

Title

'Three some' and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Ostensibly, there is dearth of academic studies that examine the intricate relationship between substance abuse and three some among street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. Therefore, the paper interrogates the complex relationship between three some and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. The qualitative research methodology punctuated by street ethnography approach was used to generate data for this paper. Research findings suggest that the relationship between substance abuse and three some among children in street situations is multi-dimensional. The child rights, child agency and ubuntu or unhu perspectives were used to analyse this multi-dimensional nature of a relationship. The children in street situations demonstrate their agency when they engage in substance abuse and group sex. Through three some and abusing substances some of the children are able to coping with their situations. However, such behaviours are considered as ambiguous of agency as they clash with moral and societal values. They are also seen as self-destructive agency because of the risks associated with the behaviours. Drawing from the ubuntu and or unhu perspective, three some and abusing substances among street children of Harare Central Business District articulates moral decadence among these children. The three some and abusing substance among children in street situations demonstrate huge child rights violations prevalent on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. The study concludes by lobbying and advocating for full implementation of child rights laws, policies and programmes specifically targeting street children so as to reduce risks associated with three some and abuse of substances among these children.

Key words

group sex, substance abuse, street children, child rights, Harare, Zimbabwe

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Introduction

Very few academic studies have been conducted that examines the intricate and multidimensional relationship between three some and substance abuse. In other words, there is paucity of literature on the interrelatedness or nexus of the ‘three some’ or group sex and substance abuse among these children. The paper interrogates the multidimensional relationship between ‘three some’ or group sex and substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. The paper problematises the multi-dimensional nature of substance abuses and ‘three some’ or group sex among the street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. The authors added that some of the sexual behaviours such as group sex, unprotected sex, multiple sexual partnerships, sodomy, oral sex, hook ups among others are common among street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. Research findings indicate that the relationship between substance abuse and three some among children in street situations is multi-dimensional. As presented below the four themes emerged from the data which include, the use of psycho active substances that facilitate in group sex, the use of aphrodisiac substances to facilitate group sex, the use of aphrodisiac substances to facilitate group sex, and the abuse of substances as a result of group sex. Drawing from the *ubuntu* and or *unhu* perspective, group sex or ‘three some’ and abusing substances among street children of Harare Central Business District articulates moral decadence among these children.

Background

Makaruse (2010) defines substance abuse as taking too much of a drug, taking a drug too often or taking drugs or substances for wrong reasons. As persons with sexual desires and sexual attractions too, street children engage in sexual behaviours (Beazley, 2003). Mhizha (2010), Rugaranganda (2008), Chikoko (2017) observed that street children engage in various sexual behaviours. Mhizha (2010), Rugaranganda (2008), Wakatama (2007) noted that some of the street children engage in substance abuse. Rugaranganda (2008) observed that some of the substances include conventional and traditional ones. However, previous studies on street children of Harare by Bourdillon from 1994 up to the present, Mella (2012), Wakatama (2007), Rugaranganda (2008) have been limited in articulating the multi-dimensional relationship between three some and substance abuse among street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe.

Conceptual frameworks

Child agency

Bell (2012: 284) defines agency as “a process whereby individuals are able to envisage different paths of action, decide among them and then take action along a chosen route.” In addition, Chuta (2014: 02) has defined agency as “understood as an individual’s own capabilities, competences and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their life worlds fulfilling many economic, social and cultural expectations”. In simple terms agency is about choices or actions taken by individuals so as to survive or meet their daily needs (Bourdillon, 2009). Bell (2012: 284) also defines sexual agency among youth as a “processes where young people become sexually active and the strategies, actions and negotiations involved in maintaining relationships and navigating broader social expectations.”

However, some scholars have criticised agency as it sometimes clashes with societal value system as noted by Bordonaro and Payne (2012). For example, Chikoko (2014) observed that commercial sex work among street children of the Harare Central Business District could be regarded as ambiguity of agency. Gigengack (2006 and 2008) has also noted that some of the behaviours of street children such as excessive abuse of substances leads to death thus self-destructive agency.

The actions or behaviours such as three some and substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District could be viewed as ambiguous agency. The ambiguity of agency is at two levels. The first context is on the fact that three some and abuse of substances threaten the well-being of the street children. Secondly the social actions or behaviours are considered as ambiguous of agency in the context that the behaviours is against the societal values of the Zimbabwean society. In addition, the actions could also be part of the notions of self-destructive agency because of a number of risks that are associated with the behaviours.

Child rights

The United Nations (UN, 1989) defines child rights into four principles namely, the best interest of the child, the right of a child to participation, non-discrimination and the right of a child to survival and development. The Save the Children (2002) also noted that, child rights perspective recognises the relationship between the duty bearer and the rights holders. Chikoko (2014) observed that the child rights perspective could be seen as social contract that exists between the rights holders and the duty bearers.

Nhenga (2008) noted that in an effort to domesticate the provisions of the UN (1989) and the ACRWC (1999), the Government of Zimbabwe has enacted a number of child rights laws, policies and programmes. Chikoko (2014 and 2017) also observed that some of the laws, policies and programmes included, the Children's Act (5:06), Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23) and the Multi-Sectoral Response to Child Sexual Abuse and the National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (2016-2020) among others.

However, a number of critics or flaws have been raised against the UNCRC. Scholars such as Nhenga (2008), Bourdillon (2009), Morrow and Pells (2012) observed that the UNCRC is seen or viewed as a western conceptualisation of childhood. In addition, Morrow and Pells (2012: 04) noted that "the UNCRC does not contain specific rights relating to poverty and does not define the term."

The vulnerability of the children is explained when some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District engage in three some and abuse of substances. In addition, the behaviours are seen as inconsistent with the provisions of the UNCRC, the ACRWC and some of the national child rights laws, policies and programmes. For example, in terms of the Children's Act (5.06), street children are viewed as children in need of care. Their vulnerability is further observed when they engage in various sexual behaviours such as three some and abuse of substances. The behaviours demonstrate huge child rights violations prevalent on the streets of the Harare Central Business District.

It would be useful if you conclude this section with your own proposed framework. That way your research contributes to literature at theory level as well.

Research methodology

The purposive sampling was used to select or identify eight (8) participants for the study. As a result of purposive sampling, the researcher identified and targeted street children who were known by locals engaged to be deviant in terms of sexual behaviours and also abusing substances. Through purposive sampling it was easier to select the participants who were considered to be hard to reach ones. Scholars such as Neuman (2011) observed that purposive sampling is suitable when working with difficult or vulnerable populations such as street children and street based sex workers. The authors added that through purposive sampling it becomes easy to identify and recruit the participants in a study. Similarly, Mhizha (2010) also used purposive sampling on his studies with the street children of Harare.

For all the 8 participants, a number of the qualitative data collection techniques such as life history interviews, in-depth interviews, informal conversations and semi-participant observation methods were adopted to collect the data for this study. During key informant interviews, social workers employed by Government of Zimbabwe and non-governmental organisations were targeted to get their views on substance abuse and three some among the street children of the Harare Central Business District.

Similarly, Bell (2012) used life history interviews, in depth interviews when researching about sexual lives of young people in rural Uganda. The research findings of this paper were part of the author's doctoral field work which involved street ethnography spanning more than twelve months.

The qualitative data was analysed through thematic content analysis. The data analysis focused on themes and sub themes that emerged from the study. Some of the themes and sub themes that emerged included, aphrodisiac substances, psycho active substances, oral sex, hook-up, group sex, among others. Scholars such as Farmer, McAlinden and Maruna (2016); Garland, Richard and Cooney (2010); Mhizha (2010); Mhizha and Muromo (2013); Chikoko (2014 and 2017); Ruparanganda (2008) used thematic content analysis in their studies with street children.

The following ethical considerations were observed when conducting this research; informed consent, confidentiality, benevolence among others. In the case of the street children of the Harare Central Business District, the researcher obtained verbal informed consent. The researcher also ensured confidentiality by using alphabetical letters instead of the names of the street children.

Research findings

The section presents the research findings in terms of the intricate relationship between substance abuse and three some among street children of the Harare Central Business District, Zimbabwe. Research findings suggest that the relationship between substance abuse and three some among children in street situations is multi-dimensional. As presented below the four themes emerged from the data which include, the use of psycho active substances that facilitate in group sex, the use of aphrodisiac substances to facilitate group sex, the use of aphrodisiac substances to facilitate group sex, and the abuse of substances as a result of group sex.

The use of psycho active substances that facilitate in group sex

There is evidence that some children in street situations of the Harare Central Business District engage in group sex, the so called 'three some or four some'. The three some involves street boys and girls having sex with more than one sexual partner in a single or several sessions. One of the major reasons cited for that was the desire to raise money among others issues, as well as having fun. The participants also revealed that, as social actors, the abuse of substances acted as a catalyst to enhance sexual pleasure during three some sessions. In certain instances, they would do three some in the presence of the so called *mhenes*. The *mhenes* would derive gratification in watching these children having sex.

During the life history interviews, one of the street girls called Shedia aged 16 years old revealed that she occasionally conducted three some sessions with two or three male clients for the reasons of getting more money. Be that as it may, she admitted that three some would become easier to practise when she was heavily intoxicated by substances such as cannabis. For her, when she is intoxicated by cannabis, she has more fun. She had this to say:

Mudhara, isu tiri mafia, tiri masoja ehondo. Tinoita mathree some sex, ndiwo anobhandara zvakananyanya, kwete zvokurovesa short time. Ndakauya kutown kuzotsvaga mari kwete kurima mbambaira. Ndikaita three some, ndinomaker mari yakareba. Last weekend on Saturday, ndakaita three kulodge kuMugonhi nemamafia. Ndaka wana mari inoita 50 dollars. Musi uyu ndakanga ndakadhakwa chaizvo. Ndakanga ndanwa Zed nemaRedds. (Elder, we are mafia. We are soldiers at war. We do threesome sex and it is more rewarding than short time sex. I came to town to make money not grow sweet potatoes. If I do threesome, I make some good money. Last weekend on a Saturday, I had three some at Mugonhi lodge with the mafia. I made around 50 dollars. That day I was drunk a lot because I had taken on Zed and Redds).

Vanhu vanoita group sex, vanowanzo gara vakadhakwa. Three some inorwadza zvakananyanya nokuti kufadza vaclients maviri kana matatu vose pasex one time haisi joke. For example, pa three some unokwanisa kuyamwa blambi, yeclient uku mumwe pamwe client inenge ichikuuta doggy style. Saka anenge ari mahwani, zvinotoda kuti uwane simba uye usinga funge zvakanwanda. (People who normally practise three some are always drunk. Three some is very painful because to successfully satisfy two or three clients sexually is not a joke. For example, during three some, you could lick the penis of one client whilst at the same time having another

fucking you doggy style. So it becomes something else and it requires strength and no worries).

Dzimwe nguva ndino wanza kuita mathree some sex nemaclients angu, mhene dzine mari, dzakafanana nemaforeigners. Asi kuti zvinyanze kunakidza ndinenge ndakabatwa nemadrugs. Kana ndakabatwa nemadrugs, mboro handizezi, ndinotoda vaya vanonzi varume, vane hombe chaidzo. (Sometimes, I do three some with my clients mhene with lot of money, such as foreigners. But for us to have fun I need to be intoxicated with substances. If I am drunk, I am comfortable with the penis, I prefer even those who are called real men with very big ones).

The use of aphrodisiac substances to facilitate group sex

The study also noted that some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District used both modern and traditional medicines to facilitate group sex. Ironically these substances were acquired on the streets. During the in depth interviews, one of the street boys called Peter (not real name) aged 17 years had this to say;

I take on some aphrodisiac substances to do group sex. I normally do three some with some old women. I take wild horse. Last weekend I had a three some in the Avenues area, after taking on capsules of wild horse. There is a guy who sells some of these tablets.

After taking on the wild horse, we had a heavy sex. However, I later on had severe headache as a result of using the wild horse. On that particular day, as a result of the migraine headache, I had also a nose bleeding.

During the informal conversations, one of the street girls called Melody (not real name) aged 16 years had this to say:

Pane vamwe vakomana vanoitavo three some nemabig mummies, asi nguva zhinji kuti zvinyatso fire vanenge vachishandisa madrugs seviagra kana mudenhatsindi. Vamwe vacho vanenge vakadhakwa nechamba futi kuti uwane simba. (Sometimes, some of the boys that do three some with sugar mummies in most cases would use Viagra or traditional medicine - Mudenha Tsindi. Some of them would have smoked mbanje to gain lots of strength).

During key informant interviews, one of the social workers also confirmed that some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District also used aphrodisiac substances to facilitate group sex. The social worker added that the street children were acquiring the aphrodisiac substances on the streets. In addition, during field work visits, the researcher noticed empty packets of wild horse, traditional aphrodisiac substances such as *vuka vuka* among others.

The abuse of substances as a result of group sex

During the informal conversations, one of the street boys called Kheda (not real name) aged 17 years also revealed that, three some was rampant among street children. He indicated that, some of the street girls that specialise in three some are normally addicted to substances because of the exploitative nature of that type of sex. He had this to say:

Mudhara, twuma hure twunoita three some twunowanzo gara twakabatwa nemadrugs. Graft racho mahwani, nokuti kukwirwa nevanhu vakawanda one time, mahwani mudhara, zvinotoda wakadhakwa. (Elder, some of the sex workers who do three some, abuses substances. The work is something else because to be fucked by many people at the same time, requires one to be intoxicated).

During the key informant interviews, one of the social workers also confirmed that some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District resort to abuse of psycho active substances such as cannabis as a result of group sex. She added that three some is so dehumanising as a result of exploitative nature of the sexual behaviour. Therefore, for street children to cope with the dehumanising experiences they resort to abuse of psycho active substances.

Discussion

The relationship between group sex or 'three some' and use of substances illustrates the agency of these children. The street girls use substances during three some so as to manage the exploitative nature of the sexual practice. For example, the street children used intoxicating substances as coping mechanism during three some practices. The use of substances and three some as survival options can be viewed in a context of multiple constraints thus as thin agency as noted by Tisdall and Punch (2012). The behaviours of using substances and three some could also be part of the concept of ambiguous agency as they clash with societal values. Also for children including those in street situations to engage in commercial sex work in the name of three some is worrisome in Zimbabwean society. The behaviours associated with commercial sex work and abuse of substances involving street children is threatening the existing moral fabric of the society. In addition, the ambiguity of the agency is shown as three some in commercial sex work threatens the well-being of the street children. Gigengack (2006 and 2008) referred to such behaviours as self-destructive agency. The actions could be self-destructive agency as a result of risks associated with commercial sex work, group sex. Some of the probable risks are exposure to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS.

The involvement of a child in three some and as well as abusing substances is a serious child rights violations issue. The Zimbabwe's Children's Act (5:06) refers to such children as 'in need of care.' The children are in need of care because of the risks associated with group sex, commercial sex work and abuse of substances involving these minors. The Zimbabwe's Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (9:23) as 'in conflict with the law'. The children are in need of care because of the criminalization of commercial sex work involving children including those in street situation in Zimbabwean society. The group sex or 'three some' among minors such as street children is seen as a form of child sexual exploitation. This calls upon all key stakeholders to assist vulnerable children to live in a safe environment that is not characterized by three some and use of substances. Drawing from a child rights thinking in fact key stakeholders should provide more support to such children so as to reduce their vulnerabilities to abusing substances and group sex. These children could be empowered through livelihoods related opportunities such as social protection programmes like cash transfers such that they refrain from abusing substances and engaging in three some as a survival options. Some of the empowerment programmes could be through information sharing on the risks associated with substance abuse and group sex.

Drawing from *ubuntu* or *unhu* perspective, the abuse of substances and three some among the street children of the Harare Central Business District, demonstrate moral decay in the Zimbabwean society. The behaviours are in contrast with moral expectations of Zimbabwean society. Mugumbate and Chereni (2019), Mangena (2012) observed that *Ubuntu* or *unhu* perspective is anchored on moral values, humanness, and humility among other virtues. Therefore, for children including those in street situations to engage in three some and abuse of substances such behaviours or actions are strongly condemned. The behaviours or actions are in contrast to the key virtues such as humanness, honesty among others.

Chikoko (2014) who observed that some of the street girls of the Harare Central Business District who were involved in commercial sex work also succumbed to substance abuse. The author added that abuse of substances facilitated the street girls to practise commercial sex work for example stripping, dancing among others. In fact, some of the street girls gained more confidence to practise commercial sex work after taking on intoxicating substances. For example, in his study, Chikoko (2014) noted that intoxicated the street girls had more confidence to practise extortion on unsuspecting male clients.

Chikoko *et al* (2018) noted that there is close relationship between forced sex or rape and

substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. The authors noted that some of the street girls were exposed to forced sex and as a result of intoxicating substances. Similarly, Chikoko *et al* (2019) observed that there is a close relationship between early sexual debut and abuse of substances among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. The authors noted that early sexual debut was as a result of substance abuse.

Apart from using psycho active substances, scholars such as Chikoko (2014 and 2017) some street girls also used beauty related substances to bleach their skins. The authors added that the beauty related substances facilitated the street girls beautified themselves as they practised commercial sex work. The girls were aware that their male clients preferred light skinned ones (Chikoko, 2014 and 2017).

The study established that some of the street children of the Harare Central Business District engaged in substance abuse as a result of group sex. In other words, the children were involved in substance abuse so as to manage feelings of regrets associated with group sex. Chikoko (2014) noted that the some of the street girls used substance abuse to cope with the exploitative nature associated with commercial sex work. For example, they resorted to abuse of intoxicating substances so as to manage their ordeal of transactional sex (Chikoko, 2014). The author noted that some of the street girls that were involved in commercial sex work used cannabis, cough syrup, among other intoxicating substances.

Moreover, Chikoko *et al* (2018) observed that some of the street children had to resort to abuse of psycho active substances so as to manage the traumatic experiences associated with the ordeal of forced sex or rape. Similarly, Chikoko *et al* (2019) observed that some of the street children ended up abusing substances so as to cope with dehumanising experiences associated with early sexual debut. As a result of the traumatic experiences associated with early sexual debut, a majority of street children of Harare Central Business District engaged in psycho active substances such as cannabis among others (Chikoko *et al* (2019).

Policy options

This paper proffers a number of recommendations in relation to three some and substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. Some of them include the following;

1. For the full implementation of child rights laws, policies and programmes targeting street children. This can significantly reduce child rights violations on the streets of the Harare Central Business District,

2. For the establishment of functional substance abuse rehabilitation centres on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. The substance abuse rehabilitation centres can be established at some of the Drop-in centres,
3. To raise more awareness on child rights, reproductive health rights, sex among others with a view to promote empowerment of street children,
4. To introduce sustainable child protection programmes embracing social protection programmes. Programmes such as cash transfer programme, assisted medical treatment orders targeting street children and
5. For improving access to contraceptives among the street children including free provisions of condoms, family planning tablets among others.

Conclusion

As discussed above, there is an intricate and multi-dimensional relationship between three some and substance abuse among the street children of the Harare Central Business District. For example, some of the children facilitated three some under the influence of psycho active and aphrodisiac substances. In contrast some of the children resorted to the abuse of psycho active substances as result of group sex. The abuse of substance and three some demonstrate agency of these children. However, the behaviours constitute ambiguity of agency as the actions threaten the well-being of the street children. In addition, the ambiguity is also explained in the context of the behaviours is in contrast with societal expectations. The abuse of substances and three some among children is seen as an abomination among the Shona people in Zimbabwe. The abuse of substances and three some is also considered as self-destructive agency on the basis of risks associated with behaviours. Additionally, the actions of the street children illustrate moral decay on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. The abuse of substances and three some among street children highlights huge child rights violations on the streets of the Harare Central Business District. The behaviours are in contrast with international, regional and local child rights laws, policies and programmes.

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