

## WORKING AMONG STREET CHILDREN: HAZARDOUS, NON-HAZARDOUS AND PARENTS' EMPLOYMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*Street children issue has been recognized as a long-standing issue in Malaysia. The majority of street children reside the area of Kuala Lumpur and Sabah. To continue survive and stay alive on the street, these vulnerable children have to engage in working. Hence, this paper explores working as a survival strategy among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Notably, the findings of this study revealed that there were three degrees/levels of working among street children in both cities, which were: (1) hazardous/dangerous; (2) non-hazardous; and (3) parents' employment. Among the hazardous/dangerous jobs experienced by street children including working at the construction area, work as a mechanic at motorcycle workshop and lifting heavy goods. Meanwhile, non-hazardous jobs engaged by the street children including working as fruits and vegetable seller, fish seller and lifting goods/bags for the customers and many others. Street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah were found engaged in parents' employment—mostly helping their parents at the Philippine market selling fish and vegetables. Further, this study also discovered that regardless of any degree/levels of working engaged by street children, it lead to many negative consequences such as affect health, safety issue, suffering from disease, being discriminated and many others. Hence, this paper argued that while working is considered as one of the survival strategies of street children; street children in the first place are not supposed to work due to their age and capabilities that still require care and protection by their parents or responsible adults. The negative consequences due to working prove that the country should provide necessary support and aid to street children so that they can continue their childhood life like other children who attending school, playing with friends and many others.*

Keywords: Street children, working, hazardous/dangerous, non-hazardous, parents' employment, consequences

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### Introduction

Street children issue is not a new issue in Malaysia—this issue has been recognized as a long-standing issue in this country (Singh, 2007). Similar to other countries, Malaysia also relies on the universal definition of street children developed by UNICEF (2009) as “any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street has become his or her habitual abode or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by the responsible adults”. The definition of street children portrays the life of street children that full with challenges and risks since they received less supervision, protection and direction, especially from the parents, father, mother or guardian. This situation requires street children to develop several distinctive survival strategies including friendship (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Hussin, 2015; Murray et al., 2012; Ofosu-Kusi & Mizen, 2010; Orme & Seipel, 2010; Berhanu 1998), working (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Hussin, 2015; Mert & Kadioğlu, 2014; Nte, Nke & Igbaniho, 2009) and education (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Hussin, 2015; Orme & Seipel, 2010). However, this paper only concentrates on “working” as a survival strategy of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, as most of the street children reside in these areas (Child Rights Coalition, 2012).

Working as a survival strategy among street children is significant in the poor and developing countries (Abro, 2012; Sharma & Joshi, 2013) including Malaysia (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Hussin, 2015). This study argued that the issue of working among children still can be debated by the scholars since children still requiring care and protection by the responsible adults—they are supposed to enjoy their childhood and cannot been given a big responsibility to work at the early age. However, life as street

children has forced these vulnerable children to leave their homes and work on the street to feed themselves and the households. In some situations, working as a survival strategy among street children has been associated with social disturbance among the close society (Mert & Kadioğlu, 2014). Street children existence on the street to work and earn some money to survive for tomorrow portrays the negative images towards the country, especially among the tourists. However, many people do not aware that these vulnerable children do not have other options to stay survive and alive rather than working; although they just earn enough money to buy some foods and drink in their daily lives. This situation is resulted from several reasons including poverty (Ahmad, 2016; Ahmad, Latif & Sulaiman, 2011) and documentation problem (Ahmad, 2016; Taib, 2016).

While there are several empirical research surrounding the street children issue in a Malaysian context; however, the study specifically on working as a survival strategy of street children in Malaysia has not been undertaken. In-line with this situation, this study aimed at exploring the degree/level of working nature among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Through the observation undertaken in both areas<sup>1</sup>, this study discovered that the majority of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah engaged in the informal sector; but, the degree/level of working among street children is different between the states. This study further argued that working as a survival strategy of street children is influenced by the different situations, context, living environment and cultural practices. Further, this paper scrutinizes each degree/level of working nature among street children that lead to many negative consequences towards the children's growth and development.

#### **Literature review: The phenomenon of working street children**

“Working street children is defined as children who have been exploited for long hours in the same posture—without knowing any safety information, equipment and consequences of the activity—and make them work for low wages without a proper social security and holiday/leisure (Goyal, 2005; Jehanara, 2002). The discussion on working among street children revealed that the term “working street children” has existed since decades ago, since the 1800s. The pattern of working street children in London was dominated by female street children during that time. Female street children (aged between 16 years old to 18 years old) were recognized as “servants of all works” in London, in that particular time. Mayhew (1861) in his book entitled, *London Labour and London Poor*, argued that the main reason that sent these vulnerable children to the street is poverty. The author further claimed that female street children were too busy with their works until they suffered the poor state of education, although some of the female street children were able to read. Other than being poor and have to work, the author portrayed the hardships and challenges of female street children in the aspect of education during the 1800s (Mayhew, 1861). Although children are supposed to enjoy their childhood life, experience a better life and receive enough protection and supervision from the parents, family members or responsible adults; however, due to the pressure of life and financial constraints particularly; they need to go out and engage in working on the street.

Working among street children continues to be debated and discussed by the scholars in the recent years. A study was done by Mert and Kadioğlu (2014) revealed that the phenomenon of working street children has become a significant societal issue in poor and developing countries including Turkey. The study of Mert and Kadioğlu (2014) participated by a number of children working on the street and their mothers. Based on the findings, the authors claimed that there were a number of reasons why children work on the street; and among the factors are socioeconomic and political factors, environmental factors, cultural factors and family factors. Further, the authors discovered that a number of male street children were sent to the street to work by their mothers is high as compared to female street children—male street children were easy to get the jobs and earn the money, compared to female street children. This is consistent with a study done by Veale and Doná (2003) where the authors argued that the majority of street children in the world are male. The above discussion portrays the contradict pattern of street children on the street—where male street children are more visible on the street recently as compared to female street children in the context of working. Notably, although female street children are less visible on the street recently; however, these vulnerable female children are exposed to high risks such as exploited to be sex workers or prostitutes at young ages.

Working among street children is significant in the poor and developing countries including Malaysia. Through the review of the literature, the phenomenon of working street children in Malaysia is still under research and less highlighted. This situation ponders various questions such as “who are working street children?”, “where they work”, “what type of jobs they engaged?”, “are they being paid enough?”, “should they work?” and many others. Working is considered as a popular survival strategy among street children in Malaysia since it is easy for them to get the money, though they are underpaid. Further, the majority of street children engaged in informal sector (Taib, 2012; Ahmad, Latif & Sulaiman, 2011) such as working as fruit and vegetable seller, fish seller, selling cigarettes, selling newspapers, selling lottery numbers, lifting goods for the customers, begging and in the worst case scenario, they have been exploited to be prostitutes or labor (West, 2003).

Similar to other countries, street children issue in Malaysia is also “one of the consequences” resulted from poverty. A study was done by Ahmad (2016) on the street children issue in Malaysia (focused on street children in Sabah, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Johor) revealed that poverty is the main factor contributing to street children issue in this country. The author further argued that there were several underlying factors contribute to poverty issue among street children in Malaysia including financial constraint, urban poverty, hardcore poverty, migration (internal and external migration) and uneducated parents. Based on the findings from 54 respondents (street children aged below 18 years old), the author further claimed that the majority of street children have to

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<sup>1</sup> The first author of this paper is the Graduate Research Assistant under the research grant of Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, entitled: ‘The social construction and identity formation of “street children” in a Malaysian context’. During the data collection of the research grant, the observation was adopted to deeply understand the street children's nature, characteristics and behavior in both areas, the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

work on the street to support themselves and their families, for example, to buy food (Ahmad, 2016). Although children are not allowed to work; however, these vulnerable children do not have other option to stay alive and survive. Working has been placed as the top priority among street children as compared to schooling. Notably, the documentation problem among street children prevent themselves from enrolling in education has thrown these vulnerable children in dropped-out cases in this country.

Working as a survival strategy among street children in Malaysia is considered as a public distraction among the close society. Although life as street children full with challenges and difficulties; however, their existence on the street portrays the negative images of the country, especially among the tourists. Further, street children do not have choices rather than engaged in working; at least they can earn the money to buy food and drinks. Notably, working as a survival strategy among street children has its own degree/level that may lead to many consequences. Hence, this paper aimed to explore the degree/level of working and its consequences among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah<sup>2</sup>.

### **Methodology**

The qualitative method is applied in this study since this method is the most appropriate method to be used for a sociological study. Two types of the qualitative approach were used in gathering the information, which were: (1) in-depth interviews<sup>3</sup> (by using semi-structured interview and prompted with relevant pictures<sup>4</sup>) and (2) observation<sup>5</sup>. The data collection of this study was conducted within three months (February – April 2016), involving 24 individual street children (12 street children from the Kuala Lumpur city and 12 street children from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah). There were three important criteria used in this study to select the samples, which were: (1) the area—12 samples were selected from both areas (the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah) to compare the findings; (2) gender—covers the perspectives from both gender (male and female street children); and (3) age group—samples were divided into two groups which were “toddlers (aged from 7 years to 12 years)” and “teenagers (aged from 13 years to below 18 years)” to get feedback from different age groups. Notably, the selection of samples was conducted by using purposive and snowball sampling techniques<sup>6</sup>. Further, the responses from street children were transcribed and analysed by using NVivo as a tool to store and manage the data (based on themes and sub-themes), establish the relationship between the data and finally present the findings based on the key themes. Notably, since this paper applied the qualitative approach by using in-depth interviews and supported by observation, the findings of this paper only applicable to street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu; thus, the findings of this paper cannot be generalized to other states of Malaysia.

### **Findings and analysis**

The findings and analysis begin with the demographic profile of respondents; followed by the findings on working as a survival strategies of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah; and finally the degree/level of working and their consequences among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

### **Demographic profile of respondents**

A total number of 24 respondents have participated in this study (12 street children from the Kuala Lumpur city and 12 street children from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah). The majority of respondents were among male street children (18 male street children); however, this study observed the rising number of female street children, yet, hardly approachable. Among the respondents, 13 of them were toddlers (aged between 7 to 12 years old) and 11 respondents were teenagers (aged between 13 to below 18 years old). However, there were 2 respondents who unsure about their age<sup>7</sup>. This study also discovered that half of the number of street children were found experienced external migration (12 respondents), from neighboring countries including the Philippines and Indonesia. Notably, some of them experienced illegal migration which resulted them to be undocumented (14 street children). Out of 24 respondents, 18 of them live with their parents/mother/father/guardian. (See Table 1).

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<sup>2</sup> This paper only focused on two areas which are the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. This is because according to Child Rights Coalition (2012), the majority of street children reside the area of Kuala Lumpur and Sabah.

<sup>3</sup> In-depth interview was considered as the best approach to delve deeper on street children’s responses on the interview questions.

<sup>4</sup> The pictures of relevant situations were used during the in-depth interviews with street children to trigger the respondents’ responses towards the questions. For instance, when a street child was asked about working, he/she was triggered by showing a picture of other street children who were working.

<sup>5</sup> While empirical research surrounding street children issue in a Malaysian context is limited, this study has taken an initiative to conduct a preliminary observation of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. By conducting observation on street children’s behavior, characteristics, nature and many other aspects, it helps this study to develop initial understanding towards street children issue in Malaysia—before conducting in-depth interviews with street children. This is because street children’s behavior and characteristics are different according to the different situations, context, living environment and cultural practices in those particular areas.

<sup>6</sup> This study adopted purposive and snowball sampling techniques—one street child has been approached at the beginning of data collection process. After the authors have successfully built the good rapport and relationship with the street child, the interview session began to gather the relevant information; and all data is recorded. Further, the street child was asked to introduce the authors to another street child. This approach/method was repetitively undertaken until the data gathered achieved saturated information.

<sup>7</sup> The majority of street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah were undocumented due to illegal migration from the neighboring countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. This situation makes them unsure about their current age and real name.

Table 1:

Demographic profile of respondents

Characteristics		Kuala Lumpur city	Kota Sabah	Kinabalu,	Total
<b>Gender</b>	Male	9	9		18
	Female	3	3		6
<b>Age</b>	Toddler (aged 7 to 12 years old)	5	8		13
	Teenagers (aged 13 to 18 years old)	7	2		9
	Unknown	-	2		2
<b>Migration</b>	Internal	7	2		9
	External	3	9		12
	Unknown	2	1		3
<b>Documented/ Citizenship</b>	Yes	12	2		14
	No	-	9		9
	Unknown	-	1		1
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Malay	12	2		14
	(Bajau Laut) Philippines	-	7		7
	(Sulu) Indonesia	-	2		2
	Unknown	-	1		1
<b>Live with parents/ mother /father/ guardian</b>	Yes	7	11		18
	Seldom	1	-		1
	No	4	1		5

**Working as a survival strategies of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah**

The findings of this study revealed a different pattern of working among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The overall pattern of working among 24 respondents discovered in this study is presented in Figure 1.

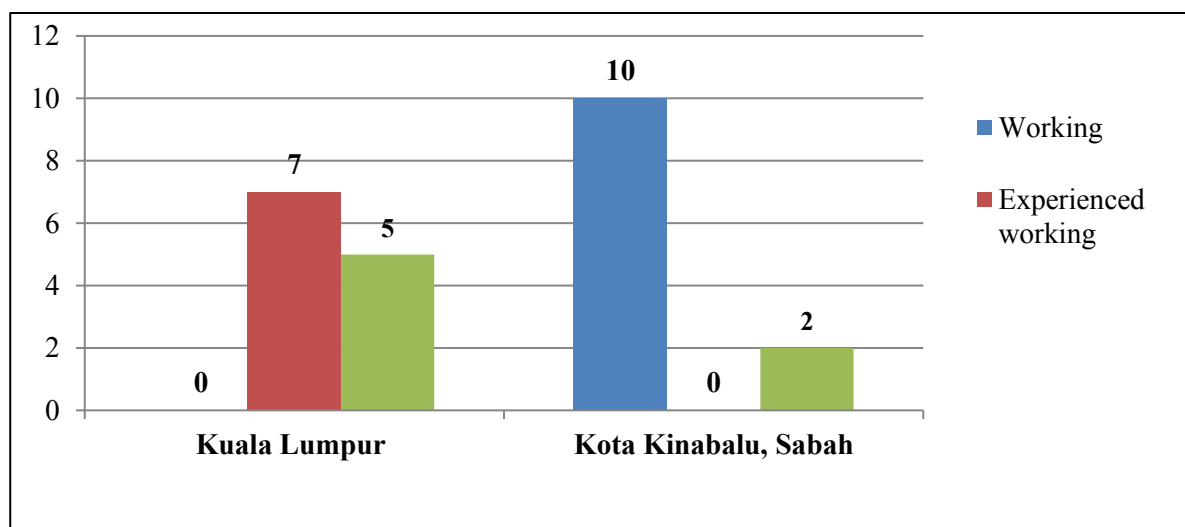


Figure 1: Overall pattern of working as a survival strategy of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Based on the findings of this study, working was not recognized as a survival strategy of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city during the data collection period. However, street children in the Kuala Lumpur city claimed that they were experienced working before, as exemplified below:

- I used to work before, but not now (Taufiq, male, 15 years old, Kuala Lumpur).
- I used to work [...] (Saiful, male, 10 years old, Kuala Lumpur).
- I used to work too [...] (Putera, male, 13 years old, Kuala Lumpur).
- I used to work [...] (Zafran, male, 15 years old, Kuala Lumpur).
- I used to work as cakes seller [...] (Aki, male, 11 years old, Kuala Lumpur).
- I used to work (Syahrizal, male, 17 years old, Kuala Lumpur).
- I am not working now, but I used to work once [...] (Amirul, male, 16 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

Street children in the Kuala Lumpur city were no longer working since they received many support and aids provided by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Pertiwi, Religion of Love, The Soup Kitchen and many others. The NGOs have taken several initiatives to enhance these children's healthy growth and development by providing free food, clothes and informal education. The findings were presented below:

*I always come here to get the free food* [provides by the non-governmental organizations] (Alin, female, 12 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*I came here just wanted to get the free food* and hang out with my friends (Azwani, female, 13 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

I ran away from my home because of the family problem [...] *I used to get free clothes from people who came here* [...] *If want to eat; I will wait for the free food like just now* (Taufiq, male, 15 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*Sometimes, I get my lunch at Pekeliling* [...] Someone gives the free food at 12 pm [...] *I already know the place where I can get free food* (Zafran, male, 15 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*If I want to eat, I will come here to get the free food.* This is because there is no cooking stove and groceries at home [...] I will come here every night (Saiful, male, 10 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

I need to drink a lot of water<sup>8</sup>. *Usually, people will give free mineral water* (Syahrizal, male 17 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*I always come here to get the free food* [...] I come here almost every night (Aki, male, 11 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*People always give the free food for us to eat* (Amirul, male, 16 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*I just eat what people give to me* (Kamaruddin, male, 9 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*I came here to get the free food* and hang out with the Punk group (Baayah, female, 12 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*Every Saturday and Thursday, we will be having classes here* (provide by the NGOs) [...] *Drawing class, they took me for sightseeing, sleep there at least two nights* (Alin, 12 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

However, out of 12 respondents, 5 street children in the Kuala Lumpur city stated that they never experience working in their life. The findings were exemplified below:

I am not working (Zulhairi, male, 17 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

I do not used to work (Baayah, female, 12 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

I do not used to work (Azwani, female, 13 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

I am not working [...] I do not even use to work before (Alin, female, 12 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

I do not used to work [...] If I want to eat, I will wait for the aid from people (Kamaruddin, male, 9 years old, Kuala Lumpur).

In contrary, working is considered as a survival strategy among street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The overall pattern of working among street children in this study was mainly to buy food for themselves, to support their daily lives and earn the money for the households (father, mother or other family members). The findings were presented below:

I am working (Johny, male, age is unknown, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

I come here (Philippine Market) to work (Faisal, male, 11 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

I am working [...] Selling drinks and eggs; and lifting water (Salleh, male, age is unknown, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

I am selling plastic bags too [...] I want to give my money to mother and buy some food to eat [...] (Juari, male, 7 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

Yes, I am working. I working at drinks stall [...] I give the money to my mother; sometimes give to her more, around RM20.00 to pay the house (Harkamil, male, 13 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

I sell plastic bags every day [...] I want to give this money to my mother, so that she can buy some food and milk for my younger sibling (Jerry, male, 9 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

Notably, this study also discovered that 4 street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah involved with parents' employment. Most of them stated that they just helping their families, especially mothers at the Philippine Market, Kota Kinabalu.

I am not working [...] I just helping my mother (Lin, female, 10 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

I am not working [...] I am helping my mother to work (Arik, male, 13 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

My mother is fish seller [...] I am helping my mother to sell the fish (Farah, female, 11 years, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

I am not working [...] I am helping my mother to sell mangoes (Misbar, male, 8 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

However, the findings of this study discovered that 2 street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah were not working. They were loitering on the street, meet their friends and play with friends only, as exemplified below:

I am not working (Noor, female, 7 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

I am not working (Firdaus, male, 10 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah).

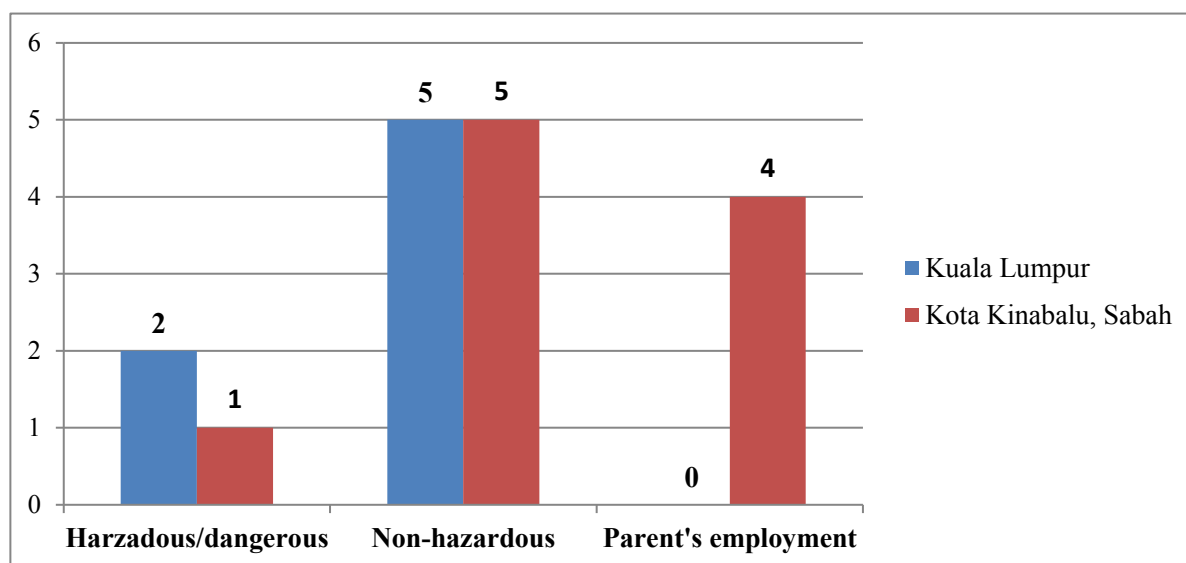
<sup>8</sup> Syahrizal is suffering from kidney problem. He used to get treatment before this; however, since he left his home in Kelantan, he is no longer received any treatment. This situation makes his disease become worst.

The overall finding of this study revealed a significant different pattern of working among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah—street children in the Kuala Lumpur city mostly experienced working, but were not working during the data collection period due to receiving high support and aids from NGOs (e.g. free food, clothes and informal education); meanwhile, the majority of street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah were working to support themselves and their families.

**The degree/level of working and their consequences among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah**

The findings of this study revealed that although street children in both areas (the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah) engaged in the informal sector; however, the degree/level of working nature was different in both cities. Based on the findings, this study discovered three different degrees/levels of working nature among street children in both cities, which were: (1) hazardous/dangerous; (2) non-hazardous; and (3) parents’ employment, as presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Degree/level of working nature among street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah



**Hazardous/dangerous and consequences**

Any works or jobs that affect the children’s development and growth are considered as hazardous or dangerous to the children. Based on the findings, this study discovered that 2 respondents from the Kuala Lumpur city have experienced hazardous works. Further, the hazardous/dangerous works have placed these vulnerable children in danger, such as suffered from pain and health problem, as the consequences. The findings were presented below:

I used to work too [...] *I worked at motorcycle workshop, sometimes I have to test the motorcycles, and I fell from the motorcycles and got wounded [...]* (Putera, male, 13 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*I used to work as labor [...] I suffered back pain when lifting the cement by myself [...]* (Zafran, male, 15 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

Only 1 street child from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah was found involved in a hazardous/dangerous work. In this case, Juari, as young as 7 years old with a small size of the body, has to carry 10 litres of water per trip while working. He claimed that he suffered pain in his hand while working. The finding was exemplified below:

Sometimes, *I need to lift the heavy goods (carry the water around 10 liters) [...]* *I can feel the pain in my hand* (Juari, male, 7 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).

**Non-hazardous and consequences**

Based on the findings of this study, 5 respondents from the Kuala Lumpur city indicated that they experienced non-hazardous works such as selling fried bananas, drinks, “*kuih*”/cakes, clean dishes, worked at the restaurant, worked at the shopping mall and worked at 7Eleven.

I used to work [...] *Selling fried bananas and drinks* (Zafran, male, 15 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).

*I used to work as cakes seller [...] I sent the cakes to the shops [...] I took the order and sent it to them (Aki, male, 11 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).*  
*I used to work [...] I clean the dishes (Saiful, male, 10 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).*  
*I am not working now, but I used to work once [...] I work at the restaurant (Amirul, male, 16 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).*  
*I used to work. I worked at Sogo (shopping mall in the Kuala Lumpur city) [...] I quit because I still need to go to school at that time [...] Then, I worked at 7Eleven Shop, but I quit because they give me night shift (Syahrizal, male, 17 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).*

Similarly, 5 respondents from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah who worked at the Philippine Market were also categorized as non-hazardous. Among the works that they involved including selling plastic bags<sup>7</sup> 'bakul', eggs, drinks, peel mangoes and lifting water. The findings were presented below:

*I sell plastic bags every day. I got RM18.00 for today [...] (Jerry, male, 9 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*  
*I had sold all the plastic bags for today and got RM17.00 [...] (Juari, male, 7 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*  
*Yes, I am working at drinks stall [...] For one day work, I got RM10.00 [...] (Harkamil, male, 13 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*  
*Every day, I come here to work, my job is to peel the mangoes to sell to people [...] I get RM5.00 per day for me to eat [...] I also do other works such as lifting the goods and got around RM3.00 to RM5.00 for that. For one day, I can collect almost RM15.00 for lifting the goods (Faisal, male, 11 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*  
*Yes, I am working here. I can earn RM10.00 per day for lifting the eggs [...] I also selling drinks and eggs, and lifting water. For that two jobs, I got RM10.00 (Salleh, male, age is unknown, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*

Although non-hazardous works can be considered as ordinary or light works; however, this type of works still affects the street children's development and growth. The findings of this study revealed that 1 respondent from the Kuala Lumpur city stated that he used to get the fever for several times due to working, although he just engaged in light work such as clean dishes.

*I used to the get fever when I was working for several times (Saiful, male, 10 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).*

Instead of health problem, discrimination also is considered as one of the consequences suffered by street children who engaged in non-hazardous works. Notably, 1 respondent from the Kuala Lumpur city shared his experience of being cheated by his employer, as exemplified below:

*I used to work before but I quit because I have been cheated by my employer (Taufiq, male, 15 years old, Kuala Lumpur, italicized emphasized added).*

### **Parents' employment and consequences**

The findings of this study discovered that 4 respondents from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah were found engaged in parents' employment. All respondents claimed that they were helping their mothers by selling goods such as mangoes, vegetables, fish and many others at the Philippine Market. The findings were presented below:

*I am not working, I just helping my mother to sell mangoes (Misbar, male, 8 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*  
*I came here with my mum to help her to sell vegetables [...] No, I am not working, I just helping my mum [...] I received nothing, my mum just gave me food to eat, but sometimes she gave me some money around RM5.00 to RM10.00 when we go for sightseeing (Arik, male, 13 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*  
*I am helping my mother to sell fish [...] I got around RM20.00 for one day (Farah, female, 11 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*  
*I am not working [...] I just helping my mother (Lin, female, 10 years old, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*

The parents' employment in the context of this study can be considered as the lightest work among street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. However, it still leads to consequences such as adding burden to support their school expenses by helping their parents to get more money. 1 respondent from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah claimed that she did attend the school; however, she needs to work to support her school expenses. This situation affects her study performance at school, as exemplified below:

*I am schooling, however, I need to work (helping the mother to sell fish). I will keep the money that I received to support my school expenses (Farah, 11 years old, female, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, italicized emphasized added).*

Notably, the issue of parents' employment among street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah require a thorough research to be undertaken as to what extent parents treated their children as property and have the rights to force or sent their children to do the works for any return.

### Discussion and conclusion

Based on the findings, this study discovered that working is considered as a survival strategy of street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Working among children still open for many debates and discussions. For examples, the phenomenon of working street children has been associated with social destruction or problem (Nte, Nke & Igbani, 2009) and social disturbance (Mert & Kadioğlu, 2014) to the close society and community. Despite that, these vulnerable children sometimes have to work because of having no other options to stay survive and alive on the street (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Hussin, 2015). Based on the observation during the data collection process, this study found that street children, as young as 7 years old, have to hold responsibility towards themselves and their households. This situation makes street children more matured as compared to other children who live in better life. This is because street children experienced a lot of difficulties and challenges in their street life such as survive from hunger, pain, violence, abuse, gengsterism and many others. This finding is supported by Davis, Miles & Tapang (2014) where the majority of street children need to work for their survival to buy some foods to eat, support their families' financial condition and many others.

Further, this study discovered that although street children involved in the informal sector; however, the degree/level of working nature is different according to situations, context, environment and cultural practices in particular areas. Among the degrees/levels of working nature engaged by street children in the Kuala Lumpur city and Kota Kinabalu, Sabah discovered in this study were: (1) hazardous/dangerous; (2) non-hazardous; and (3) parents' employment. Based on the above findings, each of the degrees/levels of working nature has lead to many negative consequences towards street children's development and growth.

In term of hazardous/dangerous, although only 3 respondents (2 street children from the Kuala Lumpur city and 1 respondent from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah) were found engaged in this degree/level of working nature; however, it leads to several serious consequences related to the street children's development and growth. Some of the street children always having the health problem (hand and back pain) and the jobs also affect their safety issue. According to Davis, Miles and Tapang (2014), these situations denied the rights of children to have a better health and development. Among the hazardous/dangerous works done by these vulnerable children including lifting heavy goods, working in the construction area and working as a mechanic at the motorcycle workshop.

The second degree/level of working revealed based on the findings of this study is non-hazardous. Out of 24 respondents, 10 street children (5 street children from the Kuala Lumpur city and 5 street children from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah) were found engaged in non-hazardous works such as selling plastic bags, eggs, drinks, bananas, "*kuih*"/cakes, peel mangoes, lifting goods and water and clean dishes. A study done by Vishal (2012) categorized the works such as selling plastic bags, eggs, drinks, bananas, "*kuih*"/cakes, peel mangoes, lifting goods and water and clean dishes under the street vendors. The author further explained that street vendors were identified by the National Commission on Labour as self-employed workers in the informal sector who offer their labour for selling goods and services on the street without having any permanent built-up structure. Hence, it is easier for the street vendors to employ street children to carry out the works, though children are not allowed to work. Based on the findings, this study further argued that although these works can be considered as the ordinary or light works among street children; however, it still leads to many negative consequences towards themselves including always get the fever and sometimes being discriminated by the employers.

The third nature of working among street children discovered from the findings is parents' employment. This study discovered that 4 street children in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah were engaged in parents' employment mainly for helping their mothers to sell goods at the Philippine Market such as selling fruit and vegetable, fish and many others. Among the negative consequences faced by these vulnerable children who engaged in parents' employment were the low performance in education and need to hold extra burden to support the school expenses. This study further argued that the issue of parents' employment among street children opens for many debates and discussion; yet, a thorough research regarding this issue requires to be undertaken in a Malaysian context.

While working as a survival strategy among street children is still open for debate and discussion; this paper argues that street children have to work to survive in daily lives to buy food, drinks and sometimes to support their families. When they received adequate support and aids, working is not their priority, and they prefer to spend their time with friends—this is observed in the Kuala Lumpur city. While this study explores the nature of working among street children in two areas in Malaysia; yet, the different situation, context, environment and culture practices influence street children's characteristics, attitudes, behaviour and their lifestyles. The findings of this study provide an in-depth understanding about working among street children, and their consequences—useful information for the government to develop effective measures to deal with street children issue in the country. All parties including the government, non-governmental organizations, corporate sectors (CSR), societies and family institutions should play their roles in addressing this issue holistically. Regardless who they are and what are their status; street children are also our children that still require enough care and protection from the responsible adults, government and country as a whole. This is because child rights never differentiate children; all children in the world have rights for protection, development, survival and participation.

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