

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON THE FAMILY  
STRUCTURE:

*The Case of Street Children in Freetown, Sierra leon*

BY  
CAROLINE M. MOMOH

*A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master  
of Arts in Mission Studies*

JULY 2006

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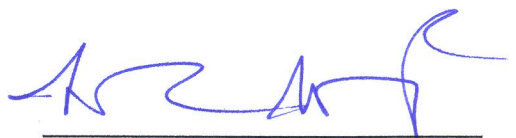
**THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON THE FAMILY STRUCTURE:  
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FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE**

**BY  
CAROLINE M. MOMOH**

**A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School in partial  
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of Master of Arts in Mission Studies**

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**July, 2006**

Student's Declaration

THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON THE FAMILY STRUCTURE: THE CASE OF  
STREET CHILDREN IN FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

I declare that this is my original work and has not been  
submitted to any other College or University for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical  
Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners

(Signed)



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Caroline Mariama Momoh

July, 2006

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring the effects of the civil war on the family structure. It specifically focused on the case of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. It was a descriptive study that sought to understand the perceptions of the growing number of street children in relation to the effects of the war on the family structure.

The data collection involved the use of discussion schedules, which were developed to guide the focus group discussions in order to answer the research questions and hypotheses in the study. Participant observation was used to clarify information received in the focus group discussions. The research population was composed of a group of street children, internally displaced women group, and three service-provider groups, namely, a church, an NGO, and a government department. The researcher facilitated the focus group discussions.

The study revealed that the growing number of street children in Freetown after the civil war in Sierra Leone was due to several related factors, which were considered as the effects of the war. Among these factors, poverty was perceived as the critical issue in the incidence of street children. The factors (many of which were aggravated by the war) were perceived to have weakened the family structure which was once the support system in the society. However, the findings showed possibility for re-integration of street children into their families as a better way of dealing with the incidence of street children.

Recommendations were made based on the findings of the study, which called for the church and NGOs' involvement in the reconciliation of street children with their families. A further recommendation made was for the church to be involved in holistic ministry that addresses the physical, spiritual, and social aspect of the street child. This suggested that the church was to be the voice and advocate in the incidence of street children.

TO

My beloved husband Edgar and our daughters Patience and Donna whose  
patience and support was an encouragement in my studies,

and the Kenningers

for morally and financially supporting my studies and family in

Kenya

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to God whose grace and faithfulness continually abounded throughout my studies and in this work. Many thanks and appreciation goes to the following people for their various contributions.

1. My supervisor, Dr. Gatara for his continual challenge and encouragement that sharpened my thinking to produce this work.
2. My second reader, Dr. Sesi for his meaningful comments and encouragement.
3. Dr. Henry Mutua, whose pastoral heart opened my eyes to the needs in urban ministry.
4. Dr. Alemayehu Mekonnen, for giving me the opportunity to do a term project on street children in Nairobi.
5. Rev. John Jusu, for his moral and financial support, and his academic challenge. Mrs Tity Jusu, whose selfless support and care for Donna contributed to the possibility of my studies.
6. Dr. Dennis Marke, who generously sponsored my field research in Sierra Leone. Special thanks also go to the Bockarie family, the Markes, the Momohs, and the Vandi family for their various contributions.
7. Laurence Mutunga, for selflessly assisting me to do my first research among street children in Nairobi.
8. Kioko Mwangangi for taking time to edit my work.
9. Mr. and Mrs. Kenninger who offered moral, financial, and spiritual support throughout our studies at NEGST.

10. Mr. and Mrs. Rumburger, whose timely concern and sponsorship made it possible for me to complete my studies at NEGST.
11. Overseas Council and the NEGST Scholarship Committee for their financial support. Special thanks goes to Charles Kyalo for his encouragement and prayer support.
12. My husband, Edgar James Momoh for spurring me on to aim for higher heights. Without his encouragement I would not have made it this far. My appreciation goes to my nephew, Dennis Marke whose love and care kept me assured of safety for our children at home. Many thanks to our daughters Patience and Donna for allowing me chance to study without interruptions.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The scars and the destructiveness of war are evident in all sectors of life, as one goes through the continent of Africa. Instances of these are seen in African countries that have experienced civil or political upheaval, tribal clashes, religious and community strives. Some of these experiences include the genocide in Rwanda, the landmines scenario in Angola, the ethnic repression in Sudan, the religious war in Northern Nigeria, the case of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the gruesome atrocities and destructions carried out in the civil war in Sierra Leone.

The effects of these instances of war on human lives and properties, and national economies pose a great challenge for the fledging economies and state of affairs in Africa as a whole. This is so because even those countries that are not directly affected by wars, experience the draining effect of putting up with huge refugee populations.

Often times the most vulnerable victims in these crises are the aged, women, and children. The aged fall prey because of their inability to escape easily from danger whenever it strikes. The women and girls on their part, often suffer gross sexual abuses that live on them long lasting traumatic effects. Some of the scars these women and girls live with include sexually transmitted disease, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, and the consequent challenges of single motherhood. The children are often used as sex slaves, child laborers and worst still engage in combat activities as child soldiers. All of these dynamics tend to take a negative toll on the family structures.

The resultant relationship between the impact of war and the family structure is often estimated in terms of refugee situation and internal displacement in general. However, this study was narrowed down to looking at the phenomenon of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone as an evidence of the effects of war on the family structure. This conception was held from the background that during the civil war in Sierra Leone, there was a lot of movement of people from the conflict zones to safer regions. In the process, many families were scattered and family cohesiveness undermined. The absence of these strong family cohesion or ties has resulted in more children turning to the streets. Kilbourn (1997, 15) argues that the streets and their occupants are providing alternatives to children who have a sense of hopelessness and social alienation. This is an indication that breakdown in the family structure is a crucial concern more especially when it is as effects of the war as the case in Freetown, Sierra Leone where the presence of street children is increasing.

This study will attempt to contribute to the knowledge body by investigating the effects of the war on the family structure and the growing presence of street children in Freetown. The study will examine both the direct and the indirect relations between the war on the family structure and explore how this in turn contributes to the growing number of street children.

### Thesis

My thesis is that the problem of street children in Freetown is a consequence of the breakdown in the family structure brought about by the civil war in Sierra Leone. This family structure has been the major cohesive force of keeping the society together. Re-integration of these children is therefore a good attempt to solve the problem of street children.

### Problem Statement

The growing number of street children in Freetown is part of the effects of the war in Sierra Leone and particularly on the family structure that is supposed to be the support system of the society. Aldous (1965, 115-6), writing about extended family and kinship ties in West Africa, comments that relatives formed the support system that met the needs of the elderly, the sick, the jobless, and the poor. However, many social changes have taken place over the years. Therefore, the problem to be explored in this study is on the growing number of street children in Freetown as an effect of the war on the family structure in Sierra Leone.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to understand how the effects of the war on the family structure led to the incidence of street children in Freetown.

### Significance of Study

The study on street children in Freetown defined as the effects of the war on the family structure is relevant and significant for some reasons. First, understanding the effects of the war on the family structure may help to explain the growing number of street children in Freetown. This will give the general populace and policy makers an insight into the nature of the existing extended family relationships. Second, a primary challenge facing the church and Non-Governmental Organizations dealing with street children is the decision on the type of intervention to adopt in dealing with the problem of street children. Therefore, this study will help them to decide on appropriate intervention to adopt. Third, the findings of this study will help the church or NGOs to realize the need for involving in reconciliation and re-integration of street

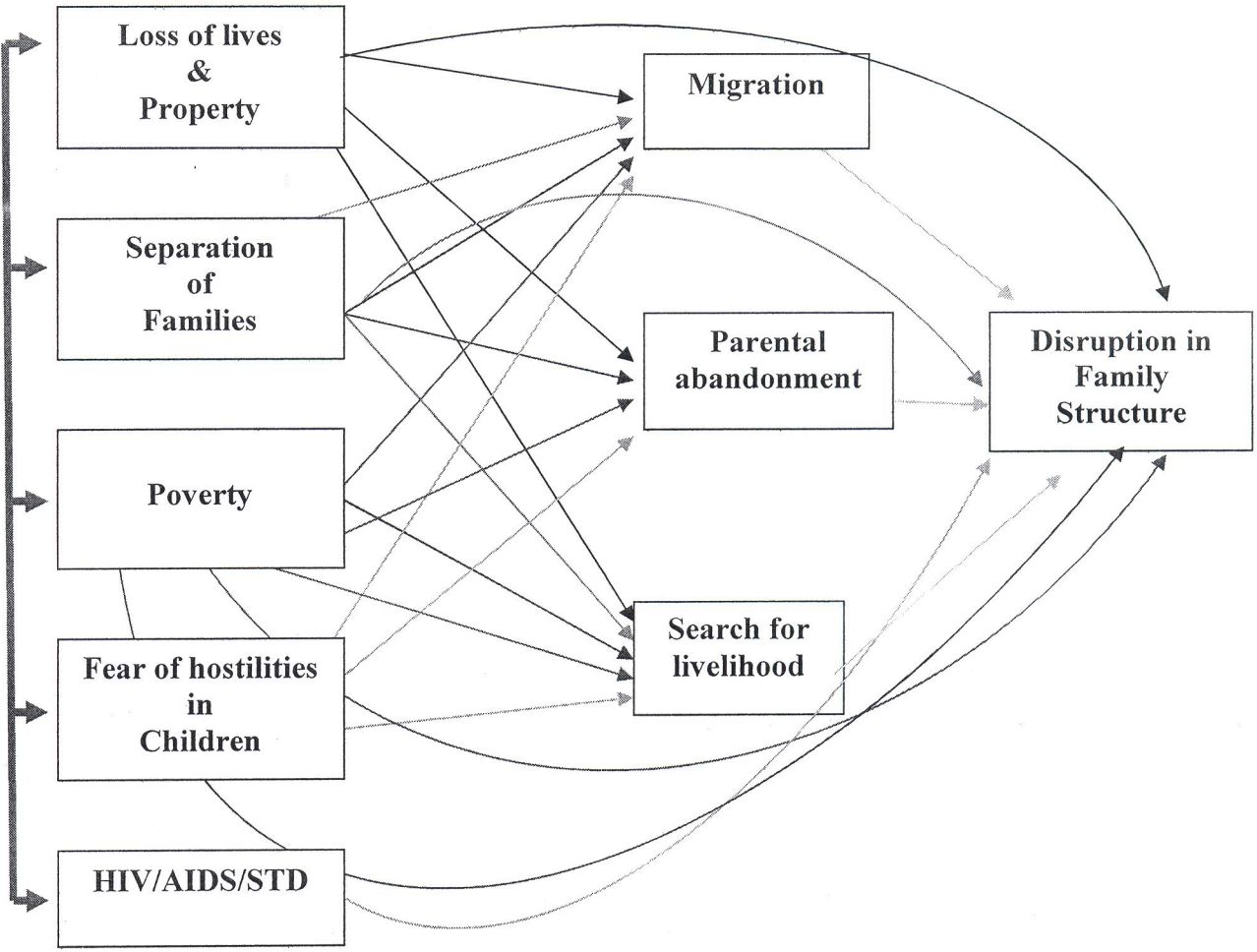
children into their societies. Fourthly, this work will add to the growing body of literature.

### Research Questions

1. What are the effects of the civil war on family structures in Sierra Leone?
2. What are the effects of the breakdown of family structure on the growing number of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone?

### Research Hypotheses

Owing to the nature of this study, the researcher generated ten hypotheses from the broad concepts in the research topic, namely the effects of war and family structure. The effects of the war are the independent variable while the family structure becomes the dependent variable. The hypotheses assume that there is a direct relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables, and there is an indirect relationship between the two, which is suggested as the intervening variables. These existing relationships are the assumptions of the researcher of growing presence of street children in Freetown. This relationship is further shown in the path model.



Path model of the effects of the war

The hypotheses are:

1. Loss of lives of parents and relatives leads to the migration of children to cities.
2. Increase in migration of children to cities, leads to more disruptions in family contacts.
3. The more the emerging of various family patterns, the higher the number of children living on the streets.
4. The death of a spouse leads to parental abandonment of the children by the surviving spouse.
5. Poverty levels determine the number of children living outside of the family.
6. Loss of property produces the need for children to search for their livelihood on the streets.
7. Separation of family members leads to breakdown in contact among them.
8. High level of poverty in families leads children to search for livelihood on the streets.
9. Children migrate to cities because of fear of hostilities and abuse from adults.
10. HIV/AIDS leads to disruption in family structure.

#### Delimitations

This study delimited itself to a group of street children, displaced women, service-providers to street children, namely, a church, an NGO, and a social welfare department. The study was flexible with the sex or age of the participants. The location for the fieldwork for street children and all of the service-givers was in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The researcher decided on the appropriate site when she was in the situation. The research situation for the displaced women was in a camp for internally war-displaced people on the outskirts of the city. The fieldwork was limited

to data collection through focus group discussions in all of the groups. Participant observation was used to study a day on the street with street children.

### Definition of Terms

#### ***Street children***

Kilbourn (1997, 10) describes street children as “children who live or spend a significant amount of time on the streets of urban areas to fend for themselves or their families; this also denotes children who are inadequately protected, supervised and cared for by responsible adults.” In the view of Shorter and Onyanacha who employ the definition of Undugu Society of Kenya, street children are defined as “any child of school age, who is out of school, lacks basic care such as shelter, food, clothing, health care, security and the love and protection offered by a parent or guardian” (1999, 13). The definition of street children adopted in this study is that of Shorter and Onyanacha.

#### ***Re-integration***

In this study the working definition of re-integration is re-unifying the child who lives out of his family (as in the case of street children), back into that family. The act of returning the child requires working with the child to adjust to home life and working with his family to accept the child and to deal with the circumstance that led the child to the street.

#### ***Family structure***

The working definition is a family organization in which interdependent and supportive relationship among family members and extended family relations exist.

### Abbreviations

HIV is an abbreviation for Human Immunodeficiency Virus

AIDS is a shortened form for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

STD is an abbreviation for Sexually Transmitted Disease

STD is an abbreviation for Sexually Transmitted Disease

PATH is the shortened form for Program for Appropriate Technology in Health

FGD refers to Focus Group Discussion

NACWAC is abbreviated form for National Commission on War Affected Children

NGO is the shortened form for Non-Governmental Organization

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Street Children

Various writers have associated the emergence of street children to different causes. Some attribute it to poverty, others to urbanization, and still others to breakdown in family structures and as the outcome of war. Shorter and Onyanha (1999, 17-19) associates the emergence of street children to several factors, namely, urbanization, poverty, parental negligence, and abandonment both of which emanates from poverty. Thus, they categorize these children as “neglected children” by parents, extended family members, and by government (35, 45). Kilbourn (1997, 7, 10) associates the emergence of street children to parental abuse and abandonment by families and the society and the effects of war, such as loss of families and diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Culnane (1997, 21) attributes the emergence of street children to several factors, namely, disintegration of families and urbanization which disrupts traditional family structures and its social network.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that no single factor leads to the emergence of street children. It is reasonable to think that some of these factors influenced the case of street children in Freetown. This suggests that the problem of street children was in existence before the war escalated it.

## Types of Street Children

It is easy for people to label children roaming aimlessly in the streets as street children. Various authors also have used different views in their description of street children. Daly's (1996, 128) idea of street living is in terms of homelessness. He states that they are people who live on the street, endlessly going up and down or are seen waiting in the street. They are always on the move at the demand of police and shelter or store owners. This raises concern for the understanding of who is a street child. Kilbourn (1997, 10) describes street children as "children who live or spend a significant amount of time on the streets of urban areas to fend for themselves or their families; this also denotes children who are inadequately protected, supervised and cared for by responsible adults." Shorter and Onyanha's (1999, 13) definition employed for street children is "any child of school age, who is out of school, lacks basic care such as shelter, food, clothing, health care, security and the love and protection offered by a parent or guardian." Both definitions show the child out of his home setting where he ought to be nurtured in love and with tenderness. Rather the child takes on adult responsibility very early, missing childhood experience needed for healthy development.

Kilbourn (1997, 11-12) categorizes street children into three groups:

1. "Children on the street" – these are temporal street children who have links with their families. They come out on the street in search of work to support their families or to pass their time away because of their congested living situations in the slums.
2. "Children of the street" – these are permanent street children who might have occasional links with their families. They usually come

from absolute poverty or from abusive backgrounds in search of livelihood and freedom.

3. “Children in the street” – these are permanent street children who have no links with their families. Street is home and everything to them.

This group consists of war victims, HIV/AIDS victims, orphans, and parental abandoned or neglected children.

Shorter and Onyancha’s (1999, 13) typology of street children is two kinds: “children of the street” who are permanent on the street and “children on the street” who are temporal on the street. They claim from their experience with street children in Kenya that these two groups live side by side each other on the street. This classification is essential in understanding the factors that precipitate the emergence of street children.

#### Effects of War

Various scholars have employed different terminologies to describe wars. The more often terms that are used are conflict and violence. Wars are a state of turmoil and hostility in which destructions of human lives and property are evident. Often the victims suffer from physical, psychological, spiritual, and social trauma. This concise description is significant as it describes the state and predicts the after-effect of wars.

Friesen (1986, 143-45) describes war as an organized form of intentional violence. By violence, he means damaging a person’s dignity, distorting his physical appearance, or taking away his life. The damaging of a person’s dignity implies reducing him to nothing, cutting off all that sustains him or gives him pride. This can have both physical and emotional effect on him. It can leave him destitute and lonesome, especially in the instances of rape, which may also expose the victim to HIV/AIDS and STDs. Thus, civil wars are devastating in the life of individuals and

nations in which they occur. The effects of war can be explained in terms of deaths of parents and relatives, poverty due to dispossession, urban migration, hostilities and HIV/ AIDS.

Wars are not only devastating but they are also very traumatic experiences for both the children and the parents. Kilbourn (1996, 13) argues that in traumatic situations the child's hope is replaced by fear and despair. Such children are likely to develop mistrust and suspicion of adult authority over them. This becomes a problem especially in stepparent relationship.

### ***Loss of Lives of Parents and Relatives***

The loss of lives of family members, relatives, or friends is inevitable in war. This loss, either by death or by separation is the most distressful experience for especially children. Kilbourn (1995, 11) captures this loss very well when he states,

Central to the children's losses in war is the loss of family and home. Especially for young children, home, together with the family is the center of their world. At home children find love, security, trust, belonging, acceptance, and care. So when the child has lost home, parents and siblings the loss is immense. Often such losses also include the loss of provision for the children's necessities, forcing them to live as a refugee or on the street.

The impact of the loss of family members is great because it is the most significant institution in the life of the child, which gives him stability. Before the advent of Western milieu, family relationship in Africa was highly extended and web-like in nature. According to Moxnes (1997, 15), these families in traditional societies formed the backbone of the society owing to their functions and relevance to their members. The functions of the family did not only include providing security, love, acceptance, basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, but they also taught skills and values to the child. Thus, the child was prepared to grow into responsible adulthood, ready to function in the home.

Shorter and Onyancha (1999, 27-28) also places the African child at the heart of his community. They purport that in traditional extended family, children, including orphans, belonged, and received support from the rest of the family. All children were meant to be integrated into their society. In agreement with Shorter and Onyancha, Miles (2003, 38) argues that the responsibilities of orphans are taken over by extended families. These arguments are however very much true where the economy of war-torn nations is stable since poor economy is one of the factors that militate and weaken extended family relationship.

### ***Poverty***

Poverty is a highly discussed subject by scholars. It is a shared plight in Africa, which emanates from many factors. Common among these factors are the destructive wars that have ravaged many African nations of both human and natural resources. The scars of wars evident in war-torn nations are high loss of human lives, especially the male productive population, and the loss of property, which were once great family or national assets. This leads to poverty in war affected nations and it results in street children problem as families can hardly support their members.

Scholars have identified two types of poverty: absolute and relative poverty. Grigg (1992, 42) describes relative poverty as a measure of the extent to which a person cannot participate in his society because of his lack in the capacity to obtain goods and services needed for convenience and for developing himself. He associates absolute poverty with the urban poor who are unable to meet their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Though he does not argue that absolute poverty among the poor is caused by their marginalization from opportunities in society, yet that is the reality among the urban poor. This population does not seek for goods and services that provide convenience. They rather seek for opportunities that serve as means to survive especially when they are usually jobless or have under-paying jobs. Some can

hardly take care of their families. They live in poorly planned environment with little or no amenities such as health and sanitation.

Goudzwaard (1995, 59) on the other hand asserts that the rise in poverty level is affected by higher costs of medical care and education. Owing to the high rise in medical care and education, the poor have little chance to improve on their condition. As a result, they become poorer and less educated. Boerma (1978, 20) likewise describing the disadvantaged position of the poor states that they are the exploited and the oppressed who occupy the inferior position in society. Grigg (1992, 48) in agreement to Boerma asserts that street children, prostitutes, alcoholics are among the absolute poor in society.

Poor economy of especially post-war nations as well affects single parenting in such a way that they find it difficult to fulfill family obligations such as the providing of basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. The failure to meet such basic needs lead children to fend for themselves and for their families or they desert their homes to live on the street. Added to the failure of meeting family obligations is the abusive lifestyle that poor single parents often develop. Garbarino et al (1992, 53) suggests that poor mothers and adolescent mothers living in poor conditions often abuse their children. These mothers may also have the tendencies not only to neglect family responsibilities but also to abandon their children. Kilbourn (1997, 14) asserts that poverty is a major cause of parental abandonment of children to the street. He bases his argument on the case of large families. In such families, the parent or parents may seek to reduce the number of children in the family so that there would be chance of survival for the rest of the family members.

### ***Urban Migration***

According to Little (1971, 10-11), in the seventies, the reasons for urban migration were associated with economic and social interests. He explained that

owing to the attraction of higher salaries or wages and the opportunities for job markets in urban areas people tend to move more toward towns. Socially urban centers were also considered the seat of development, which offered amenities and recreation. All of these were 'pull factors' that attracted migrants to urban centers. However in recent times, many other factors such as tribal clashes, civil wars, scarcity of land due to population density in the rural areas have served as 'push factors' for urban mobility

Shorter (1998, 33,34) on the other hand describes urbanization as the main example of structural change and an avenue responsible for the spread of what he calls "economism" which implies globalization, modernization and so on. He argues that modernization modifies traditional cultures as well as mutual contact since urban areas are 'melting pot' where multi cultures interact, assimilate the different cultures, and virtually modify traditional cultures. In other words, the author is suggesting that a dynamic in urban migration is that the already established structures of traditional family system are weakened as new ones are introduced. Therefore, migrants (whether economic migrants or war victims) may disrupt their family structures. This is often the case of low-income migrants. In a post-war situation, the alienation may even become greater.

Shorter (1998, 35) There are both positive and negative effects of urban migration. Among the negative effects are crime and juvenile delinquency, prostitution, drugs, and the growing number of street children and street people. The growing number of street children is an urbanization problem that can be associated with the unmet expectations of migrants (Shorter 1998, 35). Many of these migrants are low-income earners living in slums, and are confronted by hardship in the city.

Cohen (2001, 42) presents another phase of urbanization which represents the disadvantaged position of the low-income migrant. Recognizing the drastic change in

urbanization, which is revealed by the pace at which cities are growing, the content of the diversity of its people, institutions, economy, and social behavior, he writes,

Processes of differentiation have dramatically changed urban life in the past half-century both in terms of pace and change. The patterns of differentiation between neighborhoods, families, men and women, the young and the elderly, ethnic and religious groups and the segmented labor forces working in the many sectors of the economy are reflected in social distance, new patterns of inclusion and exclusion, communications, opportunity and, most visibly, competition and conflict.

He concludes his thoughts by purporting that economic pressures have led many cities to go through increasing social tensions. These economic pressures contribute to street children phenomenon, namely large turn out of children on the streets, juvenile delinquencies, crime and gang life, drugs, prostitution and STDs.

### *Hostilities*

Hostilities are usually a form of revenge in which war victims seek to inflict pain and suffering on war perpetrators and anger on innocent children. The victims of such revenge are often the vulnerable, especially children. Bainton (1960, 212) suggests that hostilities cannot immediately cease after war as people furious about war cannot automatically settle for peace and display calmness or rationality, nor do they cooperate for the society to reach stability.

Walsh (2000, 14) uses the term 'resilience' to argue for the ability that one needs to come through crises and be strengthened and more resourceful. The ability enables them to recover from painful experiences and help them to put their lives on course again in a loving way. Where resilience is however absent people blame others for their problems and seek out revenge on them. This is not only in the case of war but also in the challenges that ensue from it such as single parenting or step parenting.

Grunlan (1984, 273) refers to single parenting and step parenting as social factors that lead to child abuse. Child abuse is a kind of hostility that children seek to

escape. Grunlan argues that child abuse and parental negligence go hand in hand, as children are deprived of “necessary food, clothing, inadequate care and supervision that might lead to endangering the child’s well being.” This does not only show the relationship between child abuse and parental negligence but it reveals the intensity of the hostility that the child seeks to escape.

### ***HIV/AIDS***

Studies on HIV/AIDS have associated the mode of transmission of the virus to unprotected sex, infected blood transfusion, and use of unsterilized cutting or piercing equipment among others. In a war situation, the means of transmitting the virus is through sexual violence. Vulnerable women are taken advantage of because of their helplessness at the hands of rape perpetrators. Haddad (2003, 149) writing on violence against women and children associates the transmission of HIV through sexual violence.

Owing to stigmatization of the disease, victims face the challenges of discrimination and emotional trauma. Sickness, as reiterated by Stinton (2004, 82), is a scandal and misfortune in the traditional African setting. According to her, sickness is perceived as “a calamity that not only strikes the particular individual, but also indicates a disruption of social relationships, thereby making it a family and communal concern.” AIDS can therefore become a critical issue in society.

### The Family Structure

According to Miles (2003, 35) a family is “an institution in which God’s grace is experienced and where people find nurture and healing, thereby growing as persons in their individuality, in their social relations and in their relations with God.” What we can glean from Miles’ assertion is that the home is very important for the existence of a functional family system. Daly (1996, 149) underscores the importance

of the home as a place that gives status and social position to its members. In other words, it is “a source of pride, self self-respect, and a tangible measure of our economic worth...” Therefore, the functions of the home and family play key role in the life its members.

Sociologists and anthropologists have used different names to describe family membership and relationship. However, Comhaire (1965, 118-19) contends with such categorization with the claim that traditional African family system did not breakdown family groupings into categories like immediate family, lineage, and clan. Communities that practice the clan system use it only for the purpose of identification especially when it comes to marriage. Otherwise, no matter how far one’s lineage stretched, they still belonged to a one big family. What Comhaire is trying to project is the fact that nuclear family system was never a part of African family system. However, one could not help but note that this value system is eroding very fast in the face of modernization.

Another concept that many writers have employed to describe traditional African family system is that of kinship. Keesing (1975, 14-15) defines kinship as a “relationship based on or modeled on the culturally recognized connection between parents and children (and extended to siblings and through parents to more distant relatives)”. He argues that the kinship ties function to describe exactly the unique position occupied by each person in his social world in which he will establish mutual love and obligation in his group. Rather the inner relations that exist within the kinship relationship are the more intimate. They are also the ones who engage in kinship responsibilities. This explanation of kinship relationship may be a mere generalization and may not hold true for some societies but it however gives insight into why extended family relationships at times fail to function.

Little (1965, 96) also attests to the disruption in family solidarity and its economic viability. He further argues that other associations that are formed irrespective of tribal or kinship lines are replacing extended family relationships. Many scholars are of the opinion that as important as associations are, yet they cannot replace extended family relationships. One of such scholars is Aldous who admits that though extended family structure has been weakened, yet it cannot disappear (1965, 116). In other words, the elements that hold family relationships together can be disrupted but they cannot be completely removed. Therefore certain aspects of the supportive function of family structure can be envisaged but to a limited extent. This is however significant in examining and explaining the contemporary family structure of the African society. It might help to explain the problems encountered by children in post-war countries such as Sierra Leone.

Family structure is a very significant and central institution in the African society. Shorter and Onyancha (1999, 28) describe it as the “ideal of social harmony, of “good company”, of being at the heart of a community – especially an extended family community of mutual trust and support.” Various scholars subscribe to the manner in which this organized pattern of family relationship has held together the African family. However, over the years many changes have been observed in the family structure. These changes are attributed to varying factors. Chief among these is economic factor. Aldous (1965, 115) discovers that the extended family relationship that many West African societies were based on is gradually weakening as a result of individualism, new associations, and education. These factors are however dictated by economy, which has resulted in failure to meet extended family obligations. Aldous therefore feels that since kinship relations are only maintained when they provide goods and services to their members, any change from this norm implies a weakened relationship.

## Patterns of Family Structure

Miles (2003, 35, 38) arguing from the biblical perspective suggests that the two-parent family is ideal and is to the advantage of children. He bemoans the failures of families as they become disloyal and negligent in their responsibilities. The shortcomings of families are universal problems, which have varying underlying causes. Families however have survived throughout the ages by adopting different patterns. The patterns give insight into the life of the African family and helps in understanding how the family exists.

War Child Sierra Leone (2005, 13) on doing a thorough studies on the Sierra Leonean family describes family pattern in the sense of family living. In this type of family setup, a child is sent to be raised by an extended family at a tender age. This accounts for children living outside the homes of their parents.

Another predominant style of family pattern described by War Child that is typical to the Sierra Leonean family is the polygamous home in which the various wives become mothers to all of the children born into that family. The child in this sense may live in the family but with different challenges to face at home.

Single parenting is the common family pattern that often erupts as an aftermath of war. The two major factors leading to single parenting are loss of life of one parent or children born out of wedlock through infidelity or sexual violence against women. The National Commission for War Affected Children (2002, 14) shows that out of the population of children who were sexually abused in the war in Sierra Leone, 81% of them were females. This helps to discover the possibility of more children being born out of wedlock, thereby producing more single female parents.

Another family pattern that is common especially after war is widow remarriage. Due to the death of husbands, the wives remarry. Many of these women

have children. Though this might not be pleasing to the prospective husbands, yet they will accept the union but reject the children. Many of these children often suffer abuse and parental negligence.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This is a field research aimed at understanding how the impact of the war on the family structure contributed to the growing number of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. In this chapter, the goal of the researcher was to explain the process of collecting data on the field.

#### **Basic Research Design**

This study is a qualitative approach. Gillham (2000, 13) states that this type of research focuses on the kind of evidence that the researcher will be told or observe which will help him to comprehend what is going on in the lives of the respondents and in their social situation. Thus, data collection was focused on the perspective of the informants, namely the street children, the displaced women, and the service givers to street children. In light of this, information was gathered from participants through focus group discussions and by participant observation.

#### **Population**

Samples of the informants was from,

- 1.) Street children who lived permanently on the street in the city center of Freetown. These had some or no contact with family members and were on the street because of the war or war related problems in Sierra Leone.

- 2.) Service provider groups were groups dealing with war-affected children issues, particularly street children. The groups were a church group, a social welfare department as a governmental sector, and an NGO.
- 3.) Internally displaced women group who have been uprooted from their homes by the war and who have not returned to their homes because of certain reasons. These women were widows, single mothers and remarried widows.

The choice of participants by the researcher was to help her thoroughly understand from the perspective of the informants what the contributions of the war were on the family structure in the incidence of street children in Freetown. This was to enable her to make objective analysis of the problem under investigation.

### Sampling

The researcher intentionally selected participants that best provided information that was insightful to the hypotheses of the study. The selection of participants was therefore based on what Creswell (1998, 118) describes as “criterion” sampling, which requires participants to have had an experience of the phenomenon under study and are able to intelligibly describe their “conscious experience”.

Given the constraints of time and funds, the researcher organized 3-10 homogenous participants in the target population groups for focus group discussions. These homogenous groups consisted of participants who were of the same sex, and socio-economic background (social status, educational level, career similarity, and so on). The participant observation sample determined its own size as the study took place in its natural setting.

## Methods of Data Collection

Focus group discussions and participant observation were the two methods that the researcher employed for data collection from the three sets of population for this study.

### 1. Focus group discussions

Focus group “is a small group made up of perhaps 6-10 individuals with certain common features or characteristics, with whom a discussion can be focused onto a given issue or topic” (Wellington 2000, 124). The purpose of this method was to give insight into the depth of the problem under study through the interaction of the members of the group. Litosseliti (2003, 1) also purports that the use of focus discussion is to explore individual perspectives and experiences. PATH (1990, 1) further discusses the purpose of focus groups as a discussion group that talks about pertinent topics which are particularly significant to a forth coming project.

As important as focus groups are for collecting data for the purpose of project implementation, the goal of this research was different. In this study, the researcher explored the views of street children, displaced women, and service providers to street children about the effects of the war on the family structure. This type of research method is very significant as the researcher was less likely to influence group opinion because of the group nature that allowed more of group members to influence one another (Litosseliti 2003, 2). The researcher’s role remained as facilitator to guide the groups to discuss pertinent issues to the research hypotheses. The discussion schedule was adopted from the work of PATH on focus group discussion.

The number of focus group discussions held in the three sets of population samples was one meeting each since the information received was adequate. In conducting the group discussions, the researcher embarked on the use of a tape recorder and note taking. The researcher ensured that she did not influence the

participants' judgment by avoiding the disclosure of the topics for discussion before hand.

The crucial need that the researcher sought to meet in the field for conducting focus group discussions was, selecting the appropriate sites for carrying out the discussions. All the FGDs were held in quiet places that enhanced proper recording of the sessions. There was enough seating space for all the participants. The good sitting position was circular which allowed the researcher to have the attention of the participants (PATH 1990, 17).

One focus discussion schedule was used in all of the FGDs but the discussions were differently guided owing to the nature of the groups. The focus discussion schedule for all of the groups was included as Appendix A. The discussion guides were based on the ten research hypotheses that were developed from the variables and research questions in the study.

## 2. Participant observation

Participant observation is “designed to gain a holistic view of the community so that areas of the behavior and thought that would normally not be open to other research techniques may be examined” (PATH 1990, 1). In light of this definition, the researcher used participant observation to study one street children group to get information that was missing or that needed clarification. This required her to do informal interviews and casual conversations, unstructured behavior observations and network analysis (PATH 1990, 4). The duration required for the participant observation was a day for observing the street children group

### Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Best (1981, 55) defines validity as, “that quality of a data-gathering instrument or procedure that enables it to determine what it was designed to determine.” For this

study, the researcher developed discussion schedule for collecting data. To arrive at this, the researcher used the variables from the hypotheses to develop the discussion schedule. This discussion schedule guided the issues for discussion that gave insight into understanding the problem of the study.

There was consistency in the discussions in the focus groups. This verified the reliability of the instrument as Mugenda and Mugenda (1999, 95) state that reliability is “a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials”.

### Approach to Field

The researcher obtained official cover letter from the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology that helped her gain entry to the research site in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The letter was specifically needed for the service providers to street children, namely War Child Netherlands in Sierra Leone (an NGO), NACWAC (A social welfare department in the government sector), and Don Bosco (a church organization).

The researcher endeavored to create rapport with the street children groups, and the chief of the displaced women group. This helped her explain the nature of her study and asked for their consent to participate in the study.

### Method of Data Analysis

The researcher used the tool developed by PATH (1990, 23-24) for the analysis of the focus group discussions. This involved reviewing the field notes that were recorded in each focus discussion. The researcher sought to find trends and noted consensus or disagreement and organized them by the variables that were formulated into schedule topics. The feedbacks were compared according to the type of the group. The taped sessions were transcribed and the following information were

abstracted from them: key ideas, words, phrases, and direct quotes that portray opinions. The information were carefully categorized and the categories in turn were clustered into themes. These themes emerged in the findings of the written report. The researcher reported her findings by seeking to confirm or negate the hypotheses of the study.

The researcher analyzed the participant observation on the street children group by adopting Jorgensen's data analysis on participant observation. The reason behind the use of participant observation in this study was significant to the analysis of the data. The reason as earlier on stated was to gain a deeper insight into areas that were not clear or that needed clarifications from the FGDs. In his analyzing process, Jorgensen (1989, 108) states that the "reasons for collecting the information and making notes provide a basis for identifying and labeling these materials as a member of some class, type, or set, as part of or related to a sequence, process, or pattern". With this in mind, the researcher used Jorgensen's analytic strategy to seek for discernible patterns and relationships that were contained in the facts gathered in the data.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how the effects of the war on the family structure led to the growing number of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Uzoagulu (1998, 4) states that in case-study researches, “data are usually collected, organised, and analysed and then described as they exist (natural setting) without interfering with them.” My report is therefore in narrative form. Creswell (2003, 197) describes this type of narrative as “detailed descriptive portrait”.

The findings of the research were a result of data collected through focus group discussions with a street children group, displaced women group, three service-provider groups, and participant observation on a street children group in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Focus groups are useful analytical tools in understanding people’s perceptions about their situations. Litosseliti (2003, 93) argues its importance that, “...the intent of focus groups is not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people perceive a situation.” As a qualitative research, I used direct quotes where necessary in reporting my findings. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999, 202) see this as a very important aspect of qualitative research which they state,

Because of the tendency of African communities to pass on information orally, there is a strong argument that the most appropriate research and evaluation approach in Africa is the qualitative approach because it emphasizes oral communication and gives the respondents a chance to state their problems the way they perceive them and participate in seeking solutions to these problems....

I further used participant observation to gain more insight into the information about the effects of the war on the family structure and the incidence of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The findings of the study was intended to help the church and NGOs working with street children to see the need for re-integrating these children into their families as a good attempt to solve the problem of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. This chapter presents my findings and my interpretations of the FGDs and the participant observation.

### Analysis and Findings of the FGDs

The data analyzed in this chapter were based on the discussion issues and guide that I developed from the hypotheses of this study. My findings of the research are reported based on the hypotheses that stemmed from the variables as shown in the path model and the research questions.

#### ***Explanations of the Effect of the Civil War on the Family Structure***

I sought to understand the general perception about the effects of the civil war from a group of street children, a group of displaced women, and three groups of service-provider to street children in Freetown. This was to throw light on one of the research questions and the hypotheses, which stemmed from it.

#### ***Research question 1***

What are the effects of the civil war on the family structure in Sierra Leone?

The researcher found out six main factors that were the suggested outcome of the civil war on the family structure in Sierra Leone. These were loss of lives, migration to the city, distortion in family contacts, emerging of various family patterns, poverty, and loss of property. I used hypotheses to confirm or negate these factors.

### Hypothesis 1

Loss of lives of parents and relatives leads to the migration of children to cities.

The researcher used issues 1 and 2 in the discussion schedule to verify this hypothesis in the five focus groups. In issue 1, there was consensus among the groups that many people died during the war, especially men. This made many children orphans, women became widows, families were displaced or separated, and children migrated to the city. The suggested result of this was children living in the street. This consensus among the participants confirmed the hypothesis. The result of the loss of lives of parents and relatives was economic hardship as many who died during the war were breadwinners in their families. This hardship rendered surviving relatives incapable of taking over the responsibilities of the surviving children of their extended family members. Therefore, children migrated to the city because of the loss of lives and economic hardship.

In issue 2, the researcher understood that migration was a major push factor that escalated the number of street children. However, some of the migration to the city was not due to the loss of lives of parents and relatives. The groups reported that families were scattered during rebel attacks, which left people in a state of confusion. In that state, some children followed adults, others were taken away from the war zones to the city by loyal government forces, and adults who knew some rescued them.

Though this hypothesis was confirmed, yet the explanations about the circumstances surrounding migration to the city suggest that not all children migrated to the city because of the death of their parents or relatives but because of various factors.

### Hypothesis 2

Increase in migration of children to the city, leads to more disruptions in family contacts.

The researcher used issues 2 and 3 in all the focus groups to verify this hypothesis. The groups' response to issue 2 was a consensus that the number of street children escalated after the war owing to different reasons. Four out of eight children in the street children FGD reported the following as reasons for their migration: the civil war, to fend for livelihood, for fostering, and because of mistreatment by relatives. The three service-provider groups to street children and the women's group all agreed that the war was the major force that brought children to the city.

In issue 2, I learned from all of the five focus groups that children who migrated to the city still maintained some contacts with their families and relatives. They however reported that children were unwilling to return home. The reasons identified for their refusal to go home were due to family problems, economic hardship, and the desire for personal freedom. This consensus suggests that the increase number of migration by children had not completely led to disruptions in family contact. Although, the refusal of children to return to their homes showed that there was disruption in the family contacts, yet because there was an extent of contact maintained, the hypothesis was rejected.

### Hypothesis 3

The more the emerging of various family patterns, the higher the number of children living on the streets.

I used issues 4 in all the focus groups to verify this hypothesis. The five focus groups suggested the following as the common emerging family patterns, some of which resulted from the war: stepparent families from widow remarriage, single

parent families resulting from sexual violence in the war, death of spouse, or prostitution for survival, polygamous marriage, and extended family relationship.

In the women's FGD Martha (pseudonym) shared the following as her experience in a widow remarriage:

Our husbands do not want the children we brought into the marriage. They are not considered as their children and they do not do anything for them (2005).

Four out of the five widows in the group agreed that their husbands did not want to see stepchildren in their homes. The husbands overreacted against the children's presence. Some abused the children and denied them their basic needs. This led their children to leave their homes and went to live on the street permanently. They maintained little contacts with their mothers.

Two single parents (widows) in the group explained that they were now the household heads of their families. Since it was difficult to take care of their children because of the hardship in the country, they made their living by working hand in hand with their children. The children helped to bring in support by going to sell in the street or by living in the street where they did menial jobs and brought the money home to their mothers. Some of the children live either temporarily or permanently on the street with some contacts with family members.

The women agreed as a group that another family pattern in which children encountered problems were polygamous marriages in which the stepmothers mistreated stepchildren. This led children to go live on the street. They also agreed that relatives were once very supportive but are not so much again because of the economic hardship that had been aggravated by the war. Only one out of the ten women agreed that her relatives had taken over the responsibility of her five children.

The three service-provider FGD gave a consensus that many of the children they dealt with were from polygamous homes in which the stepmothers or the fathers mistreated the children, or single mothers who were overwhelmed with the responsibility of the children either neglected them or abandoned them.

In the street children focus group, the four non-migrant street boys were from the following family background: one from single parent family, one from polygamous family and two from stepparent family. Two of the four migrant street boys were from extended family background. Parental abuse and economic hardships from these homes were among the reasons that led them to live on the street.

The agreement in the data suggests the interpretation that the increase in the number of street children was possible because of the challenges faced in the various family structures. This confirmed the hypothesis that the more the emerging of the various family patterns, the higher the number of children living on the street.

#### Hypothesis 4

The death of a spouse leads to parental abandonment of the children by the surviving spouse.

I used issues 1, 4, and 5 in all the focus groups to test this hypothesis. Issue 1 explained the implications of the death of parents and relatives in the war. Some of the general explanations given in the FGDs were that children became orphans, or had single parents, or were separated from families in the face of rebel attacks, or migrated, lost contact with families and ended up living in the street. I used issue 4 to gain insight into the background of street children and some of the reasons they came to the street. Issue 5 gave detailed explanation of the reasons for parental abandonment which ties with the discussions to issues 1 and 4. All of the focus groups agreed that surviving spouses, especially single mothers abandoned their children

because of poverty, which the war aggravated through loss of lives, loss of property, and displacement of people from their homes and source of livelihood. Owing to the economic hardship, single parents found it difficult to meet their children's physical and emotional needs of food and love respectively. Two out of the five focus groups reported that parents left their children behind during the time of escape from rebel attacks. They explained such cases to be parental negligence and not abandonment.

The women focus group concurred with them. Gbessey (a pseudonym) explained,

We did not abandon our children. It was the children who left their homes because we, their parents could not provide them their basic needs of especially food (2005).

The interpretations from this data is that there was consensus that single parents abandoned their children owing to the economic hardship aggravated by death of their spouses, or loss of their source of livelihood, or displacement and parental flight in escape from rebel attacks. This challenges the hypothesis that the abandonment of children was caused by mixed factors.

#### Hypothesis 5

Poverty levels determine the number of children living outside of the family.

The researcher used issues 4, 5, and 6 to verify the hypothesis. There was a consensus among the groups that economic hardship had worsened after the war and that both the war and bad governance were responsible for the high level of poverty. The researcher understood from issue 4 that many children from the various family patterns have gone to the street partly because of poverty. In issue 6, one of the focus groups discussed that the loss of government revenues during the war had led to poor economy and therefore the economic difficulties in the country. This hypothesis was confirmed by all the focus groups as the underlying reason for children living outside their families.

### Hypothesis 6

Loss of property produces the need for children to search for their livelihood on the street.

I used issues 7 and 8 in all the focus groups to test this hypothesis. The five focus groups in their discussions on issue 7, agreed that the war was destructive and was a major cause of poverty in the country. Among the losses enumerated were the destruction of houses and loss of jobs. The results of this were homelessness, joblessness, mental problems, economic hardship, and difficulty in survival. One of the participants in the service-provider focus groups shared the following sentiments during the FGD.

Livelihood from property like housing, taxis, and other businesses were destroyed, reducing people to abject poverty. Breadwinners were killed. The loss of lives and property has created difficulty for the people (Munda – pseudonym, 2005).

I used issue 8 to know if there was any relationship between children searching for their livelihood and loss of property in the war. The agreement that emerged was that many parents were not able to provide for their children their basic needs of food and clothing after their losses in the war. Therefore, children went to the street to fend for their livelihood. The street children FGD affirmed that they were on the street to search for their livelihood owing to different reasons, which included losses and hardship from the war. The FGDs therefore confirmed the hypothesis.

### Hypothesis 10

HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases lead to disruption in family structure.

The researcher used issue 11 to test this hypothesis in all of the FGDs. The focus groups differed in their responses. The street children's group admitted their awareness of the epidemic but was not clear on its effects on their relationships with their families and other people. One of the service-provider group stated that it was

not so much an issue in the country. The other two service-provider group disagreed in their response. One group stated that there were some reported cases of HIV/AIDS contracted during the war. The government and the church through radio programs had intervened by convincing parents and relatives to accept their infected people. Based on this, they assumed that there were no abandoned cases. The other service-provider group argued that there was distortion in the dissemination of the information on HIV/AIDS, which had led to the high stigmatization of people with the infection. Their conclusion was that since people do not want to touch or interact with HIV/AIDS people there is possibility that it can lead to disruption in family structure.

The women's group was informed about the epidemic. They stated that the challenge about the infection was that relatives were already suffering from economic hardship and therefore do not want extra burden. They suggested that families can neglect giving care but do not sever their relationship with their sick relatives. They also mentioned that though people are very careful in dealing with HIV/AIDS cases yet they still give care to them. Out of the five FGDs, two agreed that there were no disruptions in family relationships. Only one claimed that there were possible disruptions in family relationships. Two FGDs did not share their views, which suggest that the epidemic had not yet created major problems in family relationships. This suggests the negation of the hypothesis.

### ***Effects of the breakdown of the family structure***

The researcher sought to understand if the factors in the effects of the war led to a breakdown in the family structure, which resulted to the growing number of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. This was to answer research question 2 and verify the related hypotheses.

### ***Research question 2***

What are the effects of the breakdown of family structure on the growing number of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone?

#### **Hypothesis 7**

Separation of family members leads to breakdown in contact among them.

The researcher used issue 9 in all of the focus groups to verify this hypothesis. There was consensus in the groups that separation among family members was common during the war. Children separated from parents and relatives during rebel attacks. Either they were displaced or they migrated to the city. It was reported that military soldiers rescued some children from war zones and brought them to the city. The three service-provider focus groups reported migration cases during the war in which the war separated children from their families. However, these groups were involved in re-integration programs in which they had re-united many families. The participants in women's FGD likewise stated that they were all displaced by the war but they maintained contacts with some of their relatives. They decided to continue living in the displaced camps because they had lost everything in the war. Relatives were also not financially strong to render help due to the economic hardship aggravated by the civil war. These explanations suggest that separation of family members did not disrupt family contacts to the extent that affected the family structure. This negated the hypothesis.

#### **Hypothesis 8**

High level of poverty in families leads children to search for livelihood on the streets.

The researcher used issues 6, 7, and 8 in all of the focus groups to test this hypothesis. Issue 6 showed a cause and effect relationship between the war and poverty. The focus groups stated that the war, coupled with bad governance aggravated the poverty level in the country. This affected the relationship in the

family structures in various ways. The women's focus group stated that their relatives were not able to render them help because of the economic hardship in the country. Their husbands likewise did not want the responsibility of the stepchildren because they were not able to support them. Some of their children eventually came to the streets to fend for their livelihoods. In the street children's focus group, the participants reported poverty to be directly and indirectly the main cause of their predicament.

Discussions in issue 7 established loss of property as one of the major causes of poverty that has led children to search for their livelihood on the street since most of their families and relatives experienced losses of varying degree. The economic hardship that emanated from all of these circumstances were suggested to have led children to seek for their livelihood on the street.

The response to issue 8 in the FGDs confirmed that poverty was the driving factor behind children going to the street to search for their livelihood. The service-provider focus groups however associated parental negligence with poverty since the parents permitted and gave their children the responsibility to go fend for their livelihood and also to support their families. A participant in one of the service-provider focus groups in categorizing street children stated,

Some of the street children are 'child guides' of the disabled who lead their parents to beg on the street. Others are pushed by their parents to go beg in the street. Some of these children do menial jobs on the street, while others are sent by their parents to sell in the street. In cases where these children lose money, their parents (usually single or foster) physically abuse them (Moses – pseudonym, 2005).

In another service-provider focus group, a participant argued that indeed, there is economic difficulty in the country but the negligence of some parents has led their children to be influenced by outsiders. He argued that,

Community influence is responsible for promoting waywardness in the society, especially in congested communities. The people in the communities that influence children are the 'bras'. The 'bra' acts as role model to the children and they render some financial assistance to the children. The children then, look up more to them than to their parents. They are also actively involved in socializing the children- take them to football games, cinema, and gradually the children develop bad habits. Badly influenced children reach the point of deserting their homes (James – pseudonym, 2006).

Though the focus groups held a common consensus that poverty led children to fend for their livelihood on the street, yet they suggested that parental negligence is a great contributing factor.

#### Hypothesis 9

Children migrate to cities because of fear of hostilities and abuse from adults.

The researcher used issue 10 in all of the focus groups to test this hypothesis. Two types of hostilities emerged in the FGDs: hostilities against children who were perpetrators of atrocities in the war (these were now adolescents) and children who ran away from their homes because of physical abuse by parents and relatives. There was a consensus in the FGDs that many children, both migrants and non-migrants feared to go back to their homes because of their involvement in the war or because of their parents' collaboration with the rebels. It was only through government interventions that some children returned to their homes and villages. There were many cases of child abuse, which kept children running away from their homes. Therefore, the hypothesis was confirmed by the focus groups.

#### Analysis and Findings of the Participant Observation

My aim in the participant observation was to gain a fuller insight into the research problem. Though the FGDs were detailed, yet I needed to examine "areas of the behavior and thought that would normally not be open to other research techniques" (PATH 1990, 1). This was to help me clarify information from the FGDs or to add to the knowledge gained. The participant observation analysis is therefore

hinged on the FGDs in the sense that the information gathered stemmed from the same research problem. These information are facts which Jorgensen states that “do not make sense except by reference to some intellectual context or framework you employ to render them sensible and meaningful” (1989, 108). In other words, I needed to show how the facts I gained from the participant observation related to my research problem.

### ***Description of the setting, the participants and their activities***

The participant observation was situated in the center of Freetown city in Sierra Leone. The setting was in an old, abandoned market building located close to a slum area called Susan’s Bay. There was a cinema hall and a bar within the same vicinity. In the background was ear-splitting music to which I very soon adjusted. Gamblers were in a couple of the corners of the market. Many of them were adults. Few teenagers occupied another corner who were gambling. These were street children, many of who permanently lived in the setting. There were some food vendors, drug pushers, few prostitutes, and few used-clothing sellers hanging around. The food vendors and drug pushers seemed to be making very good sales as very often I saw someone eating, or smoking marijuana or drinking affordable alcohol. The setting promoted wayward living such as gambling, fighting, drug pushing and taking, and different kinds of obscenity.

The setting was a free open space, which did not require me to gain protocol entry. I had earlier on established friendship with some street boys and they invited me to spend time with them in the setting.

The participants in the setting were predominantly male with few females who were either food vendors or prostitutes. Neighborhood children were running and playing around. My focus was on the street boys who were more than thirty. Most of

them looked healthy but a very few looked sick with scabies, wound scars, and jaundiced eyes.

I was curious to learn if any relationship existed among them and so I focused my observation on five boys. I engaged them in a friendly conversation one at a time after several hours of observation and studying the setting. One of the findings from my observation was that some level of relationship existed among the participants. Some were clique members who gambled together. Some were isolates, others had buyer-seller relationship, and some were relating with older men in a big-small brotherly manner. I further learned about their relationship as I made inquiries about the structure of their group. The group structure was as follows:

“bras” – these were older street men who lived in rented slum houses around the setting of the study. They serve as seniors over younger street boys. Their role is fatherly.

“borbor” – these are younger street boys (‘liners’) who are under the supervision and care of the “bras”. Among this group are “bombers” who are stronger street kids. These are able to take care of themselves. They are able to defend themselves and can beat up their opponents.

The group had a reason for coming together, namely, to rest in the day time, to meet together since the setting accommodates any lifestyle, to take meals at any time of the day, to make money through gambling, and to sleep in the night.

The activities the participants engaged in were working outside of the setting, stealing, and gambling. They stated that all of their activities were directed toward survival, which entails making money for food, to smoke cigarette or other drugs, dance, and feel happy like other children.

### Observations on Unstructured Behavior

The following behaviors were observed in their relationship: abusive, aggressive, bullying, defensive, ability to resolve antagonism and differences, interacts well with outsiders, and caring for the sick.

### Informal Interviews

I wanted to know their reasons for coming to the street. Among the reasons given were hardship, abusive parents, being driven from homes for petty offenses, and separation from parents during the civil war. They explained that survival on the street was possible though it was a kind of “survival of the fittest” lifestyle. That was why they sought for the patronage of the “bras” who introduced them to stealing and upheld it by defending them if caught.

I enquired about family contacts. Some said they maintained it while others said they did not care for it as they felt there was survival and more freedom in the street.

### Casual talk on Reasons for Children being in the Street

Though street boys were my target group, I sought also to learn about them from one of the “bras” who was a drug pusher and had spent long time in the setting. The reasons he gave for their leaving home were as follows: parental abuse of children, which was a post war trauma, poverty, step-parents mistreating step-children, loss of properties and lives in the civil war. His explanations were that when some breadwinner died in the war the surviving parents or relatives went through difficult and frustrating times. Some of the boys faced the brunt of such frustrations and so ran into the street. He added that children were very stubborn in the face of the

general aggressiveness in the country. He made a long comment on parental negligence as follows:

Children are left to fend for themselves or are given adult responsibilities such as selling at a tender age. In this way, girls are defiled and boys take to street life. Children are also left on their own, especially the children of business people who run all over the market place. These are sent by adults to do odd jobs like buying food for them, light cigarettes, and so on (Mustapha, 2005 – pseudo name).

I enquired about the support system that used to up hold families. He told me this still survived but the prevailing difficult times in the country weakened it.

In the analysis of this data, several patterns emerged that explains the effects of the civil war and the reasons for the growing number of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. These were poverty, weakened family structure, parental negligence, and desire for personal freedom.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

A case study was undertaken to understand the effects of the war on the family structure. The summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further studies are presented in this chapter.

#### Thesis

The researcher's thesis was that the problem of street children in Freetown was a consequence of the breakdown in the family structure brought about by the civil war in Sierra Leone. This family structure had been the major cohesive force of keeping the society together. Re-integration of these children was therefore a good attempt to solve the problem of street children.

#### Problem Statement

The growing presence of street children in Freetown was part of the effects of the war in Sierra Leone and particularly on the family structure that was supposed to be the support system of the society. However, many social changes have taken place over the years. The research problem was to explore the growing number of street children in Freetown as an effect of the war on the family structure in Sierra Leone.

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to understand how the effects of the war on the family structure led to the growing number of street children in Freetown.

### Significance of Study

This study was to help to explain the incidence of street children in Freetown, which would give the general populace and policy makers an insight into the nature of the existing extended family relationships. Furthermore, this study was to help churches and NGOs dealing with street children to decide on appropriate intervention to adopt in dealing with the problem of street children. Finally, the findings of this study were to help the church or NGOs to realize the need for being involved in reconciliation and re-integration of street children into their societies.

### Research Questions

1. What are the effects of the civil war on family structures in Sierra Leone?
2. What are the effects of the breakdown of family structure on the growing number of street children in Freetown – Sierra Leone?

### Research Hypotheses

1. Loss of lives of parents and relatives leads to the migration of children to cities.
2. Increase in migration of children to cities, leads to more disruptions in family contacts.
3. The more the emerging of various family patterns, the higher the number of children living on the streets.
4. The death of a spouse leads to parental abandonment of the children by the surviving spouse.
5. Poverty levels determine the number of children living outside of the family.
6. Loss of property produces the need for children to search for their livelihood on the streets.

7. Separation of family members leads to breakdown in contact among them.
8. High level of poverty in families leads children to search for livelihood on the streets.
9. Children migrate to cities because of fear of hostilities and abuse from adults.
10. HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections lead to disruption in family structure.

### Design of the Study

The instruments used for data collection were focus group discussions schedule and participant observation. The FGD schedule had discussion guides.

### Findings of the FGDs

The findings of the research are reported based on the hypotheses that stemmed from the research questions.

#### ***Explanations of the effect of the civil war on the family structure***

##### ***Research question 1***

What are the effects of the civil war on the family structure in Sierra Leone?

##### Hypothesis 1

Loss of lives of parents and relatives leads to the migration of children to cities.

This hypothesis was confirmed. However, the explanations about the circumstances surrounding migration to the city suggest that not all children migrated to the city because of the death of their parents or relatives but because of various factors.

##### Hypothesis 2

Increase in migration of children to the city, leads to more disruptions in family contacts.

The consensus suggests that the increase number of migration by children had not completely led to disruptions in family contact. Although, the refusal of children to return to their homes showed that there was disruption in the family contacts, yet because there was an extent of contact maintained, the hypothesis was negated.

#### Hypothesis 3

The more the emerging of various family patterns, the higher the number of children living on the streets.

The agreement in the data suggests the interpretation that the increase in the number of street children was possible because of the challenges faced in the various family structures. This confirmed the hypothesis that the more the emerging of the various family patterns, the higher the number of children living on the street.

#### Hypothesis 4

The death of a spouse leads to parental abandonment of the children by the surviving spouse.

There was consensus that single parents abandoned their children owing to the economic hardship aggravated by death of their spouses, or loss of their source of livelihood, or displacement and by parental flight in escape from rebel attacks. This challenged the hypothesis that the abandonment of children was caused by mixed factors.

#### Hypothesis 5

Poverty levels determine the number of children living outside of the family.

This hypothesis was confirmed by all the focus groups as the underlying reason for children living outside their families.

### Hypothesis 6

Loss of property produces the need for children to search for their livelihood on the street.

The agreement that emerged was that many parents were not able to provide for their children their basic needs of food and clothing after their losses in the war. The FGDs therefore confirmed the hypothesis.

### Hypothesis 10

HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases lead to disruption in family structure.

Out of the five FGDs, two agreed that there were no disruptions in family relationships. Only one claimed that there were possible disruptions in family relationships. Two FGDs did not share their views, which suggest that the epidemic had not yet created major problems in family relationships. This suggests the negation of the hypothesis.

### *Effects of the breakdown of the family structure*

#### Research question 2

What are the effects of the breakdown of family structure on the growing number of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone?

### Hypothesis 7

Separation of family members leads to breakdown in contact among them.

The explanations in the FGDs suggest that separation of family members did not disrupt family contacts to the extent that affected the family structure. This negated the hypothesis.

### Hypothesis 8

High level of poverty in families leads children to search for livelihood on the streets.

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The focus groups held a common consensus that poverty led children to fend for their livelihood on the street, though they suggested that parental negligence is a great contributing factor.

#### Hypothesis 9

Children migrate to cities because of fear of hostilities and abuse from adults.

There was a consensus in the FGDs that many children, both migrants and non-migrants feared to go back to their homes because of threats of hostilities against those who were involved in the war or whose parents' had collaborated with the rebels. Abused children also feared to go to their homes. This confirmed the hypothesis.

#### Findings of the Participant Observation

My aim in the participant observation was to gain a fuller insight into the research problem. This was to help me to clarify information from the FGDs or to add to the knowledge gained.

In the analysis of this data, several patterns emerged that explained the effects of the civil war and the reasons for the growing number of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone. These were poverty, weakened family structure, parental negligence, and desire for personal freedom.

#### Conclusions

1. Many factors emerged as the effects of the civil war on the family structure in Sierra Leone, namely, loss of lives and property, poverty, migration of children to the city, distortion in family contacts, emerging of various family patterns, and parental negligence. The studies showed that a relationship exists between these factors in that they acted upon one another to affect the family structure. This gave rise to the mixed result that negated the hypothesis.

2. However, among the several factors that were the effects of the war, the participants in the research viewed poverty or economic hardship as a critical issue in the incidence of street children in Freetown. This acknowledges that poverty needs to be radically addressed in the nation.
3. Children went to live on the street because they could not cope with the pressure that was put on the family structure. Some of the pressure was direct effect of the war such as loss of lives and property, poverty, separation of families, and hostilities. The indirect pressure was the emerging of various family patterns, parental negligence, and abandonment.
4. The findings of the research showed that there was change in the family structure. This change however did not imply breakdown in the family structure. It rather showed weakness in the support system. This was due to the economic hardship that had been aggravated by the war.
5. Though the family structure has been weakened, yet there is possibility for re-integration of street children into their families. This offers an opportunity for the church and NGOs involved with street children problems to embark on reconciling street children to their families, as home is the best place for the child to be nurtured.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the findings, the following recommendations have been advanced to deal with the incidence and problem of street children in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

1. The church and NGOs dealing with street children problems could concentrate their efforts on re-integration of children into their families as a major step in dealing with the incidence of street children. They should

remember that re-integration involves dealing with the problems that led the children to the street and working with families and communities to receive the children again.

2. Since poverty is the major issue in the incidence of street children, there must be a willingness to address the problem of economic hardship.
3. The church's role should transcend mediation in the re-integration process of uniting children to their families. Its ministry should be holistic, touching the whole man since he is a tripartite being. His physical, spiritual, and social needs must be met. The physical needs have to deal with the child's well being and proper development. The issue to address in line with this is economic hardship and the rights of the child as a human being. The spiritual ministry should be geared toward helping the child embrace the fatherly love of God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The social ministry should be rehabilitation and seeking social justice for the poor and marginalized in society, which are often the families of street children. In this way would the church be a voice and an advocate in the problem of street children.
4. Further studies will be needed to understand the nature of the family structure in Sierra Leone before the civil war.

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## APPENDIX A

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS SCHEDULE

#### TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ON

LOSS OF LIVES AND PROPERTY, SEPARATION OF FAMILY MEMBERS,  
FAMILY CONTACTS, POVERTY, FEAR OF HOSTILITIES IN CHILDREN,  
MIGRATION, FAMILY PATTERNS, PARENTAL ABANDONMENT, NEED FOR  
LIVELIHOOD, AND HIV/AIDS

#### BACKGROUND

Participants will include:

1. Street children group
2. Service provider groups
3. Internally displaced women group

#### DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Introduction of the researcher and the research purpose.
2. Explanation of the discussion.
3. Explanation of the use of the tape recorder and note taking.

#### ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Explanations for death of parents
  - Date of occurrence
  - Place of occurrence
  - Implications for the child

2. Circumstances surrounding migration to city
  - When they came to Freetown
  - Why they came
  - Implications for migration
3. Explanations of family contacts
  - Number of family members who are alive
  - Where family members are
  - How much contact they maintain
  - Reasons for break in contact if any
4. Description of family pattern
  - Family type (whether single parent, polygamous, or extended family relationship type)
  - Number of children living in family
  - Number of children living outside of the family
  - Explanation for the existing pattern
5. Explanations for parental abandonment
  - Reasons for parental abandonment
  - Implications for the child
6. Circumstances surrounding poverty levels
  - The war
  - The economy
  - What the effects are
7. Explanations for loss of property
  - How the war affected them
  - What the implications are for them

8. Circumstances surrounding the search for livelihood
  - Reasons for the search for their livelihood
  - How they survive in the street
9. Explanations for the separation of family members
  - Reasons for the separation
  - Effects of the separation on family relationship
  - What the implications are for the daily survival of children that live on the street
10. Explanations for fear of hostilities in children
  - The kinds of hostilities encountered
  - Reasons for the hostilities
  - Implications of the hostilities
11. HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases
  - Circumstances surrounding the contraction of HIV/AIDS
  - The effects of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases on their relationships with families and others



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2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2005

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

### RE: RESEARCH WORK

The bearer of this letter, Mrs. Caroline Mariama Momoh is a student at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) and is doing research towards the completion of the Master of Arts in Missions Degree. The research is on "**The Effects of War on the Family Structure: The Case of Street Children in Freetown, Sierra Leone.**" Her research requires that she conducts interviews, make observations and collect documents that may be relevant to her topic.

Any assistance that you can give to Mrs. Momoh will be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dwight Jessup, PhD

**Ag. Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs**

## VITA

### PERSONAL DATA

Name: Caroline Mariama Momoh  
Gender: Female  
Marital Status: Married  
Nationality: Sierra Leonean

### EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

NEGST	Master of Arts in Missions (Candidate)	2004 - 2006
Kenya Highlands Bible College	Bachelor in Christian Education	2000 - 2004
National School of Nursing	Diploma in State Registered Nursing	1989 - 1992
Centennial Secondary School	GCE O level School Certificate	1981 - 1987

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Nurse	U.M.C. Health and Maternity Center (Freetown)	1996 - 1999
Nurse	U.B.C. Matru Hospital (Matru Jong)	1993 - 1995