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MISSING STREET GIRLS: THE IMPORTANCE OF OVER-TIME MEASURES FOR COUNTING THE HOMELESS IN BOGOTA

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Abstract

This paper argues that street girls, and girls that move from the street to other equally dangerous situations, have been 'missed', masking in a number of senses the relative deprivation of these young women. One important reason for missing street girls is that efforts to count street children are likely to be systematically biased against girls if they are undertaken on a single night without regard to period of time. Due to frequent movement on and off the street, one-night estimates are likely to be skewed towards children who live on the street permanently, hence giving less weight to younger children and to women.

The results show that in Bogota, as in many Latin American countries, single-night counts indicate that male street children outnumber females in the ratio of approximately four or five to one. The absence of street girls explains part of why the numbers of *gamines* appear to be low. Girls tend to spend less time on the street and are underrepresented in any count taken on a single night. Beyond its implication for enumerating street children, the fact that there are so many more boys than girls found living on the street poses a series of questions regarding the relative deprivation of young women in especially difficult circumstances.

One explanation for not seeing girls on the street is that they may find street life more dangerous than boys. Still, young women are not exempt from the hardships that push young men to the streets. Many young women work in their homes and in the homes of employers as domestic servants. Others can be found exploited in brothels. While they are less visible than street children, many of these young women are exposed to dangers as great as on the street. If visibility is related to the allocation of resources, the 'missing girls of the street' may receive less assistance than boys.

This paper makes use of two main data sources, a census of street children that was undertaken in Bogotá in December of 1992, and a survey that was applied to a randomly selected 20% of the children counted in the census and to a sample of children from the poorest neighborhoods of Bogota. The data were collected as part of the Survey of Children and Youth at High Risk in Bogota.

Introduction

Are the minority of street children girls? The predominance of males among street children in Latin America has been noted in a number of studies and in various countries (Felsman, 1981a; Blanc, 1994; Myers, 1991). In Chile and Bolivia respectively, only 9.2% and 27% of street children are women (Ramírez et al, 1991; Domic et al, 1992). Ennew (1994) considers literature from Asia and Africa, as well as Latin America and highlights the common assertion that approximately 10% of street children are girls. While studies tend to coincide, it is not clear why so few girls are found living on the streets in Latin America.

Without a clear explanation, it is necessary to question definitions, conceptualizations and counting methodologies in an effort to locate the "missing" girls of the street. This extends, albeit to a group much smaller in terms of numbers, the issue of "missing women" that has been uncovered by authors such as Sen (1990a) and Coale (1991) and attributed to the relative neglect and deprivation of women in many parts of the world.

A particularly serious challenge in estimating the size of a homeless population is frequent movement on and off the street. A one-night count will not accurately reflect the number of individuals exposed to the street, even if it is able to cover both homeless people found on the street and those in temporary shelters. Movement on and off the street also complicates the analysis of the composition of the homeless population. Gender, age and other variables are related to the frequency of movement and hence the probability of being located on the street in a given night.

Street children, like other groups of homeless, tend to move between the street and temporary shelter. While researchers have identified the need to develop more effective systems for enumerating the street child population, the issue of movement has seldom been contemplated in studies (Blanc, 1994). Biases related to counting methodologies are likely to affect the identification of the population at risk, and hence the diagnosis of the situation faced. These limitations are reflected in the policies and programs that are developed for working and street children.

This paper makes use of information on street children in Bogota to analyze gender bias involved in methodologies for estimating the size of the homeless population. The analysis is based on combining the results of a one-night count with data on the frequency of nights spent sleeping on the street. In addition, definitional issues, and a series of hypotheses related to why there fewer street girls are discussed.

The paper argues that due to frequent movement on and off the street, estimations of the number of street children must be given with respect to a specific

period of time. Ideally, counts should be repeated over a series of nights in order to more adequately capture the presence of street girls. The results of this study show that in Bogota, as in many Latin American countries, male street children outnumber females by approximately four or five to one based on a simple, one-night count. The count is biased toward children who live on the street permanently, hence "missing", or giving less weight to, the many younger children and girls. Young women tend to spend more nights in temporary shelter, in part due to their involvement in the sex trade, or to more rapidly leave the street for "alternatives" such as brothels.

The findings of this research may have important implications for programs and policies. In particular, in response to the apparently high prevalence of boys, efforts to assist street children may also "miss" the girls of the street. The fact that there are so many more boys than girls found living on the street complicates the analysis of the relative deprivation of girls in especially difficult circumstances. While they are less visible than street children, many of these young women are exposed to dangers of equal magnitude as on the street. If visibility is related to the allocation of resources, this imbalance suggests the need to focus on the "missing girls of the street".

This work also contributes to several other areas of policy and research. First, this study and its conclusions are likely to be relevant to efforts to count the adult homeless population. Biases related to age and gender may skew both policy formulation and research on homeless populations in general. In addition, it is important to note that there has been very little research specific to the female street child population in developing countries (CHILDHOPE, 1989 is an exception). Further, the findings are relevant not only to questions specific to the street child population, but also gender biases within the broader context of research and policies on children"s rights and efforts on behalf of the larger group of children in especially difficult circumstances of which street children are a part (UNICEF, 1988).

The first section of the paper presents a series of issues related to gender bias in the definition of street children. The following section describes the data used in the analysis. The next part compares the results of different methodologies for estimating the number of children exposed to street life in order to show that one-night counts are likely to undercount girls because they spend fewer nights on the street as compared to boys. The fourth section begins the search for these "missing" girls by reviewing why there might be fewer girls might reach the street and why those who do go to the street migth spend less time there. The concluding section discusses policy implications and avenues for future research.

I. The Definition of Street Children

Defining street children has proved a difficult undertaking and favored definitions may tend to overlook girls. This section reviews some of the challenges that are inherent in reaching a definition, and highlights the areas in which gender bias may be an issue based on the findings presented in later sections.

UNICEF and other agencies tend to define street children based on the frequency with which they sleep on the street and the degree of contact that they maintain with their families. The population has been divided into two categories: children "of" the street, and children "on" the street.[1]

There is considerable confusion surrounding this categorization. The group "of" the street includes those children who spend almost all of their nights sleeping on the street and maintain little or no family contact. Some UNICEF publications go so far as to stipulate that children "of" the street are those children who, "...regularly sleep in the street or any other place, but not with their families..." (UNICEF, 1988; author"s translation). In a later publication, UNICEF described children "of" the street as children who: are located in urban areas; have weak or no family ties; develop survival strategies; are at serious risk; and, use the street as their principal habitat, perhaps temporarily leaving the street for places such as a family home, but always returning to the street (UNICEF, 1989; pp 19). The *gamines*, as street children in Bogota are often called, are considered to be children "of" the street.

Children who spend some time on the street, but normally return to their family"s home to sleep, are referred to as children "on" the street. In Colombia, this group includes many working children who participate in the informal sector. They are not referred to as *gamines* because they work alongside their families and do not exhibit many of the same behavioral characteristics such as drug use.

The problem of definition actually begins with the very term "child". Street children typically include a diverse group of young people of varying ages including youngsters, young adolescents, adolescents and young adults. There are families living on the street, and street mothers with infants. The upper age limit of what constitutes a "child" or a "minor" pins down the responsibility of the state. The vulnerability to street life is related to age, as the level of risk is likely to differ between a very young child, a child, and a youth. The age limit is thus important to the definition of the population of street children, yet is in practice somewhat arbitrary.

Equating street children with abandoned children who live apart from their families also defines away certain children "of" the street. In Bogota, some of the most disadvantaged street children live on the street alongside their families. Some are children who are "born" on the street in the sense that they are the children of street couples or women who live on the street and keep their children with them.

[1] The terms "street child" and "child of the street" are interchangeable in this paper. Children "of" the street do not include "working children" or "children on the street".

These children are often born under very traumatic conditions, and spend even their earliest years exposed to the physical dangers and degradation of the street. Others are families who work and live on the street as a unit. The phenomenon of street families has been documented in other countries including India, Kenya, Brazil and the United States (Glauser, 1990; Swift, 1991; Munyakho, 1992).

In the face of the difficulties of definition and identification discussed above, it is similarly challenging to develop a definition for the paper. The characteristic used to identify street children is street contact with the intention of passing the night on the street, regardless of previous street experience. No reference is made to the degree of family contact in the definition used in this paper. The premise is that having slept on the street for at least one night as a minor, with or without family contact, is an indicator of high risk.[2]

Although the definition can be criticized for not placing bounds on the degree of street contact or permanence, it has the advantage of being risk-sensistive and objective. It is based on the exposure to the street as a risk to well-being, rather than the perception of the interviewer. Further, it is not biased against those who spend the least continuous time on the street - girls and young children who are typically among the most vulnerable and at risk. Using a criteria that conditions on having spent a lengthy or continuous period on the street would generate age and gender bias.

II. Data

This paper makes use of three main data sources: a census of street children that was undertaken in Bogotá in December of 1992, a survey that was applied to a randomly selected 20% of the street children counted in the census, and a similar survey applied to children from the households in the two poorest strata of Bogota. Each is described in turn below.

The data were collected as part of the Project on Children and Youth at High Risk in Bogota (PCYHR) undertaken in the fall of 1992 in Bogota, Colombia. The purpose of this work was to gather information on the situation of street children, working children, and physically abused children aged 5 to 18 as an input for both research and policy making. The data collection involved a collaborative effort between a number of governmental and non-governmental organizations that gave financial, logistical and other types of support.[3] The difficulties associated with

[2] A similar definition has been used in research and policy work on behalf of runaway and homeless youth in the United States (Greene, Ennett and Ringwalt, 1997).

[3] These organizations include: the National Planning Department of Colombia (DNP); the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF); the Programa Presidencial de la Mujer, la Juventud y la Familia; FEDESARROLLO; Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística de Colombia (DANE); UNICEF; the Inter-American Foundation; the University of Toronto; the Canadian

drawing the samples and conducting the interviews were formidable. A careful analysis of the pros and cons of the methodology was undertaken and written up.[4] This section includes only a brief overview of the data collection strategy.

The information from street children was taken in two phases, beginning with the census that was undertaken with the assistance of the agencies working with the children on the night of the 1st of December. The month prior to the census, the organizations worked on the street with the children in order to inform them of the census and solicit their participation. The enumerators were comprised of students who were participating in community projects, the staff of the organizations, and street educators. The children were enumerated both at focal points where they tended to congregate and by mobile teams.

The census itself included a short questionnaire designed to provide basic socio-demographic characteristics, information on drug use and use of projects for street children. Further, the census instrument was designed to identify children who could be counted as street children based on the probability that they would spend the night on the street and their pattern of street nights immediately prior to the census. The number of questions was kept to a minimum given that many of the children were under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and that street conditions make it difficult to administer a long questionnaire. Further, more detailed data was collected in the second stage survey described below.

A total of 525 street children between the ages of 5 and 18 years were counted in the census as part of the PCYHR. This figure includes all of the children found sleeping on the streets of metropolitan Bogota on the 1st of December of 1992, as well as those who showed up to be surveyed two days later (see below). To avoid double counting the census sheets were evaluated one by one, based on first name, age, gender and place of birth. A total of 50 potential duplicates were found and removed.

As is the case with any census, this figure is an underestimate of the number of children on the street in any given night. Although every effort was made to cover the entire city and to make the children come out of hiding for the night of the census, it was very difficult to ensure that all of the street children were counted. Further, the 525 children counted in the census do not include children in jail, institutions or other projects for street children. Children do not necessarily stop being street children when they take up residence off the street in an institution. In fact,

International Development Agency (CIDA); FONADE; the Consejería Social del Distrito de Bogotá; IDIPRON; el Albergue Infantil de Bogotá; Casa Club del Departamento Administrativo de Bienestar Social; el Grupo Escombros; the Red Cross of Colombia; the Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes; Nueva Vida S.O.S. Colombia; and, Defense for Children International-Colombia.

[4] More detailed information on the data collection strategy, as well as manuals, questionnaires and other documentation are available in Spanish through the office of UNICEF-Colombia-CEDC and the National Action Program on Behalf of Children (*Programa Nacional de Acción en Favor de la Infancia*) at the National Planning Department of Colombia.

they frequently escape and return to the street. This implies that there are street children, or potential street children, in institutions.

As mentioned above, the other two data sets used in this research come from a survey that was undertaken in two parts: with a sample of street children identified through the census; and, with children from the poorest neighborhoods of Bogota. The household survey served both as the source of information on working and abused children, as well as the comparison group of children who were living in similar conditions and were not suffering from these difficulties.

The survey questionnaire, which was similar for both the street children and the children in households, included questions on demographics, street experience, health, living situations and conditions, abuse, education, labor force participation, time use and family background. Tests of literacy and ability were also included. The street children were asked to answer all of the questions including those that referred to the family. In the case of the children from households, the parent(s) answered the questions about other family members and about living conditions. All of the survey instruments were tested with different groups of children including street children found on the street and those in projects, children from households in poor neighborhoods, and children from schools.

Thus the second stage of the data collection with street children involved applying a survey to a random sample of those enumerated through the census. For this purpose, a festival was undertaken that was designed to provide an environment in which the longer questionnaire could be applied. During the census, each child was given a ticket for a raffle which informed them of the festival to be held on the 3rd of December. At the entrance to the festival, these tickets were replaced with color-coded tickets that were randomly distributed. A total of 110 children with these special tickets were interviewed. This amounts to approximately 20% of the children that were counted in the census.

It is necessary to discuss some of the biases that were involved in drawing the sample of street children from the census count. Most importantly, some children were not counted on the night of the census, but arrived at the projects to be taken to the festival. Under the assumption that they had been on the street, and heard of the festival but had been missed in the census, they were enumerated and randomly included in the sample. Many of the older children did not show up to the festival or did not get interviewed. This is not surprising as it may not have been as interesting to them. Knaul (1993a) compares the distributions of the census and the sample, and discusses the possible biases in the data and other issues related to sample size.

The other group surveyed was a sample of households from the poorest strata (1 and 2) of Bogota with the sampling frame based on the Survey of Poverty and Quality of Life in Bogota (*Encuesta de pobreza y calidad de vida de Bogotá*). Originally, 700 families with children between the ages of 5 and 18 were included in the survey. A total of 640 interviews were successfully completed.

It was impossible to interview all of the children in each household due to the length of the questionnaire and the need to separate the children from the parents in order to interview children directly.[5] One child was selected from each family, regardless of family size. The sample was stratified by age and gender to reflect the distributions in each area of the city. This obviously creates bias as large families are underrepresented. In addition, it proved more difficult to locate youth than children, so that the sample of children actually surveyed is biased toward younger children. Theses sampling flaws were traded off against the merits of a longer survey instrument and the possibility of conducting a more private interview with the child.

III. The Importance of Street Permanence in Estimating the Street Child Population

The frequent movement on and off the street by street children makes it necessary to differentiate among them based on the amount of time spent sleeping on the street, and on their intention to sleep or to continue to sleep on the street. There are basically two groups of street children to be considered: those who have likely adopted the street as their home given that they sleep most nights on the street; and, those who spend most nights sleeping off the street or are at high risk by having spent at least one night on the street. Girls are more likely to be found in the latter group.

Based on the number of nights recently spent on the street it is possible to adjust one-night counts in order to estimate the number of children who pass through the streets in a given time period. Specifically, the census of Bogota"s street children includes questions on whether or not the children spent the night prior to the census on the street, and the number of nights the child spent on the street the week before the census. This information serves as an indicator of movement off and on the street and can be used to examine the difference in the characteristics, and particularly the gender, of the population of street children that are identified using one night counts versus repeated cross-sections.

The night prior to the Bogota census, 73% of the children slept on the street, being more common among boys.[6] The majority of the children, 64%, spent all seven nights on the street the week prior to the census.[7] Approximately 61% spent the night prior and the entire week prior[8] to the census on the street (Table 1).[9]

[5] It was doubtful that parents would respond honestly if their children were working, abused or had spent time on the street. Comparing participation rates for children across surveys which have either the children or the parents responding, shows that the rates are higher when the children respond (Knaul, 1995). This suggests that the respondent may be an important source of bias in surveys of children and for this reason the surveys were designed to be implemented directly with children.

[6] The non-response rate for this question was 9.5%.

[7] Jencks (1994) cites data from a study conducted by Martha Burt of the Urban Institute on the nights spent on the street by homeless adults who use shelters in the US. She found that 34% used

Almost 10% of the children reported that they spent neither the night before the census, nor any of the nights the week prior, on the street. This finding coincides with previous research. Among the group of *gamines* in the study done by Granados (1976), 11% of the children had not yet abandoned their homes and were living with their families. He refers to these as children in the transition stage.

It is difficult to say exactly where the children do sleep when they are not on the street, but it is possible that for some children the census night was their first night on the street. They may also pass some nights in *residencias*[10], brothels, with sexual partners, at the homes of "friends", in police stations, or in governmental or non-governmental projects. The data from the survey of Bogota"s street children suggest that they tend to participate in several residential and non-residential projects during the course of their time on the street (Knaul, 1993a).

It is also quite likely that children move back and forth between their family homes and the street. Although street children are often assumed (or defined) to have no family contact, the information from the survey suggests that this is not always the case. Rather, street children have complex living situations that reflect a process of movement between the home and the street. The most common strategy is to live with friends, probably in *galladas* (groups or bands of children who live together on the street). Still, a large proportion of the street children report that they live with family members (Table 2). In some cases, they live on the street with their families, but the majority refer to sleeping in a family home. Almost 25% of the children said

shelters 7 nights a week, 18% for 2 to 6 nights, 24% for only one night and 24% did not use shelters. This implies that of those who spent some time out of shelters, 27% spent between one and five nights on the street, 36% spent 6 nights, and 36% all nights on the street. As Jencks suggests, the figure for 6 nights is implausibly high. The figure for 1 to 5 nights is relatively close to the finding for *gamines*.

[8] The questionnaire was designed to make reference to the calendar week prior to the census, although there may be some overlap.

[9] The information on the week and the night prior to the census tend to coincide, both in terms of the frequencies and the number of child-street nights (nights spent on the street by all of the children). This gives a higher degree of confidence regarding the reliability of the information provided by the street children on the frequency of nights slept on the street. Of the children counted, 76% spent the majority of nights on the street the week prior to the census. This number is very close to the 73% who spent the night prior to the census on the street.

Furthermore, based on the information on nights slept on the street the week before the census, an average of 396 of the children surveyed were on the street on any given night. The figure of 73% for the night prior to the census implies that 385 of the children surveyed were on the street. In order to arrive at total child-street nights, the number of children is multiplied by the number of nights slept on the street the week before the census. The distribution of nights spent on the street is assigned to the 122 children who did not answer the question, which adds 650 street nights. Dividing the total of 2766 child-street nights by 7, the number of nights in the week, gives the average number of children on the street in any given night.

[10] Residences (residencias) are cheap hotels where many children rent rooms for the nights when they have money. They may also be used for clients when prostitution is involved.

that they were living with their mothers. Of these, approximately one-third are living with their mothers on the street. The number of multiple answers lends support to the idea that children have numerous "homes" and move on and off the street.[11]

Street children maintain relatively frequent contact with their families, most often their mothers. The data from the survey also show that approximately 26% of the street children had spoken to their mothers within days of the survey. Still, 36% had not spoken to their mother in years. Contact with fathers is infrequent and 17% said that they had never known their fathers. By contrast, 9% said the same of their mothers.[12]

Other studies have also shown that many street children maintain contact with their families (Felsman, 1981a). According to the Granados (1976) study, only 15% of the *gamines* reported that they had no idea of where their parents were living and had completely broken contact with their families. Aptekar (1991) found that only 16% of the children in his study were unable to locate at least one parent. According to a study of street children of Goiânia, Brazil only 15% had no contact at all with their families. Intermittent or regular contact was maintained by 70% of the children (Rizzini et al., 1992).

The fact that there are so many children who do not sleep on the street consistently has implications for the counting of street children. An estimate of the number of children who pass through the street in a given period of time can be derived as a point of reference based on the proportion of children who are not permanent street dwellers, or in other words based on "street permanence".

The maximum weekly estimate for Bogota is based on the fact that roughly 40% of the children in the census do not sleep consistently on the street and hence have lower street permanence. If these children were all "replaced" on a daily basis with other children, then 1800 children pass through the streets of Bogota in a week.

Accounting for the probability that a child leaves the street on any given night provides a more comprehensive estimate of the number of street children. This probability can be approximated by using information on the size of the group that moves on or off the street in any given day, and did not spend nights on the street for a given period prior to the day that they are enumerated.

In the case of Bogota, the census data suggest that approximately 25% of the children who are found on the street in any given night are not there the following night. Also, close to 10% of the children are not on the street any night of the week prior or the day prior to the night that they are located, and 12% are not there the week before. The figures correspond to 25% and 30% respectively, of the those children who spend some nights off the street. Assuming that on any day of the month

[11] It is at first curious that 25% of the children said that they lived alone. Some of these children also answered that they were living with other people. While this appears contradictory, it is likely that the children live with others, but feel at the same time that they are alone.

[12] These percentages exclude the children who said that they were living with their parents.

10% of Bogota"s street children leave and are replaced by children that have not been on the street any other day of the month, 2100 children spend at least one night on the street in a month.[13] Using the figure of 12% there would be approximately 2350 children in a month. In a year, these figures are likely to be substantially higher with the majority being those who spend short periods of time on the street.[14]

The estimates presented in this section show that there are two distinct groups that make up or characterize the street child population. The majority of the street children located in one-night counts are the transients who spend only some nights on the street, but do not live permanently on the street. The other group is made up of more permanent street children who spend the majority of nights sleeping on the street. While these are the minority of children in the estimates calculated above, they are the majority of children who appear in a one-night count and they account for the bulk of child street nights (the total number of nights spent on the street by children in a given period of time).[15]

Transient and permanent street children differ not only in the amount of time and continuity of time spent on the street, but also in other characteristics that inclu-

[13] The calculations of the number of children who pass through the street are based on the underlying assumption that the number of street children is in a steady state, or stationary, when a census is undertaken. This means that the size of the street child population does not fluctuate depending on time of the year or the day of the week, and that the total number of children affected is relatively stable. It also suggests that behavior patterns in terms of nights spent at home versus on the street are stable over time. In other words, the behavior last week of children who were on the street the day of the census, mirrors what they will do in the future. If their behavior fluctuates significantly at different times of the year or even during the week, the assumption loses validity.

[14] While these figures may at first sight seem low, they coincide with previously published estimates for Bogota most of which suggest that there are between 1000 and 5000 street children in Bogota. Further, while there is an enormous degree of variation in published figures both among and within Latin American countries counts from individual cities fall within the same range as those presented here. Much of this variation is a result of important definitional differences that include working children among the street child population. These differences make it very difficult to compare the size of the phenomenon in Bogota to other countries or to arrive at regional figures. In the United States Jencks (1995) cites several careful counts that put the adult homeless in Chicago at approximately 1300 in 1958 and between 2500 and 2800 in the mid-1980s. Earlier studies for Colombia as well as the variation in figures from other countries, are reviewed in detail in Knaul (1995).

Figures on street children must be seen as and indicator of a severe social problem and extreme deprivation indicating the existence of much larger numbers of children at risk. Further, these are all short-term estimates, while a more global evaluation of the importance of the street child phenomenon must be seen in light of the number of children and youth who are exposed to the street over a longer period of time.

[15] Jencks (1994) makes a similar point regarding the homeless in the United States. He cites data that shows that half the adults who became homeless in the US during the 1980s were back in conventional housing within a few months, and that only one in eight were homeless for more than a year. At the same time, half the people who are counted as homeless on any given night, have been homeless for over one year.

de age and gender. This implies that the estimates of the street child population that do not account for movement on and off the street may provide biased results not only in terms of total numbers, but also in terms of the composition of the group.

Low estimates of the proportion of female street children are in part an artifact of the counting methodologies or definitions that are biased toward permanent street dwellers. "Missing" girls of the street many be explained by gender differentials in transience on and off the street. If girls leave the street more rapidly than boys, then it is likely that one-time counts will underrepresent the proportion of girls in the population of children that spend time living on the street. The same would be true if girls tended to move off and on the street more often than boys.

The Bogota census suggests that only 24% of *gamines* are female (Table 3), a figure that coincides with other studies based on short-term counting methodologies and cited above.[16] In Bogota, girls also account for a low proportion of child-street nights. Based on the distribution of nights spent sleeping on the street the week prior to the census, female child-street nights represent 18% of all child-street nights.[17] Further, girls spend less consecutive time on the street than do boys. Almost 79% of boys spent the majority of their nights prior to the census on the street compared to 65% of girls and young women (Table 4). Similarly, 61% of girls had spent the night prior to the census on the street as compared to 77% of the boys. Combining the information on the week and the night prior to the census, 63% of boys spent the majority of nights the week prior to the census, as well as the night prior to the census, on the street (Table 5). This is true of only 43% of the girls who were identified. These findings are not driven by differences in the age distribution among female and male street children. While older children spend more consecutive time on the street than do younger children, these differences are common to both boys and girls. Within each age group ranging from 5 to 18 years, a higher proportion of boys spend the majority of nights on street (Table 6).[18]

Applying the idea of street permanence and differentiating by gender, it is possible to use these exit and entry rates to develop an estimate of how the gender

[16] It is interesting to note that while men far outnumber women in the single, adult shelter population in the United States, the proportion of women has steadily increased from 6% in 1981 to 17% in 1992 (O"Flaherty, 1996).

[17] This calculation is based on the information from the children who responded to the question on the nights spent sleeping on the street the week prior to the census. As discussed above, the non-response rate on this question is high. Females tend to be only slightly more concentrated among non-respondents than among the general population, suggested that the bias of non-response is unlikely to the affect the analysis of gender composition described above.

[18] A series of simple regressions were run in order to investigate the degree of association between street affiliation, age and gender. The results of the analysis suggest that controlling for differences in age structure, girls who are found on the street spend less time sleeping there than do boys. Girls are less likely to have spent all seven nights sleeping on the street the week before the census, or to have slept on the street the night before the census.

distribution of street children would change with an over-time measure as compared to a one-night count. The maximum weekly estimate of street girls is based on the fact that roughly 55% of the girls counted in the census do not sleep consistently on the street. If they were all "replaced" on a daily basis by other young women, then over 500 girls pass through the streets of Bogota in a week. Based on this weekly calculation, almost 30% of street children are girls.

A slightly refined calculation is based on the result from the census data that approximately 40% of the girls who are found on the street in any given night are not there the following night. Also, 22% spent no nights on the street the week prior to the census corresponding to slightly more than 50% of the those girls who spend some nights off the street. Assuming that on any day of the month 22% of Bogota"s street girls leave and are replaced by young women who have not been on the street any other day of the month, approximately 900 girls spend at least one night on the street in a month. Applying similar calculations, there are 1440 boys who spend at least one night per month on the street suggesting that 38% of street children are female under this new definition and methodology.

Applying this risk-sensitive, over-time method gives more weight to short periods of time on the street and hence to the situation of young women. While boys continue to represent the bulk of street children, this exercise shows that one night counts miss a larger proportion of female than of male street children. The proportions "missed" may be as high as 80% and 70%, respectively.[19]

IV. Where are the Female Street Children?

Few authors have questioned why there should be fewer girls than boys in the street child population. Still, this may be a key to understanding gender differentials among children in extremely difficult circumstances.

One possible but implausible reason why there could be fewer girls on the street is that there are more projects and programs to assist girls than boys who are in danger of making the street their home. In fact, the opposite is often true. While many non-governmental organizations claim to be working with street children, only a handful of institutions have programs especially for street girls or for young women exploited in prostitution (Knaul, 1993a; Barker and Knaul, 1992).

There are many factors that push children onto the street. Poverty, as well as abuse and violence in the home, are among the most commonly cited causes (Knaul and Castillo, 1994). Yet, poverty as a causal factor is unlikely to explain why there are so few female street children. It is unlikely that girls are less exposed to poverty

[19] These rough figures come from calculating the proportion of girls and boys counted in the one-night census as compared to the monthly figures that consider movement off and on the street. Specifically, 125 girls were counted as compared the 900 that might pass through the streets in a month, and 399 boys as compared to 1440.

in a family than are boys. In fact, studies from some countries suggest the opposite. Girls are sometimes discriminated against in resource allocation within the family. Biases against female children have been documented in some parts of Asia using indicators of nutrition, morbidity and mortality (Chen, 1981; Sen, 1984).

While there is little evidence of these forms of discrimination in other parts of the world, gender differences in other capabilities such as literacy are common (Lipton, 1987; Sen, 1992). In Latin America, there has been significant progress in female education at all levels, and there is now virtual parity in primary school enrollment. Still, literacy rates and indicators of educational attainment for women are lower than for men in many countries (King and Hill, 1991; Bustillo, 1991).

One area of potential bias against girls is in type of work that they perform. Studies from various parts of the world suggest that girls often face more difficult occupations than boys. In Colombia, girls tend to work longer hours, both in the home and the market, than do boys (Knaul, 1995). Muñoz and Palacios (1978) also found that, even excluding unpaid housework in the home, girls from the poorest two strata of Bogota had longer work weeks than boys. Knaul (1997) finds that a large proportion of working girls in urban Mexico are domestic workers, and that for them school attendance is much less common than for other groups of working children. King and Hill (1991) cite studies that show that girls in Nepal, Java and Malaysia work substantially more hours than boys, and discuss how this is likely to affect their ability to attend school and their performance in classes.

Child abuse, although an important factor in pushing children to the street, is an unlikely explanation for the relative absence of street girls. The prevalence of abuse, at least in Colombia, do not seem to differ by gender.[20] A number of studies have documented the important relationship between child abuse and street children in Colombia (Felsman, 1981a; Tyler, 1985; Granados, 1976; Cobos, 1979; Tyler, 1985). Abuse and family disintegration are also factors in pushing women and girls into prostitution (Camara de Comercio, 1991). Studies from other countries have similarly found that abuse is an important factor in pushing children onto the street (Ramírez et al., 1991; Domic et al., 1992).

At least 59% of the street children interviewed in the Bogota survey left their homes due to family problems (Table 8). Abuse was listed as the principal reason for leaving for the street by 37% of the children, and 43% of those who listed abuse singled out their parents as their abusers.The families of street children tend to punish their children more frequently and more severely than families from the poorest neighborhoods of Bogota. For example, of the street children interviewed, 18.8%

[20] It is difficult to define exactly what forms of punishment constitute abuse, except on a case-by-case basis. Some forms of punishment are so severe that it becomes clear that abuse was involved because of the frequency, the object used, or the part of the body that is assaulted. Many cases of severe punishment using leather straps, for example, constitute child abuse. Often, even verbal punishment reaches levels of abuse if it is frequent, strong or leaves psychological scars.

said that they were punished every day, in comparison to 4.8% of household children (Table 9) (Knaul and Castillo, 1994).

The results of the Bogota survey, as well as those of other sources, suggest that boys and girls are subject to similar forms and rates of abuse (Knaul and Castillo, 1994). Girls tend to be punished as commonly and with equal severity in terms of the type of punishment (Tables 8 and 9). This implies that preferential treatment of girls in the home is unlikely to be an explanation for why fewer girls are found on the street. Girls and young women who stay in their homes and suffer abuse may actually be situations that are equally dangerous, yet less visible, than the street.

One possible explanation for the relative absence of girls on the street is that the street is more dangerous for girls than it is for boys. The added danger may explain why many girls are afraid of turning to the street, or why they do not spend long periods of time living on the street. Still, it does not imply that girls live in less deprived circumstances only because they do not reach the street. Instead, they may be forced to seek other dangerous "solutions" as enduring exploitation in prostitution[21], or suffering abuse from violent stepfathers. An even more severe possibility, is that a large proportion of girls who reach the street do not survive for long periods of time.

A further and more plausible explanation for the absence of street girls is that young women may have less exposure to the street through their work because female occupations are typically concentrated in the child"s own home, or the home of an employer in the case of domestic servants. Boys are more likely to have jobs outside of the home which may give them the independence and contacts they need to establish ties on the street. Working "behind closed doors", girls living in similarly difficult home conditions as boys may be less likely to run to the street, only because they are less knowledgeable of how to do so.

Some of the "missing girls of the street" may also be found working behind the closed doors of prostitution.[22] According to a recent census undertaken in Bogota, there were almost 3000 girls and young women between the ages of 9 and 17 years involved in prostitution in the central part of the city. They most commonly work in sex shows, but 20% work directly on the streets (Camara de Comercio,

[21] The term "prostitution" is used in this paper because it is easily understood. These children should be considered to be child victims of the sexual abuse of adults.

[22] There is a relationship between domestic service and prostitution. A study of women in prostitution in the central part of Bogota found that 67% had worked in the formal sector prior to entering prostitution, and that among these women the most common occupation was domestic service. Almost 25% were working as domestics (Camara de Comercio, 1991). No further information is available to differentiate between the possibility of direct links between prostitution, running to the street, and the conditions associated with domestic service, as opposed to other factors such as poverty, migration and abuse. One author who does posit that the conditions endured in domestic service push girls into prostitution is Bonnet (1993) discussing the African context.

1993). These young women are likely to spend less continuous time sleeping on the street. Further, many girls who go into prostitution seem to begin by living on the street as *gaminas* and then leave the street for a closed place of work such as a brothel. Over 45% of the young women exploited in prostitution that were surveyed by the Camara de Comercio of Bogota said they went to live on the street and entered *galladas* (groups of street children who live together on the street) upon leaving their homes. Yet, only 8.3% were actually living on the street at the time of the interview. This suggests that there is an important link between street life and prostitution, but that many girls abused in prostitution are living off of the streets. Further, young women in prostitution may not appear in street counts because they spend a large proportion of time each night with clients in hotels, cars or other enclosed spaces. In addition, girls who enter brothels may be unable to escape, even to the streets.

V. Recommendations for Research and Policy

The results of this research provide insight into the importance, particularly in terms of the situation of girls, of considering children at risk based on exposure to the street as well length of time on the street. Within any given week, many street children spend time off the street, and this is especially common among girls. They may sleep in projects or shelters, in the homes of family members or friends, or in temporary hotels. The findings stress the need to frame estimates of the numbers of street children by a unit of time. Given the amount of movement off and on the street, point-in-time estimates must necessarily understate the number of children who sleep on the street and introduce gender bias.

The distribution of child-street nights suggest that the street child population is made of two distinct groups: permanent street dwellers, and those who spend a significant amount of time off the street. Using a methodology that takes short-term movement into account, the majority of street children are made up of those who spend only some nights on the street, but do not live permanently on the street. The bulk of child-street nights are accumulated by those children who live permanently on the street. This implies that single cross-sections will give relatively good representations of children who live permanently on the street, because they account for the bulk of child-street nights. It will not give a good representation of children who are not permanent street children and are "passing through" the street. This latter group is likely to include many girls who quickly move off the street into brothels, as well as younger children who are initiating their street contact.

The observation that many young women in prostitution have passed through the street, combined with the finding that girls tend to spend fewer nights on the street, suggests that the risk of "passing a night on the street" plays itself out in different ways for boys as opposed to girls. For males, beginning to spend nights on the street may indicate that the boy is at risk of adopting the street as his home. For girls,

entering the street may more commonly lead to, or suggest the risk of, entrance into equally risky activities such as exploitation in prostitution.

The degree of street affiliation, both in terms of the number of nights slept on the street and the number of years since having spent the first night on the street, is associated with the use of hard drugs, low scores on a literacy test and exposure to violence on the street (Knaul, 1993; Knaul, 1993a). This implies that since the young women who are found on the street tend to spend less time there, they will be the ones with less exposure to these particular hazardous conditions. This may be incorrectly interpreted to suggest that girls are in less hardship or danger on than street than boys. The key factor may be that girls are exposed to different risks, such as entry into prostitution. For young women, drug use and other health hazards may not become evident during, but rather after, their street exposure. It is possible that the hardships faced by girls who have passed through the streets can best be measured by considering girls who have already left the street for prostitution, a condition that may be considered just as dangerous as street life.

Girls may be "missing" from the street and unable to escape abuse at home because they have not worked outside of their homes. This may mean that they lack the necessary familiarity with the outside world to allow them to run to the street. The fact that these girls are not found on the street does not mean that they are any more able to go to school, protect themselves from abuse, undertake technical training, or play, than children who live on the street.

Further, information on children who have spent less time on the street is likely to be important for the formulation of preventive policies. Information on short-term street contact is also important to understanding the movements of young girls who may not be reached through street-based efforts if they quickly move off the street.

So-called "defining" characteristics of street children are not always based on the children"s actual needs, or even on the realities of their situation. Equating street children with abandoned, or "familyless", children typically leads to the creation of programs for abandoned and neglected children, rather than for children and their families. This encourages the separation of children from their families and communities, rather than promoting work to reunite them. The child must typically leave the family in order to gain access to a project. Little consideration is given to the possibility that the mother, or any individual family member, may wish to stay with the child. Along this line of reasoning, there is a need for projects and programs for battered women that would allow them to search out ways of remaining with their children, and leaving the abuser.

The relative invisibility of young women who are in equally difficult circumstances as street children, the difficulties in identifying girls who have passed through the street, and the fact that the male *gamin* is easily identified could lead to a gender bias in resource allocation and in the approach to the issue of street children.

Further, the relative invisibility of girls is likely to also extend to other groups of children in especially difficult circumstances such as those who work. Domestic servants and girls exploited in prostitution work behind the closed doors of their employees making them easier to overlook and to dismiss in terms of policies of programs (Burra, 1989). Girls who are physically or sexually abused may remain hidden from view in family homes. Extending the concept of missing girls in difficult circumstances to include other groups of children also suggests a much larger problem in terms of the number of young women who are "missed".

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Table 1
Nights Slept on the Street the Week prior to the Census
(5-18 years)

Nights on the street	*Total*	
	Number	*Percent*
Zero	48	11.9
One	17	4.2
Two	15	3.7
Three	17	4.2
Four	25	6.2
Five	18	4.5
Six	6	1.5
Seven	257	63.8
Total	403	100.0

Non-response: 122=23%
SOURCES: Census of street children, 1992.

Table 2
With Whom do Street Children Live?
(6 to 18 Years)

	Number	*Percent*
Mother	27	24.6
Stepmother	2	1.8
Father	4	3.6
Stepfather	3	2.7
At least one parent or stepparent	29	26.4
With at least one family member	43	39.1
Only with friends	52	47.3
Alone	28	25.5

SOURCES: Survey of street children, 1992.

Table 3
Gender Breakdown of Street children

	Census (5-18 years)		*Survey (6 to 18 years)*	
Gender	*Number*	*Percent*	*Number*	*Percent*
Males	399	76.2	88	80.0
Females	125	23.9	22	20.0
Total	524	100.0	110	100.0

Non-response: Census 1 · 0.2%.
SOURCES: Census and survey of street children, 1992.

Table 4
Nights Slept on the Street the Week prior to the Census by gender

Nights on the street	*Females*		*Males*	
	Number	*Percent*	*Number*	*Percent*
Zero	19	22.4	29	9.2
One	3	3.5	14	4.4
Two	5	5.9	10	3.2
Three	3	3.5	14	4.4
Four	7	8.2	18	5.7
Five	4	4.7	14	4.4
Six	2	2.4	4	1.3
Seven	42	49.4	214	67.5
Total	85	100.0	317	100.0

Non-response: 122=23%.
SOURCE: Census of street children, 1992.

Table 5
Street Affiliation by Gender
Based on Street Nights the week and the day prior to the Census
(5-18 years)

Detailed Indicator	*Females*		*Males*	
	Number	*Percent*	*Number*	*Percent*
Minority of night week prior and not night prior	22	19.5	44	11.9
Minority of nights week prior and night prior	17	15.0	50	13.5
Majority of nights week prior and not night prior	25	2.1	43	11.6
Majority of nights week prior and night prior	49	43.4	234	63.1
Total	113	100.0	371	100.0

Non-response: census, 40=8%
SOURCE: Census of street children, 1992.
NOTE: There are fewer non-responses than in the question on days on the street the week prior to the census. If there is information to one of the two questions (either the week before or the day before), the observation is categorized based on the available response.

Table 6
Age and Gender of Children Who Spend
the Majority of Nights the Week prior to the Census on the Street
(5 to 18 years)

Age	*% with high street affiliation*	
	Females	*Males*
5-8	44.4	58.8
9-11	64.3	70.5
12-15	73.5	78.9
16-18	60.7	86.0
N	85	317

Non-response: census, 122=23%.
SOURCE: Census of street children, 1992.

Table 7
Principal Reason for Beginning to Sleep on the Street

Reason for leaving for the street	*Frequency*	*Percent*
Abuse	37	37.0
Family Problems	11	11.0
"Wanted to"	10	10.0
Peer or family influence	10	10.0
Bored/dissatisfied at home	5	5.0
Escaped from an institution	1	1.0
Had no place to go	3	3.0
Lost money	1	1.0
Parents are drug addicts	1	1.0
Got lost	1	1.0
Abandoned by parents	3	3.0
It got late	2	2.0
Por "el vicio"/for drug use	3	3.0
Kicked out of the house	3	3.0
Death of parents	2	2.0
Had no money for rent	1	1.0
Lack of food at home	2	2.0
Parents in jail	1	1.0
Without work	1	1.0
Problems with friends	1	1.0
Does not know	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Non-response: 10=9%.
SOURCE: Survey of street children,1992

Table 8
How Often do Parents Punish Children
from the poorest Strata of Bogota

Frequency of Punishment	*% of children*	*% of male-children*	*% of female children*
Every day	4.8	6.8	2.7+
Some days	30.1	29.3	30.8
Seldom	65.2	63.9	66.5
N	381	194	187

SOURCE: Survey of children from households,1992.
+ Less than 10 cases.

Table 9
Type of Abuse Suffered by Children from the Poorest Strata of Bogota, By gender

Type of abuse:	*% of children*	*% of male children*	*% of female children*
Insults	37.7	33.7	41.8
Grounding	13.8	16.4	11.2
Slaps	39.4	42.8	36.9
Hit with a belt	58.9	60.1	57.8
Hit with a whip	8.7	8.1	9.2
Hit with a metal object	1.7+	2.4+	1.0+
Burned	0.7+	0.5+	1.0+
N	414	208	206

SOURCE: Survey of children from households , SCYHR, 1992.
+ Less than 10 cases.
Non-response: 11 = 2.5%.