

## A QUALITATIVE LOOK INTO THE LIVES AND ASPIRATIONS OF STREET CHILDREN IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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**Abstract:** The following paper presents a phenomenological view of Street children's future aspirations in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (HCMC) in 2018. Information was collected addressing general background data, their experiences of living on the street, and the reasons for and how they came to be living on the streets. The subjects studied comprised 3 male and 3 female street children living in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Phenomenological interviews were generated using a variety of quantifiable data techniques. They included: in-depth interviews of participants (street children), in-depth interviews of adult individuals in the children's lives, questionnaires, and observation. The results of the study show a correlation between poverty, broken homes, abuse, limited schooling, and at times, human trafficking. Participants often displayed avoidance or aggression when confronted with uncomfortable or taboo topics. Possible symptoms relating to mental disorders displayed were: depression, generalized anxiety, attachment disorders, aggression, criminality, frustration and hopelessness. The children were drawn to foreigners as a means to earn money, either through sales of trinkets or through scams or begging. As such, the participants generally displayed exaggerated friendliness, superficial connections, and forward mannerisms with adult speaking patterns. All the children had aspirations and perhaps unrealistic goals for the future.

**Keywords:** Street Children, Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City, Human trafficking, Exploitation, Relationships, Future aspirations, Developing Countries, Asia's Mega Cities.

### Introduction

In 2016, the Asia Pacific region was home to nearly 4.5 billion people, nearly 60% of the world population. A diverse region, it contains seven of the world's ten most populous countries, but also holds some of the world's smallest island nations in the Pacific (Floro & King, 2016). Estimates prepared by ESCAP in the 2014 Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific reveal that the number of people in the region living on less than \$1.25 dollars a day fell from 52 percent in 1990 to 18 percent in 2011 – a reduction from 1.7 billion to 772 million people. As of June 9, 2017, the current population of Vietnam was 95,540,800 based on the latest United Nations estimates (Countries in the world by population, 2017). Vietnam's population is equivalent to 1.27% of the total world population, with the median age in Vietnam of 30.8 years ("Mundi Index," 2016). According to the Mundi Index (2016) the age structure of Vietnam's youth is: 0-14 years: 23.84% (male 11,938,563/female 10,767,261); 15-24 years: 16.69% (male 8,240,861/female 7,658,711). 15-25 million Vietnamese citizens are classified as children. The age structure of a population affects the nation's key socio-economic issues. Countries with young populations (a high percentage under age 15) are often advised to invest more in schools, while countries with older populations (a high percentage over age 65) need to invest more in the health sector (McNicoll, 2006). The age structure can also be used to help predict potential political issues. For example, the rapid growth of a young adult population unable to find employment can lead to unrest ("Mundi Index," 2016).

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