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Author(s)	SUCHARITKUL, Juthathip
Citation	Journal of the Graduate School of Letters, 2, 103-116
Issue Date	2007-03
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/20499
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	SUCHARITKUL.pdf



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Street Children as Marginal People: The Relationship between Life History and Social Networks on the Street

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Abstract: This paper assumes that street children are victims of socioeconomic development policy. As a consequence of the street life experience, children are labeled as street children by society and their way of their life is different from ordinary children, thus pushing them to become marginalized people.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Street Children phenomenon, and especially to study the relationship between their life history and personal networks on the street. The focus is to explain why street children are pushed into becoming marginal people. To do this, I conducted personal interviews with two street children and seven people related to them in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The main findings were: (1) The life histories of street children show that their lives are related to a special group, especially in non-kin relationships. (2) The core of their networks consists of friends who are fellow street children in the close zone who can help them to survive on the street; these close zone people are non-kin. (3) Street children survive by themselves and know that their lives are different from others, so they need space for activities and want to isolate themselves from others to protect their lives. They lose the loose zone network which provides support such as new opportunities and information to raise their socio-economic status. (4) Street children have weak status in society because the street children network domains are constricted, and most network agents do not support them to re-enter mainstream society, but rather, push them to become marginal people. From these results, it is suggested that the government and third sector parties (including NGOs) should focus more on street children support networks to solve the street children problem.

Keywords: Street Children, Marginal People, Social Network, Life History, Thailand

(Received on December 27, 2006, Revised on February 17, 2007)

1. Introduction

This paper assumes that street children are victims of socio-economic development policy and

are low in socio-economic status (SES). Thailand has achieved an impressive economic growth rate over the past forty years. Rural-urban migration is closely related to the disorder in rural areas after the 1st National Economic Development Plan (1961–1966). Economic development and growth brought with them income disparities between urban and rural areas, rapid migration to urban areas, and the disintegration of the extended family and traditional values. That phenomenon revealed the imbalance between rural-urban areas of socio-economic development. Moreover, migrants moving to urban areas had to face limited and insufficient facilities in the urban areas to provide adequate jobs and services.

Therefore, the phenomenon of street children is seen as an element of urban areas. They are young people who spend a considerable amount of time living or working on the streets of the world's cities. As a consequence, the situation of children who become street children, as labeled by society and community, are separated from other children and pushed into becoming marginal people.

In this study, I: 1) describe the phenomenon of street children by considering their life history and previous lives, 2) explain street childrens' social networks and classify the relation of interaction and exchange when they live on the street, and 3) study their network that led them to have low SES and become marginal people.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Who are street children?

Since the implementation of the national economic development plan in Thailand in the 1960s, poverty and rapid urbanization have become serious problems of socio-economic development. Many children have been forced onto the streets or abandoned there because of their dysfunctional families; an equal number have escaped there (due to death or imprisonment of their parents). Some children are also victims of adult abuse and economic exploitation, and are compelled to become street children. They escape to the streets from the poverty of the slums, from family neglect, abusive parents and guardians, or from places such as factories where they have been illegally employed (Somphong Chitradub, 1998: 3–14).

In Bangkok, Thailand, it is estimated that over 10,000 children live on the streets. They come from rural areas and urban slums; they come from the 1.5 million child laborers, the 30,000 child prostitutes, the 300,000 child drug abusers, the 500,000 slum children, and the 2,000 children that are abandoned every year¹. In 1997, the total number of street children was about 14,000–16,000². Moreover, according to Somphong Chitradub, “In 2006, the number of street children in Thailand is about 18,000, and will increase to 30,000 in the next 3 years. More than 50 percent of street children are from the northeastern part and foreign countries (such as Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos).”³

There is no universal definition of “street children” and several interpretations are in

¹ Tangkananurak, Wallop. *The Forgotten Children in Thai Society*. 1987.

² <http://oppy.opp.go.th/about/doc/youthrep46-47.doc>

³ http://www.chula.ac.th/chula/resources/download/cu_rel/curel_36_2006.pdf

common use, some covering smaller populations of children who live on the streets, others including children who work on the streets (Thomas de Benitez 2003). They are living in different cities and are facing many challenges to survive (UNICEF 1998). Street children utilize the street as a place for work, for learning by doing, for resolving family economic affairs, a place for recreation, and to fight for survival. In Thailand, street children are one of the underprivileged or disadvantaged types of children. According to UNICEF's 1989, Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is a person under 18 years of age⁴, but according to the Ministry of Social development and Human Security, Thailand, a child is a person who is under 15 years old, and a youth is a person under 25 years old⁵. So a child can mean a person who is under 18 years old, and sometimes a group of children and youths together are under 25 years old. For this reason, a street child is under 18 years old, and a street youth is under 25 years old. For the current study, I put street children and street youths in the same group, namely, a person who is under 25 years old, and use the term "street children" in this paper.

These children use the streets in different ways (e.g., for working, playing, or living) and researchers study many aspects of the street children phenomenon (e.g., their way of life, their relationships with family, and poverty). Geraint J. Richard (1994: 57) separates street children into three distinct categories: 1) children working on the street with regular family contact; 2) children living and working on the street; and 3) completely abandoned and neglected children. Jan Grundling and Irma Grundling (2005: 175) separate street children into two groups: 1) children *on* the street; those children who spend each day either working on or roaming the streets but who returned to the family each night to sleep, and 2) children *of* the street; those children who have either abandoned their home or have been abandoned by their parents and who consequently live their entire lives on the streets, sleeping outside their home. According to Schurink (1993, see Grundling and Grundling, 2005: 175), children *on* the street in the Third World constitute the largest group (approximately 75 percent), and Lusk (1992) has estimated that 70–90 percent of all street children fall into this group.

2.2 Social network and the importance of a personal network

Social networks and social support are related in that support received from a social network can buffer stress and improve coping in all stages of life (Kef et al., 2000). A positive association between SES and network size is found in particular for the partial network of non-kin (Campbell, Marsden and Hurlbert 1986, Johnson 1994). The networks are social resources (Coleman 1988); high status persons have relatively numerous weak ties to individuals who have wide networks themselves and the concept of information diffusion through weak ties in social networks is very useful for many kinds of problems (Granovetter 1973, 1983: 201–233). For this reason, Granovetter's theory shows that most working people are satisfied, enjoy their jobs, and exchange information through weak ties. It is generally found that useful information comes from people outside one's immediate social group. Most studies have found a positive association between SES and network support.

⁴ <http://www.onec.go.th/Act/6.12/disadv1.doc>

⁵ <http://oppy.opp.go.th/about/06.html>

Personal networks have structural and functional network aspects, which are also described as quantitative and qualitative aspects of a personal network. Structural aspects refer to the importance of the size and composition of the network, accessibility, durability or length of relationships, and density of a network. Functional aspects refer to the quality and content of a relationship. They refer to aspects like social support, reciprocal balance of support provided and support received, intimacy, and satisfaction with support (Kef et al., 2000).

According to Marjolein I. Broese Van Groenou, "Personal network characteristics in later life are the impact of childhood and adulthood inequality SES (Marjolin, 2003: 625-645)." The general population has consistently indicated that people with low SES (i.e., low level of education, occupational level or income) have smaller networks with a larger proportion of kin relationships compared to those of higher status. According to Jeremy Boissevain (1978: 24-48), "A social network is transactions. An interaction between two actors that is governed by the principle that the value gained from the interaction must be equal to or greater than the cost; a social network can be classified by network zones⁶. A social network, at one level of abstraction, may be depicted as a scattering of points connected by lines. Persons and the lines are social relations and each person can thus be viewed as a star from which lines radiate to points, some of which are connected to each other. A network is similar to a communication circuit: it indicates that certain persons are in touch with each other, and once the new structure of the networks is established, the nature of that link is determined to the possession of a model of how a given individual can receive messages and how he can send messages, and to whom as well as through whom he can do so."

The linkages between persons in a network may be examined in terms of their structural diversity, the goods and services exchanged, the direction in which these move, and the frequency of interaction. These criteria make the universe of a person's total personal network, isolated from the total network including friendship, religious affiliation, and place of work or residence.

The purpose of the present study is to examine the street children phenomenon, especially with regards to their life histories and networks on the street. In particular, the focus is on why street children are pushed into becoming marginal people with continually low SES.

In the present research, I focus on the life histories of street children and personal networks on the street. Personal networks are the set of social ties that an individual creates for economic and social reasons. Their networks always connect with social capital because social capital is understood to be the set of social relations that may help or hinder individual opportunities, the household economy, or community development. Social capital is often measured through the presence and strength of particular social institutions (i.e., family, kin, community or volunteer organizations) and an individual's access to resources through personal networks.

⁶ Jeremy Boissevain (1978: 238) noted that Barnes (1969: 57) designated personal (ego-centric) networks as primary or first order stars and zones, and to be able to compete with the already established metaphorical use of personal network.



Picture 1: Map of Thailand

Note: <http://www.maps-thailand.com/>

3. Research Methodology

In July 2005, I contacted The Volunteer Group for Children Development (VGCD) in Chiang Mai Province, and asked them to identify and introduce street children. During the first visit, I stayed in Chiang Mai Province for 15 days and interacted with them every day for observation and established connections with street children participated in VGCD activities. In the second visit, in July 2006, I returned to spend 2 weeks conducting research. During 2005 and 2006, especially when returning to Thailand for research in other places, I always contacted the NGO's staff and my respondents to ask about their movements and changes.

It is very difficult to research the life histories of street children; because of their experiences on the street, they often do not want to tell about their lives in detail, especially concerning their family and connections. While their life style is such that they may move to another place or disappear at a moment's notice without telling anyone, I nonetheless asked them to introduce me to their acquaintances. For these reasons, this

study shows the personal networks of two street boys, who opened their hearts and consented to share their real life histories. Their interviews can be used to check and confirm the accuracy of the data. I spent time every day to speak to them ask about their networks that they wished to reveal, the results of which resembled snowball sampling. So, I interviewed seven people related to them such as a wife, two NGO staff members, two acquaintances, a close street child friend, and a non-street child friend who sometimes plays with street children and helps them with basic needs, through quantitative research and semi-structured interviews.

According to Jeremy Boissevain, social networks may be clustered into six zones: 1) a personal cell such as one's closest relatives and most intimate friends; 2) Intimate zone A such as very close friends and relations with whom an Ego maintains active, intimate relations; 3) Intimate zone B such as friends and relatives; 4) Effective zone: some persons who may be useful to the Ego, such as friends of friends; 5) Nominal zone: the Ego is acquainted with them, but that is about all; often he/she is uncertain of their names; 6) Extended zone: the collection of people whose faces the Ego recognizes; those who remember that he/she has met the Ego even though the Ego no longer remembers them.

Jeremy Boissevain's network zones explain the interaction and transaction between Egos and their network zones. In this research, I adapted these network zones to explain the relations

between street children and their network interactions and show how each network zone affects street children's interactions and status in society.

In this study, I clustered Jeremy Boissevain's six social network zones into four zones, each of which forced an individual into an individual interaction, because, personal cells represent the respondents, and in this research I would like to show how the relations of each zone affected respondents. Thus, I did not cluster the respondents in the zone. Beginning with Zone 1, this indicates the closed network (intimate zone) which contains both the personal cell zone and intimate zone A, which in this research is very close friends and very close relations such as wife/mother and one NGO staff member. Zone 2 is the effective network (intimate zone B). Zone 3 is the nominal network which includes both the effective zone and nominal zone, because the Effective zone and Nominal zone, are clustered in the same level because friends of friends in some cases know only their name, and have very loose contact, but can support each other in some situation at some time, depending on their exchange and profit. Zone 4 is the loose network (extended zone).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Data Collection

Both of the main respondents were street children with street experience of more than 8 years. One of them left the street over 2 years ago and is trying to be self-reliant by working in his field of interest. The other is trying to leave the street with the assistance of NGOs.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Relationship between Street Children's Lives and Social Network Zone Roles

Figure 1 shows which network zones affected the different roles of respondents. Zone 1 offers the strongest effect and support to children and Zone 4 gives the weakest support to children, but strongly affects children in their life.

Zone 1 support roles include: helping to find a job and work, giving job information, teaching and imitating socialization in the group zone, introductions to new friends and networks, providing basic needs, counseling, supporting emotions and health, and protection from antagonists (only street children's close friends' role). Therefore, for street children's relationships, zone 1 network's role functions like family, and this research shows that street children's close friends are very important for them on the street. When their relationship continued, some members of their group may have left the street.

“When I was 8 years old, my family went broke and my elder sister went to find a job in Chiang Mai. She left me with my relatives (my mother's elder brother). I do not like him. He is always violent and neglects me. So I left that house and my hometown to Chiang Mai alone to search for my elder sister. Unfortunately,, I could not find my sister; I stayed at the bus station where my first street experience started. At that place, I met U (nickname). He and I went everywhere in Chiang Mai; working, sleeping, eating, and when I had problems, the first person who tried to help me was U. He is very important for me living on the street. Recently U left the street to work at a shop, but everyday he comes to

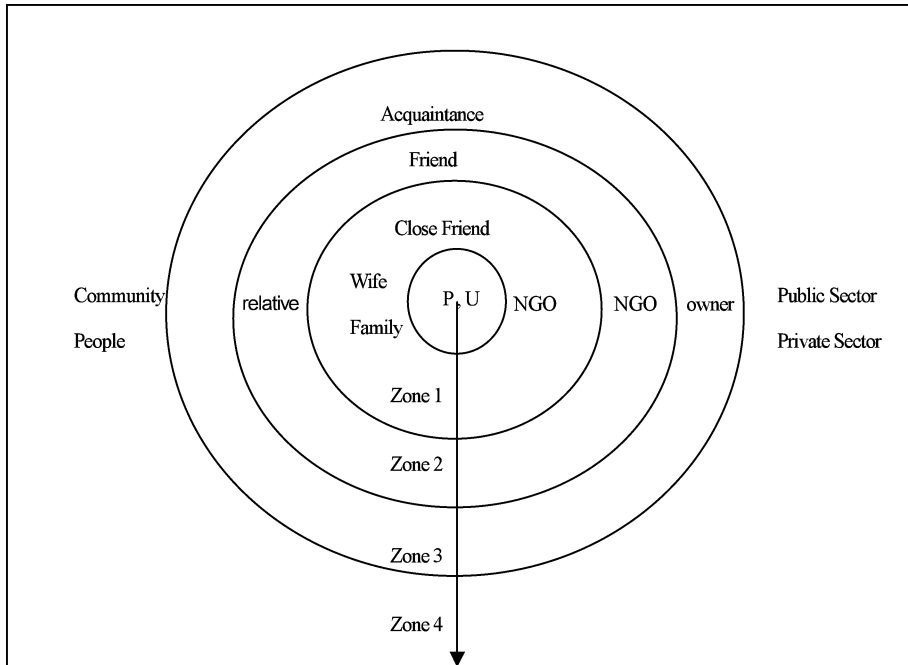


Fig. 1: The relation pattern of Street Children's Networks from close relations and strong ties to loose relations and weak ties.

This figure is adapted from *Networks: Interaction and Structure, Friends of Friends* (Jeremy Boissevain; 1978: 47)

my workplace to talk and play football and sports together.” (P)

Zone 2 support roles are: providing new job/information, counseling (e.g., money, health, food problems), teaching socialization, introducing new friends and networks, and providing basic needs such as food and money. In the case of U, this zone member taught him about painting, gave him a chance to meet other people in his field of interest, and give him self-esteem and self-confidence. Therefore, for street children's relationships, Zone 2 network functions as kinship and neighborhood, and they try to preserve this relation as in zone 1. When zone 1 cannot provide support, zone 2 has an influence on street children when they are in trouble.

“Three years ago I met “P” (nickname) who is a painter and works on the sidewalk. I went there every weekend to see him drawing and painting pictures. When I came back home, I started to train by myself for 2–3 hours every day. But my technique and my equipment was bad, so I consulted with “B” and “F” about giving me new equipment and a book for painting. With these, I hope I can find a new job in my field of interest and find a future.” (U)

Zone 3 support roles are: contacting them by providing money and food when needed, providing a job or a one-day job (i.e., jobs in the informal sector such as waiter, car park attendant, souvenir seller, car washer), providing counseling and support (e.g., money, health, and food). Therefore, Zone 3's role is an acquaintance relationship, and they preserve this relation,

Table 1 Data of the main respondent “P” and “U”

	P	U
Sex	Male	Male
Age	21	20
Education	2 years of elementary school drop out	Non formal education, 2 years high school
Job	NGO staff	Painter, CD seller
Income	120 bath/day	CD seller: 120 bath/day Painter: 300-700 bath/time
Living Place	Shelter	Mother's apartment
Living time on the street	12 years	8 years (left from street 2 years ago)
Birth Place	Phrae Province	Chaing Mai Province
Family Number	wife+1 son	mother
When you have problems, who do you consult with?	Future planning: B, C, F Job: B, C, F Money: B, C, F Playing: A, B, C, D, G Healthy: A, B, C, D, F Hope: A, B, C, F Daily life: A, B, C, D, E, F Food: B, C, D, E, F, G	Future planning: B, C, F Job: B, C, F Money: B, C, F Playing: A, B, C, D Healthy: B, C, D, F Hope: B, C, F Daily life: B, C, D, E, F Food: B, C, D, E, F
How to contact with The new network	1. Direct contact at work place, living place, playing place 2. Indirect contact: friend, friend of friend, acquaintance introduction	1. Direct contact at work place, living place, playing place, introducing himself, same interested field, painter 2. Indirect contact: mother, friend, friend of friend, acquaintance etc introduction
Future hope	To open his own coffee shop	To enter a university and buy a house.

Table 2 Data of the other interviewees

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Sex	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male
Age	15	32	18	27	45	38	40
Education	Drop out	High school	High school	Drop out	None	University	High School
Job	Housewife	NGO staff	CD seller	Food seller	Souvenir seller	NGO staff	Food seller
Income (bath)	0	6,000/month	150/day	150-200/day	100/day	15,000/month	200-250/day
P&U 's relation Period (year)	P: 1 U: 1	P: 10 U: 10	P: 12 U: 12	P: 7 U: 6	P: 1 U: 2	P: 10 U: 10	P: 5 U: 5
P&U contact time (times/day or month)	P: everyday U: 5/week	P: everyday U: 5/week	P: 5-6/week U: 5-6/week	P: 1-2/week U: 1/week or 2 weeks	P: 1/month U: less than 1/month	P: 2-3/week U: 1-2/week	P: 1/month U: -
P&U relationship	P: wilf U: Friend	P: Close Friend U: Close Friend	P: Close Friend U: Close Friend	P: Friend U: Friend	P: acquaintance U: acquaintance	P: Friend U: Friend	P: acquaintance U: acquaintance
P&U network zone	P: Zone 1 U: Zone 2	P: Zone 1 U: Zone 1	P: Zone 1 U: Zone 1	P: Zone 2 U: Zone 2	P: Zone 4 U: Zone 4	P: Zone 2 U: Zone 2	P: Zone 3 U: Zone 3

but it depends on time and the situation that benefits them. They will stop this relationship immediately if trouble arises between them and move to contact other network members, for example, business owners, out-group members (street children), or friends.

“I help him sometimes only with meals and a little money, because I am poor and do not have money either. I have known them more than 5 years, because my workplace has a lot of street children who are working and living there. I learned how the street children live; some boys are good, some boys are bad (thieves, pickpockets, those who don’t pay money for food). But P & U were good boys; they helped me find a job, and didn’t give me trouble.

... I could not teach them about their way of life and their future because the relationship between them and me was only that of an acquaintance. If they were hungry they came here for work and to eat; after that they went out. I didn’t talk with them about their lives, family, or future. Because I know, they didn’t want to tell me, maybe they are injured and feel hurt.” (G)

Zone 4 support roles are: support them sometimes and in some situations; give money and food sometimes when they see them or ask for help, and give them a job. Therefore, Zone 4 roles operate via indirect relationships, and most of this zone network does not contact this zone by themselves; they know each other by their network ties, e.g., friends of friends, NGO staff network, and the same community.

The benefit of this zone is their occupation. Their job is in the informal sector with no guarantee for safety and stability. First, street children are a cheap labor force with no obligations and no contract to negotiate between laborer and owner/employer. Their force is very important in the informal market sector. Second, they have no chance to choose their way of life (occupation, education, social welfare), because their status is still illegal in that they are not looked after by their own parents, or they are illegally overstaying foreigners. For these above reasons, the business sector derives great benefit from the use of their labor.

After their job finishes, street children are able to contact people in this zone because their relations are only exchange-based (i.e., work for money or work for food) and depend on the satisfaction and conditions of the exchange. This zone can welcome street children’s survival styles, partially because most people who interact with street children have low education, weak morals, and a low SES, similar to street children. By contrast, some people in this zone, who are of higher SES, do not need to interact directly with street children, so street children need space for activities and want to isolate themselves from others to protect their lives. Therefore, it is very difficult for street children to interact with and relate to others.

4. 2. 2 Street Children and Personal Support Network -Kin and Non-Kin Relations-

1) Kin Relations

Family functions as an important network factor for children. In traditional cultures, families have functioned to support and teach, nurture, educate, instill moral values, and provide for children’s education. A happy family is a place for its members to get together. It is the driving force for children to grow and develop the cell of society. By contrast, in the case of street children, the family is the main cause for a child to run away into the street to earn a living.

Economic hardship of many families in both rural and urban areas, and family tension, conflict, and fragmentation are the main causes for children to leave their families.

Children are led to street-life in many ways, but the most important reason is to support their family. Their relationship with family members can be classified into 4 categories as follows: 1) Street children with strong family relationships and regular contact (the children of low income families, migrant children, and child laborers); 2) Street children with weak family relationships and irregular contact (broken home children from low, middle, or high income families); 3) Street children who have cut off their relationship with their families (runaway children); 4) Street children without families (abandoned children) (Jesus V. C, et al. 1994: 78, edited by Hamish R. and Geraint J. R. 1994).

In this research, case study “P” is one who had cut off his relationship with his family, and “U” is a child with weak family relationships and irregular contact. However, the reasons why they left home were because of a dysfunctional family, poverty, family harmony, dynamic social solidarity, and insufficient support from their family (education, socialization, emotional support). For these reasons, street children’s relationships with family continue to weaken, and street children who run away from home will live longer on the street.

2) Non-Kin Relations

Most street children live in slum areas and are closely related to the social functions of the community. Accordingly, they are greatly affected by the lack of solidarity, poverty, and loose social networks in the community.

The increasing number of street children is a new phenomenon in Thailand. Traditionally, orphaned and abandoned children were cared for by extended family members or by the community through the services of the wat (Buddhist temple). As traditional structures and values fade, in the absence of any alternative structures to the deteriorating extended family, more children are simply abandoned or escape to the streets.

In the present study, “P” and “U” left from home (without family support) to work any kind of job in order to earn enough money to buy food, drugs, and for playing games. For them, clothes and a place to live are not important. In the case of “P”, he had not received enough support from relatives, neighbors, and community. His survival on the street can be analyzed by the relationship between his street survival and his network setting. When he lived with street children friends, spent a lot of time on the street, learned how to survive on the street, lacked the chance to study in school, work for money, and was lonely. By contrast, “U”, is able to receive new non-kin support, and that support network can help him find a new way of life (i.e., occupation). He is able to leave the street and start a new job.

For “P”, the bus terminal is his society, “...I think the bus terminal is my house, my workplace, my place. I learned everything for surviving by myself and my friends’ teaching; where we are safe from police, government officials, and gangs, how to get a lot of money. When I stay there I am never lonely because it is very noisy. I had a lot of friends, and moreover my freedom is very important. I can do everything; sleep, eat, work any place, anytime.... I do not want to contact them. I speak with them only to buy food and drugs, to get money, and to get a job. Some people do not want to speak and interact with me;

dirty clothes, drug addiction. But when I was young, some adults abused me, hit me, stole my money, so I learned to fight, form a group; it made me strong.” (P)

“I met my senior at a holiday market in Chiang Mai. He is a painter and he always works there, every week, so I go to see him and ask him about painting. He looks at me and asks me, “you want to paint?” I said, “yes, I like pictures and painting.” And he said he would teach me, but I would have to do a lot of work on my own if I want to be successful at painting.... I tried hard to be a painter, practiced every day, and told NGOs staff about the painting equipment and book to support me. My friend told me that my pictures were very beautiful. My senior showed me a place to work and where I could sell my first pictures. I feel proud. I think I have a new job and can support myself.” (U)

As street children come from broken families as described above, they are not able to receive essential support from kin and their family. When they survive on the street, association with and support from friends and other non-kin becomes most important (Case P). In contrast, both the support of kin and non-kin in terms of skills and information are important for getting a new job (Case U). Types of support in different types of relationships and zones affect their thinking and behavior. Positive associations between children and zone relations affect their self-esteem and self-confidence, self-selection, and promote their level of SES within their closed zone (Zone 1 or 2).

4. 2. 3 The Relation of Street Children’s Personal Networks and Marginal People

In general, families, friends and other adult support networks are very important for children and adolescents to protect them from negative effects on their mental health when they are exposed to stress, and this support improves well-being, self-esteem and self-assurance (Kef et al, 2000). In contrast, this paper shows how the exchange and interaction between street children and persons who interact with them in each zone affect their street survival, life style, behavior, and ability. Their relationships in the close zone included strong ties and only the street children group who can support their basic needs and help each other. Moreover, each zone can not raise their socio-economic development nor introduce them to wide personal support networks. There is a lack of social institutional support in their situation (e.g., family, social welfare, community, school support). When they lived on the street, the chance to make contact with other networks became limited. These problems were due to drug addiction, street children manners, and education of the street, which forced a separation between them and other children in mainstream society. Street children learn by themselves that their lifestyle is different from the lifestyles of people in mainstream society, and they are satisfied with their way of life. They have the chance to support their group members who tend to have similar backgrounds and SES and take pride in helping themselves.

In all situations, street children consider kin relations and intimate friend relations (zone 1 and zone 2) as important for their survival. If those network agents lack the power to raise them into a new status, self-esteem, and self-confidence, they isolate themselves from mainstream society.

The loose network (zone 3 and zone 4) showed 2 kinds of support: Support for daily life

survival needs (e.g., food, money, and clothes) and economic support (e.g., providing a job, and providing help to get a job). These jobs are in the informal sector (e.g., waiter, dishwasher, unskilled laborer) and most kind of jobs are one-day jobs at daily rates (less than minimum wage). They could not offer emotional support, reciprocity, or satisfaction with the support provided. Furthermore, those support networks did not pull him from the street life. Socialization of street children tends to proceed in steps taken outside the conventional paths of the family, school, and community environment, as is reflected in the actions on the streets of a group of people who may be suspected to have gone astray from the norms of society.

For those reasons, close networks are the direct factor that most affects street children's isolation from mainstream society. The shared culture and support reinforce street children's tendency to associate with others that are similar to themselves. The loose networks help push street children into becoming marginalized people because the street children network domains are limited and have conflict within networks. For this reason they have no power to claim their rights in society, which leads to low SES.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this paper show that though the two street children are of the same network type, and grouped within the same network level, one was able to obtain a support network that could help and promote him and give him a new chance in life, while the other could not acquire a support network like his friend.

For street children, the relations within each network zone show the kinds of ties and groups of persons who can support and give substance to the fulfillment of an individual's socio-economic development. Thus, street children have an opportunity to contact different groups and engage in different types of activities during their daily lives, which influences their potential for long-term development and improvement in their living standards.

The strength of kin and non-kin relations and the clusters of close or loose zones are relevant because most people put their kin in the close zone (intimate zone) and higher SES persons receive more support from friends and other non-kin, whereas lower SES persons receive more support from kin (Wenger 1995). However, street children, who have lower SES, put kin in the effective zone or loose zone and get the most important support (emotional, psychological, information) from peers and non-kin more than kin. People can get useful information and support from weak ties in their network (Granovetter 1973), but street children do not receive enough useful information and support that can promote them to higher levels of SES.

Furthermore, building a personal network is one part of building a life. Street children are marginalized people because their survival support is from only very strong ties in the close zone. They also lose the loose ties in their personal network, and each network zone does not have the efficiency and effectiveness to support them. The inadequate networks of support in their daily life and street living, and the strength of closed zones (street children friends) may lead them to be marginal people. Nevertheless, several such support networks have shown negative impacts on the child (e.g., job, daily life, survival, and socialization).

For these reasons, to support and understand street children and the other marginal groups,

we must learn about their network zone and then we will be able to understand their way of life and activities. The importance of peoples' networks lie in the close network zone and in the effective network zone.

Whereas planning and policy-making aimed at supporting street children — both in the public and private sectors — has focused on immediate problems, simply planning short-term goals has impacted just the basic need level of the participants in this study. For this reason, public policies and private organizations (NGOs) have not succeeded in saving street children from life on the street. Therefore, carefully considering the zones of the street children network will make it clear why street children remain on the street, and will clarify the strength of their personal networks. Future research should identify support needs and examine ways to support them. The focus should be on helping street children to widen their support networks and obtain useful information to solve problems by themselves through the promotion of diversity of education, information, and occupations, rather than short-term support that only provides for basic needs.

6. Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Prof. Yoshihide Sakurai for his comments and encouragement, and I would like to express my appreciation to David Dalsky for checking the English in this paper. I would also like to thank the anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

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