

Behavioral Survey among Street Children in Greater Cairo and Alexandria

By

Khaled Nadaⁱ, El Daw Sulimanⁱⁱ, Nadia Zibaniⁱⁱⁱ

1. Introduction:

Egypt has a localized HIV/AIDS epidemic. Despite the low prevalence (5,300 cases estimated in 2005), Egypt had witnessed a steady increase since 1990. Street children are among the major groups exposed to the risk of HIV/AIDS. Few studies focused on the situation of street children in Egypt, especially their health status and exposure to disease.

2. Study Objectives

1. Identify behaviors that increase the vulnerability of street children to HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
2. Provide evidence-based policy recommendations.

3. Data and Methodology

The data for this paper comes from a cross-sectional behavioral study of street children in Greater Cairo and Alexandria, conducted in 2007. The study sample consisted of 463 (373 boys and 90 girls) and 394 (354 boys and 40 girls) completed interviews with street children in Greater Cairo and Alexandria, respectively.

The study comprised three components:

Rapid Assessment: A time-location approach was adopted to estimate age and sex distribution of street children in the different geographic locations and at different times of the day. The results allowed the selection of a probability sample for quantitative data collection.

Quantitative Component: This is the first cross sectional survey of street children in Egypt that is based on a probability sample. 463 study participants in Greater Cairo and 394 in Alexandria completed an interviewer administered questionnaire.

Qualitative Component: Included focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and community mapping.

4. Ethical Considerations

There first submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Population Council was on August 2006, a conditional approval was obtained on the 14th of February 2007. A local ethics committee followed up implementation of the study.

5. Results

- Major causes for engaging in street life were: 65.2% to escape family problems; 29.5% earning money for self and family; 22.8% were forced to leave home by a family member (usually a step parent).
- Only 38% and 16% of street children in Greater Cairo and Alexandria reported that they would like to return home, respectively.
- Selling items and begging are the most common activities for earning money.
- Only 5% of street children are currently attending school, 35% have never been to school, 62% out of the remaining have completed grade five.
- Older street children who become street leaders are notorious abusers of younger street children (verbal, physical and sexual abuse).
- Harassment and abuse by the police is among the major concerns of street children.
- Smoking, alcohol consumption and drug abuse are common. Injection drug use is uncommon.
- 66.7% of study participants 15 – 17 years old have ever had sex with someone of the opposite sex. Among those who had sex during the last 12 months, 53.6% had sex with more than one partner, and only 25% used a condom consistently.
- Around 28% of street boys had sex with other boys, frequently under the influence of drugs, and in many instances as part of group rape, nearly half had more than one partner. Females rarely have sex with the same sex.
- Forced sex is reported by 16% of street boys and girls.
- About 26% of street girls in Greater Cairo and 58% in Alexandria reported participating in commercial sex. This is uncommon among street boys.
- A considerable proportion of street children in Cairo (52%) and Alexandria (61%) are engaged in multiple risky behaviors (at least two).
- There is poor knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases. Only 22% have ever heard of hepatitis, 44% have heard of STDs, and 79% have ever heard of HIV/AIDS.

- Regarding modes of transmission (multiple answers allowed), 59% mentioned heterosexual relations, 21% mentioned homosexual relations, and 22% mentioned contact with infected blood (blood transfusion, unclean needles, etc.). However, misconceptions also existed.
- To avoid contracting infection 49% mentioned abstaining from sex, 17.1% mentioned avoiding skin piercing instruments, 12% mentioned using condoms and only 4.9% mentioned being faithful to one uninfected partner. 16% of respondents did not know how to avoid contracting the infection.
- Regression analysis revealed that knowledge of the means of HIV prevention has no significant impact on reducing sexual risky behaviors among street children.

Table: Distribution of the street children by ever use of drugs, BSS 2007

	Cairo				Alexandria			
	12-14		15-17		12-14		15-17	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Ever used drugs (%):	41.7	8.6	66.7	52.7	69	52.4	88.5	52.6
Currently using drugs (%):	29.4	2.9	50.5	41.8	60.2	52.4	79.2	47.4
N	187	35	186	55	171	21	183	19
Median age at first drug use (in years):	10.5	11.5	12	13	11	10	13	13.5
N	68	2	117	29	77	10	106	10

Table: Distribution of the street children (ages 15-17 years) by sexual behavior,

	Cairo		Alexandria	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Ever had sex (%)	60.0	70.9	69.8	89.5
Ever had sex with the same sex (%)	20.4	3.6	36.6	0.0
N	185	55	182	19
Median age at first sexual intercourse	13.0	14.0	15.0	13.0
N	103	39	80	17
Sex in last 12 months (%):				
Had sex with one partner	43.8	51.3	23.6	17.6
Had sex with more than one partner	43.8	35.9	66.1	64.7
N	112	39	127	17
Condom use during sexual intercourse (%):				
Always use condom	8	0	38.1	17.6
Sometimes use condom	18.8	15.4	34.9	17.6
N	112	39	127	17

Figure: Percent distribution of the street children (ages 15-17) who received money in return for selling sex to boys/men, BSS 2007

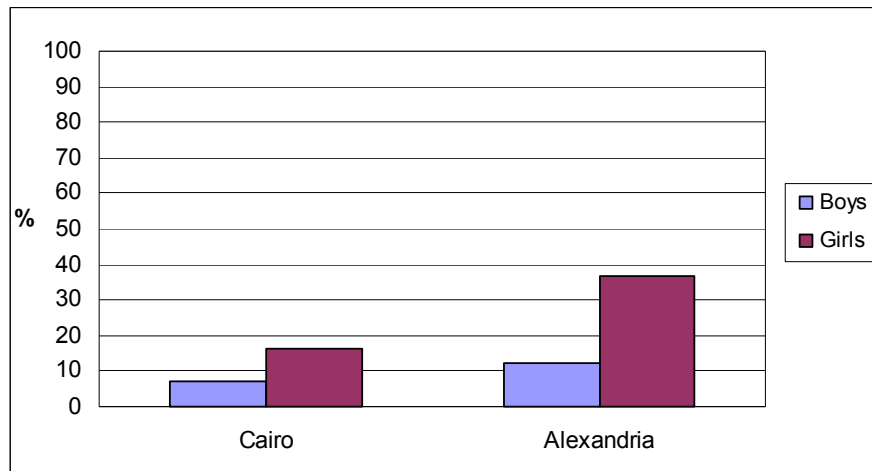
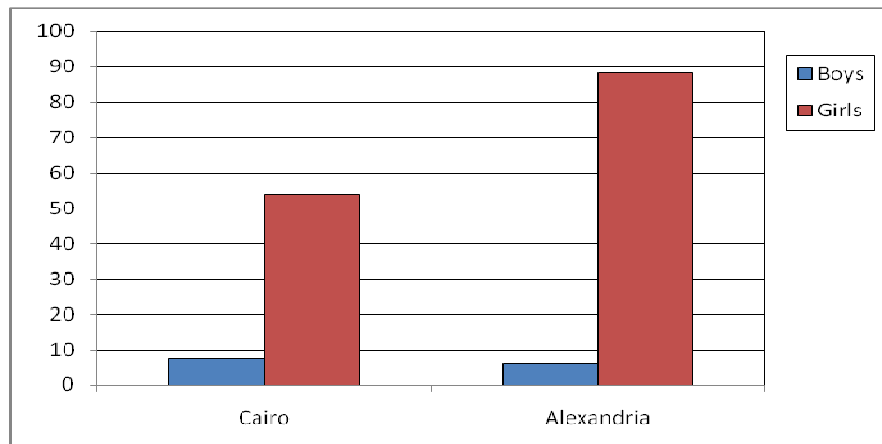


Figure: Percent distribution of the street children (ages 15-17) who were forced by a boy/man into having sex, BSS 2007



ⁱ Khaled Nada is the coordinator of the Population Council Regional Health Program at the West Asia and North Africa regional Office.

ⁱⁱ El Daw Suliman is an Associate with the Population Council; he is directing the Council Regional Health Program at the West Asia and North Africa regional Office.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nadia Zibani is a researcher working with the Population Council Regional Office for West Asia and North Africa.