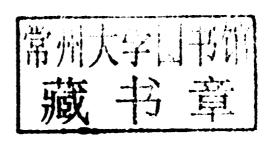


The Social Problems of Children in Sub-Saharan Africa

Ву

Jerry W. Hollingsworth





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This book is dedicated to Dr. Robert Wallace, long time teacher, amazing scholar, mentor, colleague, and even more amazing friend.

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I have many early memories to lean on in the development of some of my ideas and visions. From an early age, I listened to my father tell stories about his adventures in Japan during the United States occupation after World War II. Those stories filled my head about world travel and cultures that were different from my own. Unfortunately, he passed before he realized that he had impacted me in such a way.

As an undergraduate Anthropology student, I would begin studying about different cultures, and that would become a permanent part of my intellectual journey. I would like to thank Dr. Gordon Bronitski for his impact on my early training in Anthropology. I would later transfer to McMurry University, where Dr. Robert Wallace convinced me that Sociology was a journey that would take me wherever I wanted to go. He was right. Without the guidance and mentoring from Robert Wallace, this project, along with any others would not have happened. His impact on my future has been undeniable, both while I was an undergraduate, and now as a colleague. He was also highly involved in the eventual shape this book would take. He has always kept me grounded academically, and for that, I owe a huge debt of gratitude.

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To all my friends in Ghana, I say, Okokroko Nyame, Obaatan pa Nyame Omfa ne Sunsum mmo mo ho ban. Ye da moa se. May the great God surround the people, living and dead, with his great love and protection.

-Jerry W. Hollingsworth

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgementsix
Introduction
Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten

Table of Contents

Millennium Village Project	143
Epilogue	152
References	166
Index	173

INTRODUCTION

There is something magical about traveling the world. Of course, as a tourist, you enter a country with great expectations. Perhaps you have looked at guidebooks and identified several key areas you would like to visit. You pick out a nice hotel, or you examine restaurants, transportation possibilities, and a host of other amenities that will make your visit more appealing. That's traveling like a tourist. That's fun, and there's nothing wrong with that. Traveling to third world countries examining social problems of children and conducting qualitative field work, however, is quite another story.

Instead of checking into a nice hotel with plenty of conveniences, you check into a hostel or other type of "group facility" where other workers are also staying. You might take a job as a volunteer, or a caseworker, or some other temporary position. You work yourself into an environment where you can see the problems firsthand, either in a hospital, an orphanage, school, or similar facility. In some ways, it is incredible to work in these types of organizations. More often than not, you meet terrific people who are out to make a difference in the world. I have worked alongside medical students, lawyers, doctors, social workers, teachers, students, and volunteers from all over the world. As a result, I have friends in different countries I still keep in touch with.

An Ethnographer also directly encounters the population they are observing. They may or may not let others know that they are on a research project. They are in a unique position to observe firsthand, the culture, the behaviors, lifestyles, and activities of the group in which they are interested in studying. If anyone knew that they were being studied, there is the distinct possibility that some behaviors may change, for several reasons. Some may want to appear more socially acceptable, thus giving you a false impression.

In other circumstances, I have told most of my subjects that they were part of a study, and eventually, they just accepted me and forgot all about the research. It is up to the Ethnographer whether or not they should inform the subjects, but good ethics might require that a standard permission be granted, as well as a brief overview of the research that is taking place. Interviews actually become easier, because you are there. It is also quite humbling for a professor who is used to standing in front of a

classroom, to be working with orphans, holding them in your lap as they urinate down your leg, or following a street child to his cardboard box house to see where they live. It brings the developing world to an "up close and personal" view.

The downside is that you may be alone in a foreign country, and vulnerable to certain conditions, such as robbery or kidnapping. Foreigners from Western countries are mostly considered "rich" by those in poor countries, and at times, can be targets of muggings and street crimes. Situating yourself in a high crime area in slums, shanty towns, or out in the streets observing conditions, you may inadvertently be putting yourself in harm's way, and increase your chances of becoming a victim. Since 9-11, Americans are vulnerable in certain locales, and may be potential kidnapping victims.

Other downsides to working in these types of environments are possible medical problems. Some hospitals are poorly operated, with less than adequate resources, such as physicians, nurses, or other major medical personnel. Sometimes, blood supplies are even contaminated, and if you are in need of a blood transfusion, that could create numerous difficulties. My physician has constantly nagged me to take my own blood on my journeys to such places at Sub-Saharan Africa because of these conditions, but I could never bring myself to try that.

An Ethnographer working in these conditions in developing countries may also have to prepare for such things as malaria. One of the major drugs available for preventing malaria is Lariam, which I took before I left, during my stay there, and then for another month after returning home. The medicine works great preventing malaria, but has some nasty side effects. It may cause nightmares that can be extreme or may cause depression that can become debilitating to some people. I've seen many grown men crying in the night for no reason that they can think of. I have heard people screaming in the night from horrible dreams that were haunting them. Being away from home and family may intensify the depression and anxiety, as well.

In some regard, this style of research follows the style of Erving Goffman, who would immerse himself into his chosen area of interest. For example, Goffman posed as a pseudo-employee of St. Elizabeth's Hospital for a year, and collected ethnographic data on selected aspects of patients' social life (Goffman, 1961). Other noted sociologists have used this method to study such topics as drug use, crime, and homelessness. For this study, I set out to examine the life of children who live in orphanages in Sub-Saharan Africa. Several questions instantly arose as I mapped out my plan of study. For example, how and why do children end

up in an orphanage in the first place? What are the orphanages like in Africa? How does it affect development of children who are living there, both socially and cognitively? What are the long-term implications of being an orphan?

While the original intention of this work was to study orphans and orphanages, the situation quickly developed into a much deeper subject. Out of necessity, I was charged with looking at other social problems that were present in Sub-Saharan Africa. Orphans, I found out were vulnerable populations, and were perfect targets for child molesters, military recruiters, traffickers, employers looking for cheap labor, and other reprehensible situations. Thus, I felt it was important to include other social problems of children into the study.

From Latin America to Africa

This study actually follows my original study on the street children of Latin America in my first book, *Children of the Sun: An Ethnographic Study of the Street Children of Latin America.* While studying street children there, I was appalled at the living conditions of people and children that were living in slums and shanty towns in Mexico and Peru. The nature of that work influenced me to project myself into the Continent of Africa, where I traveled to Ghana, in West Africa to continue observing the conditions of children there. However, when I landed in Africa, I was amazed at the number of people living in those conditions. In Latin America, there seemed to be pockets of prosperity, but in Africa, those pockets of prosperity were few and far between. As a matter of fact, the more I observed in Africa, the more problems I discovered.

Family life of society is also put under the microscope in the culture of Sub-Saharan Africa, and as a result, a number of questions begged to be answered. For example, what do we expect from the family unit? How does the family unit in Sub-Saharan Africa differ from family life in the United States? What other social problems do children in Sub-Saharan Africa suffer from?

Expectations for Children in Western Society

Western societies, especially U.S. society have a somewhat contradictory idea of what childhood should be. On one hand, we feel like children should play, surrounded by this idea of innocence and play. Some of our fondest memories as adults are of the times when we were children and had no cares that adults faced. Yet, in between those years,

4 Introduction

adults have insisted on moments when children should be studying, working, improving, and stimulating their brains. Therefore, we encourage educational activities and create an environment where essential development takes place.

However, in some cultures, this is not possible, as children are abandoned to live on their own as orphans, street children, or become exploited in many other ways. In Latin America, street children have become "pseudo-adults" at very early ages (Hollingsworth, 2008). In other cultures, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, although families are important, it is not always possible to maintain those family connections with children, especially when the adult population is dying off due to HIV/AIDS.

Setting and Methodology

For the purposes of this study, I lived in a tiny fishing village in Ghana, West Africa, known as Teshie. I worked in several orphanages in Ghana, to get a real picture of what life was like inside an African orphanage. I also interviewed other workers in other orphanages to get an idea of what they were like. I walked the streets in Accra, the capital city, as well as Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana to observe street children, as well. I observed Cape Coast, and the Slave Castles, where the Colonial powers such as Portugal, Spain, The Dutch, and the British held slaves in dungeons during the Atlantic Slave Trade era. I observed and conducted interviews in as many areas as possible to get a real picture of these social problems in an ethnographical sense.

What Are Social Problems?

According to sociologists, a social problem exists when an influential group asserts that a certain social condition affecting a large number of people is a problem that may be remedied by collective action (Zastrow, 2000). For instance, they refer to the influential group as one that appears capable of having a significant impact on social policy at the national level. For the purposes of this book, the United Nations may be just such an influential group on an international level, along with several other International organizations, policy makers, and Institutions, such as UNICEF, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. These organizations have been leading the way into discovering and addressing the problems of children in developing countries, and especially on the Continent of Africa. In this volume, we will also investigate these

organizations, as well as their policies, and their activities concerning the social problems of children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Social problems must also affect a large population of people. If they affect only isolated individuals, they may be personal problems but not social problems. Accordingly, the Sociologist C. Wright Mills explains this concept as understanding the *Sociological Imagination*, (1959), or the ability to see the relationship between individual experiences and the larger society. Social problems are social because they are so widespread that they affect society itself.

This study should demonstrate that large enough numbers of children are affected by child soldiering, child labor, sexual exploitation, street children, and orphans in the developing world and thus are fully deserving of the title: social problems.

The Problem

Currently, UNICEF estimates the number of Street Children around the world at 150 million. Those numbers are more than the combined populations of either Russia or Japan. Orphans are estimated at another 140 million. The International Labor

Organization (ILO), a UN agency, estimates the number of child laborers at 250 million. There are another 1.5 million children being trafficked each year for labor or sexual purposes.

If these numbers are not substantial enough to call these issues a social problem, then nothing is. Therefore, I will be presenting my picture of these child difficulties as social problems in the strict sociological sense, and presenting my case through statistics by influential groups such as UNICEF, The United Nations, The International Labor Organization, as well as International reports such as the Children on the Brink series, which gathers data on such topics as AIDS Orphans in Africa.

Another contributing factor in examining issues as social problems is that these social conditions may be remedied by collective action. Collective action can be described as strikes, demonstrations, public service advertising, lobbying, and formation of interest groups. In the area of social problems with children in a global setting, it has long been thought that these were conditions that were unchangeable. That sort of thinking must be abandoned in favor of collective action in the form of governmental groups, national agencies, the United Nations, Micro lending institutions, and Non-Governmental Agencies around the world to bring about lasting change for some of these problems.

6 Introduction

Background and Experience

I suppose I have a unique background for the work I am presenting here. Most of my academic credentials are specialized in several fields. Although I am sociologically trained, I have a Social Work background, and that is where I spent thirteen years in the field, working with children. My Doctoral work was also very specific, in that it trained me for my further work in children's problems. I am also anthropologically inclined, which means that I have a keen desire to get out into the field and observe social conditions firsthand, ethnographically.

My first book, Children of the Sun: an Ethnographic Study of the Street Children of Latin America, was an exploration into the culture of Street Children in Mexico and Peru. Delving into those problems directly led to the development of this study, which takes into account problems of children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The statistics and the indexes, and the coefficients, and the reports from International research all make sense to me, but I find it particularly fascinating to try to live in those conditions as much as possible to get a feel of what poverty is like from an observation viewpoint. This is qualitative analysis in a nut shell. My academic training leads me to believe that one gain a greater understanding of a problem when they enter the field and observe, interview, or otherwise live with the people who are experiencing social problems.

While this is a great tool, sometimes it has its drawbacks. For example, when I first returned to the United States from Africa, I had a terrible time adjusting. I went to lunch at one of my favorite Chinese buffet restaurants, and after a few moments of watching people pile food high on their plates, and then returning to the buffet line for seconds and thirds, I had to leave. I was no longer the same person I was before I went to West Africa. I still had visions in my head of children living in an orphanage, eating one or two bowls of rice a day and crying themselves to sleep at night because they were hungry. I could remember the children in Mexico and Peru that huffed glue and other dangerous substances so they could numb the hunger pangs.

On the other hand, I have to admit, that at times, even I am often desensitized to the information I am working with. Recently, I was invited as a guest speaker at the University of Arkansas for their annual Sociology Alpha Kappa Delta event. The room was full to capacity as I began my presentation. I was presenting data that pertained to a good portion of what is contained in this book: orphans in developing countries, child trafficking, etc...and I proceeded with great gusto, trying to communicate

well, and with complete emphasis on my performance. After all, I was on stage in front of hundreds of people. When I was done, and it was time for questions, I looked up as they turned the lights up and I noticed that people were sporadically sniffing and crying. It dawned on me afterward that not everyone was used to seeing the facts, figures, and worst of all, the pictures that represent the many social problems of children in developing countries.

While it is not my intention to unfairly trigger emotional responses for the reader, I will present the information as clearly and accurately as possible. The information contained herein is often unpleasant and sometimes surprising. It's sometimes difficult to believe that some parts of the world can be so bad. It is hard to witness children starving, or living in squalor, when, in the developed world, we have so much, especially in the light of the "promise of globalization."

CHAPTER ONE

CULTURE, HISTORY, AND FAMILY LIFE

Arrival in Ghana

As my plane landed at the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, I was greeted with one of the many con games practiced by airport security. It was a well-practiced routine; one improved over time on their part, and one that depends on the naiveté of the innocent traveler.

First, they asked you if you have made contact with the parties that will be picking you up at the airport. If you say no, they will offer to contact them for you, using their cell phone. Afterwards, they aggressively suggest that you owe them for the service they provided. It's a "shakedown," and a very efficient one, especially since they are wearing a uniform. It's also not a good first impression of Ghana, but was also indicative of the massive poverty that existed there.

I was waiting for my official greeting party from the organization I was working for. It was a non-profit Non-governmental Organization known as the IFRE (the International Field Research Expedition). After finally meeting my group, I felt more secure, as I fended off at least a half-dozen more of Airport Security on my own before having to give up a few more dollars. I soon was joined by several others who would also be taking positions in various places in orphanages or hospitals, or schools in the greater Accra region of Ghana. The IFRE is a placement agency who is in contact with the many orphanages in Africa and provides qualified volunteers for a fee.

Most of the volunteers I met would be working inside the various agencies in Ghana, and would be staying in the same central location, and would report daily to their assigned positions. We would sleep at the central compound, take all our meals there, and basically reside there during the time of our employment at our various jobs. It was more like a glorified dormitory.

The agency would also contribute to our field of knowledge in other ways, such as giving us a basis of understanding the language there. We would receive classes on the culture of Ghana, as well as lessons in Twi,

one of the 57 different dialects of the Akkan language of Ghana. Twi is spoken by about 50 percent of the people in Ghana. The organization would also provide us with trips to different areas of the country to help us understand the culture and the country better, which I thought would be very important in working with the children in the orphanages. In my work with street children in Peru and Mexico, I ended up spending a couple of years studying Spanish and the culture in order to understand the children's basic culture. I would not have enough time to totally grip the languages in Ghana, but fortunately, most people would be able to understand English, as English was the official language of Ghana, due to British Colonialism.

As we made our way through the streets of Accra from the airport area to our compound, it was an eye-opening experience. All around me, citizens carried large bundles of objects on their heads, carrying them with ease. As we approached our destination, the streets became less passable, and the paved roads disappeared. Houses and neighborhoods became more rundown. Naked children ran down the dirt roads, along with a large numbers of dogs, goats, and chickens.

As one government official told me later, you could see what areas the British had occupied, as the roads were well-paved, but once you got outside of that central district, the roads were particularly bad. I noticed that right away as we bounced along the dirt roads in the area known as Teshie.

Teshie was a small fishing village just outside the Greater Accra area. It was about one step up from a shanty town. The people here lived in small shacks, with no running water, no electricity, and no conveniences. The people were largely fishermen, craftspeople, or small store-owners. Large numbers of the people there were also poor and unemployed. The majority of the people grew small amounts of vegetables around their homes, and owned a few goats or chickens. Most of the people living in the village spoke either Twi, or Ga, another one of the local dialects.

As we made our way to the compound where we would be staying, we made our way across the ruts and the holes in the dirt roads. Nothing was paved. Transportation in the area consisted of beat-up and aging minivans the locals called "Tro-Tro's." These vehicles ran periodically through the dirt roads providing a way for citizens to get into the greater Accra region. They ran even when the ruts in the roads were so deep that it doubled the amount of time it took to get to the city. During the monsoon season, the rains would come and damage the roads even more, deepening, and widening the ruts as more and more Tro-Tro's ran through the roads.