and even psychosis. An active sexual life, prostitution and sexual abuse lead to a high number of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV/AIDS.



Photo 11: “This is HonKon [in Lima], an illegal hostel where we pay 3 sols a night. I sleep there sometimes.” (photo and quote by Antonio)

When asked what children do if they have health problems, the most common answer was “just endure”. Access to government health services is mostly denied to street children, because minors must be accompanied by a parent with an identity card. Besides, as stated by a health worker in Lima, “they are refused because they look dirty, are unregistered, have no money and are regarded as potential trouble”. Also HIV tests on minors are not allowed without parental consent, resulting in a rapid spread of HIV among street youths. Street children are completely dependent on the good will of private doctors and street child organisations for any form of healthcare.

Thus, street children in Peru are excluded from the right, stated in article 24 of the CRC, to the highest attainable standard of health and facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. The Peruvian state fails to ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and healthcare to street children, because it doesn't reckon with the specific characteristics of this group of children, i.e. the absence of parents and identity documents. This stresses the need for non-governmental organisations to provide healthcare to street children, either on the street or at a clinic/centre. Knowledge about health is often poor among street children and therefore informal health education programmes are of great importance.

5.9 Dreams and Wishes

When questioned about their future, most street-living children expressed the wish to not live and work on the streets their whole life. They all desired change and wished to “become someone” in life and have a better working place. An example is Carlos (16), who dreams of starting his own business:

I hope to open a supermarket in the future, that I would call “SuperCarlos”. All the people will respect me for what I have acquired in life. I want to be my own boss, so that I can earn a lot of money and command my employees. I definitely don't want to be a shoe shiner my whole life.

Also Jeremy (15) dreams of having a respected position in the future. For that he wants to become a famous football player “and to have a good family, a piece of land, a house and a car, and all the things that I have never had”. The dream of becoming a famous football player or musician was often expressed by street children in Lima and Cusco. This way the low and shameful status of a street musician would turn into the respectful and proud status of a professional musician. In Cusco a popular job for street children to long for was being a tourist guide.

Besides a respected status and a good job, many children also expressed the wish to improve their family relations and reunite with their families. Naomi (12): “My dream is to go back to my family and to be a better person. My perfect day would be with my mother, father and brothers”. Like Naomi, many children want to change their personality or behaviour in the future and to become a “better person”, which would involve having better family relationships. One of them is Lena (14), a street girl in Lima: “I would like to change my behaviour first and learn how to respect my family. I want to learn how to forget the street and drugs. In the future I will change and quit my drug use. I want my family to be proud of me. I want to change to be able to live at home.”

These statements reflect the discomfort that most street children have regarding aspects of their current lives. Moreover, the majority of children hope for a better kind of life for their own children in the future; a life far away from the streets, without humiliating work and drugs.

The quantitative survey shows that the most immediate wishes of street-living children are similar to the wishes of street-working children. The three most frequently given answers to the question of how to improve their lives, were education, more money and better family relations. Education refers to all types and levels including basic, higher or further education. Through a professional career, they argued, they would be able to get a good job and get out of poverty. More money would either enable them to work less, or would solve all other problems. Other mentioned wishes were among others: “being with family”, “having a proper house”, “being someone in life”, “more or better friends” and “a stable job for their parents”.

Contrary to the general opinion society has of street children, street children’s wishes for the future are basically the same as the ones valued by society in general: having a family, having a formal job, finishing education, having a home, not using drugs, being respected and treated like everyone else. All the children hope to someday acquire a status respected by society, although most of the children admit to making poor day-to-day decisions, which contradict these dreams, i.e. taking drugs or not going to school.



Photo 12: “My dream is to be re-united with my family.” (drawing and quote by Lucy)

Chapter 6

Comparisons and Contrasts with Street-working Children

As was argued before, there is a direct and strong relation between street-working and street-living children; the line separating these groups is extremely vague. Many street-living children started their “street career” as street-working children. They share the same physical environment and therefore also many of the risks of this environment. This chapter will look into the characteristics, reasons and encountered problems and hazards of street-working children in Lima and Cusco and compare them with the ones that street-living children identified.

6.1 Characteristics of street-working children

Unlike street-living children, street-working children are mainly on the streets for income generating reasons and they are less involved in illicit activities like stealing, prostitution and drug trading. Street-working children in that way distinguish themselves clearly from the street-living children, who they often call *rateros*, *pirañas* or *maleados* (troublemakers). They often argue that the main difference between them is that street-living children are involved in illicit activities, swear, beg, take drugs and drink alcohol, harass girls, are violent, are out of school etc., while they themselves are just on the streets for “good reasons”, like helping their parents or earning money to pay their school fees. In general they sell more valuable products than the street-living children and especially in Cusco their economic activities are mainly related to tourism: vending handmade souvenirs, postcards, finger puppets and paintings. Younger children often sell more low-value products, like chewing gum.

The different locations where street-working children can be found in Lima and Cusco are similar to the ones street-living children hang around and relate to the type of activity. Children selling handicrafts and souvenirs, or shoe shiners and postcard sellers, are normally found in the tourist and historic centres of the cities. Other popular places are commercial areas and entertainment centres, such as markets, shopping streets and areas with a high density of restaurants and bars catering for Peruvians. Big traffic intersections attract children that make a living with washing windcreens and acrobatic performances in front of traffic lights. Children who play music and ambulant candy sellers hang around bus stops and bus stations, where they jump from one bus to the other.

While street-living children generally spend up to 24 hours on the street every day, the majority of street-working children spend between 4 and 9 hours on the street. There is also a group of children that migrate by themselves from rural areas to the cities during weekends and school holidays to add to the family income. Therefore, during school holidays and weekends many more children can be seen working on the streets of Lima and Cusco. For example, Aurora (9) travels five hours by bus every weekend, with her younger brothers and sisters, from a small Quechua village to Cusco to sell *tostaditas* (dried seeds) on the pavements. Like Aurora, many of these children don’t speak Spanish well, often don’t know the city and lack a social network in the city. Therefore they are a highly vulnerable group for abuses by passers-by, street gangs and street-living children. They also run the

risk to be negatively influenced by street-living children or end up staying alone in the city, especially if conditions at home are not good.

One of the main differences between street-working and street-living children is family relations. Street-working children generally maintain close ties with adult family members and live at home. The majority (74%) of street-working children in Lima and Cusco claim to see their relatives every day. It is either the entire nuclear family or the mother that children see the most. The fact that these children live at home distinguishes them from street-living children: street-working children generally live in a socially acceptable manner. When asked in which place street-working children prefer to be, most children mentioned their parent's house (34% in Lima and 26% in Cusco), the street (32% in Lima and 29% in Cusco) and their school (25% in Lima and 37% in Cusco). Very few street-living children mentioned their parent's house or school as their favourite places, due to the family problems they have experienced there in the past.

Unlike street-living children, street-working children are generally strongly influenced by their parents, who mainly control their economic activities. Street-working children chiefly work to contribute to the household economy and therefore they hand over most of their money to their relatives (44% of street-working children in Lima and 53% in Cusco). However, the majority keeps a part of their earnings for themselves to buy personal articles.

It's mostly the parents of street-working children who decide on times, places and methods of working. However, the majority of the street-working children and adolescents in Lima and Cusco, almost 40%, are alone on the streets while they are working. Around one third spend their time on the streets with an adult relative, mostly a father or mother, and an almost equal number are on the streets with friends or minor relatives. Although it is not always visible to outsiders, most young girls and boys (5 to 9 years old) perform their activities on the streets under supervision or accompaniment of adult relatives. Parents, in particular, coordinate the activity of the children and keep an eye on the children's safety and wellbeing from a distance.

Rosada, a mother of three street-working children, admits that street work involves several dangers and that therefore her presence is necessary: "I don't want my children to get in contact with bad children who steal and use drugs, the *pirañas*; I am afraid that my children will start to copy their behaviour". Both boys and girls spend increasing lengths of time alone as they grow older. With age, girls start to spend less time with friends on the street, while boys increase their time with friends and decrease their time with adults or relatives.

Unlike street-living children, most street-working children ask adult relatives for help when they have a problem, or else friends and minor relatives. This shows that street-working children have a stronger social support network of family and friends they can rely on than street-living children.

6.2 Reasons for working

The children were asked about their involvement in street work; the three most common answers were: because one of the parents told the child to do so (29% in Lima and 43% in Cusco), because the child has to earn money for his or her basic needs (37% in Lima and 31% in Cusco), or because the child wants or needs to help his or her family (15% in Lima and 20% in Cusco). The difference between 'want to' and 'need to' help was difficult to define: children wanted to help because it was necessary. This answer in fact overlaps with the first two answers; a child could often not remember if parents had instructed him, if he decided himself, or if it was simply necessary to

provide for basic needs. Reasons for working are mostly a combination of the parents asking children to help and the child's feeling of responsibility for the family.

Because parents often have insufficient resources to meet household needs for food and services such as healthcare and education, they will make use of their children. Parents send them to the streets to work, for example selling goods or washing windscreens, mostly for long hours. Not being able to sustain the household with the parental income can have various reasons, as Ensing [2008:54] shows: "... lack of (well paid) employment for the parent(s), single parent families as a result of divorce, disease or death, a large number of children per household, high costs for basic services such as healthcare or education, and poor management of family money due to alcoholism or other problems."³³

In addition, policy measures that prohibit informal street vending in Lima and Cusco increase the economic pressure on already poor and vulnerable families. Especially single mothers, who earn their living as ambulant street vendors, have a hard time after merchandise seizure to find other means of income generation to maintain their family. For most women merchandise seizure implies starting all over again, with the possible consequence of feeling 'forced' to make instrumental use of their children. For example, Mary, a single mother of six children, ranging from 3 years to 15 years old and living in Cusco, commented:

I used to work as an ambulant vendor of underwear around the San Pedro market, but these 'monkeys' [police] were always harassing me. They are corrupt. Several times they took away my merchandise. They say that I am not allowed to sell on the street but how can I pay a fixed market stall? I was working in the street to feed my children!

Her son Michael (7), who washes windscreens with his 3 brothers and sister at a big traffic intersection every day, continued his mother's story:

Because they [the police] didn't let our mother do her work, we have to help her. There was no money left to buy us food or to pay my tuition fee, so we said "Mama, we will help you. You have to take a rest, because you are very tired". Sometimes there is no food and we have to enter the restaurants to beg for food. When did we start working? One month ago, after the last time mother lost her stock of underwear.

Mary explained that her children run fewer risks of being caught by the police, because they run faster and don't have valuable merchandise to lose. This example shows how policy measures can have unexpected and unintentional results. Instead of solving the problem of the presence of street vendors, the problems become worse by forcing adult vendors to send their children out to work, instead of working themselves. Children are more accepted in low informal street jobs than adults, making them less vulnerable to merchandise seizure.

Besides economic factors, the reasons for children to work are also often related to existing Andean traditional norms that see child work as part of children's socialisation process. For instance, various mothers and fathers of working children justified their children's work as a way for their children to learn how to be independent and responsible. They argued that helping with income generation teaches the children useful skills in life and makes them value their belongings. Nora, a single mother of five, who all work as street vendors on the main square in Cusco, commented:

³³ See the IREWOC report on working children in Lima for other factors relating to the involvement of children in economic activities [Ensing 2008:54-65].

“Look, I am a single mother; what will they do if I die tomorrow? My children have to know how to earn their own money and how to survive. So it’s necessary that they learn how to use their hands and be independent.”

Moreover, some children migrate from the countryside to the cities to work because of chronic impoverishment and a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas. They end up with other relatives or alone in the city.

Low-quality or inaccessible educational services in the countryside and in poor neighbourhoods in the cities also play a role. The lack of educational services in the country side results in children’s migration to urban areas, where they have to work to make a living. Also high costs of further education and/or school supplies force children to work outside school hours.



Photo 13: Young girl from the countryside selling *tostaditas* in Cusco.

A lack of safety and child care in the cities’ outskirts drives mothers to taking their children along to their workplaces on the street. Rosada, a mother of three young children helping her on the market, commented: “I prefer to take my children with me so I can keep an eye on them. In San Juan de Lurigancho [outskirt of Lima] you never know what will happen, there are many gangs. I am afraid my children will join the gangs or they will fight with them. If they are with me, they are safe.”

Concluding we can say that most of these children work for a combination of economic, social, educational, cultural and political reasons.

6.3 Consequences of street work

As a consequence of street work, many of the children reported deteriorating educational progress. Having to work long hours on the streets is not only exhausting, but also has negative influences on school performance [Ensing 2008]. Work reduces the number of hours at school or the time spent on completing homework, which can result in a definite school dropout. However, compared to street-living children school attendance of street-working children is relatively high. There is a clear link between school enrollment and living together with parents or other adult relatives; family ties seem to have a positive influence on school enrolment and attendance. While street-living children are characterised by a lack of education, the great majority of the street-working children in Lima is enrolled in school or finished their education: 77% in Lima and 86% in Cusco of the street-working children who live with their family goes to school. The remaining children have never been to school or they dropped out. When asked why they dropped out of school, 29% in Lima and 26% in Cusco argued that they had to work during school hours. Other reasons mentioned for not attending school included not having enough money to pay for education (26% in Lima, 31% in Cusco) and not liking school (27% in Lima, 23% in Cusco). Minor reasons that were mentioned for non-enrolment are a lack of practical information about education, for example, because of migration; the idea that school isn't that useful or the idea that the child is not talented enough for school; (mental) health problems, lack of documents, expulsion or having family problems.

The differences between boys and girls are many: more girls than boys are enrolled in education (69% versus 52%); more boys than girls drop out (41% versus 22%); and more girls than boys have finished their education (8% versus 5%).

Working children who attend school either work in the weekends or work outside school hours. They, however, run a great risk of dropping out, because the work is tiring and less time and energy can be spent on homework, which results in poor performances at school. Many street-working children have an educational level below the level that corresponds with their age. Like street-living children, street-working children often come from families in which the general educational level is low and parents are unlikely to value education. Besides, once a child becomes accustomed to earning money s/he is likely to spend increasingly longer hours on the streets and the motivation to do well at school is drastically reduced. If school is fully abandoned this negatively affects future prospects of the child: the child will spend more time working or hanging on the streets and therefore has a bigger change of staying on the streets permanently.

Like school attendance, drug use is also related to family ties. While most street-living children identified drug addiction as a major problem in their lives, just a relatively small number of the street-working children has ever used any drugs (16% in Lima and 5% in Cusco).

In general more street-working children claimed to not perceive any problems on the street than street-living children (21% of street-working children compared to 10% of street-living children in Lima; 37% of street-working children, compared to 16% of street-working children in Cusco). However, still a large percentage of street-working children does encounter problems on the streets. Most hazards that children encounter during their street work are related to the location. A considerable number of street-working children expressed feeling unsafe on the streets (44% in Lima and 32% in Cusco). In Lima the areas in which most children felt unsafe were found in both the conurbation of Lima and in the Conos. Specifically, the area around plaza Grau in Lima centre, Gamarra shopping area, and La Parada market in the La Victoria area of Lima, Pro in Comas (Cono Norte), Puente nuevo (Cono Norte), Ovalo de Santa Anita and the Mercado Ceres (both in Ate-

Vitarte, Cono Este) and Ciudad de Dios in San Juan de Miraflores (Cono Sur). Overall, street-working children feel safer in the conurbation of Lima than in the outskirts of town. In Cusco the historic centre was considered to be the most unsafe neighbourhood. This is remarkable since this is also the area with most security forces. On the other hand, this could also be the actual reason for feeling unsafe: 40% of the street-working children in Cusco consider police to form the major problem on the street.

Generally, boys feel safer on the streets than girls. In Lima, feelings of safety decrease as children get older. This might be related to the fact that older children are less frequently accompanied by adult relatives, but also perhaps because older children are treated as adults, considerably harsher and more unforgiving than ways in which younger children are approached. Generally, children who work with (one of) their parents on the street, claim to feel safer and happier, especially if the parent has a registered selling place on the street.

The most mentioned dangers relate to their working environment: the traffic and traffic accidents, pollution, violent passers-by and drunken men, verbal and physical violence, gang members, thieves and drug users. In Cusco many street-working children who work at night mentioned the cold as a major problem. They often lack warm clothing, but stay on the street overnight. Fewer street-working children than street-living children experience discrimination as a major problem on the street. This might be explained by the fact that children working on the streets are more socially accepted and tolerated than children living on the streets. Whilst street-living children are seen as an exception, street-working children are on the whole perceived as the norm in Peruvian society. Some street-working children nevertheless complained about how some passers-by consider them to be the “same” as the “bad *pirañas*”, the street-living children, although they differentiate themselves quite deliberately. Lisa (14): “I feel really sad if they call me *piraña*; they are the bad children, while we are good”. Moreover, many street-working children complain about the fact that the police don’t let them work in the street. Jeronimo (12), a porter on the La Parada market in Lima, complained: “They don’t let us work, because we are children; that’s not fair!”

Health problems, not being able to work and delinquency, especially by youth gangs, are problems more often mentioned by street-working children, while street-living children experience more physical violence than street-working children (17% of the street-living children compared to only 7% of the street-working children). Similar to street-living children, the majority of street-working children accuse police and security forces as the main disturbers on the streets. More girls than boys experience sexual intimidation on the streets, while more boys experience physical violence and health problems and tiredness, mainly related to heavy jobs. The majority of street-working children claim to be aware of the dangers on the street, like drug using street children, gang members and passers-by. Carla (9), who sells handmade hats on the Plaza de Armas in Cusco at night, commented:

Yes, working on the street is dangerous. I know some girls who have been raped by tourists. And it also happened sometimes to me and my sister. We always go to that dark alley to pee and it happens sometimes that some of the boys that hang around here follow us and ask us to be with them. But I always run away if I see them.

Thus, although most activities carried out by street-working children are seemingly harmless and relatively easy, the working conditions in which these activities are performed put the wellbeing, health and morals of the children at risk.

Moreover, children who work on the streets run the risk of going off-track and becoming involved in even more hazardous and unacceptable forms of child labour, namely in unconditionally hazardous forms of child labour such as prostitution and drug trafficking. Street work in a malicious and violent street environment, especially if parental supervision is lacking, can damage the socialisation process of young children to such an extent that street work can result in a permanent stay on the streets and even worse working conditions.

Once a street-working child starts to live on the streets permanently, his working conditions worsen and he will encounter more hazards such as violence, sexual abuse, drug addiction, health problems, social exclusion and the lack of education. Overall, it is not so much the work itself that is hazardous, but the conditions in which the work is done, caused by the lack of a healthy and safe working and living environment.

Chapter 7

Current Street Child Interventions and Policies

This chapter will outline different intervention programmes for street-living children in Lima and Cusco. First, the role of the national and local government in protecting children will be discussed, including the legal framework of child protection in Peru. Then the police's attitude towards street children and their attempts to 'remove' them from the streets will be described, before turning to a discussion on the services of non-governmental and welfare organisations that aim to improve the situation of street-living children. Particularly the positive and negative effects of their interventions on street-living children will be examined.

7.1 Child protection and legal framework for (street) children in Peru

In the beginning of the 20th century the Peruvian state started to address the problem of unprotected children. Basically, the child was seen as immature and possibly 'dangerous' if not controlled by either his parents or society. The idea prevailed that abandoned children were "distorted" children that had to be re-socialised in closed institutions. In 1924 a law was established, The Penal Code 4868, which stated that children at risk younger than 13 years had to be housed with a new reliable family and that delinquent adolescents between 13 and 18 year had to be corrected in closed detention centres. One of the oldest institutions of this kind, founded in 1896 in Lima, is the girls' home *Hermelinda Carrera*, dedicated to girls that had been morally and emotionally abandoned. These days the rehabilitation centre *Hermelinda* still plays a prominent role in the lives of Lima's street girls. Later several more youth prisons came into being, like the *Escuela Correccional de Menores* in 1902 and the *Centro Juvenil de Maranga* in 1969. Many of Lima's street boys now pass through the latter, after sentencing by the juvenile court magistrate³⁴.

Due to Peru's long history of economic struggle and the country's armed struggle till the beginning of the 1990s, government attention for disadvantaged and poor children has been very weak. Lourdes Ferbes, of the child right's organisation *Acción por los Niños*, reported in the newspaper *El Comercio* that the Peruvian government has done little for the protection of the Peruvian childhood [El Comercio 2009]. For this reason a wide range of non-governmental and religious organisations were initiated, starting in the 1970s, to fill in the gaps of state intervention [Castro Morales 2006:176]. According to Martin Milla, a street educator in Lima, the government has to pay more attention to the prevention of street migration by, for example, providing information to poor families about the risks of child work and by working closely together with neighbourhood organisations, such as local soup kitchens, which can monitor signs of street migration. Many NGOs and street workers try to achieve more support for street children on a government level, but, according to a social worker in Lima first a mentality change of the authorities is needed.

³⁴ Interview with Jorge García Escobar, professor of child right studies at the San Marcos University in Lima, November 2nd 2009.

Anahí Camero, a social worker at Lima Kids:

They have to understand that the wellbeing of these children is important and that they have rights as well. First they have to take an interest in the characteristics and living circumstances of street children, not just seeing them as criminals. They have to understand why these children are on the street, before they will budget for street child interventions. Even in the National Action Plan on Children and Adolescents (PNAIA)³⁵, not a single word is said about street children. They are merely excluded from interventions aiming at poor or working children, because they don't match characteristics. They, for example, are not allowed to enter a public hospital, because they are not accompanied by parents with a DNI.

Although several national and international laws and conventions exist in Peru to protect children and adolescents, not much attention is paid to the specific situation of street children. One of the most important international agreements is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; a component of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights [United Nations 1989]), that was signed by Peru in 1990. Article 32 deals specifically with child labour: "States Parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development." Besides, the CRC states that, among others:

- Every child should be protected against "all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status" (article 2).
- State interventions for children should be in "the best interests of the child" and States Parties should take measures to "ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being" (article 3).
- "A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment ... shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State" (article 20).
- Every child should have access to healthcare (article 24) [United Nations 1989].

In 2002, Peru signed Convention 138 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)³⁶, which obligates member states to "pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to progressively raise the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons". Of particular relevance to Peru is that "The minimum age specified in pursuance of paragraph 1 of this Article shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years" [ILO 1973].

Another agreement signed in 2002 is ILO Convention 182³⁷, which focuses on the worst forms of child labour. Members are obligated to "take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition

³⁵ In 2002 the Ministry of Women and Social Development (MIMDES) started an eight-year plan, called PNAIA, to improve the lives of children and adolescents in Peru. However, the plan proposes no concrete interventions for street children, and mainly focusses on children at risk and working children [PNAIA 2002 - 2010].

³⁶ The Peruvian parliament approved ILO C138 in 2001 and ratified it on November 13th 2002; <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/ratifcs.pl?Perú>

³⁷ The Peruvian parliament approved ILO C182 in 2001 and ratified it on January 2nd 2002; <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/ratifcs.pl?Perú>

and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency”. The worst forms of child labour include:

- All forms of slavery or similar practices;
- The use of children for prostitution or pornography;
- The use of children for illicit activities;
- Work that is by its nature or its circumstances likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children [ILO 1999a].

As was shown in the previous chapters, the informal jobs that children in this research carry out on the city’s streets are concerned with the last mentioned work on the list. It remains unclear however under what criteria the ILO considers work to be harmful to the children’s health, safety and morals [Lieten 2006]. More specifically, hazardous forms of child labour, as defined in Recommendation 190, is work that, among others, exposes children to all forms of abuses, work carried out in dangerous locations and in an unhealthy environment [ILO 1999b]. Children who work on the streets run the risk of going off-track and becoming involved in more hazardous and unacceptable forms of child labour, namely in unconditionally hazardous forms of child labour such as prostitution and drug trafficking.

To protect children from illegal, hazardous or dangerous forms of child labour, the Peruvian state has designed various national laws concerning children. Several forms of national legislation can be identified to protect children. To regulate the work of minors the Political Constitution of Peru declares that the state has to protect “especially children, mothers and handicapped persons that work”, article 23 [CPETI & MTPE 2005:22]. The 1991 Penal Code, another legal instrument at the national level, states in article 128 that a caregiver will be sanctioned with imprisonment when he/she exposes the life or health of the person under his/her authority to any dangers [CPETI & MTPE 2005:30-31]. In 2003 a national action plan was created towards the progressive eradication of child labour, called National Plan of Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour, coordinated by the National Directive Committee for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour (CPETI) [CPETI & MTPE 2005].

Moreover, the Code of Children and Adolescents of 1993 establishes a set of norms to ensure the wellbeing of children, especially working children. Children between 12 and 14 are allowed to work for 4 hours a day, during the daytime, with a maximum of 24 hours a week. However, the work should not be harmful to the child’s health or development, it shouldn’t interfere with his or her school attendance and the child must be able to participate in formation or orientation programmes” [Nuevo Código de los Niños y Adolescentes 2000 Art. 51]. Youngsters between 15 and 16 may not work in excess of 6 hours a day and 36 hours a week. Article 57 states that during night time (19:00-7:00), boys and girls between 15 and 18 years old may work, but only with a judge’s authorisation, and for a maximum of 4 hours a day³⁸.

Of importance to street children are especially the civil rights that are specified in the Code, such as the right to freedom, the right to an identity, the right to birth registration, the right to live in a healthy environment, the right to grow up in an adequate familial environment, and so forth [Nuevo Código de los Niños y Adolescentes 2000 Art. 1-13]. Also cultural and socio-economic rights are

³⁸ As the only country in Latin America, Peru legally recognises the adolescents’ right to work in article 22 of its Code. This implies that if the adolescent is officially employed, he or she has the right to receive social security, such as healthcare, and the same salary as older workers, from his or her employer [Nuevo Código de los Niños y Adolescentes 2000 Art. 56-64].

defined, such as the right to culture, education, recreation and sports and the right to adequate healthcare. Working children are allowed special hours of education [Nuevo Código de los Niños y Adolescentes 2000 Art. 14-22].

Article 40 is one of the few that exclusively addresses street-working and street-living children. It states that children working on the street should participate in specialised programmes that reassure their educative, psychological and physical development. Similarly, children living on the streets have the right to participate in welfare programmes aiming to eradicate the need to beg and reassure the child's educational, psychological and physical development. The Ministry of Women and Social Development (MIMDES) is held responsible for the coordination and carrying out of these programmes. In reality, however, besides coordinating an official register of private and non-governmental street child shelters, MIMDES doesn't do a lot for street children.

The once successful street educator programme, initiated in 1993 by MIMDES, with about 300 street educators all over Peru, has been dramatically reduced since 2005. The goal of the programme, coordinated by INABIF³⁹, was to assist street-working and street-living children at the national level and to mediate between them and institutions. Nowadays the number of street educators has been reduced to 25 and they only attend to working children in the conos of Lima. INABIF also manages various children's homes all over Peru. These shelters, however, don't accept children who have been living on the streets, but focus primarily on children at risk and working children.

Chapter IX of the Code refers to abandoned children, including most street-living children. It specifies the task of state or local authorities to house abandoned children with their family, a substitute family or a social protection centre. Within the category of abandoned children fall children who are maltreated, given or sent away, emotionally and morally deprived and/or exploited by caregivers. Also children in a total state of "helplessness" are considered abandoned [Nuevo Código de los Niños y Adolescentes 2000 Art. 243-248].

The 2004 Begging Bill⁴⁰ (Law 28190) states that children begging on the street should be removed by the police and brought to the police juvenile custody centre, called *preventivo* in Lima and *Comisaría de la Familia* in Cusco. From the centre contact with the family of the child is sought and if possible the child will be returned to his/her parents or placed in a children's home by a juvenile judge. Although this law aims to protect children from begging and possible exploitation by caregivers or third persons, many street child educators are sceptic about it. According to them the law is "misused" by police officers and authorities to remove street children from the streets and lock them up, as part of their policy of "social cleansing".

In 1993 the government adopted a law on protection of children against domestic violence (Law 26260) and in 1999 a law criminalising sexual violence (Law 27055). Corporal punishment, however, is still not explicitly prohibited and is therefore widely practiced as an acceptable means of discipline in juvenile detention centres, the family and schools [Save the Children Sweden 2009:29].

The Defensorías Municipales de Niños y Adolescentes (DEMUNA), or Ombudsman, is a social service at state level that defends children's rights and denounces crimes committed against children; it falls under control of MIMDES. DEMUNA is obliged to prosecute the violators of children's rights and see to it that the corresponding state organisations fulfil their responsibility to protect children. However, street children seem to not be reached by this service. One of the DEMUNA employees in

³⁹ Programma Integral Nacional para el Bienestar Familiar

⁴⁰ In Spanish: *Ley que Protege a los Menores de Edad de la Mendicidad*.

Cusco told us: “Street children rarely report abuses, because of fear of being transferred to the police station or to a children’s home for abandonment”. To make children generally more aware of their rights, DEMUNA employees visit schools, parks and squares regularly to inform (working) children. Again, street children seem not to be reached with this “rights campaign”, because none of the children we had spoken to had ever heard of it. The places where street children can be found, on the outskirts of the city, were probably not visited. It is very important though that education about child rights also reaches street children, as they are one of the most vulnerable victims of violence, abuse and (sexual) exploitation. As Van den Berge [2007] shows, knowledge of their rights will improve the resilience of children, giving them confidence to stand up to abusive employers, police officers and customers.

Another institution implemented to ensure legal protection of children is the Public Provincial Prosecutor of Family Affairs. If a (street) child, or organisation working with children, reports a violation of a child’s right the Prosecutor is entitled to take legal proceedings against this person. Nevertheless, according to attorney Sarah Rivera in Cusco, the problem is that most street children are not aware of their rights, so accusations are rare. Because of their exclusion from mainstream society, “invisibility”, lack of education and distrust in state-institutions, they are unlikely to report a right’s violation.

Many more programmes exist to protect working or poor children’s wellbeing. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MININTER) coordinates “Colibri”, an initiative carried out by the police focussed on working children on a national scale. In Cusco, however, the Colibri centre was closed down a couple of years ago because of poor governance, and supposed maltreatment and child abuse. The Ministry of Employment initiated “Projoven”, a programme that facilitates the entrance into the labour market for adolescents with limited possibilities. In the words of Thomas de Benitez [Thomas de Benitez 2003], Projoven is a good example of a broad-based initiative that includes street children in theory and in planning, but excludes them in practice. Broad-based programmes aim at “poor youth” in general, and are likely to find street-based children too rebellious, aggressive and unskilled. Therefore street children are automatically de-selected, as poor children from less violent, turbulent and neglectful homes are better emotionally, cognitively and even physically prepared for training.

7.2 The local government’s approach

The local governments of Lima and Cusco have very few programmes aimed at street-living children. In Lima, however, slightly more is done than in Cusco. Besides giving some (financial) help to a non-governmental organisation for street children (Qosqo Maki), the municipality of Cusco hasn’t organised any programmes open to street children.

The municipality of Lima, through the project Department of Communal Child Assistance (COMAIN), organises a vocational training programme to adolescents up to 18 years old. The programme is called “Chikos Ecologicos” and trains disadvantaged youngsters and street children to work as gardeners in the public gardens of Lima; they train four hours a day for a maximum of one year. According to the programme’s psychologist, the aim is to “reintegrate marginalised youngsters in society and the formal labour market and give them back their self esteem through dignified work”. Through the work the youngsters are able to build up a social network different from the street network they were in. Most street children in this programme enter through the mediation of NGOs and street educators. Instead of being internalised in the juvenile prison or children’s home,

disadvantaged adolescents are given a chance to learn a job, receive a regular wage of 300 sols a month and maintain themselves. The programme was started in 1998 by the street child organisation Generación under the name “Jardineritos de mi Ciudad” and focused exclusively on (addicted) street-living children. While following the programme, children slept in the shelter of Generación and received alternative education in the shelter. Since 2004 the municipality of Lima took over the programme, renamed it and changed its focus to disadvantaged youth instead of street-living children.

The rules of the programme are strict and if the participants don't follow the rules they must make room for a new participant. During the trajectory participants are obliged to follow an education after working hours and to have a stable living environment. Social workers of the programme assist the children in finding an educational programme and a place to live. Youngsters can't participate while still living on the street or in a street-like environment, like in abandoned buildings or in the illegal hostels, because of the temptation of returning to drug consumption and street life. Education doesn't necessarily have to be formal education, but can be any kind of schooling or vocational training. Besides, the participants have to attend workshops about, among others, sexuality, life trajectories and drugs.

Most children employed in the programme live with their parents. For street-living children, however, this is mostly not a reliable option. They therefore either have to live independently or in a street-child shelter. Drug consuming children are not allowed to enter the programme and first have to kick their drug addiction in one of Lima's rehabilitation centres. Although many participating youngsters and street educators expressed enthusiasm about the programme, in practice it turns out to be difficult for (former) street children to participate in the project. A street educator in Lima explained that it is hard to enrol street children, because they have low self-esteem, combative characters and find it hard to follow strict rules. Besides, “300 sols a month is a very low wage if you consider that renting a normal room in Lima already costs 150 sols a month.” This shows how attention should be paid to the specific characteristics of street children to not exclude them from valuable interventions.

7.3 Clearing the city's streets from street children: street children and police

Ramon (14, Cusco):

One day I was walking on the sidewalk towards Plaza de Armas. I had my pan-flute with me and was on my way to Universidad. I met Carlos and Juan, who were shining shoes around the plaza. So, we are just talking and hanging. Then there was a *batida* [police raid]. Pack! Pack! Someone hit me on my back. It was one of the *monos* [monkeys, other word used for police]. Another was pulling Juan's shoe box. Tourists and bystanders were watching us, but didn't do anything. They loaded us all in their truck and took us to the *comisaría*. We were with many. One of them [the municipal agents] called us '*Terokaleros, rateros*'. I asked him 'why?' and they accused us of robbing a tourist. I was not even there! If something happens, if some purse is stolen, they will always point at us. But believe me, we didn't do anything!

The quote above is not uncommon in Cusco's and Lima's street scene; many children that use the street on a daily basis for earning an income or for spending their days and nights, have had similar experiences. Being involved in conflictive or violent confrontations with the municipal or national police is rather the norm than an exception in the daily life of these children.

The presence of street-working and street-living children is seen as a threat to public order and safety by the local governments. Street vendors and street children are often treated like delinquents by the municipal agents and removed or banned from the city's streets. Many of the reasons for which street children come into contact with the police and the justice system are "status offences", which means "acts that would not be criminal if they were committed by adults" [CRIN 2009]. An example of a status offence law in Peru is the Begging Law: this law gives police the right to pick up children that are homeless or begging on the street. The acts of vagrancy or begging are considered unacceptable on the basis of age and not because they are harmful to others. According to a report on status offences by the Child Rights Information Network, status offence laws often target street children because "they are forced to spend more time outside the home and fuel cultural biases that equate poverty with criminality" [CRIN 2009]. Through the implementation of status offence laws the lifestyle of street children is being criminalised. In frequent police round-ups in Lima and Cusco street children are arrested and brought to the police station, poorly-suited detention centres, called *preventivos*⁴¹, or juvenile prisons. Thus, on the basis of their social status, i.e. being poor and homeless, street children face harassment and detention by the police.

Many street children in Lima and Cusco complain about physical maltreatment and harassment by police officers. The fact that this happens even in front of passers-by and tourists shows the impunity of the police and the overall acceptance of violence against street children. With this policy street children are pushed to areas outside the city centre, making them 'invisible' to tourists and local policy makers.

At the time of our research Cusco's police in particular carried out a harsh policy against street vendors and street-living children, probably because of the high amount of tourists in the city. This policy is part of an in 1998 established plan by mayor Valencia⁴² to "clean up" Cusco's streets by relocating street vendors to modern marketplaces outside the city centre. Since this relocation in 1999 street vending has not been accepted anymore by the municipality. If a vendor doesn't respond to the request of a municipal agent to stop vending, the agent has the authority to confiscate the merchandise [Steel 2008:54]. Day after day street (working) children are chased by armed municipal agents. Police frequently confiscate the merchandise of street vendors and take it to the police station. Afterwards, vendors can claim back their goods in exchange for a certain fine.

At the core of children's stories in Lima and Cusco are accounts of violence and discrimination by the municipal's police and other security forces. Various children testified about insults made to them by municipal agents while they were working on the streets. For example, Doris (12), selling small bags of grain to feed the pigeons on Plaza de Armas in Cusco: "They often insult you; for example, they call you beggar, spoilt or pig". The street-living children told similar accounts of verbal and physical aggression towards them by municipal agents (see paragraph 5.4).

Unannounced and violent police raids (*batidas*) are a common method to clear the streets from vendors, street children and prostitutes. During "street-sweeping campaigns" children without adult supervision or street vending, are forced into a pick-up truck and brought to the local police station. At the police station they have to wait for a family member to pick them up. In case

⁴¹ In Cusco there are no *preventivos*. Children that are picked up from the street stay in a special room in the police station for family affairs, the *Comisaria de la Familia*.

⁴² In a report on urban revitalisation in Cusco, mayor Valencia called the act of street vending: "*the cancer of the historic centre which not one government leader succeeded in facing up to*" (Valencia 2005 in: Steel 2008: 52).

relatives can't be contacted or are not willing to come, the child or adolescent has to stay in a special room for children in the police station. In Lima the so-called abandoned children are transferred to special "prevention centres"⁴³, where they stay until a juvenile judge decides on further measures, i.e. mostly a transfer to one of the children's homes. Although in theory children should stay at the prevention centre or at the police station for just a short transition time (48 hours), in practice many children are kept there for weeks or even months. This is mostly the case with street-living children who have sporadic or no family contact and whose parents cannot be contacted. The director of a street child dormitory in Cusco, Livia Tapia, stressed this problem:

In Cusco a policy of social cleansing is implemented to remove all children from the street. During operations of the National Police they pick up all children and adolescents that are found in the street and bring them to the police station. Some of them are fetched by their parents or relatives, but those who don't have family stay there for an indefinite time.

Unlike in the Cusco police station, in the *preventivos* in Lima children are separated during their detention according to gender and age. It is alarming that in Cusco children with different backgrounds, gender, ages and reasons for detention, are all locked up in the same small room. Reasons for detention range from 'abandonment', 'maltreatment', 'homelessness' to 'having committed offences, like theft, fighting or drug-use'. Some children resort to the police station voluntarily, for example, to flee physical abuse at home or at domestic work, while others are detained under police pressure. In Cusco boys and girls are separated only during night time. But beds are often too few and children are forced to share a bed with two or three others. Sometimes children have to sleep on the floor. Although solid evidence is lacking, some children mentioned sexual intimidation and sexual abuse by their bedfellows during night, as a result of the cramped sleeping space and the police insisting they undress at night.

Children also told of heavy punishments by police officers on duty in the detention centres, both in Lima and in Cusco. Elmer (13), who stayed in the Cusco police station two weeks, for abandonment and maltreatment at his aunt's home, commented: "In the *Comisaría* they bathed me the whole night with cold water, just for making a 'funny' joke!" Ramon (14), who had already been detained for four weeks because of minor theft, commented: "When they brought me in, they hit me with a stick, many times. It made me sad and I was thinking 'why do they abuse us?'" Mily (15, Lima) stayed in the girls' *preventivo* for 5 months:

They [police attendants] always told me "you will never change, because you are a bitch, a *piraña*". I fought a lot with them as they used to hit me with a stick on my head. I insulted them, because I hated them. They washed me with cold water. In the beginning I wanted to change, but afterwards I didn't care anymore. My mother never came to visit and left me with abusive police. I cried a lot; I wanted to leave.

One positive fact is that, in Cusco, the police officers who take care of detained children are women, in an attempt to avoid sexual intimidation and sexual abuse. Also in Lima the *preventivos* for girls are staffed with exclusively female personnel.

In general the reasons for punishment are vague and arbitrary. The children fear the officers on the streets and in the detention centres. We witnessed children cowering in the corner when officers

⁴³ Research shows that in Lima 67% of the street children has at one time been detained in a prevention centre of the police [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009].

entered the room. The police officers communicate with the children in an authoritarian and abusive manner. Even children who had voluntarily entered the police station or *preventivo* as a refuge expressed regretting this. Their expectations of the police station as a safe and secure place were certainly not met.

Violence between detained children is also the order of the day, which is not surprising considering the cramped facilities. For example, a 9-year-old girl from the countryside who had escaped her violent employer in Cusco, and who was not streetwise yet, was often bullied and beaten by a group of four older street boys who had been detained for drug use and theft. During the hours that the children are literally locked-up in their room, with a padlock on the door, there is no surveillance at all and stronger children sometimes “make use” of the weaker children. The latter have no one to turn to besides the police officers they fear. Julio (17), for example, states that he became more aggressive and violent during his stay in the police station, because he had to defend himself from the older boys:

Because I was a very quiet boy, I was an easy target for the older boys. They were detained for committing serious offences, like theft and other things, while I was there for abandonment. They wanted to hit and kick me. They insulted me and if I kept quiet they became even worse. So I thought: I’m not going to be so silly, waiting to be abused, so I learned how to defend myself. You have to defend yourself to survive.

In the *preventivos* in Lima violence and abuse between kids is also abundant. Most children we spoke to could indicate scars on their bodies from fights in the *preventivo*.

Within the *preventivos* or police stations no special attention is given to the children’s physical or psychological wellbeing, even though many children struggle with traumatic experiences and extreme backgrounds. Police staff seemed to award low priority to the children’s future lives. No interest was shown either for the children’s histories and reasons for landing in delinquency. Very few activities are organised inside the detention centres and except for some visits by NGO workers and street educators the children are left doing nothing. Street child educators are critical of the centres; an educator in a children’s home in Lima commented:

They put all kinds of children together; delinquents with abused children with street children. The centres have no specific programmes per type, but treat all of these children the same. The children negatively influence each other, i.e. motivating each other to turn to the streets after release. Besides, no educational or recreational activities are carried out resulting in bored and rebellious children. Adequate personnel is lacking, because only police officers work there and they were never taught pedagogic skills. Police staff acts authoritarian and violent, causing even more distrust and anger in the already psychologically damaged children. A stay in these centres often makes street children more self-destructive, because it makes them lose all their hope in a better life. Although children are only supposed to stay a short transition period, they sometimes spend months there, without any education or psychological assistance.

The time that children spend in the detention centres can be used more efficiently, with the aim of contributing to the children’s psychological and physical wellbeing and re-integrating them in society.

If a child is not retrieved by his relatives, a judge decides where the child should be transferred to. Mostly this is one of the many children's homes, or the juvenile reformatory Maranga or Marcavalle, often called '*la correccional*'.

Thomas de Benitez has commented that the police's methods to solve the 'street child problem' are a 'reactive approach':

This approach sees street children primarily as a threat or potential threat to public order and safety. A key policy manifestation is the use of the juvenile justice system as a way to clear the streets and punish offenders against the common good ... Street children can be particularly vulnerable because they rarely receive family support in their journey through the court system. Where a child rights agenda is not yet in place, or where it is only nominally in place, policies can be highly repressive towards children at any stage of the legal process [Thomas de Benitez 2003:6-7].

By arresting street children for unnecessary, sometimes even illegitimate, reasons, the municipality tries to 'hide' the children from the public eye, placing them behind walls in closed institutions. As a result of police repression and violence towards street children in the city centres, the children have mainly moved to the marginal outskirts of the cities. There they became less visible and increasingly alienated from society. The dangerous outcome of a harsh repressive policy on street children is less supervision over the street child population, which makes them even more vulnerable and an easy target for child traffickers, drug dealers and child prostitution. Because street children don't trust the police and other state institutions, in fact consider them their enemies, they are less likely to report these kinds of crimes⁴⁴. Instead of decreasing delinquency on the street, as is the police's goal, repressive policy against street children seems to stimulate more hidden and extreme forms of crime.

The reactive approach doesn't appear to be solving the problem of the existence of street children either. After being detained in the *preventivo*, police station or juvenile reformatory, most street children return to the streets, since no attention has been paid to the problems that led to their homelessness. An example is Diego (15). He was detained for two weeks in the police station in Cusco because of his *Terokal* consumption on the streets. His mother came to fetch him, and he wanted to go home with her, but she just started swearing at him and even slapped him in the face. Diego told us: "Well, I already knew she didn't care about me, and still she doesn't, so what can I do". That same night he again slept in a deserted building near Cusco's airport with his "*tekito*" (*Terokal*).

Many children claim they will "never ever steal again" because they would never want to be detained ever again. Unfortunately, this promise is mostly short lived, and soon after their release they are once again attracted by "easy money" and are pulled back to former illicit habits. After their detention they return to the structural circumstances of poverty and exclusion which led them to offend in the first place. Police interventions lack social reinsertion strategies which might enable these children to resist temptations of illicit activity. Ricardo (12) commented: "If the police don't let me work in the street, I have no other options than stealing."

⁴⁴ According to Arely Aráoz, director of the NGO Codeni (Coordination of Children's Rights), Cusco was one of the departments with the most cases of child prostitution in 2006; with an estimated 400 adolescent sex-workers between 14 and 18 year, an increase of 25% since the previous year.

In the juvenile reformatories adolescents are imprisoned after committing major offences, like theft, rape, drug trafficking or murder. Many of these detainees are former street children. Even though, in the reformatory, they were taught new skills in workshops, they returned to school and they kicked their drug habit, as soon as they are released they return to street life again because of the lack of a follow-up trajectory. An example is Juan (17), who was detained for nine months in Marcavalle. After his release he was doing well: he didn't use drugs, he slept in the city's dormitory (instead of the park as he was used to), he looked for a restaurant job and he tried to improve his family relations. He seemed very motivated to leave street life and start all over again. However, the problem was, according to him, that the only friends he had were his former (drug-using) street friends, that no employer wanted to accept him and that his family trusted him even less than before his detention. Reintegration support was lacking and Juan felt excluded from society. One month later he was sleeping in the park again, with a bottle of *Terokal* in his hand.

7.4 Non-governmental projects and services in Lima

In Lima a wide range of organisations are actively working with street-living children. Most of these organisations have been initiated by foreigners and the majority depend on funds from abroad, usually from the USA or Europe. The main services offered to street children by NGOs to improve their situation include outreach programmes with street educators, basic needs provision, permanent shelters, day shelters, night shelters, reintegration programmes, family counselling and healthcare. These types of local services fall within the category of so called 'targeted policies' that are small scale and address the specific situation of street-living children [Thomas de Benitez 2003].

While religion is the main pillar in some organisations and is explicitly expressed in their work with the children, it plays only a minor role in other organisations. While some organisations involve children with varying profiles, others work only with children who fall with the same category, such as exclusively drug addicted street children, or non-addicted children with a street-history. Some organisations involve both boys and girls and different age-groups, while others make clear gender and age distinctions. Services, strategies and ideologies also differ greatly between organisations. Some organisations focus only on one specific service, while other organisations aim for all-round attention and include several services.

The main challenge for street child organisations is to have their aims correspond with the wishes of the street children. While the former generally aim for school attendance, drug rehabilitation and a reintegration into society, the latter search for fun, freedom, respect, belonging and day to day necessities such as food and clothes. The organisational ideologies range from *paternalistic*, i.e. considering street children as a helpless and lost generation that has to be cared for, to *protagonistic*, which perceives street children as independent 'little adults' with the agency to make their own decisions about good and bad. While the former approach runs the risk of making children too dependent on the services, the latter overlooks the self-destructive behaviour of street children.

7.4.1 Outreach programmes

In the centre of Lima ten different organisations run an outreach programme in which they actively seek contact with children on the streets. The street educators operate mostly in groups of two or

three. Most belong to NGOs that also provide other services, like a permanent street child shelter or day shelter. Street educators that don't belong to a specific street child shelter, mediate between the children and shelters in the city.

In the first place street educators try to befriend street children in their 'own' environment, build up trust and provide basic aid services such as healthcare and health advice. Slowly the children are made more conscious about their bad habits and future prospects and are informed about alternatives to a life on the street. Most street educators bring games or food to facilitate contact with the children and to help children open up:

We play games with the kids. We sit down with them on the street, no matter how dirty the place. Through play we can get in contact with them, we have a laugh and a talk. We start to talk about the wishes of the child, his problems and the street. We talk about the centre, about a different kind of life the child can opt for. After a while the child will voluntarily express his wish to change. He knows that we are there to help him with this. We respect the choices of the children, but also show them "look, this is how street life is and this is what we can offer you at the shelter".

In most cases outreach programmes are focused on the needs of children, as defined by adult street workers, such as love, food, social reintegration, shelter and better future prospects. Moreover, street educators get to know more about the reality lived by street children. By knowing a child's personal situation, help and advice can be fine-tuned for the specific personal situation of a child. Once a child enters a children's home, more information about the child's past and street circumstances become available.

Moreover, some street educators use the time spent with children on the street to offer alternative (health) education, personal advice or mediation for work. By visiting the children on a regular basis, street educators show the children that they are not forgotten, that people care about them and that they are there to help them if needed. According to street educators this helps the children to rebuild their self-esteem and reflect on their life situation. The outreach programmes thus aim to empower the children and make them aware of themselves and their lifestyle. In addition, some street educators focus on children's rights in particular and inform street children about them.

However, street educators should be aware of the possible dependence they create. Street children easily become used to the presence and help of street educators while they continue their street life. This is especially the case when street educators hand out food or clothes to street children. This is done by three to four Christian organisations in the centre of Lima at fixed times and places. They give the children milk and bread after having sung and prayed with them. In practice only a small number of the street child population participates in the singing, while the majority queues for the food distribution. Some street educators argue that handing out food is a way to establish contact with the children and make them open up:

To make the children reflect on their current situation and drug use, we as street educators have to get closer to them. Giving them food helps us to make the first contact and to meet the children on a regular basis. Well, didn't you see the hundreds of children here last night? No more explanation is needed, I guess.

Other educators, however, criticise this practice for being *asistencialismo* (welfare), a term referring to direct short-term help that builds dependence and stimulates street life. Street children can get dependent on street educators, especially if they hand out food or clothes and purely give attention. This “charity-work” facilitates street life for children and alternatives to street life become less attractive, or at least less urgent.

According to one female street educator food handouts have become part of street children’s daily routine in Lima Centre. They know exactly when and where to go for their daily meal, as every organisation has its own schedule for the handouts. Unfortunately, regular food and clothing distributions facilitate street life, making it hard for the children to break the vicious circle of drug abuse, prostitution and criminality. As Dallape already wrote in 1988, street educators have to be cautious in presenting themselves as “Father Christmas”, because “giving food and blankets for a long time might give a distorted idea of what we want them to do” [23]. Moreover, most street children in Lima Centre are able to buy their own food from their income, beg for food at restaurants or get their food for a minimum price at soup kitchens.

Other NGOs openly criticise *asistencialimo* and distance themselves from these kinds of interventions. One organisation, for example states on its website that they avoid “making children merely receivers of food and medicines”, but that they aim to make them “capable persons that are able to interact and are conscious of their importance to others”. The same organisation started a campaign against *asistencialismo* with the slogan: “With alms, the street will continue to be his home”. The presence of the many food distributors in Lima Centre makes it difficult for other organisations and street educators to do their job. Several street educators commented on the way in which many children lose interest when they realise no food is on offer. Some even become aggressive. Street educator: “Food and clothing distributions make children dependent and create false expectations among the street child population. Moreover, what are these children going to do when they have grown old and nobody is handing out food to them anymore?”

Outside of Lima Centre, where there are no distributions, it is much easier for these street educators to approach street children without giving them food, as the children have no such expectations.

Street-living children in Lima Centre, Puente Nuevo and La Parada are visited once a month by outreach health workers. With a basic supply of medicines and first-aid materials they visit the street children and give medical attention and advice where necessary. The health workers are very popular among street children and are most often approached by teenage street girls working in prostitution. For more severe health problems they redirect the children to a free health clinic in El Augustino. Besides giving first aid, they also try to motivate street-living children to leave street life and enter a children’s home: “Health is a sensitive topic among the children and by showing them how their health is related to their lifestyle, we try to motivate them to change”.

Some street educators also work specifically to prevent other children from joining the street child population, or from relapsing and returning to the streets. They talk to at-risk children at schools, soup kitchens and among families in the poor outskirts of Lima. Children who are at risk of moving to the streets include the younger siblings of street-living children or former street children that have returned to live with their family. Through an identification of family problems, family counselling and giving emotional and financial support, they try to prevent more street migration.

Actually, all outreach programmes for street children in Lima have the same final goal, namely redirecting and motivating street children to replace street life with an alternative lifestyle. Some

street educators therefore only focus on street children with potential for changing their lifestyle and who would be accepted into a children's home, like new street children or children with a moderate drug addiction. The fact that street life in itself is not seen as an acceptable lifestyle, by most street educators, shows a kind of paternalistic approach to street children. Street children are considered to be vulnerable and beyond society, with the need to be guided by adults towards social reintegration and a return to an "acceptable" childhood.

According to the specific profile of a street child, i.e. its gender, drug consumption, personality, personal wishes and street experience, street educators redirect the child to the most suitable shelter. This doesn't necessarily have to be the same shelter as the street educator is affiliated with. In practice, however, some street workers actively search only for street children who suit the specific profile of the shelter they are working for. They therefore exclude children on the streets who might also need their help, but who don't fit within the required profile.

For example, one particular shelter focuses exclusively on the rehabilitation of drug addicted street children; they are mainly active on the outskirts of Lima, where very few other outreach programmes are present. Only children addicted to drugs will be taken to their shelter; those who are not addicted are denied help by these particular street educators. The result is that street children in need, but who are not drug addicted, start to fake an addiction (eg with theatrical imitations of *Terokal* consumption and drug-user behaviour). Most unfortunate though, is that the newly arrived boys and girls, not yet addicted, but who are definitely most responsive to interventions, are generally overlooked by this programme.

Most street educators work according to their own schedule; some visit children at fixed times, others have more flexible working hours. Because there are so many different street educators in Lima Centre, it is common for them to cross each other's paths. The unwritten agreement is that a team of street educators will only approach children after another team has withdrawn itself. A lack of coordination between different teams of street educators results in an overload of visits to street children in Lima Centre and a scarcity of attention to street children in other parts of Lima. The Conos and dangerous neighbourhoods such as Callao and La Parada are, for example, rarely covered by street educators. Apparently the popularity of Lima Centre and the infamy of other parts of Lima relate to the 'number game'; all street child organisations are financially dependent on foreign sponsors, who fine-tune their financial aid according to statistics and the number of street children reached:

Children in Lima Centre are accustomed to street educators, so it's easy to approach them and motivate them to come to your shelter. Unlike the children in the Conos who are not at all used to attention from adults, so they will be more suspicious and hostile. To achieve a high 'score' of reached street children and receive more funding, many organisations focus on high density areas, such as Lima Centre.

Although a network of street educators exists, called Network of Street Child Educators (REDENAC), in practice coordination and division of areas is lacking. Street educators compete with each other for the children's attention and the number of street children reached. Therefore every team considers the street children of Lima Centre "their children". The lack of coordination and communication means that street educators fail to share their plans and progress about a specific child, which results in double the work, money and energy, without major results. For example, one day street educator A has a long talk with Juan about possible school enrolment. The following day street educator B has the same talk with Juan. However, while both of them were searching for a

proper school and filling in paperwork, street educator C has motivated Juan to come to live in his shelter. Without knowing it street educator A and B have done a lot of unnecessary work and have no idea as to where Juan has gone. In addition, street children in Lima Centre have learned how to take advantage of the variety of help offered and pick and choose as they feel like it.

Although some street children are indifferent to the visits of street educators, in general they seem to value the visits and help. In areas where many street educators are present, their visits have become part of the children's daily routine. In Lima Centre every street child is generally in contact with more than 10 different street educators, all from different organisations. However, each relationship is at a different level and varies according to characters and ability of the street educator to relate to the child. Street children will often approach educators they are familiar with and ask for a hug and a chat. Their enthusiastic greetings indicate they appreciate the attention, care and advice. Even street adults still greet the educators and give them the latest updates, especially if they have achieved something to be proud of, like obtain an identity card or a stable job.

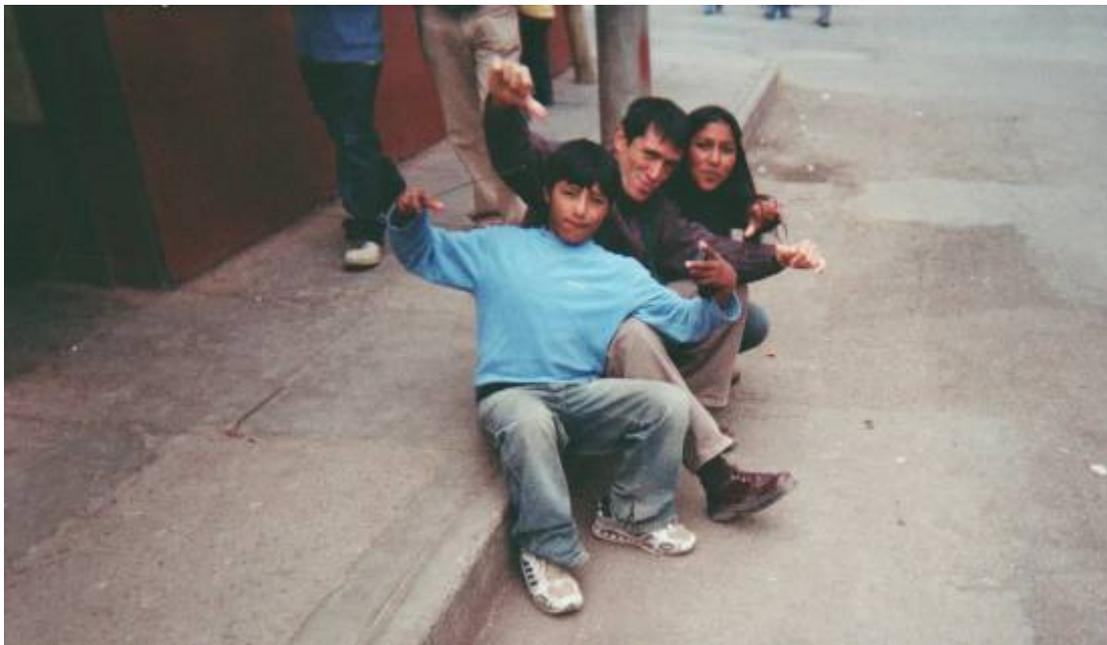


Photo 14: "Street educator Nica is my friend. He always comes to search for me." (photo and quote by Ricardo)

Although in some way the close relationships can have a positive effect on the development of the child, it also creates dependency. Too much dependency can even slow down the rehabilitation process, like one street educator explained:

Street children can become very attached to street educators. When the child has become dependent he will miss this person too much when he goes back to live with his family. Besides losing his friendships with the other street children, the child also loses the special attention he got from the street educator.

For this reason it is important that visits from educators continue even after a child has returned home, or to a children's home. Street educators should search for a balance, but for many it is too

difficult to maintain that line between work and personal life. Educators become like a mother or father for many children. Gustavo (15): “Normally a mother or father should tell you what is good or bad in life, but I don’t have them anymore. That’s why I see Lina and Rodrigo [street educators] as my family; they are always there to have a good talk with”. Manu (28, former street child in Lima):

During my street time I was really lost. I was walking around in rags like a fool, with long dirty hair and a black face. *Terokal* cans all over my body and even strapped on my legs. People would avoid me since I was always on the riverside getting high on cocaine-paste and glue. The only person willing to talk to me was Gaby. All the others had already given up on me. But no matter how rude and aggressive I was, Gaby always kept visiting me. I will never forget what she did for me. Once I had a big wound on my foot and she brought me to a doctor. Otherwise they would have never helped me, because they discriminate against street children. Because of Gaby’s visits I didn’t forget that I existed. Till today I am thankful for her work.

Some children, on the other hand, find the educators a nuisance and their visits bothersome. Especially when they are high on drugs they feel that street educators have only come to correct and judge them.

7.4.2 Day shelters

In Lima two different organisations run day shelters for street children. These shelters function only on certain days. Both target a specific group of street children; one of the shelters receives street boys and girls from the street children hangout “Cine Planet”, and the other from “La Piedra” and “Cotabambas”. The first shelter opens three days a week from 14:00 till 18:00 and the second shelter once a week from 10:00 till 13:00. The first shelter provides washing and bathing facilities, storing facilities for personal belongings, and a warm meal. Both shelters offer medical help, counselling, recreational activities, health education, and short educational lessons. Both shelters are visited by approximately 5 to 10 children at any one time, which is of course a very small number of the total street child population in Lima Centre. Possible reasons for this are that children do not know the shelters exist, that children forget about them, that children prefer to work during the daytime, that children don’t like the rules or that drug consumption is prohibited.

The main function of the day shelters is to create an alternative environment for street children during certain hours, where they can feel cared for, be safe and have a rest from street life. Most project workers at the day shelters also work as street educators. This way they meet children in different situations: in the street environment when the children are mostly on drugs and in the shelter when they are (supposed to be) clear from drugs. This deepens the understanding they have of a child’s personal situation and the relationship between child and social worker.

Most children get to know of the day shelters through street educators or friends. Day shelters can be considered places in between street life and children’s homes. Attendance is voluntarily, but once inside children have to follow the rules of the shelter, such as no drug consumption, no aggressive behaviour, no lying, no stealing and no vandalism. According to the website of one of the shelters, street children are “provided with the tools necessary to begin working on their own personalised project of rehabilitation”. After the child leaves the shelter he/she returns to the street again and in most cases continues his work, his drug consumption and other street related

activities. The majority of children visiting the day shelters are severe drug consumers, adolescent mothers and street prostitutes.

These shelters are places where children can talk to the project workers and foreign volunteers, play a game, read a book, and be listened to and be heard. If desired, the children can take one of the project workers apart to discuss their problems and get counselling. An important goal of both shelters is to let children recover their skills of good interpersonal relationships and educate them in an informal way. "Through sports children are taught discipline and during educational sessions we teach them about children's rights and health", explained one of the project workers. Children that visit the shelters are encouraged to choose a different lifestyle and to leave the streets. Therefore, most project workers are in contact with several children's homes in Lima, so they can redirect a child when s/he wishes to leave the street.

Moreover, the project workers of the afternoon shelter attach a lot of importance to family visits. The objective is to become acquainted with the children's families, to better understand their difficulties and therefore provide better help for the children. The final goal is family reunification. Follow up visits to children who have decided to move into children's homes or reintegrated with their families are also an important task of the project workers. Children should in no way feel abandoned by care workers once they move away from the street.

When the children visit the shelters they must refrain from using drugs, even though it is clearly difficult for them to do so. The fact that they do make that effort, however, indicates their appreciation for the shelters. Lisandro (13): "Here I learn many new things, like cooking and playing music. That's why I like it here". Moreover, they feel respected by the project workers and enjoy the freedom of the shelter. Gustavo (15): "This is one of the few shelters where they respect us; they don't ask us to be a different person like they do in the children's home. Here I can come and go whenever I want". Children enjoy the talks and making jokes with project workers, who are often considered to be like family. Gustavo (15): "They [the project workers] are like my family; that's why I love them and like to pass by".

Many children have asked for the shelters to stay open for longer hours, more days, and preferably also nights. A difference between the shelter and a children's home, as mentioned by the children, is that the shelter allows them to walk in and out as they want, but that in a children's home they feel locked up. Lisandro (13): "I would like a place like this to spend the night, to have a rest, a chat, and learn something new. But I don't want to go to a children's home, because they don't allow me to work". Thus, street children expressed the need for a safe and warm place, but without losing all their freedom.

Children enjoy the shower and washing facilities of the shelter. Being clean and looking neat, are crucial factors for a street child's self-esteem. At times during our visits to the shelters, if a street child entered looking particularly dirty, s/he would in first instance not want to talk to us or the project workers. After having taken a shower they seemed to change: they showed more self-respect and confidence and were willing to talk, play or joke. Sometimes, even their facial expressions and posture had changed after a shower. A space for personal hygiene thus seems an important starting point to work on a child's self-awareness and empowerment.

Although drugs are not allowed inside the shelters, most visitors use drugs before arriving. Sometimes children are too high to join the activities and just attend to get some food and to wash themselves. The shelters thus also run the risk of facilitating street life and being *asistencialismo*. To avoid this, the afternoon shelter has a policy of child-participation: every child visitor is held

responsible for the cleaning of one of the areas of the shelter and every day one of the children is held responsible for the task division and implementation. Assigning responsibilities to the children seems to have a positive effect on their behaviour and makes them feel part of the project. It makes them feel important and on the same level as the project workers. This stimulates their self-esteem and the children seem to try their best, because they don't want to disappoint the educators who have shown confidence in them. Sometimes, the most unruly and aggressive boys turn out to be helpful angels when they are made to feel respected and indispensable.

7.4.3 Semi-open and closed permanent shelters in Lima

In Lima approximately seven NGOs run nine permanent shelters for street children. One of these shelters is for girls only; one is mixed and seven are for boys only. The number of children varies per shelter: while one of the shelters allows a maximum of ten children, another shelter houses up to one hundred street boys. In shelters with a small number of residents, children live more in a family-like atmosphere, while in the bigger shelters the atmosphere is generally more chaotic, authoritarian and hostile.

All of these shelters claim to have "semi-open doors": children enter the centre voluntarily, but if a child decides to stay, s/he has to follow the rules, has to go to school, and has to eat and sleep there. Children are allowed to leave the homes, but only during certain hours and in accordance with the adult staff. Thus, generally the children cannot leave for the streets to work or to hang out with friends anymore. In practice, the meaning of semi-open varies between shelters: while in some shelters the door is literally open and children can enter and exit whenever they want, in other centres the door is locked and children are not allowed to leave without supervision.

The physical space and policy of children's homes seems to have major influence on how the children experience the place. Especially children's homes with big outside areas, playing fields or the beach nearby were appreciated and gave children a feeling of freedom. Unlike in some other places, where the homes literally have high walls around them, children enjoy the freedom of the more open children's homes. A boy in one of these places stated, while showing me around the vegetable gardens and river area surrounding the house: "Here you're not locked up like in other places; we are allowed to walk and run wherever we like; on a hot day we even take a bath in the river". In another home where the door was never locked and children were allowed to walk in and out as they liked, children greatly valued the freedom and trust they were given by staff members. Reynaldo (14), who has been in several children's homes already, said: "It's nice, if I want to go to the shop or walk around, they'll just let me go. That's the main difference with other shelters, I think". One of the educators at the shelter explained that children feel as if the place is theirs when doors are open and the child's personal wishes are heard and respected. "Children are more susceptible for love, affection and amicable contact than for authoritarian screaming, which will make them even more rebellious". In shelters where the children are provided with personal space and close interaction with the staff, residents appear to be happier and choose to stay longer.

Giving the children space and freedom doesn't prevent all children from running away, but in general most street children seem to feel happier and more respected in open places. Institutions that seem prison-like to the children are much disliked and often given as a reason for not wanting to be internalised in a children's home. Kevin (16):

The problem is that I was used to street life. In the children's home they wanted me to change everything that I was used to. I only heard "you're not allowed to do this; you're not allowed to do that". They tried to discipline us. They punished us for everything. Well, then the choice for freedom is easily made. I think they are too strict. Who wants to be punished time and again? If you feel locked up you feel uneasy. They should give us more freedom; we cannot change from one day to the other.

Moreover, many adolescents stated that they had the wish to change, but that they at the same time wanted to stay independent and continue to work. It must be said, however, that the strategy also depends on the profile of the residents: a shelter focusing on children with severe drug addiction needs a stricter policy and rules than a shelter for less addicted children.

Besides the provision of basic needs, the purpose of all children's homes is to provide street children with an opportunity to leave street life. The website of one of these homes, for example, claims to provide street children "the mechanisms for an independent life when they reach adulthood" through offering, among others, education, job training and healthy norms and values. Through education and reintegration strategies children are, in the long term, prepared for a life independent of NGOs and social workers. Most children's homes therefore try to enrol their residents at public schools, but only when the children are ready for it. If enrolment is not possible, a child receives alternative education within the home from either street educators or professional teachers. Moreover, the majority of shelters organise additional workshops or vocational training to improve the children's skills and keep them occupied.

Some of the shelters give importance to psychological guidance and therapies to residents, while in other shelters psychologists are absent. Only one NGO puts emphasis on the process of drug rehabilitation under supervision of psychiatrists. They call themselves a therapeutic community and only receive street children with advanced drug addiction.

The majority of the street child population in Lima has had the experience of living in one or more institutions at some point. Research among 102 street children in Lima showed that 72% had entered a children's home during his or her life [Voces para Latinoamérica & Sinergia por la Infancia 2009:47]. Several street workers stressed that most street children have been living in four to six different children's homes. This information coincided with the stories of the street children themselves. Apparently street children have the wish to change their lifestyle, but children's homes seem to fail in meeting the expectations of the street children. Many street child organisations overlook the fact that street children are in general very much imbedded socially, culturally and economically in street life and that ties with the street cannot be broken from one day to the next. According to a street worker "every time a child escapes a children's home, he becomes more sceptical about interventions and discouraged to change his lifestyle". The experiences of ex-street child Manu (28) illustrate this: "Every time I left a centre, I got worse, with more distrust. The problem is that inside the centre I didn't feel any love or care. Sometimes they maltreat you, they oblige you to pray. Three times I have stayed in a children's home, but every time I escaped."

It should be avoided that children leave and enter too many different homes. Children that have lived in many different homes seem in general to have lost hope of ever leaving street life again. "I simply can't get used to it", was the most heard response. Often the most drug addicted children were the ones who had lost all hope in street child programmes and institutions. They mentioned an unwillingness to give up their friends, freedom and drugs for a life bound by rules and punishment, referring to bad experiences they had in the past.

According to a project worker at a day shelter the wish to change should come from the children themselves: “Therefore a solution could be a children’s home where the rules are made by the children themselves. You’ll see that also street children ask for a place free of drugs. If they have the feeling that it is their own rule, it will be easier for them to accomplish.” The project worker thus suggests giving more responsibility and participation to the children themselves, instead of authority and rules.

The ability and desire of a street child to leave street life and live in a children’s home often depends on the time s/he has been on the street, the level of drug addiction, personality and age. In general, the shorter the time a child has been living on the street, the easier it is for the child to adapt to life in a children’s home. Most children enter a children’s home through friends or through street workers they have met on the street. In some cases children are brought to a children’s home by a parent, a school teacher, someone from the community or the church. The importance of adults in the social networks of street children should therefore not be underestimated.

The positive aspects of these shelters, as mentioned by the children we spoke to during our research, are mostly related to good facilities such as food, water and beds (61%). Other positive aspects are friendships with other children in the shelter (27%); the fact that people who work in the shelter treat the children well (21%) and the recreational activities (16%). On the other hand, the most negative aspect is the lack of freedom (38%); followed by bad relations with the other children in the shelter (14%) and with the people who work in the shelter (18%). It thus appears that people around the street children, like staff members and other residents, are determinants in setting a positive or negative atmosphere.



Photo 15: Sewing workshop in a shelter for street girls

When children were asked why they had come to the home, most of them explained they had been looking for a better life, a chance to go back to school, they had become tired of street life and had wanted to quit drugs. Especially the activities and workshops that children's homes provide are very popular among the children. When asked what they liked most about the place they (temporarily) stayed in, the majority referred to the workshops, sports and excursions. To avoid boredom and rebellious behaviour, children should be kept occupied with stimulating activities. Through appealing workshops, which fit into the world of street children, residents can be motivated to stay in the children's home. Juan (14), for example, stated that he would like to have computer classes: "Computers is what I like most. On the street I was already spending four hours per day in the internet cafes. Wouldn't it be nice if they teach us how to make a website with our favourite music? I think I would stay in a home if they would teach me that." One of the children's homes does indeed provide computer classes and these are obviously among the most popular activities.

Another important aspect of children's homes, according to many children, is that staff-members give the residents the feeling that they are important and that they matter. Especially in smaller homes with more personnel, children feel respected and cared for. In family-like places where the interaction between the same staff-members and children are frequent and respectful, children often express their love for the staff-members and feel at home there. Care workers should, however, be careful not to make children too dependent on them, because that can also hinder family reintegration and a child's intended independence. In some of the bigger children's homes with a large number of children, contact between children and staff seems to be less friendly and more authoritarian. Sometimes educators won't even know a child's name and treat them as clients instead of important individuals. Children in these kinds of homes express a feeling of disrespect, abandonment and loneliness.

Fights between children occur more frequently in the overcrowded homes that have few supervisors, especially when children of different age groups share the same spaces. Even (sexual) abuse between children was mentioned as a problem in these homes. Street children have complex histories and therefore demand a lot of personal attention. Fights with other children were sometimes mentioned as a reason to leave a children's home and return to the street. Benny (15), who currently lives in a family-like shelter with only boys of his own age:

Before I was living in another shelter, but I didn't like it there. I was always fighting with the young kids. I don't like them; they always molested me. And the educators always blamed us, the older ones, although the kids started with irritating. That's why I decided to run away and I returned to drugs. At the place I am living now I feel more relaxed; all the others are around my age, so we understand each other.

Mixing up children with varying profiles, such as children at risk and street-living children, can have undesirable results. Manu (28):

I didn't like the children's homes, because the other children were not like me, they had fathers and mothers and talked about home. They knew they would go home someday. But for me that was no option. That's why I didn't feel at ease there and I wanted to be with people that are just like me, so I escaped.

Contact with other residents often plays a role in a child's experience of his stay in a children's home: having good friends and feeling accepted is an important motivation to stay in a home, while fights and abusive relationships with other residents are reasons for a child to want to leave.

Family involvement is an important part of the programme at some shelters. They try as much as possible to invite family members to happenings and events in the shelter and stimulate children to visit their family regularly, sometimes under supervision of an educator. They teach parents and children how to communicate with each other and express mutual respect and love. Children in these shelters seem to always be extremely happy and proud after having received a visit from family members or after having visited their homes. These shelters aim for reintegration of the children with their families, if that is what they desire. The shelters' educators function as mediators between a child and his family. In some cases, however, the family is still unable to provide adequate care for the child and family unification quickly results in a return to street life.

Other shelters, however, don't stimulate family contact at all, because they argue that this can do harm to the child: "Children have fled their homes because of abuse and we have to protect the children from the dysfunctional families they come from." The Peruvian law that regulates the incorporation of children and adolescents in institutions (Ley N° 28179, art. 11), however, states that all shelters "are obliged to promote family reinsertion, family support or adoption to be able to offer children family based alternatives instead of institutionalisation".

Many street children have had the traumatising experience of being locked up in illegal prison-like institutions in Lima. These institutions force street children to live there and have an abusive and harsh policy. Lucia (15) told of her experiences in such a place:

I was walking with a friend in the street in Villa Salvador [district]. I was drunk. Some people pulled me in their car and brought me to a centre where they didn't treat me well. A place where they lock children up against their will; a place for drug addicted women. I was crying and didn't want to enter the place. I went totally crazy, insulting and smacking all the others. The sisters grabbed me and took all my clothes off. They pushed me under a cold shower; they slapped me many times. They didn't teach us anything there and they didn't treat us well. They treated us like their personnel: "clean this, clean that!" they screamed. Sometimes I had to put my face against the wall for four hours; sometimes till 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning! After twelve weeks finally my mother came to get me out. She had to pay 100 sols.

One of the social workers we spoke to explained how the (street) children who end up in these types of homes are extremely vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional abuses by often unqualified personnel. Locking up children against their and their parents will is by no means legal and should be persecuted by the law. These experiences are very traumatic for children and decrease their confidence in adults and street child interventions.

7.5 Non-governmental projects and services in Cusco

While many organisations in Cusco claim to work with street children, the majority of them turn out to be directed towards street-working children or abandoned and orphaned children without a history of living on the street⁴⁵.

In general, the term 'street children' attracts more attention and sympathy from outsiders than, for example, the term 'poor children'. As a result many projects claim to target or claim to include

⁴⁵ For a list and contact details of the various organisations working with children in and around Cusco, see <http://semillanueva.110mb.com/documentos/directorio/DIRECTORIOINSTITUCIONEREDWEB7junio09.pdf>.

street children to attract funding and volunteers, even though they may have very few, if any, actual street children. According to Walter Alarcon organisations use the term street children to make the situation sound worse in order to draw more attention. In practice, however, most projects find street-living children a difficult group to target, because success rates are low due to the specific characteristics of street-living children, e.g. their unruly and rebellious lifestyle, drug consumption, and distrust towards adults. The Encyclopaedia of International Development states: “It proved far easier to dedicate resources to street-working children, whose greater numbers and spatial concentration allowed economies of scale, and who require less individually tailored assistance” [Forsyth 2005:660].

Several examples can be given of the exclusion of street-living children in broad-based child interventions. For example, in the centre of Lima and Cusco a number of *comedores infantiles* (canteens for children)⁴⁶ can be found that claim to provide free meals for street children. However, one of the requirements to apply for a meal is that the child is enrolled in the “programme” by a parent on a yearly basis; this is unthinkable for most street-living children. Furthermore, street children are often excluded on the basis of their supposed delinquent behaviour. A staff-member of an organisation that provides education, meals, medical and psychological support for street-working children, explained it as follows: “We work with all children that have a relation with the street, but real street children are mostly into delinquency and we don’t work with that kind”. Other organisations, such as the children’s movement MANTHOC, aim to improve working conditions by formally organising working children, but “it is difficult for street children to enter ... [because] the rules are too strict for street children to join” [Van den Berge 2007:28]. Thus, absurdly, street children are often excluded from working children programmes on the grounds of their degree of marginalisation.

In total, only two projects were found in Cusco that specifically target street children: a dormitory for street-working and street-living children and a children’s home called Oasis⁴⁷. Both receive (a part of their) funds from abroad. The former was initiated by a French lady, while the latter has a Peruvian founder. The former has an “open doors” policy, while the latter is an institution with “semi-open doors”. “Open doors” lets children participate completely voluntarily; they can come and go whenever they please, according to pre-arranged hours. The “semi-open doors” approach also works on a voluntary basis, i.e. all children enter the centre voluntarily, but if a child decides to stay, the approach aims for a total incorporation of the child in the institution, where he follows the rules, goes to school, eats and sleeps. Children are allowed to leave the home, but only during certain hours and in accordance with the adult staff.

⁴⁶ Three *comedores* that are popular among street-working children are the Niños Hotel, Huchuy Runa and Hogar Transitorio de Niños Jose. They all claim to receive more than 200 children a day.

⁴⁷ The name ‘Oasis’ is a pseudonym.

Table 1: Services for street children in Cusco

<i>The Dormitory</i>	<i>Oasis</i>
Open access	Semi-open access
Voluntary stay	Voluntary stay
Age limit is 18 years	No age limit
“Education in Liberty” approach	“Needs-based” approach
Religion is of minor importance	Religion plays a major role
Children can voluntarily apply for school enrolment	Children are obliged to go to school
No ex-street children among staff	Employ ex-street children as tutors in the organisation. They function as role models for younger children
Mixed population	Mixed population
Recreational activities, e.g. sports, music	Recreational activities, e.g. sports, music
Children are barely sanctioned. Sporadically a child is dismissed from the dormitory for a couple of days or weeks in cases of severe misbehaviour	Sanctioning children for not following the rules, e.g. household chores
Little personal attention given to children; only if the child explicitly asks for attention (birthdays are not celebrated)	A lot of personal attention per child, e.g. birthday festivities

7.5.1 Open-doors approach: Cusco’s Dormitory

The ‘open’ dormitory targets “working children and adolescents living in a street situation” (*Niños/as y Adolescentes Trabajadores en situación de Calle* (NATsCa)) up to the age of 18. Besides the actual dormitory (*La Chosa* in street slang), that can house a maximum of 30 children, it has a library, it organises sport activities, provides breakfast services and an evening snack, dinners on Sundays, recreational activities in the evenings, psychological support, scholarships, and it offers a woodcraft and bakery workshop. Besides, this institution defends the rights of working street children, for example, by helping and visiting the dormitory users when they have been detained by the police.

Morning hours are from 6 till 9am, during which time there are recreational activities. At 9am children are asked to leave and “to go and work”. The library is open from 6 till 8pm and is accessible for all children, including “neighbourhood children” who go to school and live with their parents. Between 8 and 8.30pm the *lonche* (evening snack) is served, followed by a recreational or educative evening activity, including music lessons, handwork, karaoke, movies or story telling. Children are free to come and go until 11pm, but are supposed to leave the institution during daytime. Thus, children are stimulated to go out on the streets and work during the daytime. To

make use of the dormitory and the food services they have to pay 1 sol (0.25 euro cents)⁴⁸, which is used to buy provisions and to organise group activities, like camps and excursions. This dormitory is, according to staff members and children, the only non-discriminatory night shelter because it receives all kinds of children. This makes the dormitory appreciated and known as such by most street children in Cusco.

The dormitory takes on a *regulacionista* approach and works according to their philosophy “Education in Liberty and Co-determination”, which is based on the theories of, among others, Celestín Freinet (1896-1966) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Within this philosophy the children are “respected as people who make their own decisions and who know what is best for them”. The decision of a child to run away from home, to use drugs or to work instead of going to school is therefore respected, because the child is seen as the principal subject of his own development. Labour is seen as a contribution to the child’s development and a way to learn practical skills that will be useful later. Nevertheless, the work should never damage their physical and psychological development. The task of the dormitory is, according to one of their staff members, to improve the conditions under which children are made to work and “to provide a shelter for the night and an informal space where they can learn in a pleasant rhythm and at the right moment”. This philosophy implies that a child should never be forced to do anything, like going to school, but that the wish to do something should first come from the child before an educator takes steps to accomplish this, e.g. before a scholarship is given, or contact is sought with a child’s family.

The Education in Liberty idea is expressed in, among others, the weekly activity of street football⁴⁹. Every Saturday the dormitory psychologist plays this ‘free’ game with self-made rules with a group of 10 to 15 boys. Before the game starts the boys have to make their own rules, such as ‘forbidden to swear’, ‘forbidden to discriminate’, ‘forbidden to use violence’ and ‘good team cooperation’. Besides counting goals, the teams also get points for accomplishing these self-made rules. Thus, in an informal way, outside of the regular school system, street children are educated in developing their social skills and values. If this would be done in a formal and pedantic setting, like in regular schools, the dropout rate for street children would probably be high. Street football is a popular activity among the users of the dormitory, as many street children refer to it as the reason why they visit the shelter.

Also other sports activities are popular, like the recently introduced swimming lessons. The visits to the swimming pool attract a lot of new users. Sport activities seem to have a positive effect on the street children and can sometimes even motivate them to stop using drugs. Carlos (16) and Jherson (17), for example, both stated that they tried to reduce or quit their drug use simply to improve their football playing capacities. Carlos: “I felt that my lungs were so damaged that I couldn’t even run during street football; that’s what motivates me now to quit smoking *Terokal*”. Besides, children expressed feelings of strong friendship and solidarity during the football games and that it helps them to forget their problems.

The dormitory gives scholarships to children who express the wish to continue their studies and staff members help the children to enrol. The dormitory works together with EBA schools. These schools are specialised in working children and offer evening classes, alternative teaching methods and

⁴⁸ According to staff members it’s a symbolic contribution; if a child is unable to pay s/he will still be admitted. “It will be added to the debt of this child, which is a symbolic debt off course”.

⁴⁹ Street football is a methodology used worldwide to promote issues such as children’s rights and education. For more information see <http://www.streetfootballworld.org/>.

flexible rules in comparison to mainstream public schools. For example, there is no age limit and the curriculum is in tune with the daily reality of the children. But despite the possibility to study, just a few dormitory users actually attend school. Educators blame the character of street children for high dropout rates:

Because these children don't know another reality but the street, they are constantly in a state of defence. Because they have experienced so many bad things, they cannot differentiate between what's good for them and what's bad. So, one moment they will be crying and asking us to enrol them in school, the next moment they have gone to another city and living there on the street. Their actions are very spontaneous and they are quickly frustrated with something.

At the beginning of a school year many children enrol in school, but within the first month the majority drops out. Although many factors can be blamed for this, including low self-esteem, discrimination in school, a lack of discipline and structure, a lack of parental support, a failing education system and violent and combative characters, various staff-members of other NGOs blame the dormitory's policy of "voluntarism" for the dropout rates. An ex-educator from the dormitory clarified the problem as follows:

You cannot always expect that children can make their own decisions. Neither should it be only the educator that decides for them. But if we look at former dormitory residents, most of them are still doing the same thing: shining shoes and drinking. Now they say "I wish that the educators had stimulated me more". I think the problem of the method is a lack of really living with the children, looking for them in the streets, accompanying them to school, persuading them to change. Although the children should be free in their decisions, I think they also need someone who helps and guides them in making the right decisions.

Thus, the dormitory should be aware that too much reliance on the agency of street children neglects to acknowledge the self-destructive behaviour of street children, like drug addiction [see also Gigengack 2006:351]. Special attention and intensive personal guidance are therefore important to structurally get street children back to school. Moreover, attention should be paid to informal education on health, sex and drugs during visiting hours of the dormitory. Children should be encouraged to attend these meetings so that more awareness can be raised within the street child population.

A couple of months ago the dormitory employed its first street educator, partly coinciding with above recommendations. This educator looks for frequent dormitory users in the streets and tries to make regular contact with them within their street environment. By gaining the confidence of the children he tries to guide them in making the 'right' decisions, i.e. persuading the children to return to school, to leave their drug use or to come to the shelter more often. Only frequent users are approached and the aim is not to recruit new children on the street "because we want to avoid that children just come to take advantage of our services although they are not in real need" [Baufumé, I. R et al. 1999:19]. The outreach project is still in a developmental stage and there are no clear results yet.

10-20 boys and 0-5 girls make use of the dormitory every night. Most of these children fall within the category of street-living children, although many switch regularly between spending the night on the street, in cheap hostels, in internet cafés, in the dormitory or at their parent's house. The

director of the dormitory explained that it is difficult to define the group of children who attend the dormitory:

We mostly receive street-working children, but street children never stay in one place very long and switch regularly between activities. One day they are selling sweets, the next day they are stealing and sleeping in a hostel. Because this is a place with open access, a child can come one night only or he can stay till he is 18 years.

Especially during weekends and school vacations the services of the dormitory are frequented by working children from rural areas. But sometimes, as the director explained, these children befriend street children, become influenced by what they see, and “although in the beginning their goals were very clear [earn money to bring home], after one month or one year you can see them stealing and inhaling *Terokal*”. This example shows that a stay in the dormitory can have a negative effect on the behaviour of rural children, pulling them (permanently) to Cusco’s streets.

The dormitory attracts a variety of children that have a special relation with the street: boys and girls, young children and adolescents, drug users and non-users, orphaned children and run-away children, temporary and permanent users. The heterogeneous population can have a bad influence on some of the residents (e.g. introduction to drug-use). Besides, the presence of both boys and girls often results in harassment and sexual intimidation. Several girls have reported feeling unsafe, even though they sleep in a separate girl’s room. The director of the dormitory acknowledges this problem and stresses the need for a separate girl’s shelter:

An example is the case of Juana (13). After she was abandoned by her mother she came to live here, but we already knew that this would not be a good place for her. But what could we do? In a closed institution, a children’s home, she would not bear all the rules and lack of freedom, but staying in this place is neither the solution for her. During the 2 years she stayed here I saw her change from a sweet quiet girl who was really motivated in school into a drug-using rebellious street girl. Because she is one of the few girls here, all the boys fall in love with her and try to be with her, something she learned to make use of. Now she says to the boys “I’ll give you a kiss if you buy me new clothes”.

The reaction of Juana to the attention she gets from street boys is quite common among girl residents of the dormitory. Asking for clothes or drugs in exchange for sexual acts can be seen as a kind of prostitution, which could be avoided if the girls were housed in a separate girl’s dormitory, with specialised female educators. Street girls face specific problems because of their gender and special attention must be given to these problems.

A separate dormitory would also be desirable for children from rural areas; this could protect them from bad influences. At the time of our research the dormitory staff felt they had no choice but to accept all children, regardless of their profile, because of the financial restrictions to opening other shelters in Cusco.

Another dilemma the dormitory deals with is drug use within the institution walls, and whether or not they should allow it. To protect non-using children they recently decided to implement a new rule that denies admission to children under influence of drugs and alcohol. Several street children claimed to feel safer at the shelter since the introduction of this rule, but many others now stay away because they want to be able to use drugs at night. Thus, this rule makes it more difficult to reach the drug-addicted street children, leading them to become more invisible and therefore more

vulnerable. A solution for this problem would be, again, a segregation of the street child population and giving them the choice to either sleep in a “drug-free shelter” or an “open-access shelter”.

Many of the dormitory’s users have a history of escaping (forced) stays in institutions with closed or semi-open doors. Children hear about the services of the dormitory through friends on the streets or through other detained children at the police station and ex-street children in children’s homes. Within the two last-named environments the dormitory is often spoken of as a “paradise” where there are no rules and food and beds are available for anyone. Ramon, 14 years old:

I came to live in a children’s home because I had problems with my stepfather. There I met Ferdinand and I thought he was a really tough guy; he told me stories about the street. He said “why don’t you go to La Chosa?” and later also Ricardo said “why don’t you go, it’s very nice!” So I escaped and now I sleep here [in the dormitory].

Children in institutions who have never lived on the streets before (e.g. abandoned or orphaned) can become tempted by the stories they hear and sometimes decide to run away from the closed institutions to the “open and free” dormitory. Once they start sleeping at the dormitory they come into contact with (drug-using and delinquent) street children and start to copy their behaviour. Because the shelter is closed during the daytime the children are “forced” to spend their days outdoors, where they become accustomed to street life and how to earn their own money. Lotta’s (13) experience illustrates how an open-door policy runs the risk of stimulating the wrong kind of child agency, and can actually lead children to the streets:

I met Lotta at the police station, where she had been detained for two weeks because of running away from her home in Puerto Maldonado. She looked well groomed and was wearing nice clothes. She ran away from home because her parents were working in the goldmines all day and she felt bored being alone in the house. It was clear that she was impressed by the presence of some dormitory street boys. Lotta: “They are different than the boys I used to play with”. She was hanging around with them, flirting with them and listening to their stories about street life. I heard Diego and Jaime telling her: “La Chosa is awesome, very different from this place! Nobody tells you what to do. We hang around with our friends in the street and in the evening we even get nice food.” Lotta showed her interest in visiting this “ideal place” and one week later, after Lotta was transferred to a children’s home, she escaped and dropped by at the dormitory. Soon she fell in love with one of the street boys and she started to work during the daytime: *haciendo de campana* (keeping watch during robberies for the boys). When I returned to Cusco six months later I found Lotta still sleeping in the dormitory and hanging around with the street boys.

During visits to children’s homes we regularly heard children fantasising about running away and enjoying the freedom of the street. Like Ricardo (12), who had already been living in a semi-open institution for three years: “Sometimes if they punish me and I have to do all the dishes I really think about running away to this place...um...I think it’s called La Chosa; supposedly they don’t have that kind of punishments, because it’s a place for *rateros*”. This quote shows the inconsistent image of the dormitory held among non-street children: both positive, “a place without rules”, and negative, “a place where thieves and derailed children come”.

Another risk of an open-door policy is pulling children away from home because of the attractive illusion of freedom. Staff members should be aware that some children may use the shelter to hide from hassles and normal responsibilities at home, as many youngsters do. An example is Maria (13),

a boyish girl that is known for her excessive *Terokal*-use. She has been sleeping at the dormitory regularly for the past year. She admitted honestly that she ran away from home, simply because she enjoyed hanging around on the streets, “earning easy money and using my *tekito (Terokal)*”. Her mother frequently visited the shelter in search of her daughter, but educators felt that they couldn’t force the girl to go home. Although it’s sometimes hard to determine the exact situation a child comes from, it’s important to put more effort into getting to know a child’s family and personal history.

The dormitory’s policy of sending children outdoors during the daytime is often criticised. Critics argue that this maintains, and even stimulates, the existence of street children. A police officer on the Main Square, for instance, argued that the dormitory doesn’t offer alternatives to street life:

During my evening shifts I always meet the same boys from the dormitory, flying on *Terokal*. Although those boys are sleeping in the dormitory, during the daytime they are using drugs, they are raped or raping. Nothing changes in their conduct and life situation. Therefore I think the dormitory is not solving any problems.

The dormitory’s counter-argument is that the children they attend to are working children, which implies that they would not want to visit the place during daytime anyway. Besides, opening the place during the daytime will involve more personnel expenses; money that the institution doesn’t have.

In reality, however, it seems that a lot of street children are in need of a place they can turn to during the daytime. Most street children just work a couple of hours a day, spending the rest of the time hanging around, playing video-games and using drugs. Some of the children stated that they would be interested in joining a group or individual activities during the daytime if these would be offered. For example Jaime (13): “Often I feel bored on the street; the dormitory is closed and there’s no other place to go to. That’s why I start irritating passers-by. Normal children go home, but for me that’s no option.”

Jhon (12) added: “I think they should also open during the day and play some interesting games, so that children don’t use *teko* just because they have nothing else to do”. More children expressed the need for a safe place they could turn to during daytime to, among others, “have a talk with the educators”, “drink something warm” or “have a rest”. Having a place to rest is particularly relevant for those who work all night.⁵⁰

It is important to note, though, that the dormitory deals with the most difficult to help street children, i.e. children involved in delinquency and drug use [Thomas de Benitez 2003; Dybicz 2005]. Furthermore, the open-door strategy of the dormitory is utmost successful in attracting vulnerable street children who would never endure the strict rules of semi-open and closed institutions. Without the dormitory these children would be at the mercy of sleeping on the street. Through easy accessibility and informal assistance the dormitory reaches an extremely marginalised and withdrawn street child population.

⁵⁰ In some cases the dormitory makes an exception and allows boys who work in the bakery at night to make use of the dormitory during the daytime.

7.5.2 The children's point of view on the open-door strategy

Among street children in Cusco the dormitory is well known and much valued. Although staff members don't recruit children on the street, it doesn't take newbies on the street long to discover the place. Arturo (15) explained: "I was sleeping in the park and a friend said 'why don't we go to the dormitory? They'll give us a bed, and we can take a bath. They'll give us breakfast, just for 1 sol!'"

Most children stated that they had only slept on the street during their first days of street life, before turning to the dormitory at night. Freddy (14), who ran away from his village, because of physical abuse by his mother: "I am happy to know a place like this, because I cannot sleep at home at the moment".

The children emphasise the preference of a warm bed rather than the "freezing cold" nights in the street, but they also greatly appreciate the evening meals and breakfasts, because "sometimes if you didn't earn anything in the whole day, you look forward to the evening snack". Carlos (16) said that the dormitory is more attractive than sleeping in a hostel, "because in a hostel you have to work before you can eat some breakfast".

In addition to the practical services, such as the dormitory and meals, the children also appreciate the non-material benefits, such as love and protection. The lack of (parental) love and respect the children encounter in their daily lives stands in contrast to the caring and safe environment the dormitory offers them. Unlike in other facilities for street children, the dormitory staff makes them feel respected "as they are". Reasons for this are probably the openness and tolerance of the organisation towards the choices and habits of street children. Most children emphasise the importance of having a person around who worries about you and stops you from going astray. For example Hector (16):

Most important are *los profes* (educators), because they are always there for you. Like Nicanor, he is always concerned about what is best for me. He tries to correct me if I'm falling back in my vices. The fact that he comes to see me and that he talks to me is more important than the dormitory, because that's just for sleeping.

Many children even consider the educators their "substitute families" who fulfil the roles their birth parents were not able to, like Carlos (16): "I like it here, because I feel like being with my family. Street life is very different from the dormitory. In the street use *Terokal*, nobody cares, but in the dormitory I feel that I would make them sad if they smell the *Terokal*. I think that is how a family should be, no?"

Ramon (14), after being abandoned by his mother, called the dormitory his "second home":

I felt that I was really alone on the street. Then I met Cocoliso [educator] and now he is my best friend! I like to come to the dormitory and discuss things with him. He said that he wants to meet my mother, so we are planning to visit my village. But I told him that my family is nothing compared to him, because he cares and they don't.

Many children see the dormitory as a place they can turn to in times of problems. Diego (15), who prefers the street to the dormitory at night, explains that he appreciates the help from the dormitory-staff. When he was sick he turned to the dormitory's educators:

The dormitory has been more than a home for me. I stayed for two weeks in the first-aid room of the dormitory, where they gave me lunch. They even brought me to the hospital. I will never forget that they did this for me. Every time I had real problems in the street *el profe* Guillermo helped me out.

Antonio (16), who comes from a remote village and one of the few who goes to school, added: “I like to sleep here, because they help me with my homework, so I’m able to improve in school.” Jherson (17) also goes to school thanks to the dormitory’s help: “They helped me with enrolling in school and now I’m almost finished. I like it that they don’t pressure you like they do in other places, but they convince you in a loving way”. Educational and health assistance is greatly appreciated by the children.

Besides the friendship, care and love the children receive from the educators they also stress the fact that they need someone who corrects them and helps them to keep on the right path, e.g. giving advice, discouraging them to use drugs, motivating them to go to school and telling them not to be involved in illicit activities. Several children stated that this should normally be the role of their parents, but that they had failed in doing this. Although several educators told me that it is difficult to stop children from using drugs or encourage them to go to school, because they often reject the help, many children felt that they “really need and appreciate” this help from the educators. Hector (16), for example, explained that he prefers to sleep in the dormitory than at home or in the street, as he sometimes does. Like many children, Hector values the psychological assistance in particular:

We need psychological assistance to learn more about life; to learn that there are more interesting things in life than only stealing and drugs and to understand why we are doing these bad things. The street work is actually a kind of psychology too. Nicanor tells you “boy, it’s not good what you are doing” and he says that we need strength to change. But sometimes I don’t want to listen to him. If I see him in the street sometimes I quickly hide; I think “oh, this guy again comes to bother me”. I feel like he’s wasting my time. But slowly I’m learning from him and now I know that I’ll not even reach my twentieth birthday if I continue like this. You know, it’s so difficult to quit drugs, because it really dominates you, it’s like you’re trapped ... You want to leave and leave, but the desire to take drugs always enters your mind. I cannot quit alone. I really need the educators’ help.

Carlos also emphasised the need for psychological and emotional help, “because in the street nobody orientates you, but here they let you reflect on your life. Because you know that they love you, you try to listen.” Ramon (14) added: “One day my friend Cocoliso [educator] told me ‘if you continue like this, you’ll be a *Terokalero* the rest of your life’ and I listened to him and try to stop using drugs.” Freddy (14) also approves of the educators’ assistance in learning how to behave “well”: “They tell me that I should not swear at people or fight, because sometimes these things are hard to understand for us street children. Learning about good manners makes me proud of who I am and gives me more confidence.”

Although most dormitory users didn’t have any complaints about the service, several children commented that the dormitory could improve by spending more time teaching children about “bad habits” and “proper behaviour”. They feel that educators should be out on the streets more often to control the activities of street children. The children seem to feel that the dormitory is too “free and open”, and that it should focus more on changing the children’s lives instead of facilitating their “bad behaviour”. Hector offered some recommendations for educators:

They should ask more often “what do you want to do in the future?” so that you are reminded of your vices every time you enter the dormitory. It would be good if more educators would go to the street, so that they’ll find abandoned children and talk to them about their options. Otherwise, I think, more and more children will go astray, like I did. Street life is hard, you know, you can’t make it alone.

Diego added that there should be more compulsory assemblies at the dormitory, during which future perspectives of the children are discussed.

We have to know that we’re not going to be *chibolitos* [small boys] our whole lives, but that we’ll regret our lifestyle when we grow older. Like me, I am 16 now and I feel like time has gained on me. I wasted my life. Maybe if they had talked to me more when I was young, I would be a good student now.

Although the children said to appreciate the good advice from educators, they also admitted to not always following it. Despite finding “serious talks” boring, they still think that the dormitory should make informative meetings about drug use, education and health compulsory for the residents. Levi (23), an ex-user of the dormitory who works as a shoe shiner and still uses a lot of drugs and alcohol, criticised the dormitory staff for being too easy on the children: “Street children should be brought up the hard way. If you let them make their own decisions, they’ll never improve in life. If you oblige them to attend a meeting they’ll do it anyway, because only then they can use the dormitory.” Levi regrets it that he was not stimulated enough by the educators to go to school. Now he has no other option than to work as a shoe shiner the rest of his life.

Several children criticised the limited opening hours of the dormitory and mentioned that it’s hard to escape delinquency and drug abuse if you’re forced to spend your days on the street. Carlos explained that hanging around on the streets led him to use drugs: “My friends will push me to use and anyway, what else should I do the whole day?” It is hard for most children to change their lifestyle if they have no safe and welcoming place to turn to during the daytime, “something like a home”.

On a positive note, the children develop many valuable friendships at the dormitory. Most street children have few friends other than those whom they have met at the shelter. Ramon spoke of his loneliness on the streets before coming to the dormitory: “I didn’t know who to play with or who to talk to, so I felt sad and lonely. This changed when I got to know La Chosa, where I met Nestor and Carlos.” During the daytime street children disperse in small groups across the city, but at night the dormitory is a meeting place for many of them. During group activities, such as games and football, the children are able to build up new friendships and develop feelings of solidarity. Ricardo (12), and several others, spoke about the fun he has singing and playing with his friends during the weekly karaoke evenings: “It makes me forget my sorrows for a while, singing songs with my best friends Arturo and Jaime”.

The recreational activities are enjoyed by many children. In the first place children become more aware of their bodies and the effects of an unhealthy lifestyle. Hector: “Since they give swimming classes I am motivated to quit my *Terokal* use. The teacher says I have a talent and that I can improve a lot if I start to live healthier.” In the second place the children stress that recreational activities give them feelings of joy and the diversion lets them “forget the daily problems for a moment”. Ramon said that playing soccer with the educators makes him feel happy and “if I am able to make a goal I feel really good about myself”. The children are also excited about the

excursions the dormitory organises several times a year. Juana (13): “They give us the opportunity to see many places we would otherwise never be able to visit. For example, we’ve been to Machu Picchu and Sacsayhuaman; some have even been to Lima and I think Ecuador”. Several children stated that being able to visit these places and go on “vacation” makes them feel like “normal” children.

The possibility to apply for a scholarship was also mentioned as an important service, even though few children actually make use of it. The vocational education projects are more popular, like the bakery and carpentry workplace, where children can learn a skill and get some work experience. Despite the popularity, some ex-participants of the project have complained that the work was too tiring; especially in the bakery where children work at night. Nevertheless, children who were able to overcome the demands of the jobs are now very happy to have learned a skill. Jherson (17) worked for years as a shoe shiner and beggar, but the bakery project changed his life:

One day they gave me the opportunity to work in the bakery. In the beginning it was hard. I was young and the work seemed boring to me. I didn’t like the commands “do this, do that” and I left several times. But when I learned how to make my own bread I started to like the work. It feels so good if you make delicious bread and people say “wow, that’s a good taste!” It lifts your spirits and you feel proud about yourself; it makes me feel an important person. Every baker has his own secret to make the perfect bread.

Antonio (16) agreed that the bakery is preferable to street work, because he can combine the bakery roster with going to school: “I work from 4am until 1pm in the bakery and then I go to school from 3pm till 8pm”. Angel, who works in the carpentry workshop, added that he earns less than in the street, but that “it’s at least a stable income”. After finishing the vocational training, dormitory educators help the children to search for a stable job in, for example, a restaurant or hotel. The disadvantage of both the scholarship and vocational project is the limited access. Many children lack the knowledge about how to apply for these services and feel excluded. Julio (16), who is a permanent user of the dormitory, complained about the positive discrimination towards children who are more difficult to handle than him: “They just give this scholarships to the *pirañitas*, those who are stealing and taking drugs, but because I’m more serious and not involved in criminal activities they think I don’t need their help”. A couple of days later he retracted his earlier statement and said that he had talked to the director of the dormitory and that he was now also allowed a scholarship.

Above all, many street children said to prefer sleeping at the dormitory, rather than a children’s home, because “here you are free and you can come and go whenever you want”. Carlos (16):

The dormitory is like a [children’s] home, but with freedom. That’s why most street children like this place. I feel much better here than in the children’s home I have lived before. Here I can earn my own money and I can buy whatever I want. In the children’s home I felt locked in. I am at an age that I need my freedom. If I want to be with a girl I can rent a room in a hostel and tomorrow I am still welcome here. Or if I want to go to a party it’s the same for them [the dormitory’s educators], they’ll still love me. But in other places it’s not like that, they want to control everything you do.

Although the freedom that the dormitory offers has marginal notes and criticism, it’s also the main reason for street children to visit and value this place.

7.5.3 Reasons for not sleeping at the dormitory

A considerable number of Cusco's street children alternate between spending the night at the dormitory and spending the night in a cheap hostel or in the street. The reasons for children not to make use of the dormitory are mostly related to their drug-use or sexual desires. Children are constantly struggling between making the "good choice" of sleeping at the dormitory or giving way to their desire of drugs. Juan (17):

In the dormitory they don't accept me as I am, with my *Terokal*. They want to take away my can [of glue] or pasta. Sometimes I give it to them [the educators], to stay clean for the night in the dormitory. But than my mind couldn't handle it anymore and I said "give me back my can now, I prefer to stay on the street tonight."

Hostel rooms are places where the children can have "free sex" and where they can "get high on *Terokal* all night long." Hector explained: "If I have money I prefer to sleep in a hostel, because that's the only place where they let you in [with drugs], as long as you pay the room." When they don't have money they are likely to sleep in the streets, "and because you are already so high you won't even feel the cold."

A reason for some street children to not participate in the evening recreational activities at the dormitory is the presence of "normal" children from the neighbourhood. The dormitory opens its doors, and especially its library, to all children in the neighbourhood. They hope that everyone will learn from each other through socialisation; in practice, however, only a few non-street children visit the dormitory, because in general outsiders know it as the "place for *rateros* and *pirañas*". Children from the neighbourhood that do visit the library have little direct contact with the street children, because of mutual prejudices. The former see the latter as "untrustworthy" and "ruined", while the latter see the former as "boring" and "nerdy". The presence of neighbourhood children in the library has the adverse effect of keeping most of the street children away till 8pm.

Conflicts also occur between street children at the dormitory. Some "weaker" children and girls are regularly the target of physical abuses and bullying by older or stronger children. Pedro (17), an orphan who has lived at the dormitory since he was 11, said that he is sometimes bullied by drug using children to give them his money. Arturo (15) admitted that he hadn't come to the dormitory for two years because he had been molested by older dormitory users. Temporary dormitory residents from rural areas are most often openly discriminated and harassed by more brutal street children. Instead of providing a safe place for all street children, for some of the weaker and vulnerable children the dormitory is just another place where they are abused and discriminated against.

Another reason for not using the dormitory is the supposed presence of (evil) spirits in the sleeping rooms. The story is that some former street children died in the beds of the dormitory due to overdoses' or health problems. Several users of the dormitory explained how they are visited by these spirits at night:

I don't like to sleep in the dormitory, because I am very afraid. One night I slept in the middle room and I heard strange voices. I saw a ghost that said "I have nobody to play with, do you want to be my friend?" I was afraid; I screamed "no!" Since then I prefer to sleep in the street or in a *hueco* [dilapidated building]. Sometimes when I perish with cold and my back hurts, I ask myself "why do I sleep on the street?", but the dormitory is no option for me.

Rules and restrictions on drug use, the presence of too many types of children (with lots of different backgrounds and traumas), and the “ghost-stories”, makes the dormitory unsuitable for some and keeps many children from using the facilities.



Photo 16: Street children having an evening snack in the night shelter

7.5.4 Semi-open shelter in Cusco

Besides the dormitory there is just one other place in Cusco that receives street children as well as “abandoned street children and high risk children”. This place, we refer to it here as “Oasis”, provides a semi-open shelter with school and food facilities. According to their website the shelter can be described as “a place to rest and take shelter in the middle of a desert”. It provides a separate home for boys, which houses up to 18 youngsters, and a home for girls with space for 10. They are supported by foreign volunteers who organise recreational activities, English classes, and additional education.

Oasis resembles the dormitory in several ways: it targets street children, manages a dormitory, provides services, organises recreational activities and excursions and gives workshops. The biggest difference is that the organisation has “semi-open” doors: children can only leave the place with permission. Admission is voluntary though; no one is forced to come there in the first place. Children who stay at Oasis are removed from their street environment. They are expected to not return to the streets, whether for work or to just meet up with friends. In other words, the children break off all contact with their past street lives as soon as they start living in Oasis. The director believes that change and progress in the children’s lives can only be made after breaking the chain of delinquency, drug abuse and violence.

Besides, Oasis is a highly Christian organisation, all its inhabitants are obliged to attend school and entry is not granted to those who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Their approach to street children is a protective approach and perceives street children as “individuals in need of extra attention to reintroduce them to the traditional socialising systems of school and home” [Council of Europe Steering Committee on Social Policy 1994 in: Thomas de Benitez 2003:116]. The Oasis approach entails getting children (back) into formal education and withdrawing them from street life and work.

The age limit of 18, which is very strict in the dormitory, is treated flexibly by Oasis, because “how can you neglect them help, just because they passed a certain age?” At the time of our research two boys of age, former street children, were still living in Oasis, both nearing the completion of their secondary education. One of them was planning to start a course in psychology and the other in law. They were called “tutors” by the other children and functioned as role models and leaders for the younger children. “They show the younger children that if you really want to achieve something in life, you can do it, although it’s by trial and error”, explained the director. Involving former street children in the institution seems to have positive effects as many of the younger street children did indeed admit an admiration for the tutors and their achievements. Elton (13) explained how he prefers the ex-street children over other educators when talking about his problems and feelings, “because they know what we are going through; they were even worse than me.”

Oasis’s approach to the children and their belief in the agency of street children, and children in need, stands in stark contrast with the “Education in Liberty” vision of the dormitory. In the words of the Oasis director:

These boys are too young to make decisions on right or wrong. They have a spoiled view on society, because they come from broken families with violence and alcoholism. Most of them have survived in harsh conditions on the street; they have been exploited and violated. The elder ones are addicted to drugs and alcohol; some were even involved in the sex industry. How can you accept their self-destructive decisions? First they have to rehabilitate; that needs a lot of strength and strict rules.

With the Bible as a guide the children are taught mainstream society norms by the director, her son and the tutors. In daily assemblies before lunchtime the children are asked to reflect on experiences in their past and daily lives and relate this to spiritual and moral values from the Bible. According to the director the most important aspect of the development of the children is their spiritual development: “They have to know that God is the only one that can help them, because He helps the children to find love and gives them confidence. These children have strong feelings of hate and grudge in them and with spirituality we try to recover this.”

The children are handled with a lot of love and care by the adult collaborators and the organisation is designed to function like a “family home”. Every child is treated as a unique and important person, for example, through celebrating every child’s birthday extensively and giving them a lot of personal attention. The aim of Oasis is to give former street children new future perspectives through education: adequate schooling is arranged, homework assistance is provided and every child is obliged to attend English classes given by foreign volunteers. Besides, children are taught not to use drugs and not to steal. When rules are violated, sanctions like “doing the dishes”, “cleaning the house” or “temporary house arrest” follow. In some cases, if a boy has stolen something, his head is shaved clean. A shaven head is an embarrassing reminder to all of bad behaviour.

Most children arrive at Oasis after being detained by the police. A juvenile judge makes contact with different children's homes and if there is a vacant bed in Oasis abandoned or street children are transferred there. Some children are also brought in by their parents, by other street children or walk in themselves. Oasis doesn't recruit children on the street, and has no street educator outreach programme.

Most children at Oasis are aged 8-12. There are few adolescents because many children fail to adapt to life with many rules and regulations. Ex-street children in Oasis often feel a high desire to return to street life and "to feel free again and be independent". According to the director, "in street life all the rules of mainstream society are broken and therefore the children can't get used to the rules we have here". In addition, children who lived on the streets for a long time suffer from many physical and emotional traumas and often miss their families or (street) friends.

Street children often relate rules to authority and authority to violence, as was their experience at home and in the streets (with the police); they therefore feel a lot of resistance to life between four walls abound with rules. It is easy to observe how children consistently, and in every way possible, attempt to break the rules in the shelter: they often play truant from school, they try to wheedle money and commodities out of foreign volunteers and they secretly smoke. The rules in the shelter stand in sharp contrast with the freedom of the street and are associated with violence, restrictions and authority. We often heard the children in Oasis speak of street life as a kind of paradise. If asked what the children liked so much about street life, many mentioned, among others, "the fresh air", "the sun on your skin" and "seeing the clouds pass by". These are all symbols of freedom to them.

Many children who do well at Oasis, who are motivated in school and confident about their new home, eventually revert back to old ways and become disinterested in their futures. An NGO collaborator explained: "Street children often make their decisions very spontaneously, without taking into account the consequences of this decision".

An example is Jeremy (14), a talented and motivated musician, who has lived in Oasis for two years. He was living on the streets at 9 and was the youngest member of a street gang. He had been given shelter in several (closed) children's homes, but ran away every time "because they treated me very bad". After three years he was brought to Oasis, according to him the best place he has ever lived:

It's the best place I have ever been because they treat your life with love. Not like in the dormitory where they don't care about what the children are doing during daytime. They don't care that children are taking drugs and destroy themselves, like I do sometimes. Here in Oasis you cannot do that; Nilda will always talk to me if I have something bad in mind. She asks me how I will achieve something in life. She is like my mother; she wants me to be someone in this life. I think there should be more places like Oasis in Cusco.

In Oasis Jeremy kicked his drug habit after a 2 week house arrest. "They gave me workshops in music so that I could distract my mind from drugs, so that I would forget all the bad things on the street". But although Jeremy is a serious child and has an affectionate relationship with the director, he is still known as a "problem child"; during his stay in Oasis he has already run away seven times. After running away he mostly sleeps in the dormitory and falls back into old habits of using drugs and stealing. Every time he runs away he goes back to his former gang, until being returned to Oasis by the police. Jeremy spoke of his personal struggle:

Sometimes if I feel sad and lonely; I am crying about my parents. That's the moment that I want to run away, go back to my friends and take drugs again. *Terokal* is always on my mind and I think about leaving the house. The problem of this place is that we are not free. I get a lot of punishments because of my bad behaviour and I have always house arrest. That makes me angry, so I'm planning to escape again this week. I can't get used to this life, rules and structure, I can't handle it. But if I think about my future I think: do I want to be a street rat my whole life? Well, I really don't.

The lack of freedom is the most mentioned reason for children to run away from Oasis and return to street life. Also social peer pressure from former street friends plays a role. Jeremy explained that it is really very difficult to not return to his former street gang each time they ask him, on his way to school, "Why don't you come with us for a *vuelo* [a trip on *Terokal*]". Although most children realise that staying in Oasis is the only way to get out of the vicious circle of violence, drugs and self-destruction, they also long for the freedom and unconstrained life on the street. On the one hand Jeremy knows that the strict rules and discipline in Oasis are essential for helping street children back onto the rails, on the other hand they are the reason that he and many other children run away time and again.

Most escapes happen in a group of two to five children. If one of the children decides to escape, often other children decide to join in with this person. Mostly the older children take with them the younger ones and teach them how to survive on the street. Wilmer (13) recounted how he took five of the younger boys, including his little brother, with him: "One day I wanted to leave for the street to sing in restaurants, but the director wouldn't let me go. That's when I decided to escape and I took five *chiquis* (small boys) with me." Although the children are always talking about "escaping", in practice they just walk out of the door and don't come back. Although the children talk about being "locked up", in reality the front door is always open. The director explained: "Off course we cannot force the children to stay here; we can only help them if they voluntarily want to be helped". The children who ran away are in most cases welcome to return.

Despite the policy of hands-on attention and personal care at Oasis, there remains the problem of a lack of (qualified) personnel. No psychological assistance or therapy is offered to help children process their traumas. Because of the lack of love at home and in the street, street children need personal assistance and care to regain their confidence in others and in themselves. They quickly feel let down by others, and are pushed back to self-destructive habits, a negative self-image and a low self-esteem. Most children long for someone who is always there, "someone like a true friend who really cares". In Oasis the only permanent staff are the director, her son, the cook and two tutors; they are expected to attend to 30 children. There are no appropriately trained staff members in the field of (traumatised) street children, which in fact is vital for the successful recovery of neglected, abandoned and abused children. Unfortunately, this situation is often the reason for children to drop out of the programme.

Oasis places a lot of value on maintaining regular contact with the parents of the children. Although in most cases family reintegration is not possible, it is important for the child's development that the parents visit sometimes: "At least the parent can give his child a hug. If a child bears too much grudge he cannot concentrate improving in life". In some cases, if parents refuse to visit, the director tries to oblige them to come at least once per month with a comminatory letter from the court.

Despite the high dropout rates for reasons described above, there are in fact also some very successful outcomes. Children who manage to stay at the shelter, and live according to the rules, do very well in school and are motivated to “become someone” in the future. An example is Tom (19), who currently studies psychology. He recounted his experience:

In the beginning it was very difficult, because in the street there are no rules and in Oasis they had so many rules. I had many problems, I escaped often. But because I got used to the warmth in Oasis I also returned. I stayed for a while and returned again. It was because of the director that at the end I decided to stay, she gave me so much love. That was what I needed. That’s why I was able to finish secondary school. And now I am even studying in University.

Another example is Sharon (16), who has been living in Oasis with her younger sister since she was thirteen years old. Sharon recalled: “It was difficult for me to adjust to this new life after what I was used to on the street”. Several times she went back to the street where she feels free, without rules.

At the end I always returned to Oasis, because here it’s better; you don’t have to fight to survive. They give you food at fixed times, they give you love, they help you with your career and we get everything we need. And in the street, who is going to help you if you’re sick? You can only endure. Who is going to help you? Nobody!”

She described Oasis as safe and secure place, which gives street children an opportunity to make progress in their lives. Sharon is in her last year of secondary education, is good in English and hopes to be enrolled in a tourism course next year. Sharon explained that she realises that she was lucky to come and live in Oasis. Most of her former street friends ended up differently: “as teenage mothers or prostitutes and addicted to drugs. A couple of my friends have already died.” Sharon has no contact with her former street friends anymore; she considers Oasis her “home” and the other children her “brothers and sisters”.

In contrast with Sharon, other children are of the opinion that the relationships between children in children’s homes are unequal and that fights between children are too common. Especially in children’s homes that, unlike Oasis, accept few street children, discrimination against them is high.⁵¹ Some children blamed problems with other children in the home as the reason for running away, back to the streets. Vulnerable children are easily bullied and cast out by others. Like Ramon (14), who has lived in several children’s homes:

I didn’t like it there because I couldn’t sleep at ease. The other children bothered me at night time; hitting my nose and chest. Although we are supposed to see our fellows in the institution as brothers, they behaved very badly. I couldn’t even take a seat quietly or these *chismósos* [squeakers] started to harass me. If they know that you have been living in the street, they’ll always see you as the dirty one, the target.

Julio, who lived in a children’s home for three weeks, added that not only the other children discriminate, but also the staff-members. He said that he was always the one that was blamed when

⁵¹ Other children’s homes in Cusco receive street children only sporadically, which means that these children are mixed up with non-street children.

things went wrong, such as thefts or fights, because the personnel “has a bad image of street children”.

Besides, several of these homes are well known to be malfunctioning and inadequate, having abusive personnel and being under-resourced. Several street children talked about physical and emotional abuse by staff members in institutions. For example, Diego (15), who claimed that he was regularly beaten with a broom in a children’s home when he was still a boy of 10 years old. Freddy (14) referred to emotional abuse as his reason to escape a children’s home:

The first day they are nice to you, but from the second day on they start treating you bad. Well, they don’t actually express it, but you can feel that in their mind they are treating you bad. They murmur angry words at you and give you a bad feeling about yourself. After three days I’ve run away, because they made me feel sad and lonely.

7.6 Children’s ideas on street child services

Street children are the intended beneficiaries of street child services and therefore it is important that services involve them in the design and evaluation of the projects. In practice, as we witnessed during two child participative meetings in one of the shelters, this is very difficult. While the educators asked the children for their opinions and suggestions, the children were unwilling to participate and didn’t cooperate at all. The children present stated that these kinds of meetings were boring and school-like or that they didn’t know what to say. Reasons for this can be the fact that most street children are not used to being asked for their opinions, neither at home nor during street life; their low self-esteem; their lack of cognitive abilities and the effects of drug use.

However, when asked concretely what they appreciated or disliked about a specific children’s home they lived in or had lived in, their answers were often clear. The following answers were the most common mentioned during informal conversations, group discussions and written assignments:

Things that the children like:

- Children appreciate the activities and workshops: “I like excursions”; “I like the workshops”; “I learn many new things”; “We get distracted with music and nice activities like sports”.
- Children appreciate good social relationships: “I like my friends here”; “This place is like a family”; “I love the educators”.
- Children appreciate their freedom: “They let us leave”; “I can still go working”; “The doors are not locked”; “I go to the beach often”; “We are allowed to play outside”; “I entered voluntarily, not like in juvenile prisons”.
- Children appreciate the care, attention, love, respect, help, counselling and guidance of the educators and other staff-members: “They care about me”; “They search for me and give me good advice”; “It is good that they correct me”; “They help me with my problems”; “They listen to me and talk with me”; “It’s good that they tell me what is right and wrong”; “They treat me well”; “They give me more confidence”; “They don’t discriminate”, “I feel that they love me”; “The educators are nice with us”; “They are patient with us”; “I like it that we celebrate my birthday and Christmas”; “They make me feel important and worth it”; “That they trust us and ask for our opinion about what we want in life”; “The psychologist helps me with my problems”.

- Children appreciate improvements in life and living standards: “I like it that I will get a better life”; “I like to go to school”; “I like it that I quit drugs”; “I want to change my way of living”; “I hope to become a better person”; “I can make my parents proud”; “Here I can have some rest”; “Here I feel safe”; “They give us another opportunity to become someone”.
- Children appreciate good facilities and food: “I like it that the house looks nice and colourful”; “The place is clean”; “The food is nice and we get enough”; “The garden is beautiful”; “The beds are nice”.

Things that the children don’t like:

- Children don’t like authoritarian and punitive treatment: “I don’t like it that the educators scream at us”; “I don’t like it when they make me feel nervous”; “I don’t like all the rules”; “I don’t like to be punished”; “I don’t like to be beaten”; “I don’t like to be locked-up”; “I don’t like it that they lie to us and don’t keep their promises”; “I don’t like to take cold showers”; “I don’t like that they look down upon us”; “They suspended me”.
- Children don’t like boredom and lack of freedom: “There are no interesting activities”; “I am very bored”; “I miss my street friends”.
- Children don’t like violent and abusive relationships with fellow residents: “I hate the other children”; “I don’t like the fights”; “The young children are very annoying”.

Thus, interventions should search for a balance between different strategies, offering children freedom, attention, guidance and concrete alternatives, so as to not disrespect street children’s identities and wishes, but simultaneously seeking long lasting improvements for their wellbeing. According to the children, the ideal children’s home is a non-discriminative place with adequately trained educators who give the children a feeling of freedom and love, while at the same time counselling and guiding them to keep on the right path.

Table 2: Positive and negative aspects of street child services and strategies

	Positive	Negative
Open-door night shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracts a lot of street children and offers them a relatively safe place during night time. A way of reaching street children who avoid staying in (semi) closed children’s homes and would otherwise fall between the cracks of social child care. • Once street children are inside, they are obliged to stop their drug use. • Provides affection and immediate protection during night time, when children experience the greatest dangers on the street. A place where street children feel ‘at home’ and where they feel loved and cared for. • Offers children a place to rest, which is good for the health and well-being of a child. • The time street children are in the shelter can be used to teach them social skills and to offer them alternative education, counselling and medical help. • Street children feel respected and ‘free’. This makes them feel comfortable in the shelter. • Place where children meet peers in the same situation. Here they build friendships and feelings of solidarity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much credit given to the agency of street children, overlooks the self-destructive and spontaneous behaviour of street children and doesn’t promote structural changes in a street child’s lifestyle. • Creates dependency on the shelter and makes it easier for children to continue street life. • Open access can stimulate the wrong kind of child agency, i.e. leads children to the streets, children who would otherwise return home after work or stay in institutions. • Accepting children with different profiles can have a negative impact, e.g. street children pulling non-street children to the streets or boys sexually harassing girls. • The absence of a day service and activities ‘forces’ children to return to the streets daily. Therefore a night shelter barely brings about structural improvements in the children’s lives. • Due to open access not much protection or security is provided for weaker (mostly rural) children, and girls. They are often abused and harassed by “experienced” street children. • Discrimination by staff and children can occur if not enough personnel and principles of equality and non-discrimination are not practiced.
Semi-open doors children’s home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children get an education. • Children are taken out of the street environment and are totally cared for, so there is no need to work anymore for children. • Breaks the vicious circle of drugs, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of freedom and abundance of rules makes children run away. • High dropout rate because of rules, violence within the shelter, and a lack of qualified therapists. • Children feel they are not respected

	<p>crime and violence by taking them out of street environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe and family-like environment. • Former street children that have grown up in the children's home, can function as role-models. • Children that manage to stay in the home, adapt to the rules, develop better future perspectives. 	<p>the way they are, because they are expected to change their behaviour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination by staff and children can occur if there are not enough qualified staff members, and if principles of equality and non-discrimination are not practiced.
Sports and recreational activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracts many street children. • Makes them aware of their bodies and health. • Can be motivating factor to stop drugs. • Makes them forget problems and street life for a while. Gives them joy. 	
Vocational training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disadvantaged and uneducated children get a change to learn skills and a profession. • Children get a stable income. • Better prospects for street children. Educators help them in finding a job after completion of training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is selective because of limited space and not all children are eligible. • Work is tiring, especially night work in the bakery.
Street educators (outreach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaches street children in their own environment. • Builds up relations of trust. • Gains knowledge about the street children's situation and well-being. • Provides basic aid services and informal education such as healthcare, (health) advice, mediation and information on children's rights. • Respects the choices of the children. • Targets a large group of street children, which would otherwise not be reached by any intervention. • Increases self-esteem and self-reflexion of street children, because they feel that street educators care about them. • Street educators sometimes become an integral part of the social networks of street children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can create dependence of street children on the educators. • It doesn't directly decrease the number of street children and can even have the opposite effect of maintaining street life, especially if food and goods are handed out. • <i>Asistencialismo</i> (welfare) should be avoided. • Street educators who hand out food to street children, make it difficult for other educators (without hand-outs) to approach the street children. • Street educators can be too selective and overlook needy street children. • Lack of coordination between different street educators and city areas are not all attended to, because of the competition based on the number of children reached.

<p>Day shelter</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivate children to adapt to another healthier lifestyle and leave street life. • Focuses also on prevention in outskirts, schools and soup kitchens. • Provides an alternative and safe environment away from the street where children feel cared for and listened to. • Provides an alternative for children that don't want to live in a children's home. Children feel more free and respected in a day shelter. • Children are attracted by the recreational activities. • Street children start working on rehabilitation: they stop drug use during visiting hours and positive social values and interpersonal skills are transmitted to them. • Street educators can make contact with street children while they are clear from drugs. • Provides a place where street children can have a rest, learn new things, wash themselves and their clothes and become empowered. • Provides alternative education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaches only a small number of children. • Isn't a substitute for street life and doesn't solve the problems of street life. • Should be aware of <i>asistencialismo</i> (welfare) and should not be just a "tool" that makes street life easier.
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Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report on street children in the urban areas of Lima and Cusco discussed the situation of street-living and street-working children and the policy initiatives of GOs and NGOs to improve their situation. The research results gave insights into the various reasons why children are in the streets, the activities in which the children engage, how they generate income, the consequences that the children experience from their working/living/being in the streets and the character and effectiveness of policy interventions for street children. This chapter will summarise the findings and formulate policy recommendations for NGOs and GOs working with street children in Lima and Cusco.

8.1 Conclusions

Although street children are among the most physically visible of all children, they are also among the most disadvantaged group of children. Usually they are dispossessed of almost all the rights embodied in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. Most of them have no access to adequate healthcare, education, social services and (family) protection. They often work under hazardous conditions on the streets and are vulnerable to becoming involved in the worst forms of child labour.

We distinguish between street-working and street-living children in this report, however, the research shows that group boundaries are fluid, definitions overlap and children can move easily between categories. The two groups of children have a direct and strong relation with each other, as many of the street-living children started their “street career” as street-working children.

Most street-working and street-living children in Lima and Cusco are either migrants themselves or second generation migrants from Peru’s countryside. The main reasons for rural-urban migration are chronic impoverishment, the lack of quality education and the lack of jobs in the countryside. Children with family living in the city, normally come from large families in the poorest parts of the city, characterised by poor housing, lack of basic facilities, bad infrastructure, failing social services and unemployment. The majority of street-living children come from single-parent families, mostly female-headed, in which the parent was either unable to take care of the child due to economic restrictions, emotional and psychological instability or the introduction of a stepparent. In many children’s accounts not the lack of money, but non-material factors, such as aggressive family relationships, the lack of communication and love, or an exuberance of rules and parent’s authority, were fundamental in their final decision to leave the house.

The reasons for children to leave home and live on the streets are often a combination of push and pull factors. The push-factors are negative factors within the child’s household, including domestic violence, parental alcoholism, low family income or unstable family income (children are sent to work to supplement the family’s income), neglect and abuse, a poorly functioning school system, poorly educated parents, the loss of parent(s), violence and gang culture in the neighbourhood and

the absence of parents at home because they are out working all day. The pull-factors are aspects of street life that children imagine to be better than their current situation. Pull-factors attract the children onto the streets, offering them an escape from their homes. They include, among others, freedom, (economic) independence, friendship and love among (street) peers, opportunities to earn an income, drugs, attraction to the city and the (social) entertainment in the city (e.g. internet cafés and game halls/video arcades). Although the majority of street-living children claimed to have left their homes themselves, most of them did this after being abandoned already within the home through, for example, neglect or abuse. There is a high incidence of domestic violence in poor households in Lima and Cusco, which can be related to alcohol abuse, poverty and machismo.

Although reasons for living on the streets are diverse, there is a relation between poor families temporarily sending their children to the streets as breadwinners and the permanent transfer of the child from home to the street. When children work on the streets, either accompanied by family members or alone, their income successes or failures often become the centre of their parents' positive recognition or disapproval. Parents place a lot of financial responsibilities on the shoulders of their children and become angry or disappointed when their expectations are not fulfilled. Children feel pressured and will become more hesitant about going home after an "unsuccessful" day of work. As they start spending a lot of time on the streets, children also start to compare advantages of street life with disadvantages of their home situation, with the possibility of finally, in a gradual process, replacing home ties with street ties. Although not all street-working children necessarily end up as street-living children, most street-living children did start out as street-working children.

Once children are living on the streets they continue to use the streets for income generation, as they work independently on the squares, main roads, sidewalks and alleys. Street children have different strategies for making a living on the streets, ranging from real labour activities, such as shining shoes, collecting garbage, making music or selling sweets, to illicit activities, such as stealing, prostitution and drug trafficking. The type of labour activity chosen often depends on the child's talent and preferences and on what their friends are doing, as children learn from each other. In most cases street children combine different strategies or switch regularly between legal and illegal income generating activities. As street children grow older feelings of shame and discrimination increase as a result of the low status and bad reputation related to street jobs. The fact that society perceives them as delinquents and loafers when they try to earn money with street jobs, gives some children the feeling that they have no option but to steal.

Contradictory to the stereotypical image of street-living children, they in fact appear to live relatively luxuriously, especially compared to street-working children: they often buy food, candies and soft drinks; they regularly buy new fashionable clothes and sometimes they can even afford accommodation. They keep all their money themselves, which makes them financially better-off than their street-working peers who have to hand over most of their money to their relatives. Generally they also earn more, due mainly to their illicit activities, although their income is insecure and varies per day.

Although in general the street-living children claimed to enjoy the kind of work they do, they also identified many negative consequences of their work and lives on the streets. Overall, it is not so much the work itself that is hazardous, but the conditions in which the work is done, caused by the lack of a healthy and safe living environment. Street-living children experience more problems on the streets than street-working children living with family in a home. Their working conditions are worse and they are confronted with more hazards such as violence, sexual abuse, drug addiction,

health problems and social exclusion. The needs that street-living children express are less related to material needs, and more to emotional needs. They feel that society does not accept them as they are and that they are therefore always discriminated against. They lack the feeling of belonging to a family, of having someone who really cares about them.

Violence is an often named consequence of street life. The vulnerability of street children makes them prone to different kinds of (sexual) exploitation and abuse. They lack the social safety net of a family or neighbourhood, which makes them vulnerable to threats from each other and outsiders. When asked who the main perpetrators of violence are on the streets, the majority of street children pointed at police, municipal guards and other security forces. The relation that street children have with police on the streets is obviously confrontational and problematic.

As a result of police repression and violence towards street children in the city centres, the children have mainly (been) moved to the marginal outskirts of the cities. There they became less visible and increasingly alienated from society, thus more vulnerable and an easy target for child traffickers, drug dealers and child prostitution. Instead of decreasing delinquency on the street, as is the police's goal, repressive policy against street children seems to stimulate more hidden and extreme forms of crime. Moreover, police interventions lack social reintegration strategies, so after detention street children simply return to the structural circumstances of poverty and exclusion, which led them to offend in the first place.

Discrimination was also mentioned as a major problem on the streets. Street-living children are not perceived positively by society in Lima and Cusco. They exhibit behaviour that doesn't agree with the general image of the "good child" in society, including the belief that a child should be with his family, should go to school, should not use drugs, should not steal, should not be violent and should not hang around on the streets. The children often complained about the unfairness of the social prejudices and name-calling: "delinquent" or "drug-addict". They expressed a strong wish to be treated just like anyone else in society and to be accepted. In general, the older a street child is, the more he or she is, or feels, discriminated against (with age their presence and behaviour becomes even less tolerable for the public). The feeling of being excluded by others in society results in a low self-esteem and a lack of confidence.

One of the main factors that exacerbate the children's exclusion from society is their drug addiction. The most common drugs are alcohol, the glue *Terokal* and cocaine-based paste (*pasta*). Peer pressure, curiosity and hardships of street life play a major role in becoming addicted to drugs. However, many street children expressed the wish to quit their drug use, as they have learned the negative consequences it has for their health and future prospects. But despite their disapproval of drugs, most children are not able to resist its temptation and become addicted quickly. This often amplifies the negative image a child has of her/himself.

Deteriorating family relations is another problem street-living children referred to. Even though friends replace family on the streets, the children still continue to choose family over friends when asked who is more important. Once children have run away from home it becomes difficult for them to restore family relationships. They feel ashamed of their lifestyle, drug use or criminal acts and avoid family contact, even though they simultaneously express the desire for family reunification. The children often expressed the wish to grow up in a united and peaceful family, but felt this was not an option for them.

Moreover, many street children expressed the wish to attend school, but one of the main characteristics of street children is that the majority does not follow any form of education. The

result is that many street children are illiterate or have difficulties with reading and writing. In general, street children who attempt a return to school don't manage to stay there longer than a couple of days or weeks. The reasons for this low success rate are, among others, a lack of parental (mental, emotional and economic) support, a lack of discipline and structure, group pressure, drug addiction, low self-esteem, shame, discrimination in school, and poor quality education.

Another consequence of the working and living environment of street children are health problems, related to environmental pollution, drug consumption, poverty, the cold and promiscuity. Respiratory problems, such as bronchitis and tuberculosis, skin infections, malnutrition, diarrhoea, structural injuries, bad teeth and psychological defects are the most frequent health problems for street children. Because the majority of street children lack a birth certificate and identity card they have no access to healthcare, governmental social aid programmes, education or the formal labour market.

When questioned about their future, most street children expressed the wish to not live and work on the streets for the rest of their lives. They all desire change; this reflects the discomfort that most street children experience in their current lives. Unlike the common expectations society has of street children, street children's wishes for the future are basically the same as the ones valued by society in general: having a family, having a formal job, finishing education, having a home, not using drugs, being respected and treated like everyone else. All the children hope to someday acquire a status respected by society, although most of the children admit to making poor day-to-day decisions, which challenge these dreams.

In Lima and Cusco we observed the work of various street child organisations and services to identify the positive and negative effects they have on street children. The organisation's ideologies range from *paternalistic*, i.e. regarding street children as a helpless and lost generation that has to be cared for, to *protagonist*, an ideology that perceives street children as independent "little adults" with the agency to make the right decisions. While the former approach runs the risk of making children too dependent on the services (welfare), the latter overlooks the self-destructive behaviour of street children.

Although the Peruvian government initiated several broad-based initiatives aiming at "poor youth" in general, street-living children are mainly excluded from these services on the basis of their extreme marginalisation, i.e. they are either considered to be too rebellious, aggressive, unskilled or lacking in knowledge, parental support and certain required legal documents. Chikos Ecológicos (garden project), in the municipality of Lima, was the only government programme we found that targets street-living children.

Strategies of street child services can be roughly divided into the reactive, the protective and rights-based approach. While police mainly follow a reactive approach, i.e. street children are seen as delinquents who have to be corrected through imprisonment and punitive methods, most (governmental and) non-governmental programmes follow the protective and rights-based approach. Through street outreach programmes, day shelters, night shelters and semi-open children's homes they try to rehabilitate and empower street children.

Street outreach programmes mainly function as the first step to get to know the street children and build up relationships of trust with them. Street educators make children feel cared for and can motivate them to leave street life. Day and night shelters, in which children are free to come and go whenever they like, have a similar function, but in addition they also offer immediate

protection, recreational activities, a starting point for rehabilitation, healthcare, mediation in family contact and (alternative) education. Outreach and day/night shelters manage to reach street children who would otherwise fall between the cracks of social child care because they mainly target children who don't receive other types of aid. However, these services are generally ineffective in helping children leave street life altogether. Street educators at the shelters should be aware to not create too much dependency and, even worse, (unintentionally) facilitate street life with *asistencialismo* (welfare). Sometimes care workers give the agency of street children too much credit and overlook the self-destructive and spontaneous behaviour of street children.

If a child chooses to leave street life, as most street children have at some/several points in their lives, s/he can enter a children's home. Once children voluntarily enter a children's home or drug-rehabilitation centre, they are expected to follow the rules, go to school, quit drug use and street work, and to sleep at the shelter. Despite their inner longing for a place they can call home, and people who will give them care, guidance, boundaries and support, relatively few children actually manage to stay in the children's homes for very long. Once inside they miss the freedom of the street, their street friends and drugs. They find it exceedingly difficult to live according to all the rules and regulations. Sometimes street child organisations overlook the fact that street children are very much imbedded socially, culturally and economically in street life and that ties with the street cannot be broken from one day to the next. Children who have recently moved to the streets, who have not yet become heavily addicted to drugs, and who have not yet become inextricably tied to a social network, are also still more willing to be helped by street educators, and to trade street life in for a life in a children's home. The more drug-addicted and adapted a child is to street life, the harder it is to offer adequate help and get the child off the streets.

Children that have entered and left multiple homes and shelters seem in general to have lost any hope of leaving street life ever again. They have become disillusioned with the system and the people who have tried to help them. People who the children come into contact with, including staff members, educators, and other residents, are major determinants for the child's experience. Children seem to be happier in family-like institutions with many (recreational) activities, outside areas and playing fields, close interaction and understanding with personnel and educators, relative freedom and mutual understanding with other residents. Especially for this last point (peaceful interaction between residents), it is vital that street child organisations target children with specific profiles, and that they do not jumble up children with a variety of histories and characters; i.e. children should reside at shelters with peers, according to age, gender, street history and experience with drug addiction. In addition, shelters and homes should staff themselves with properly trained personnel, and in sufficient numbers, so that every child can receive personal guidance and attention. Overcrowded children's homes with few staff members don't seem to be able to give street children the much-needed love, care and personal attention. Children living in smaller homes, with more personnel, feel noticeably more respected and cared for. In family-like places where the interaction between the staff members and children are consistent, frequent and respectful, children will often express their love for the staff members and claim to feel at home there.

Street child organisations should be aware that in a setting where different services are offered to the children, street children will find a way in which they can benefit from all interventions without losing their lifestyle as a street child. In this way, they tend to turn (welfare) organisations into a tool within their social network, without achieving structural improvements in their lives. Interventions should search for a balance between different strategies, offering children freedom,

attention, guidance and concrete alternatives, so as to not disrespect street children's identities and wishes, but simultaneously seeking long lasting improvements for their wellbeing.

8.2 Recommendations

The existence of street children and the hope to improve their situation and prospects requires a combination of integrated interventions, considering the diversity within the category of street children and the various reasons landing them on the streets. None of the recommendations are by themselves able to offer a complete solution to the problems of street children; it should be a collective and coordinated approach.

Once children are living on the streets it becomes exceedingly difficult to get them off again, because of habituation to street life and drugs. Interventions for street children are for that reason relatively expensive and time-consuming and investments in prevention will be more lucrative. Therefore the Peruvian state needs to take responsibility in preventing children from moving to the streets to work or live. As it is known that many of the street children are first or second generation migrants, the rural-urban migration should be halted through poverty reduction and investments in rural education.

Also in the marginal outskirts of the city, poverty reduction and the improvement of living conditions should be a major concern. This includes the improvement of free education and healthcare, safety, recreation, community awareness/participation, and nutrition. Parents can be discouraged to make their children work through, among others, the provision of formal employment opportunities, cash transfers, micro-credits and business management training. Financial aid for low-income families and free/inexpensive healthcare and education can prevent parents from making instrumental use of their children or sending them from the country side to the cities to work. Social cohesion and the development of informal support networks in marginal neighbourhoods should be promoted. Moreover, the national government should promote birth registration of all children, make it more accessible and free of charge, so that all children have a birth certificate and ID card. Without these legal documents children become excluded from the formal education system and labour market.

This report has demonstrated the relation between parents temporarily sending their children to the street to work and permanent street migration. Therefore NGOs must inform families, whilst remaining respectful of traditional beliefs and norms, about the risks of child labour and street work, and about the importance of education. To avoid mothers bringing their children with them to the streets while working, quality public child care centres should be established in the at-risk neighbourhoods of the cities. Information and advice on family planning should be included in the interventions, because smaller families generally exhibit less need for their children to work and to contribute to the household income.

Root causes of violence and child abuse should be addressed and regulations on child abuse implemented. This includes combating the acceptance of violent and authoritarian child rearing practices in the home, schools, penal system and alternative care settings. Moreover gender-equality should be promoted and help provided to adults with drug and alcohol problems. Child protection mechanisms are vital, i.e. children should be helped and removed from violent and abusive family situations. In cooperation with neighbourhood organisations, community networks, schools and soup kitchens, social policies should focus on timely monitoring of dysfunctional and at-risk families, child abuse and street migration at an early stage. Especially families, in which one or

more siblings have already taken to the streets, or families with street-working children, are at risk for further street migration. Social protection for these children should be secured. This includes making the Ombudsman for children (DEMUNA) more accessible to marginalised children and street children.

Once children live on the streets they encounter various forms of police violence and their children's rights are frequently violated. More control within the police system is essential to prevent the violent, corrupt and offensive methods used towards street children. Police staff at all levels should be trained on children's rights and the specific situation of street children. Police officers who violate children's rights should be sanctioned. A lack of information about the background and real preoccupations of street children is what causes people to make false assumptions about them. Through public awareness raising campaigns violence, stigmatisation and discrimination of street children can be decreased. The current police approach to street children is a reactive one, in which street children are not helped or rehabilitated; they are instead criminalised and simply moved out of sight into the marginal areas of the city.

The situation in the juvenile custody and detention centres of the police should also be improved and made more child-friendly. Corporal punishment should be prohibited and no child in detention should be held for more than the 48 hour limit. More (educational) activities and (psychological) counselling should be organised in detention centres, so the children can keep busy and work on their (mental) development while on remand. Children with different profiles should be kept separate according to age, gender and reasons for detention, e.g. delinquent drug users should not be locked up in the same room as children who took refuge at the police station from abuse at home. NGOs must cooperate with detention centres, police stations and juvenile prisons to support positive reintegration of (ex) street children into society and the community.

NGOs and local governments should work on making street-living children more aware of their rights. It is important that education about child rights reaches street children, as they are one of the most vulnerable victims of violence, abuse and (sexual) exploitation. The Ombudsman for children (DEMUNA) should be made more accessible for street-living children and they should learn to report violations of street children's rights.

For organisations working with street children, like day/night shelters and children's homes, it is first of all important to have street educators out in the streets on a regular basis in order to monitor and analyse street migration, make contact with the street children, keep track of their life trajectories and to learn more about the needs and problems of the children. Especially children in the first stages of street migration, with moderate and less incorporated drug consumption, should be identified as soon as possible. The more addicted and adapted a child is to drugs and street life, the harder it is to offer adequate help and get the child off the streets.

One of the main difficulties for street child organisations is their dependence on foreign donors, who (in most cases) are foremost interested in the numbers of street children reached. As a result, organisations compete for the children's attention instead of cooperating with each other to reach their mutual goal: improving the living conditions and future prospects of street children. Foreign donor organisations should therefore shift their focus from a major interest in numbers to an interest in quality, diversity and joint cooperation.

Close communication between different street educators from different organisations, and between street educators and other staff members in the organisations, is crucial to keep everybody

informed, avoid double work and to help as many children as possible. Instead of competing for the children's attention, NGOs should collaborate more to prevent street children from "aid-shopping", i.e. children taking from every organisation what suits them best to facilitate street life instead of looking for structural improvements.

In Lima the areas visited by street educators should be more diverse, i.e. not only the centre of Lima, but also the Conos and at-risk neighbourhoods should be given attention by street educators and street child projects. Moreover, street educators should cooperate more with other people in the street children's networks, like market vendors, car mechanics, internet cafés, (illegal) hostels, and police officers.

Street child interventions should make more use of new trends in street life, such as the extreme popularity of online chat-sites among street children. Street educators can befriend street children online, have personal talks and give them advice and lend a listening ear. Often children open up more easily through the internet, their location can be traced (most children log in every day around the same time at the same place), and they feel freer to ask and answer "embarrassing questions", for instance regarding sexual habits and diseases or drugs.

In the day/night and permanent shelters attention should be paid to informal education on health, sex and drugs. Children should be encouraged to attend these meetings so that more awareness can be raised within the street children population. Special attention needs to be given to street girls, especially young street mothers, to avoid a next generation of street children. When a street mother is not able to take care of her child, street educators need to interfere and search for an adequate solution. Besides, it's important that more information on birth control and consequences of drug use during pregnancies reaches street girls. Moreover, sex education to street children should also focus on the particular health risks of homosexual relations and break the taboo on homosexuality in Peruvian society. Currently, many homosexual street children are denied access to shelters or other institutions, because of the taboo, and as a result are more at risk for exploitation and prostitution.

Cusco lacks adequate numbers of street educators and day shelters. Street children in Cusco expressed the need for places where they can turn to during the day, where they would receive personal guidance and attention and where they could learn new skills. In Lima there is a need for an adequate night shelter, to prevent so many street children from sleeping in illegal hostels and on the streets, where they are exposed to abuse and diseases.

Before street-living children are placed in a children's home, staff members and educators of the home should ensure that the placement is in the best interest of the child and that a re-integration of the child in his/her family is not an option. Also for day/night shelters it is important to obtain thorough knowledge about a child's background and family situation to avoid (unintentionally) pulling children to the streets who would otherwise return home after the work. Moreover, street child programmes should not be limited to the provision of basic assistance only, to avoid dependency and *asistencialismo*, but they should focus on child development and long term solutions, like family and school integration. With vocational training the future prospects of the children on the labour market will be increased. Also the child's connections with family and society should be strengthened.

All shelters or other institutions should target particular street children, or at least have separate areas for children with different profiles (including only-girl and only-boy wards). It can be highly damaging and counter productive to let children clean from drugs and with a history of sexual abuse

intermingle with drug-addicted street-living children who have been heavily involved in criminal activities. As with children all over the world, these children too will heavily influence each other.

To get (often traumatised) street children back on the right track and back into school, intensive personal guidance is a must. Every street child organisation should have enough trained educators and psychologists to give individual attention to the physical and mental health of every individual child. Before children are ready for family or school reintegration they need to receive intensive psychological support. Educators should be aware that every street child has its own history, needs, aspirations and skills and therefore every child needs its own tailor-made rehabilitation programme.

Considering the importance that most street children attach to family, street child interventions should involve family members in the rehabilitation process of the children as much as possible. Family involvement in the rehabilitation of a child can help children come to terms with their traumas. In general, street children are more motivated to change and get out of street life when their families are supportive and care about them. Therefore, much attention should be paid to re-establishing family contact, family counselling and family development, i.e. searching for solutions for socio-economic and emotional problems within the families' household. The reunification of a child in his/her family should be the most desired outcome of every street child programme. The focus during family reunification should be both on the child and on the family. The child's wish to return home is not enough on its own. Future family reinsertion cannot be successful if family members don't cooperate and the child encounters the same problems at home from which he in the past decided to flee. After family reintegration educators should not lose contact with the child as long term follow-up and counselling with both the child as his/her family is essential for success.

Besides the family, also the close social environment of the street child should be involved in the rehabilitation process. It is important that the child feels supported by his street friends and/or girlfriend/boyfriend. Moreover, to really forget the street lifestyle, a total change of the social and physical environment of the child is necessary. It is almost impossible for a child to maintain his new lifestyle, without drugs and with an education, while still roaming around with the same street friends.

When a street child returns to school, a proper (psychological) preparation and intensive tutorial support outside school is determinant for success. Moreover, within the educational system of Peru a specialised programme for street children and marginalised children should be developed and schools should pay more attention to disadvantaged youths. School staff should receive a specialised training to overcome stereotypes, accept and integrate street children, and pay attention to their specific skills and needs. When vocational training is provided to street children, it is important that the learned skills meet the labour market needs, as to increase the formal job opportunities for street children after finishing education.

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