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Public Perceptions of Street Children in Cairo

The Criminalization of Street Children and the
Role of the Public

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Abstract

The present study seeks to explore the criminalization of, and punitive responses toward poor and marginalized people, through a case study on street children in Cairo. The specific focus of the study is public perceptions of the street children. Through focus group discussions with Cairo residents of different ages, gender and socioeconomic backgrounds, it explores how members of the public understand the causes and solutions for the issue, as well as their view on who bears responsibility in relation to it. In-depth interviews with representatives from NGOs working with street children also provide an additional perspective on the public perceptions. The findings are analyzed through a theoretical framework focused on individualistic and structural perspectives on crime and poverty, two broader topics that the issue of street children relate to. They are furthermore assessed in relation to the criminalizing approach adopted by the Egyptian state toward street children. The study reveals that members of the public have complex perceptions of street children, often adopting both individualistic and structural perspectives. Representations of street children as ‘criminals’, ‘victims’ and ‘cheaters’ could be identified in the participants’ narratives. The study concludes that their perceptions both challenge and, in effect, reinforce the approach of the state. It is argued that the combined effects of public stigmatization and repressive responses by the state reinforce the marginalization and vulnerability of street children, and will impact negatively on Egypt’s democratic development.

Key words: street children, criminalization, public opinion, public perceptions, Egypt

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1. Introduction

Five girls were arrested with me. They took us to *al Azbekiya*. They tied us with rope and made us walk to the station. There were four police. They didn't say anything, just 'Begging.'

-Widad T., Cairo¹

They become beggars or drug addicts... They take the wrong turn. Some become beggars even though they don't need to. They got used to living this way, they don't need the money but they just do it.

-Cairo resident (focus group participant)²

They're criminals, they can snatch your bag or rob you. You can be walking and they can snatch your bag and you're afraid to run after them or do anything.

-Cairo resident (focus group participant)³

Widad, the girl quoted above, is one out of the many Egyptian children who live and/or work on the street. All over the world, children who spend all or most of their time on the street are facing a wide range of hardships and are denied the opportunity of a better future. Studies show that these children are not always met by compassion and do not receive the support they need, but are instead often stigmatized, criminalized (defined and/or treated as criminals) and handled with repressive responses. In violation of international human rights, street children are arrested for offenses such as 'vagrancy' or 'begging', or for status offenses such as 'truancy' or 'running away from home'. They are furthermore victims of oppressive and violent police forces, who in many countries have the habit of routinely rounding street children up and bringing them into custody, where they are subjected to further abuse. Correctional institutions are commonly characterized by the same brutal practices. (Wernham 2004, Thomas de Benítez 2007, Human Rights Watch 2003)

¹ Human Rights Watch 2003: 22

² Focus group participant, Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22, Cairo, 2016-04-28

³ Focus group participant, Group 4: F, DE, 23-35. Cairo, 2016-04-30

Street children are often perceived and treated as dangerous criminals, public enemies or even “rubbish people” by their surrounding societies. (Scheper-Hughes 2006: 154) These stigmatizing, criminalizing and sometimes dehumanizing sentiments contribute to a hostile political and legislative climate in regards to the street children, as well as having a more direct impact on an individual level. (Scheper-Hughes 2006, Wernham 2004: 22-24)

These experiences do not belong to street children only, but are shared by various groups of poor, vulnerable and socially excluded groups of people over the world, such as for instance homeless people in North America. The criminalization and punitive approaches add to these peoples’ stigma and to the deterioration of their already precarious situation. Ultimately, this shapes the development and well-being of a country and its population, regardless of where in the world it is located. However, there are reasons to pay particularly close attention to this process in developing countries. Research suggests that the consequences of repressive approaches tend to get amplified in countries that have a history of dictatorship, including police violence and impunity, and with severe poverty and inequality –features that are characteristic of Egypt. (Wacquant 2003) The criminalization of poor and marginalized people in Egypt is likely to exacerbate existing problems such as delegitimization of law and justice institutions, obstruction of the principle of legality, lack of equal citizen rights, social exclusion and poverty. The case of street children is of particular significance, since they by virtue of being children constitute the future of the country. With an increasing number of children on the street, Egypt is facing a generation of big amounts of uneducated, traumatized, socially excluded and poor people. This will undoubtedly have severe impacts on the development of the country.

As previously argued, the faith of the street children is not only dependent on the government and its agencies, but also on the public. It is thus of great importance to understand the public perceptions in-depth, beyond superficial statements deeming street children as criminals. From exploring the complexities and sometimes contradictions in their reasoning, the perceptions of society members can be understood, and therein lies a key to create change. To this end, I will conduct a case study on public perceptions on street children in Cairo. I will explore how these coincide or contradict the response of the state and how they may reinforce and perpetuate, or challenge, the criminalization and punitive approaches toward street children. Finally, I will discuss what the implications of this might be for the children and for Egypt’s future development.

2. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the present study is to explore the criminalization of, and punitive responses towards poor and marginalized people, and how public perceptions relate to these. Through a case study on public perceptions of street children in Cairo, I seek to get an in-depth understanding of the different opinions, attitudes and beliefs that exist in relation to these children. Given the Egyptian state's criminalization of, and repressive practices toward the street children (which will be described in a background chapter), I will analyze how public perceptions may reinforce and perpetuate the criminalization of street children, or, how they might challenge them. Finally, I will discuss the implications of the public perceptions and of the repressive policies and practices in relation to street children, and what the consequences might be for Egypt's development.

Research questions:

1. What are the various public perceptions of street children in Cairo?
2. How do the public perceptions of street children in Cairo relate to the approach to street children adopted by the Egyptian state?
3. What are the implications of the public perceptions and state approach for the street children and, by extension, the development of the country?

3. Previous research and expected contribution

The overall question of interest in the present study is the criminalization and punitive responses toward poor and marginalized people, and the implications of these. There are many different issues that touch upon this larger question and that have been subject of research, such as the so called war on drugs in the United States (Beckett and Sasson 2004) and the criminalization of homeless people in various Western countries (See Douglas 2011, Truong 2012, Ali 2014, O'Connor 2006). Some of the contributions on the latter topic focus specifically on how public perceptions and attitudes contribute to responses toward the homeless (Truong 2012).

The criminalization and repression of street children have been documented in many studies and reports from various countries, including Papua New Guinea (Human Rights Watch 2005), Vietnam (Human Rights Watch 2006) and India (Ganesan & Gossman 1996), as well as internationally (Becker 2001). There are also a number of academic contributions, including a study of police round-ups and detention of street children in Tanzania (Buske 2011) and of the infamous death squads which assassinated street children in Brazil in the 1990's (Scheper-Hughes 2006).

In the context of Egypt, there are very few studies on street children related to the criminal justice system. There are two main articles in English on this topic which are frequently cited in other studies about Egyptian street children. One describes the relationship between the street children and the justice system in Egypt (Ammar 2009) and the other focuses on street children who ends up in corrective institutions (Bibars 1998). There is also a very thorough report from Human Rights Watch (2003), describing the various forms of abuse Egyptian street children are subjected to by the police and in the justice system.

Other contributions on street children in Egypt are largely descriptive. Efforts have been made to map the numbers, characteristics, family backgrounds, health status and substance abuse of

street children, among other aspects. (See for instance Ghobashi et al 2006, Guarcello & Koseleci 2009, Salem & Abd el-Latif 2002, Nada & Suliman 2010, Elkoussi & Bakheet 2011)

Many of the contributions on criminalization of street children around the world mention negative attitudes and hostility from the public. However, research specifically focused on public perceptions of street children are relatively scarce. The ones available include a study on public perceptions on street children in Ibadan, Nigeria (Ogunkan & Adeboyejo 2014) and in Accra, Ghana (Quarshie 2011), and a perception survey by a local NGO in Tanzania (Mkombozi 2010). In a more theoretical contribution, Aptekar and Abebe (1997) develops a taxonomy for the hostility toward street children.

There is no study on public perceptions on street children in Egypt produced in English, and to the author's knowledge none in Arabic either. However, the need for such a study is indicated by existing contributions on street children in Egypt, which frequently mention that they are stigmatized and met with a great deal of hostility from the public, who tends to see them as "delinquents" (ODCCP et al 2001: 13) and "trouble-makers and/or criminals" (Bibars 1998: 209). The present study thus aims at filling a research gap by exploring the public perceptions toward street children in Cairo, and examining how these relate to the criminalization and punitive responses to street children.

4. Definition of the concept ‘street children’

Unicef developed one of the earliest definitions, which is still used by policy-makers and service-providers, by which ‘street children’ refers to boys and girls aged under 18 for whom ‘the street’ has become home and/or their source of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised by responsible adults (Thomas de Benítez 2007: 2, 65, OHCHR 2012: 9) In this early concept, two categories were identified: Children *of* the street, who live and sleep in public spaces, and children *on* the street, who work on the streets during the day but return to their family homes to sleep. (Thomas de Benítez 2007: 2, 65, OHCHR 2012: 9)

However, the great variation in children’s experiences creates considerable overlap between these groups. For instance, some children live on the streets all the time, while others only occasionally or seasonally. Some children keep strong links with their families, while others have broken or lost all contact. Research in the 1990’s highlighted the weaknesses in these categories, and also argued that the term ‘street child’ was problematic as it could be used as a stigmatizing label. At the same time, some street children and their representative organizations have embraced the term, considering it as giving them a sense of identity and belonging. Definitions continue to evolve to try to capture the fluidity and differences in children’s circumstances, including terms such as ‘street-connected children’ and ‘children in street situations’ and ‘street-involved children’. (OHCHR 2012: 9-10, Wernham 2004: 13, Thomas de Benítez 2007: 2, 65)

The wide variety of children’s circumstances continue to make definitions challenging. While the umbrella description ‘street children’ is still used as a convenient shorthand, it should be done with the recognition that the term is a socially constructed category and that children living and working on the street all have unique experiences. (Thomas de Benítez 2007: 65, OHCHR 2012: 10) For the purposes of this study, and in the absence of a widely accepted alternative, the term ‘street children’ will be used, while acknowledging its limitations.

5. Case study: Cairo, Egypt

This chapter will provide a brief introduction to the Egyptian context, with a focus on political and economic aspects. It will then give an overview of the characteristics and backgrounds of Egyptian street children and the conditions they face. Furthermore, the main causes behind the street child phenomenon will be discussed. The chapter will finally describe the criminalizing and punitive approach toward street children, adopted by the Egyptian state and its agencies.

5.1 Egypt: The political and economic context

With its population of nearly 85 million people, Egypt is the most populous country in the Middle East. Cairo and its suburbs is inhabited by around 20 million people. The previously high population growth has slowed down, but the population is still young, with 37,1% being under 17 years old . (Landguiden 2016b, Unicef 2010: 5, 22)

Egypt has historically been marked by authoritarian rule. Following Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar al-Sadat, Hosni Mubarak became president and remained in power until 2011, when he was then removed through a revolution, inspired by the people's frustration over rigged elections, abuse of power, oppression, corruption and unemployment. The first free elections were won by the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012, but the army soon took power through a coup. The army general Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi was elected president with 97% of the votes, without having any real competition. (Landguiden 2016e, Landguiden 2016f, Landguiden 2016a) According to international human rights organizations, Egypt is currently an authoritarian police state marked by censorship and control over the media, and arrests, killings

and “disappearances” of the opposition. (Landguiden 2016e, Landguiden 2016f, Landguiden 2016a, Landguiden 2016d)

The economic policies of both al-Sadat and Mubarak were characterized by deregulations and privatizations, which had the result of creating large inequalities and leading to high unemployment. (Landguiden 2016c) While positive economic results could be noticed in the early 2000’s, Unicef Egypt (2015) argues that the macro-economic reforms have not yet been able to reduce poverty, and the economic growth that took place was not pro-poor, nor pro-children. In urban governorates, the child poverty rate increased from 7,9% in 2008/9 to 17,9% in 2012/13. The political turbulence that started in 2011 has since had grave consequences for the Egyptian economy. (Landguiden 2016c, Unicef Egypt 2015: 215) The poverty is particularly widespread in rural areas, but Cairo and Alexandria are also struggling with slum areas and insufficient services. (Landguiden 2016g, Unicef 2010: 23, 25) Egypt is marked by huge disparities between the rich and the poor. While the level of poverty is higher in rural areas, the urban areas have a higher degree of interpersonal inequality, with both more extremely rich and poor people. (Landguiden 2016g, Verme et al 2014: 5, 44, 53, Unicef Egypt 2015: 212)

5.2 Street children in Egypt: Characteristics, backgrounds, and conditions on the street

There are no official statistics on the amount of street children in Egypt and the efforts that have been made by various organizations to estimate their numbers vary widely. However, according to Unicef Egypt, one thing is clear: “the numbers are very large and almost certainly growing” (Unicef Egypt).

A survey conducted with 332 street children in Cairo (Guarcello & Koseleci 2009) revealed that most street children are between ten and eighteen years old, with the highest incidence observed for children aged thirteen to fifteen. Most of the Egyptian street children are found in Cairo, and the vast majority (85%) are boys. (ODCCP et al 2001: 19, Guarcello & Koseleci 2009: 10)

A Rapid Situation Assessment of street children in Alexandria and Cairo (ODCCP et al 2001), involving fifty street children, showed that 70% of the sample had dropped out of school during their primary education and 30% had never attended school. The study also revealed that most of them had previously worked informally in various shops and workshops before being dismissed or forced to leave due to abuse. (ODCCP et al 2001: 16, 19)

Street children tend to concentrate in areas suitable for their lifestyle and where their existence does not pose a threat against them, such as popular areas where their presence do not upset local inhabitants, where there are many opportunities of informal work, and where they can find cheap food, or near transportation hubs where they can both travel and beg. (ODCCP et al 2001: 19, 48) According to the Rapid Situation Assessment (ODCCP et al 2001:19-21), street children engage in various activities to survive and sustain themselves, including begging (78%), washing cars or shop windows (68%), selling tissues or other items on the street (62%), working temporarily and informally in shops and workshops (48%), and collecting plastic garbage to sell for recycling (42%).

Sometimes street children are also pushed by their circumstances to engage in crimes. It may be one or several types of crimes, of varying degrees of severity. (El-Badry 2016, interview) According to Wernham (2004), crimes are not necessarily a means of economic survival, however, the links between poverty and survival can explain why the majority of crimes committed by street children are property-related offenses, such as theft, burglary and robbery. (Wernham 2004: 47, 54-55, 57) Among the types of felonies associated with children's 'exposure to delinquency' (more on this law in forthcoming section), that Egyptian children were arrested for between 1995 and 1999, robbery amounted to 56% while violence, for instance, only represented 5, 2%. (Statistics of the General Social Defense department, 2000, in ODCCP et al 2001: 15)

Many street children are exploited in various ways. They may fall prey to other young persons and adults who force them to pay "protection money" or commit crimes, or be forced by parents or family members to beg and work in the streets. Street children are also exposed to a great deal of physical, psychological and sexual violence from peers, employers, members of the public, leaders of criminal activities and the police. They furthermore suffer from a variety of

health- and psychological problems. (Bibars 205, 207-208, ODCCP et al 2001: 5, 20-21, Guarcello & Koseleci 2009: 1, 20, OHCHR 2012: 13, Meshreki 2016, interview)

Street children develop different coping strategies to deal with this reality. Many (not all) turn to substance abuse, including glue sniffing, bango (marijuana), hashish and tablets. (ODCCP et al 2001: 5-6, 22, 49) Another strategy for coping is to form informal support networks, commonly framed by the public as ‘gangs’ and associated with crime. (El Manssy 2016) Although these groups can sometimes indeed involve organized criminal behavior, and be characterized by violence and drug use, they can also involve positive aspects such a sense of belonging, sharing of resources and information, protection from outside threats, support during illness and injury, and friendship and emotional support. (Wernham 2004: 59, Thomas de Benítez 2011: 23-24)

5.3 Causes

The causes for the emergence and development of the street children phenomenon in Egypt can be divided in two main set of factors. The first consists of direct and immediate causes which led to the child turning to the street, and the second is made up by paving or indirect causes, which pave the way for the emergence of the phenomenon, but do not directly cause the child being on the street. (ODCCP et al 2001: 17)

Among the direct risk factors that push children to the street, family violence stands out as the most commonly cited cause. (ODCCP et al 2001: 17-18, 47, Wadie Ibrahim 2016, interview, El-Badry 2016, interview, HRW 2003: 9, Ammar 2009: 559) 82% of the children interviewed in the Rapid Situation Assessment (ODCCP et al 2001) stated that they were forced to escape or leave their homes due to the physical and psychological abuse by parents, step parents or other family members and relatives. Some children are also subjected to abuse while working informally in shops and workshops. Many children also take to the streets due to neglect, for instance due to parents’ constant work and lack of supervision, sickness of a parent (especially fathers) or parents’ attitudes toward them as burdens due to large families. (ODCCP et al 2001: 17-18, 47)

Several indirect/paving economic and social reasons can also be identified. Many of these are fundamentally about poverty, which is widely understood as one of the main reasons for the street children phenomenon. (ODCCP et al 2001: 5, 17, Wadie Ibrahim 2016, interview, El-Badry 2016, interview, El Manssy 2016, interview) 98% of the children interviewed in the Rapid Situation Assessment come from low income level families and 66% of them were low educational level families. This is furthermore connected to large family sizes, which children stated as yet another cause. (ODCCP et al 2001: 17)

Another widely identified cause was lack of education (Labib Abdelsamie 2016, interview, Wadie Ibrahim 2016, interview, Bibars 1998: 203, ODCCP et al 2001: 17-18) While the Egyptian Constitution provides free, compulsory basic education, parents of children in public schools have to pay registration and health insurance fees, buy school uniforms and supplies, and are often pressured to pay for private tutoring for their children to succeed in school exams. (Human Rights Watch 2003: 11) Schools are also characterized by poor quality of education and large classes, and children sometimes get abused. (ODCCP et al 2001: 17, Labib Abdelsamie 2016, interview, Wadie Ibrahim 2016, interview, Bibars 1998: 203)

Finally, a third paving cause which is broadly agreed upon is family breakdown, including the death, imprisonment or sickness of one or both parents, divorce and remarriage. (ODCCP et al 2001: 17, Wadie Ibrahim 2016, interview, Human Rights Watch 2003: 9)

While the mentioned causes have been categorized as direct/immediate and paving/indirect, the distinction can be debated, as it is largely a matter of perspective. Abuse and neglect in the family is indeed a direct cause on the level of the individual, but it is arguably connected to larger, indirect factors. Research in Europe and the USA has consistently shown links between concentrated poverty, high unemployment levels and child abuse, and research furthermore suggests that rates of child abuse is influenced by the level of inequality in a society. Many Egyptian families who are economically marginalized have become seriously dysfunctional, and as a result children have found themselves in circumstances that pushed them toward the street. (ODCCP et al 2001: 5)

In general, most families of street children have experienced persistent discrimination, poverty and social exclusion within societies where inequalities are high and/or growing. They often

struggle to cope in overcrowded and inadequate housing, with poor access to basic services and increased health risks. Few have received economic support, child-care assistance or access to mental health or drug rehabilitation services. Thus socio-economic, cultural and community circumstances can undermine the ability of families to care for children. (Thomas de Benítez 2007: 16-17, 51-52, OHCHR 2012: 11) From this perspective, the specific causes for individual children ending up on the street can vary from one child to another, but the fundamental causes for the street children phenomenon at large are structural in nature.

5.4 The criminalization of street children in Egypt

As noted by Wernham (2004) and Thomas de Benítez (2007), many governments around the world continue to believe that repressive approaches are effective to deal with street children. Street children are commonly labeled a ‘social problem’ and policies often seem to be designed to protect society from ‘antisocial’ children rather than protecting the children from societal violence. (Thomas de Benítez 2007: vi, 2, Wernham 2004: 11) This is arguably the case in Egypt, where street children are met with severe repression by the state and its agencies.

Wernham (2004) argues that street children who come into contact with criminal justice systems fall into three different groups. The first one is *children in actual conflict with the law*, which refers to children who, because of their circumstances, have been pushed towards crimes such as theft. The second category is *children in perceived conflict with the law*. This includes children who are arrested for activities that are officially criminalized in legislation, but are in fact violating international human rights. Children are for instance commonly arrested for vagrancy, or for status offences (offences that would not be applicable to adults) such as truancy, running away from home or being beyond parental control. The third group involves *children in need of care and protection*. These children have not committed any crime, but are still arrested randomly and illegally based on prejudiced suspicion of criminal behavior or ‘for their own protection’. (Wernham 2004: 14-15, 47, 52-57)

All of these categories are reflected in the Egyptian legislation. Historically, street children in Egypt have been labeled as “vagrants”, “delinquents”, “juvenile delinquents”, and “juveniles

exposed to delinquency”. (ODCCP et al 2001: 13) The Child Law of 1996 contained a provision outlining a number of features that characterize a child as “vulnerable to delinquency”, including begging, selling trivial items, collecting cigarette ends or other items from wastes, or sleeping on the street. (ODCCP et al 2001: 13-14) When issuing the Child Law’s implementing regulation in 1997, the government added the category of “vulnerable to danger”, to include children in need of protection in a more suitable way. This provision contained situations where the child’s security, morals, health or life are in danger, where its environment exposes it to danger, and where the child is exposed to incitement to illicit use of drugs, alcohol, violence or immoral acts, among others. (HRW 2003: 39-40)

In 2008, a package of amendments to the 1996 Child Law was enacted by the Egyptian parliament. (Unicef 2010: 30) In the new, amended version of the Child Law, most of the criteria previously included in the categories “vulnerable to delinquency” and “vulnerable to danger” is encompassed in the new category of “children at risk”, found in part eight of the Child Law, titled: “Dealing with children having infringed the penal law”. (The Child Law 1996, Part 8) In addition to the already mentioned criteria, this provision stipulates that a child is considered to be at risk if it is deprived of basic education, if it mingles with deviants or with those known for their bad reputation, if it behaves badly or revolts against its father’s authority, or if it is exposed to neglect, abuse, violence, exploitation, or vagrancy, among other criteria. (The Child Law 1996, Article 96)

According to Human Rights Watch (2003), the laws that are allegedly meant to protect children are in practice used as a pretext for mass arrests campaigns by the police to clear the streets of children. In the words of an interviewed police officer who had participated in arrest, the purpose is to “demonstrate the government’s presence. Because if we didn’t have arrest campaigns then quickly the streets would fill up with kids selling tissues and wiping cars and begging.” (Anonymous police officer, quoted in HRW 2003: 41) As noted by NGO representatives in Cairo, many of the street children who get arrested did in fact not cause any problems, and in the case they did commit crimes such as stealing, arrest campaigns will not deter them. (Labib Abdelsamie 2016, interview, El-Badry 2016, interview, Wadie Ibrahim 2016, interview) “This is just because the Ministry of Interior wants to get rid of them for a short time, because they don’t have a solution.” (El-Badry 2016, interview).

According to the study by Human Rights Watch (2003), children are routinely abused by the police during arrests. They are beaten with fists and batons, subjected to degrading and humiliating language and sometimes sexually abused. The children are transported in unsafe vehicles that lack ventilation, sometimes together with adult criminal detainees who verbally and physically assault them. The abuse continues in custody, and once transferred to the *Al Azbekiya* juvenile lockup, they face deplorable conditions including overcrowding, inadequate food and bedding and denial of medical care. Furthermore, they may be held with children who are significantly older, and who may have committed serious crimes. According to Human Rights Watch (2003), the police frequently use the threat of arrest or prolonged detention to extort bribes or steal money from the children. In some cases police also extorted sex from girls in exchange for protecting them from sexual violence by others. (Human Rights Watch 2003: 16-37)

Street children also suffer procedural abuses in the justice system. For instance, the study by Human Rights Watch (2003) revealed that children are often held for long periods without being brought before the Public Prosecution Office -in violation of the law- and in some cases released without ever seeing the prosecutor. The report also notes that public prosecutors for juveniles do not visit places of detention for children regularly or conduct adequate investigations of children's arrest and detention, as required by Egyptian law. Children interviewed in the study, who had been arrested for being "vulnerable to delinquency", reported that prosecutors often did not speak to them at all, or only asked basic questions about their names and addresses. (HRW 2003: 4-5, 43-44)

If a child is found in a situation of being at risk, it can be subjected to one of the measures set forth in Article 101 in the Child Law, depending on the specific conditions of the case. (The Child Law 1996, Article 98) These include, among others, placement in specialized societal care institutions for juveniles. (The Child Law 1996, Article 101) Placement does not involve a time limit in the ruling, but instead the court should follow up regularly on the case to decide whether the measure should stop or continue. (The Child Law 1996, Article 107) According to Bibars (1998: 209), the different types of institutions that street children are referred to are underfunded and lack specialized staff and updated care programs. Interviews with institutionalized children reveal that various types of abuse, from both peers and staff, are commonplace. Bibars (1998) also note that the time spent in institutions tend to reinforce

negative behaviors among the children, and that they accumulate many more criminal skills during their stay there.

In spite of these largely repressive approaches toward street children, some efforts have been made by the Egyptian state to address the issue in other ways. In 2003, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, which is the primary agency addressing child abuse, neglect and exploitation, launched a national strategy to address children living on the street. Pilot interventions were implemented, providing children various services and building the capacity of professionals working with them. The council furthermore assists street children by a Child Helpline, through which complaints from children are received and protection is offered. (Unicef 2010b: 35-36) The amended Child Law from 2008 also includes the creation of Child Protection Committees at two levels: a General Committee for Child Protection in each of the 29 governorates, and Sub-committees at the district level. (Unicef 2010: 30)

However, the implementation of the law has been slow and many of the services it includes, such as specialized children's courts, are not yet fully operational. (Unicef, b) According to El Manssy (2016, interview), the amended law is adequate in itself, but it is yet to be implemented since it has not been translated into secondary laws, which governs institutions. Ammar (2009) argues that despite the development of the national strategy on street children, little has been accomplished to address these issues. (Ammar 2009: 565-566)

The criminalization of street children in Egypt is not only perpetuated by the authorities. Street children tend to be marginalized, discriminated against and excluded in society, and they are often viewed as criminals and trouble-makers. (Guarcello & Koseleci 2009: 1, Bibars 1998: 207, 209, ODCCP et al 2001: 52) 48% of the children interviewed in the Rapid Situation Assessment (ODCCP et al 2001) stated that they consider community disapproval as a major problem they face on the street. They are not welcomed in certain areas and communities, and people often tend to drive them away, sometimes by using violence against them. (ODCCP et al 2001: 20) They are thus met with hostility both by the state and by the general society.

6. Theoretical framework

While this theoretical framework will address street children specifically, it will also refer to the broader themes of crime and poverty. These can be seen as two overlapping frames that the issue of street children is placed in, and perspectives on these themes can thus help us understand the particular phenomenon of street children. As the focus of the present study is to explore the criminalization of street children, it will draw on criminology, informed by a political science perspective. Political science intersect with the multidisciplinary field of criminology in, among other things, the examination of opinions and political behavior of citizens in relation to crime or the criminal justice system. Political criminology, according to the definition of Scheingold (1998: 859), is interested in the social and political meanings that attach to crime. It seeks to explore what relevant actors, including the public, understands as being a crime, the causes of crime, and crime control policies. (Scheingold 1998: 859) To a lesser extent, insights from previous research on poverty, from various academic disciplines, will be used.

The relevance and impact of public perceptions and attitudes on social and political issues will be described in general, as well as in relation to street children specifically. The wider implications of criminalizing and punitive approaches for development will moreover be discussed. Finally the field of public opinion within political science will also be introduced.

6.1 Social and political constructs

Issues such as crime and poverty are socially and politically constructed: They acquire their meaning through struggles over their interpretation and representation. The frames that come to dominate the political and cultural landscape are likely to have a significant impact on policy. For example, Beckett and Sasson (2004: 45-72) argues that when crime is seen as a consequence of permissiveness within the criminal justice system, policies that get tough with offenders seem most appropriate. Conversely, when crime is seen as a consequence of poverty, unemployment, or inequality, policies that address these social and economic conditions appear relevant. Correspondingly, attitudes toward the poor and attributions for poverty are related to positions on public policy issues such as welfare, health insurance, and child care for the working poor. (Cozzarelli et al 2001: 225)

Policy-making in relation to street children is similarly dependent on how the issue is conceptualized. Two social constructions of street children are dominant: the dangerous delinquent and the helpless victim. These constructions, which also can be seen as stereotypes, provide bases for different policy approaches. When street children are conceptualized as deviants and threats to public order, policy approaches tend to be correctional, reactive or repression-oriented. When they are instead seen as victims, through an emphasis on the harsh living conditions of the street, rehabilitative or protection-oriented models are often favored. (Thomas de Benítez 2011: 11-12, 38)

As noted by Thomas de Benítez (2011), policy-making in this area is highly political in nature, as it can reflect competing ideologies. For instance, some organizations that work with street children take a micro-perspective, such as cognitive behavior models targeting individuals, while others take a macro-perspective, associated with social justice and empowerment models. (Thomas de Benítez 2011: 38-39, 47-48)

6.2 Structural and individualistic perspectives

Two broad, contrasting perspectives are prominent in research on crime as well as poverty, and can hence be seen as applicable also to street children: one structural and the other

individualistic. **Individualistic** beliefs about poverty “hold the poor to be personally responsible for their plight, through their lack of ability, efforts, or morals.” (Wilson 1996: 413). This is paralleled to what Scheingold (1991) describes as volitional criminology, according to which crime is seen as volitional, i.e. a matter of personal choice. According to this view, society is composed of autonomous and responsible individuals, who are equal before the law and provided with equal opportunities to make the most of their lives. Some people *choose* to abide by the law while others choose to violate it. Following this perspective, social programs undermine personal responsibility and retributive punishments that fits the crime is instead preferred. (Scheingold 1991: 8-13)

Structural perspectives on crime and poverty, on the other hand, are focused on the societal level. From a structural point of view, “...the poor suffer from circumstances largely beyond their control, such as a shortage of jobs, inadequate schools, or discrimination.” (Wilson 1996: 413). Similarly, structural criminology see crime as determined by the material conditions of society. Crime is a response to various kinds of deprivations that bias the opportunities and limit the autonomy of individuals in the lower strata of society. Inequality is thus seen as a main source of criminality. Proponents of this perspective regard symptomatic remedies offered through the criminal justice system as inefficient, and instead call upon more far-reaching, redistributive changes in the social order. These structural interpretations are rooted in ideals of social justice. (Sheingold 1991: 6, 9-14)

As illustrated in the previous chapter, the state of Egypt has taken a largely volitional approach to street children by criminalizing them and favoring repressive responses. Scheingold (1991) highlights a few different possible reasons behind the preference of volitional approaches. As structural criminology is underpinned by collectivist and egalitarian values, there might be ideological objections against this approach. When crime is traced to material inequality, crime control becomes a matter of formulating redistributive economic policies, which can be perceived as a threat to the vested interests of affluent and influential elements of society who are not to gain from social change. (Sheingold 1991: 6, 14-15, 23) Volitional criminology, in contrast, refocuses attention from structural problems that are a tremendous challenge for the state, to individual pathology, which stigmatizes the criminal and validates punitive responses, which are less costly than broad structural transformation. Furthermore, repressive policies imply fewer constraints on, and more prerogatives for, the state. (Scheingold 1991: 6, 24)

As previously noted, there is research suggesting that members of the public also tend to favor volitional approaches toward street children. Bibars (1998) argues that the prevailing public view of these children are "...‘trouble-makers and/or criminals by nature’ -rather than victims of circumstances." (Bibars 1998:209) According to Scheingold (1991), the preference for volitional perspectives on crime are rooted in a complex web of social values and material circumstances, but it most generally comes down to concerns with personal security and social order. Crime tend to generate widespread fear and weaken social bonds. In addition to that, criminal behavior can be perceived as a threat not only to our physical security but also to our sense of fair play. The criminal is seen as someone who is trying to get something for nothing, and thus disdain the reciprocal society in which we are expected to settle for what we have earned. By reducing structural problems and injustices to an issue of crime, they become more familiar and manageable. It makes it possible to identify the offenders and distance ourselves from them. A volitional perspective on crime thus offers easy, reassuring, and morally satisfying responses. (Scheingold 1991: 6, 15-16, 21-24)

However, people do not necessarily adhere strictly to one out of the two perspectives on poverty and crime, but often both structural and individualistic perspectives simultaneously. The combination of perspectives may for instance allow a person who recognizes structural barriers that makes overcoming poverty difficult, to believe that these barriers can be surmounted by continuous personal effort. (Cozzarelli et al 2001: 209-210, Wilson 1996: 413-414) Beckett & Sasson (2004) also note that popular sensibilities in relation to crime are not of one piece. While popular attitudes toward crime and criminal offenders hardened over the past three decades, most Americans also see crime as a consequence of environmental and social factors, and support various prevention initiatives and rehabilitation efforts. Thus, popular sentiments regarding crime and punishment are complex. (Beckett & Sasson 2004: 103-128)

6.3 Relevance and impact of public opinion

There is plenty of academic literature on the relationship between public opinion and government policy-making, but the findings of this strand of research are hardly conclusive. Some research shows that political elites influence public opinion to reflect their own

viewpoints and agendas (see for examples Beckett & Sasson 2004:103-128), while other authors instead argue that policy-makers follow public demands to varying degrees (see for example Truong 2012). Horne (2010) suggests that even authoritarian leaders to some extent is dependent on domestic support. Yet others hold that the direction of influence between governments and the public is better understood as more of a two-way relationship. As Scheingold (1991: 22) argues, the state is both constrained by the prevailing culture and a powerful instrument for shaping it.

While acknowledging the research suggesting that the public is influenced by the political leaders, the present study will focus on the other direction, namely, the ways in which the public influences and can shape policies and practices. In the case of street children, Wernham (2004: 22-24) and Scheper-Hughes (2004:16) argues that negative public opinion contributes to a hostile political and legislative climate. Public fear, inspired by representations of the children as dangerous and fueled by sensationalist media reporting, has an impact on local and national politics and contributes to the shaping of discriminatory, repressive and punitive policies and practices against street children.

Vulnerable street children are frequently seen as dangerous outlaws who lack morality and pose a threat to their societies, and this results in them being transposed from ‘children’ to ‘street children’ to ‘criminals’. This leads to a form of dehumanization, which serves to absolve the authorities of their obligation to grant them their human rights. It furthermore justifies different types of abuse toward them and fosters a culture of impunity, where violations such as police brutality, arbitrary arrest or ‘round-ups’ are accepted or even encouraged. Negative public attitudes also contribute to negative individual relationships, in the justice system and elsewhere. It can for instance translate into maltreatment by individual police officers or members of the public. (Wernham 2004: 22-24, Scheper-Hughes 2004, Thomas de Benítez 2011: 11)

The severe consequences of reducing street children into expendable non-persons are illustrated by the death squads and vigilantes in Latin America who set out to “clean up” the streets of street children and marginal youth in the 1990’s. (Wernham 2004: 22, Scheper-Hughes 2006, Thomas de Benítez 2011: 11) In the case of Brazil, Scheper-Hughes (2006) argues it all happened in the absence of national public outrage. To the contrary, public-opinion polls revealed strong popular support for social cleansing campaigns. The “respectable people”,

together with the police, political leaders, commercial firms, and armed response groups all turned against the dangerous classes of sub-citizens. (Scheper-Hughes 2006: 152-154) Hence, the tacit or explicit support of the public played a vital role in these acts.

6.4 Impacts of criminalization on development

Meth (2014: 326-327) argues that responses to crime is a significant developmental concern. The criminalization of the urban poor impacts on their human rights, their access to justice and their ability to live safely within cities, which have been illustrated in previous sections of this study.

Wacquant (2003) describes how criminalization and repression of the poor, including ‘street-sweeping’ and mass imprisonment, can seriously obstruct democratic development. According to Wacquant, the effects of this type of repressive approach to crime is particularly severe when applied in countries with widespread poverty and with a history of authoritarian rule, such as Brazil. Comparing to the ‘zero-tolerance’ model toward crime implemented in the United States, he argues that the adoption of the same model in Brazil and its South American neighbors will result in a social catastrophe due to a number of current and historical conditions that makes them different from the United States. One of them is that the depth and scale of urban poverty in Brazil are much greater. Without any social safety net, many youth from popular areas with severe unemployment/underemployment turn to crime. (Wacquant 2003: 197-199)

Furthermore, criminality is not reduced but rather aggravated by law-enforcement forces in Brazil. The Brazilian police constitutes a source of violence in itself, with routine use of lethal violence by the military police, torture to make suspects “confess”, summary executions and “disappearances”. This creates an environment of terror among the targeted popular classes. Police violence is part of a centuries old Brazilian tradition of controlling the dispossessed by force, emerging from slavery and agrarian conflicts and later on reinforced by two decades of military dictatorship, when the fight against ‘internal subversion’ was presented as crime control. Adding to this, the Brazilian court system has serious shortcomings, including not

ensuring protection of constitutional rights, and the prisons are characterized by horrific conditions and brutality. Wacquant argues that it is senseless to rely on the carceral system to deal with rising poverty and associated urban disorders, as it in fact adds to the instability and poverty of the families of prisoners, and feed criminality by its contempt of the law which fosters defiance of authorities. (Wacquant 2003: 199-201)

For these reasons, Wacquant argues that the adoption of a U.S.-inspired measures in relation to crime is bound to obstruct Brazil's journey toward a genuine and solid democracy, as it will exacerbate many of the nation's existing problems, such as escalation of both violent criminality and police abuse, criminalization of the poor, delegitimization of law and justice institutions, obstruction of the principle of legality and the lack of equal citizen rights. (Wacquant 2003: 200-201) Many of the conditions described in the case of Brazil are present in the Egyptian context: a long authoritarian military rule, widespread poverty, police brutality, atrocious prisons, and flawed legal institutions. It is hence very likely that repressive policies towards poor and vulnerable groups of the population –such as the street children- create similar negative consequences for the Egyptian society and its development.

6.5 Public opinion research in political science

The concept of public opinion gained influence with the growth of modern democracies, with their expanding electorates in the twentieth century. Citizen polls were conducted as early as 1904 in the United States, but the industry of public opinion research had its big breakthrough after World War II, thanks to increased literacy, improved means of communication and the emergence of mass consumerism. Public opinion research became a valuable tool for politicians, as well as in advertising and marketing. (Letki 2007)

Letki (2007) describes the meaning of public opinion, in the most general and popular terms, as "...the beliefs, attitudes, and preferences prevailing among the members of a given community" (Letki 2007). The definition of '*the public*' has been debated along republican versus liberal lines in democratic theory, according to which it has been described as various sociological entities, including a complex of groups pressing for political action (interest groups); people engaged in debate over a certain issue; people that are informed enough to form

opinions on a given subject; groups of people who are following some issue in the media (audiences or attention aggregates); an electorate; an agglomeration of all citizens and/or the general population of some geopolitical entity. (Prince 2008) The public in this particular study refers to the population of Cairo.

A similar variety of definitions exist in relation to the concept '*opinion*'. Researchers have attempted over the years to either distinguish concepts such as attitudes, beliefs, opinions and stereotypes or to collapse such distinctions. (Tourangeau & Galešić 2008) While acknowledging that these are somewhat distinct terms, I will include all of them, since they are closely connected, under the umbrella term '*public perceptions*'.

7. Methodology

The current chapter accounts for the methodology employed in the study. It starts out by outlining the basic premises of qualitative case studies. It then describes the data collection, including a number of in-depth interviews, focus groups and secondary data, as well as the method for data analysis. Finally, it discusses the validity and reliability of the study and some of the ethical considerations.

7.1 Qualitative case studies

Merriam (1998) defines a case study as an examination of a specific phenomenon, for example a program, an event, a person, an institution or a social community. The phenomenon in question is an example of a more extensive group of events, persons or processes and by studying one case in depth one can acquire a better general understanding of the issue one is interested in. The case study can illustrate the qualities of the group of phenomenon that the case exemplifies and illuminate the interaction of important factors that characterize the phenomenon in question. Qualitative case studies are aimed at insight, discovery and interpretation. The result of these studies are ‘thick’ and extensive, and show the complexity of a situation with the many factors that play a part. (Merriam 1988: 24-27)

In the context of public opinion research, qualitative studies are employed when the focus is on meanings rather than measurement. The purpose is not to establish the exact prevalence or extent of different ideas, which can be done through quantitative methods (such as traditional political polls). Instead, qualitative studies on public opinion seeks to understand how members of the public create meanings on certain topics.

7.2 Interviews

Interviews have been conducted with five persons from four different organizations that work with street children, two of them international and two of them local.

1. Radwa El Manssy. Child Protection Officer, Unicef Egypt.
2. Ibrahim Wadie Ibrahim. In charge of children without shelter, Caritas Egypt.
3. Sali Meshreki. Social worker with children at risk, Kafr El Sisi Center in Cairo, Caritas Egypt.
4. Abdelsamie Labib Abdelsamie. Assistant CEO and Accomodation Manager, Banat El Ghad (Banati)
5. Abla Al-Badry. Secretary General and Board Member, Hope Village Society (HVS).

There are several benefits to including these informants in the study. As professionals with long experience in working with street children, they provide valuable knowledge and information which also served as initial orientation to the subject. They also provide an important complement to the focus groups. When asking members of the public directly on their thoughts and attitudes towards street children, there is a risk that they hold back or sugar-coat comments that can be perceived as negative. By interviewing professionals, who are experiencing the public attitudes and hearing from the street children themselves, complementary –and potentially more honest- accounts regarding the public can be added to the data. I have chosen not to include any children in this study, considering its limited scope and the high ethical standards necessary when conducting research involving children. However, by interviewing persons who work directly with street children, I can to some extent access the experiences and accounts of the children through an intermediary.

The interviews were qualitative and semi-structured. The semi-structured interview begins with the assumption that one cannot know from the start which questions are important and meaningful. It is instead carried out as a form of guided conversation, which requires the interviewer to develop questions partly based on earlier questions and answers. Hence, within a qualitative interview the interviewer is a co-creator of the result. (Starrin & Renck 1996: 53-56) (See interview guide in Appendix 1.)

7.3 Focus groups

Focus groups provide a useful method for studying public opinion in a qualitative manner, as it provides an opportunity to hear members of the public discuss their opinions in complex ways, and thus offers a deeper understanding of how they think than some of the quantitative methods available. The aim is to understand the participant's multiple meanings and interpretations. (Morgan & Fellows 2008, Liamputtong 2011: 3) In contrast to a group interview, the emphasis in a focus group is the discussion and between the participants. (Liamputtong 2001: 31) This creates what Stewart et al (2007a) calls a 'synergistic effect', as it produces data that would be less accessible without the group interaction. The focus group discussion allows participants to react to comment by other members of the group and build on these. It reveals areas of agreement, conflict and uncertainty and brings challenges and contradictions to the light. (Liamputtong 2011: 31-32) Focus groups provides a chance for the researcher to learn about the participants' framework for understanding their world, their hierarchies of importance and the language and concepts they use for speaking about a certain topic. (Liamputtong 2001: 31-32)

7.3.1 Sample

In the present study, the sample frame is constituted by female and male, adult residents of Cairo, between the ages of 18 and 55. From the total population, a nonprobability sample was produced. Nonprobability samples are based on the researcher's judgement to select participants, and are common in qualitative research, for various reasons. From a practical point of view, it may not be possible to produce a probability sample due to cost considerations and difficulties in counting the total population, among other issues. Furthermore, qualitative studies tend to analyze a smaller number of rich data sources in-depth, and these small sample sizes does not allow statistical analysis, thus making probability samples superfluous. (Morgan 2008b, Saumure & Given 2008)

Quota sampling, which is one of the most common nonprobability sampling techniques, has been chosen for the present study. Quota sampling identifies categories within the total

population, and specifies the number of sample members from each of those categories. (Morgan 2008a, Saumure & Given 2008) This ensures that people with varying backgrounds and characteristics are included in the study, which is crucial to obtain a broad sense of the various opinions and attitudes among the public. The quotas also serve to create relatively homogenous focus groups, which are argued to work better as participants may feel more comfortable to talk to each other openly and freely. (Liamputtong 2001: 34-35, Stewart et al 2007a) Several demographic factors, such as age, gender and socioeconomic background, can impact the group dynamic in different ways. (Stewart et al 2007b) Since these three factors have a significant impact on people’s interaction in the Egyptian context, they have provided basis for the quotas.

The socioeconomic quotas has been retrieved from the Egypt branch of the market research company Ipsos, and are illustrated in the table below. The table accounts for the income and educational profile of the quotas. For a more detailed description, see Appendix 3.

Income Unit: EGP	SEC
More than 15,000 Holders of University degree and above	A
Between 10,001 and 15,000 Holders of University degree and above	B
Between 7,001 and 10,00 Completed Secondary/Diploma, up to University	C1
Between 4,001 and 7,000 Finished primary or part of secondary	C2
Between 1,501 and 4,000 Finished primary or part of it.	D
Less than 1500 Finished part of primary, Illiterate	E

Source: Ipsos Egypt (2015)

Table 1: Socioeconomic quotas

To accommodate the scope of this study, the socioeconomic quotas, as defined above, have been combined in pairs to create a total of three socioeconomic quotas. The table below illustrates the age, socioeconomic and gender quotas and the sample established for the present study.

Age	AB		C1C2		DE		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
18-22	1	-	-	1	-	-	2
23-35	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
36-55	-	1	-	-	1	-	2
Total	2		2		2		6

Table 2: Focus group sample

Six focus groups was considered as an adequate number for the purpose of the study. Each group was intended to include six participants, as this would create a constructive discussion climate. (See Liamputtong 2001: 42) However, to ensure the number of participants over-recruiting was done, resulting in seven participants in two of the groups, while one group ended up having only five participants. After considering the merits of both pre-existing and constructed groups, the latter was chosen based on a number of advantages. (See Liamputtong 2001: 37-38)

Quotes in the analysis will be paired with the particular focus group they belong to, along with the gender, socioeconomic, and age characteristics of the group, e.g. “Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22”.

7.3.2 Recruitment

The recruitment strategy has largely been based on practical considerations. Being a foreign researcher in Egypt, I do not have a network of my own through which I can find participants. I therefore hired two freelance recruiters, recommended by a contact who works with market research in Cairo. The recruiters have a vast network within different socioeconomic groups and geographic areas in Cairo that they could reach out to, and by the word of mouth they gathered the requested participants for the study. They also organized transportation for the participants to the focus group venue. This was crucial since Cairo is a very big city, and the participants were spread out geographically.

7.3.3 Execution

A focus group is guided by a moderator, whose tasks are to make sure all participants engage actively in the discussion, manage disagreements and conflicts in the group, and steer the discussion in the right direction to cover all of the topics in the available time. (Liamputtong 2001: 60) Culture and language is of great importance when conducting a focus group. It is preferable to conduct the discussion in the participants' native language, and that this is also the first language of the moderator. Interpreters should be avoided. (Stewart et al 2007d) Since I am only superficially familiar with the Egyptian culture and do not speak adequate Arabic, an Egyptian acquaintance assisted me in this task. He was carefully prepared before the sessions. With my basic understanding of Arabic I could follow the discussions in broad terms and pose additional questions through translation, when necessary.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to give a general direction for the discussion, while leaving room for the participants own narratives as well as providing a high degree of flexibility in the discussion. The interview guide was pre-tested. (See interview guide in Appendix 2.) A stimulus material, in the form of a newspaper article, was also used, as this is held to be a good way to access topical issues, and to spark discussions that resemble those people tend to have in their everyday conversations. (Liamputtong 2001: 65) The article was about a former street child, who in adult age and as the leader of a street gang, raped and murdered at least 32 children, some of which also were street children. The culprit became

known as 'El Torbini' and the case received extensive media attention in Egypt in 2006. (Loza 2006)

7.4 Secondary sources

As an introduction to my subject, and for complementary information, I have relied on a number of secondary sources. These consist of academic articles and books, reports by various NGOs, and a few regular news articles. The descriptions of street children in Egypt, and the state's response to them, heavily rely on a comprehensive report written by Human Rights Watch (2003), and a report produced by ODCCP, WFP and Unicef (2001) -all of which are widely renowned organizations. My inability to access sources in Arabic is undeniably a weakness. However, I have managed to find a number of academic articles in English written by Egyptian authors, which serve to provide local knowledge and perspective.

7.5 Data analysis

The data collected through this study have been processed through an inductive thematic analysis, which has a descriptive and exploratory orientation. This type of content-driven analysis starts without specific predetermined codes or analytical categories, and instead derives codes from the gathered data. Through thematic analysis, both implicit and explicit ideas are discovered in the data. (Guest et al 2012: 6-9) According to Guest et al (2012: 9), it is the most useful kind of analysis for capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set, and it is the most common method of analysis in qualitative research.

The first step in analyzing the data of the present study was to have all the focus group recordings transcribed in English. A freelance professional was hired for this purpose. Unfortunately, the circumstances did not allow for individualized anonymous identities (Ex. '*Respondent no 4*') in the transcripts, since supporting notes could not be taken during the

discussions to facilitate identification in the transcriptions. In the quotes that have been included in the analysis, I have gone back to the recording with the help of a translator and distinguished the participants speaking. However, it was not feasible to carry out this identification process for the recordings in their entirety. Thus, in a given excerpt I refer to the participants as 'R1', 'R2' and so on, but the 'R1' in one quote is not necessarily the same person as the 'R1' in another quote. Consequently, I cannot follow the reasoning of a particular person throughout the course of the discussion, which undoubtedly is a significant weaknesses. However, I believe that the data can still provide meaningful insights into the opinions and thoughts of the participants. Albeit not capitalized on fully, the unique advantage of focus groups' interaction between participants is still reflected in the analysis.

General themes were then identified in the transcripts, followed by the development of a number of specific codes and the mapping of how they relate to each other. The data was finally interpreted through concepts and perspectives from the theoretical framework.

7.6 Reliability and validity

All types of research should strive to be defensible in different regards, which makes the considerations of reliability and validity important. In broad terms, a study can be found **reliable** to the extent that it can be replicated by other researchers. There is considerable division among qualitative researchers regarding the possibility of reproducing results. However, some maintain that even in qualitative inquiry, the different methods employed in a study should yield similar results for it to be considered as good and valid. (Smith 2004) While acknowledging the difficulties inherent in the replication of qualitative studies, a detailed description of the methods of data collection and analysis has been included in the thesis to facilitate repeatability.

Validity is concerned with whether the claims, implications, and conclusions in a study can be justifiably made. (Yue 2010) One of the strategies available for strengthening a qualitative study's validity is triangulation, which entails the use of different theories, methods, data and/or investigators in order to explore a problem from different perspectives. (Sullivan 2009a) In the

present study, triangulation has been used through incorporating a variety of data sources, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, as well as secondary sources.

Among the many different types of validity, the so called “**external validity**” is of particular relevance for the present study. External validity refers to the degree to which research findings can be generalized to different people, places, settings and times. Generalizability is a matter of concern for qualitative case studies in general, as well as in relation to nonprobability sampling, which can be argued to limit the transferability of data. (Saumure & Given) However, qualitative case studies often suggest that their strength is in not achieving significant possibilities of generalizability, as the very nature of a case study requires some sort of restriction in relation to context, time, or population characteristics. (Yue 2010) It is often recommended that instead of making generalizations from qualitative studies, the reader should make a judgement of how well the context of the study matches his/her situation, and make generalizations based on this. (Sullivan 2009b)

7.7 Ethical considerations

Three issues have been subject to particular ethical consideration: consent, confidentiality, and compensation. **Informed consent** refers to the requirement that all participants fully comprehend the nature of the study and their role in it, and voluntarily agree to it before the research starts. The researcher must thus provide information about the purpose, methods, and how the results are to be disseminated. (Israel & Hay 2008: 57-58) In the present study, focus group participants and informants were asked to give their oral consent in the beginning of the session/interview, after being provided with information about the study.

All focus group participants in the present study was granted **confidentiality**, i.e. the concealing of their true identities. The informants representing NGOs were asked whether they wanted their names to appear, and all agreed. It is imperative that research participants, who share their private thoughts and experiences, are protected as far as possible, particularly in certain political environments. (Liamputtong 2001: 25, Stewart et al 2007d)

The question of **compensation** is a debated one, with some maintaining that it might be necessary to provide some sort of incentive to acquire the participation of people and others

arguing that this can constitute a form a coercion, especially in relation to poor people. Some emphasize that compensation is a way to acknowledge and show appreciation for people's participation, which involves time and effort, and the value of their contribution to a study. (Liamputtong 2011: 55-57) After having considered the various points of views in relation to compensation, I chose to assume the latter perspective in relation to focus group participants. Compensation can be of different worth and take varying forms, and should have universal value to the participants. (Liamputtong 2011: 55-57, Stewart et al 2007c) I decided to give the focus group participants a voucher of 100 EGP at a supermarket chain with branches all over Cairo.

8. Analysis

This chapter will account for the public perceptions of street children, as described by members of the public during the focus group sessions. It will include participants' understanding of the various causes to the phenomenon, their perceptions of street children and crime, thoughts about the neediness and worthiness of street children, their perspectives on responsibility for and solutions to the problem, and, briefly, their sources of information. It will finally account for NGO representatives' understanding of the public perceptions of street children.

In the beginning of each focus group session, participants were asked what comes to their minds when they hear the term 'street children'. The most frequent immediate associations included 'criminals', 'begging', 'poverty', 'no home', 'no parents', 'no education', 'drug addicts', 'taking the wrong turn', 'stealing', 'gangs/mafia' and 'a big/increasing problem'. All of these associations are further elaborated in the forthcoming sections.

8.1 Causes

The three main topics that came up when discussing causes were poverty, education, and parents. A few other issues were mentioned, but receiving significantly less attention than the mentioned three causes.

8.1.1. Poverty

Poverty was cited as one of the main causes in all groups. There were some discussions regarding the backgrounds of street children, where some participants claimed that street children do not always come from poor families. Some also argued that they are not always forced to the street by poverty, but rather by choice (see forthcoming section 8.3) Overall, however, most participants agreed that poverty is an important factor in explaining the street child phenomenon. Many mentioned unemployment, low wages and increasing prices as causes, arguing that the parents inability to provide for their families cause children to end up on the street.

R: In addition to the factories that have closed, which leads to unemployment and affects the Egyptian home negatively, so that it can't meet its needs and therefore turns to different bad ways [...] If there's no poverty and we give much care to education, there will be nothing called street children.

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

R: I know someone with 2 kids and his salary is 700 L.E -how are the children in school? How can he live like that? How can he live and afford to raise them? Certainly he will turn to other things if he is not going to send them to the street, so I see that as the main reason, whether there is a job that provides decent pay and education.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

A few participants also mentioned the political system, social justice and rights, although participants rarely engaged in discussions that were explicitly political in nature.

M: Do you think this [poverty and not utilizing the country's resources well] is because of bad management?

R: Yes, bad management, bad president, it's a country of old people. The only good thing is the army, they are doing everything in the country and now running it. During Mubarak they [the poor] could not talk, but after the revolution they came out. After the revolution they said they will take their rights, but in the end they didn't take anything, it's the same as before, the system is coming back.

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

8.1.2 Education

R: 70 or 80 % of the cause is the education.

M: What do you mean with education?

R: When there isn't education, street children will appear.

M: You mean that they don't go to school?

R: Yeah, sure. Or they joined schools but couldn't continue.

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

Education was frequently mentioned as one of the principal reasons for children ending up on the street. Participants understood education as a cause in mainly two ways: in relation to the parents or in relation to the child.

It was argued that the lack of education, illiteracy and ignorance among parents lead to poverty, to child abuse, to the decision of having many children, to setting bad examples and failing to teach children right from wrong. In these narratives, 'education' were not strictly referring to formal schooling, but also to a broader sense of knowledge, understanding and "culture" of the parents. These conditions were seen as contributing to children turning to the street.

R: Someone [a street child] says my father was a drunk, or my mother married [meaning: had a baby, my note] without knowing my father. Parents are the basic reason of this phenomenon, their indifference, ignorance and lack of education, or any environment they came from.

(Group 6: M, DE, 36-55)

Participants also held that the limited access to education and poor conditions in the schools are direct push factors in children's decision to take to the streets. It was argued that although governmental schools are officially for free, there is a widespread practice of teachers offering private tutoring, which is more or less perceived as mandatory since the teacher has the power over the student's grades.

R: Teachers use schools to gather many students in their private tuition. If you can't afford the private sessions, you'll not go on.

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

Participants also brought up the poor quality of governmental schools, which in practice is the only option for many due to the high fees of private schools.

R1: Everything is related to education, especially the factor of the governmental schools, in which they let their students gather rubbish in their PE sessions.

R2: Yeah, in the governmental schools.

R1: Yeah, so you're teaching a primary student such things. Instead of letting him enjoy his time in the PE or music session, you're teaching him to clean the school in your fun time, so what do you want from such a child to do in society after this?

R3: And he also sees his teacher when he doesn't teach him anything during the school time.

R1: No one corrects him when he makes a mistake.

R2: There's no one who's responsible in schools.

[inaudible talking among participants]

R1: ...and so the child is the victim.

R4: The capacity of the classroom is like 80 or 90 students.

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

8.1.3. Parents

R: The fundamental problem is the parents; this means that the ignorance of the father and the mother are the primary factor that drives these kids to become street children.

(Group 2: F, AB, 36-55)

The parents were also perceived is a crucial cause to children ending up on the street. It was often argued that some parents have more children than they can afford. Sometimes this was brought up as part of a discussion of poverty -i.e. that some parents are so poor that they cannot afford to provide for their children- and other times it was rather to suggest a lacking sense of judgement or responsibility on part of the parents. Lack of education, or ignorance, was also linked to the decision of having many children.

R: A guy wants to get married but does not understand the consequences, then gets five or six or seven kids and wants them to get them money by any means or kicks them out.

(Group 4: F, DE, 23-35)

R: To have a mother give birth to five, six or ten -that is ignorance. How are you going to raise them all?

(Group 4: F, DE, 23-35)

Another commonly mentioned aspect was disintegration of families, following divorce or the death of the father (which is considered the primary bread-winner). In relation to this, it was argued, the child might be kicked out as the divorced parent gets remarried, or it might run away from home due to maltreatment in the new family constellation.

There were also many narratives of selfish, neglecting or abusive parents. Participants argued that some parents are simply not willing to spend money on their children, and might throw them out to get rid of them. Many also argued that children often turn to the street to escape parents who are beating them. It was also held by many participants that some parents exploit their children by, for instance, forcing them to beg.

R1: They used to be only bastard kids, but now some of them are well-bred kids whose parents are just too busy traveling or divorced, maybe even due to domestic violence or whatever.

R2: Parents are throwing their kids away. "Get out and never come back" has become so easily said.

(Group 2: F, AB, 36-55)

R2: From my point of view, parents are responsible for street children. Not only the society or all of us but the home, parents have the responsibility for this. If a child's dad hits his son, the child will not go to school, he will escape from home as he hates his father, so you will find this one in street, getting to know other children and being friends with them, he will start to change completely. In my opinion the basic problem is the home and parents.

(Group 6: M, DE, 36-55)

It was also continuously emphasized in the group discussions that it is essential for parents to teach their children right from wrong, or *halal*⁴ from *haram*⁵. The failure to do so might cause the children to run to the street, and once there they might engage in unacceptable or criminal activities such as stealing or doing drugs. Several participants argued that some parents are setting bad examples for their children, who as a result will follow in their footsteps.

R1: If I put wine in this cup it will be haram?

R2: Yes.

R1: If I put water in same cup it will be halal?

⁴ Permitted in Islam

⁵ Forbidden in Islam

R2: Of course.

R1: So it depends on parents and how they educate their kids, fathers and mothers who are not capable [of raising children] with a low level of education, so street children comes from parents.

(Group 6: M, DE, 36-55)

R1: Some people have money but still do that, I know a well-off man who lives in a decent place and his children brings him drugs and stuff like that, little children, as a profession, and he got them cars that take them to those who bring stuff like smoke. What he did is sending his kids to the street. For instance his children got use to the street so they could leave him. Now they have a profession.

R2: Yes, like arms dealing...

R1: Or drug dealing, it's a job they do willingly. They don't do that unwillingly. They found their father doing that. My father is a drug dealer so I will be exactly the same.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

8.1.4 Other causes

A few other causes were brought up during the discussion, although these were less emphasized and received less attention and agreement from the other participants. Peer-pressure and negative influence from friends was mentioned on a few occasions. A few participants mentioned that children sometimes get abused at their workplaces, such as mechanic shops, which makes them run away and end up on the street. One participant argued that lack of religion is the root cause of many of the other issues brought up during the discussion. Yet another participant mentioned the question of the large population in Egypt, relating it to the issues of education and poverty.

8.2 Neediness and worthiness

One theme appeared repeatedly throughout all focus groups. It involved claims, reflections and discussions regarding the neediness of street children and/or adult beggars. Many, if not most, participants maintained that some were on the street by personal choice, and that it was a lifestyle rooted in unwillingness to take on "real" work. This decision was allegedly motivated by the big sums of money that one can earn by street activities such as begging, selling tissues,

parking cars, etcetera. It was claimed that these revenues exceeds those earned through “regular” work. In these accounts, street children and the adults they are associated with were characterized as lazy and/or greedy. Street children in specific were also claimed to choose the lifestyle of the street because of their reluctance to abide by rules, and the street allegedly offers more freedom.

R: But for someone who got used to getting money without working, it will be hard to actually work. They won't do it. Whatever I can earn in a month by working I can get in a week [on the street].

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

R: There was a beggar in my mother's neighborhood. When she died they found bags full of money organized by bills. Why wouldn't she set a goal and start living a normal life once she reached it? It's greed. Once hungry for money, will never be full.

(Group 2: F, AB, 36-55)

R1: They earn lots of money.

R2: Yeah, that's true. I see that they earn a lot of money. If you followed any of them from a balcony or whatever you would see that a street child stands in the street for 12 or 13 hours daily doing nothing but asking the car drivers for money. And if you calculated the number of the cars that give him money, you would see how profitable it is and how they make their families rich.

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

It was furthermore argued that they resort to lying and faking to evoke pity and sympathies from the public. This is done by faking handicaps, claiming sickness, or dressing up in clothes in bad condition. Children might claim to be alone and without family, while in reality he/she was sent out to beg by the family. Sometimes adults use children who are not really theirs as “props”.

R: One day I was in *Al Hejaz* and found a little girl walking next to me and said “Please I need two pounds“, then I asked her “Who are you and where do you work?”. She said “My mother put me here, and told me not to go home until getting ten pounds.”. I asked her “Where is she?“. “She is there.“ I found her standing under a tree and waiting for her girl to get the ten pounds for her. Now you will find mothers using their children, by carrying them in their arms and going to beg, saying to the people that “She is sick and I need money to get medicine for her”, even though they may be new born babies, you will find some of them carrying them to beg with them.

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

They were thus described as dishonest, and cynical. The common theme of these points is that the neediness of the street children and the authenticity of their plight was called into question. Subsequently, their worthiness of sympathy was questioned.

A few participants questioned the narrative of being on the street as a lifestyle choice. However, the mistrust was widespread among participants and there were not many incidents of challenging these types of accounts and claims.

Some participants talked about “the decent street children” or the “respectable kind”, and they were compared to homeless Syrians who live on the street in Egypt, to highlight perceived differences.

R: They can tell you that his father is always abroad and his mother is alone and he can't afford life and so he had to be like this. This is the respectable kind, like those who have tissues or flowers and they want to sell them, I mean he isn't smoking or doing drugs like those who sleep in gardens and streets. I mean you usually talk to those who seem respectable, and they tell you that they don't have any other alternative since there's no one who is responsible for him, and so he is led to gathering some rubbish or whatever and so you have to give him some money when he asks you for some money to eat Koshary or whatever, he doesn't even ask you for money to save, he just wants some money to live.

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

R1: There are decent street kids that don't put out their hand for money without selling something.

R2: Syrians are like this, not reaching their hand out asking for extra money.

[...]

R2: They [the Syrians] go around selling Kleenex, key chains and sweets. I buy them even if I don't want them.

R1: Mo'men, my son, buys it even if he doesn't need it, to help them not beg or steal.

[...]

M: Just one point on selling versus begging: One thing that was also raised in an interview with an NGO was that the kids you see selling Kleenex need parents or a leader who could put up money to buy this stock to sell. So normally a whole family doing this or [the street child] is supervised by a leader doing this. A child wiping a car with a rug, nobody is behind him. So family is behind these kids or a leader.

R1: Still more dignified than begging.

(Group 2: F, AB, 36-55)

Being “respectable” or “decent”, in these accounts amounts to not asking for money without offering a product of some sorts, as well as not engaging in negative or inappropriate behavior such as smoking or doing drugs.

8.3 Crime

Crime was one of the things that was consistently mentioned when focus group participants were asked about what comes to mind when hearing the word ‘street child’, and it was a prominent theme throughout the discussions.

8.3.1. Criminal behavior

R: They’re criminals, they can snatch your bag or rob you. You can be walking and they can snatch your bag and you’re afraid to run after them or do anything.
(Group 4: F, DE, 23-35)

Participants described a number of crimes that they know or perceive street children to be engaged in, including theft, robbery, drug selling and using, and breaking into cars. Some participants defined begging as a criminal activity, while others saw begging as a sort of gateway to crime, or as associated with crime, for instance in the way that some children find opportunities to steal while begging. One participant defined sexual intercourse (between the street children, and thus outside marriage) as criminal behavior. However, most participants mentioned sexual relations as something immoral or haram rather than criminal. Other types of inappropriate behavior that was brought up included foul language and harassment.

The street children were described as violent and aggressive, both towards each other and to other members of the public. Some participants also had experiences of being subjected to crime. Several participants expressed that they are afraid of the street children, who they feel are dangerous and unpredictable, especially while under the influence of drugs.

R1: You can be sitting in car and all of a sudden...

R2: One of them steals your mobile and vanishes.

R1: Yeah, it happened to me once that a street child stole from me.

R3: And the bags...

R2: Yeah, if one of them is a bit older, he can be specialized and steal the whole car or open the car to steal what's inside, I mean the motor and such important parts. There are so many cases, like when you're on your way in the street and then your mobile is stolen suddenly while talking on it.

R1: It happens a lot.

R2: And one of my friends had some street children who gathered to tease her until she started to focus on them and then they stole her bag.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

R: I'll be scared to walk during night time, there are some streets which I know by name where I can't walk on during night time.

M: Why?

R: Because I have been attacked before in these streets, and more than one time, and this happened to me by the street kids, yes they look like street kids, so these sons of bitches scare citizens. Me as a citizen, I'll be scared to walk in the streets.

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

R1: I'm afraid that they might steal something from me, snatch my purse or steal my watch.

R2: They might have small knives hidden with them and they might cut you or stab you with it.

(Group 4: F, DE, 23-35)

It was argued that the criminal behavior gets worse by time, as the street children get more experience and become increasingly innovative in their exercise of criminal activities. Many participants argued that all, or a majority of the street children engage in crime. At the same time, many participants emphasized that not all of them do that. When the case of 'El Torbini' was brought up, it was often exclaimed that there are many like him, and that he was just one who happened to get caught.

In addition to being perceived as criminals, street children were also seen as a threat to national security. They were described as "a ticking time bomb" and as "terrorists", and participants predicted that the phenomenon of street children will lead to increasing crimes and terrorism in the future. To illustrate this, several participants brought up the involvement of street children in the revolution in 2011, and the protests that followed in 2013.

R: There has been no care about these children for many years, so they grow [in numbers]. So street children are a risk to the national security, especially at the time of the revolution. About 30% from those who took part in the revolution were recruited street children. We saw them in the revolution, they were paid.

(Group 6: M, DE, 36-55)

8.3.2 Organized crime and gangs

The issue of organized crime and gangs frequently came up during the focus group discussions. There were two main types of approaches to this theme: Either it was argued that children are being exploited through crime networks and thus used to emphasize their victimization, or it was brought up to illustrate the severity of the criminal activities of street children and associated to the disingenuity of their plight -they are “professional” criminals. These perspectives sometimes overlapped in the discussions as many participants reflected on both aspects.

Street children were perceived to be victimized through organized crime in several ways. Many participants claimed that some children end up on the street after having been kidnapped by gangs, who intend to exploit them for begging or crimes. Participants also described how children who have run away from home or been kicked out are taken under the protection of adults living and/or working on the streets, and taught to work for these adults. Many participants expressed sympathy for the street children who were seen as being exploited by ruthless and greedy leaders -adults or older street children-, and it was generally held that they do not get to keep the money they earn.

R: Now I see children who go around and clean cars in the street. And he tells you that he begs for money to go to school and there is always someone who makes him to do it and who takes the money from him, because most of the time the money is not meant for them but for someone else. They take them [the street children] and distribute them over different places, it's like I have a group of ten and I assign everyone a location, and he [the street child] never takes all the money for himself but the guy who forces them takes the money and give him some of it.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

The accounts of organized crime and gangs were not always victim-oriented, however. Many participants described begging, cleaning/parking cars, selling things and other street activities as a business which is organized and more or less run professionally. Others described it as a mafia. These accounts were often brought up to question the neediness and genuinity of the street children, and to challenge the idea that the children are engaging in these activities purely for survival. It was often claimed that this type of “business” generate big amounts of money (as discussed in the previous section).

R: Such actions aren't random, they're organized. No one can stand alone and start begging since the head must approve it. Like those who help you to park your car who are like the mafia, everything is organized and everyone is assigned to cover a part of the street which he pays for daily to be responsible for, and no one else can stand there on his own [initiative]. It's like a mafia, like the begging...

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

Participants also mentioned the more self-formed gangs of street children. Some argued that they form groups to do bad things and some expressed that they are particularly afraid of the street children when they are in groups of big numbers.

R1: They should be split up because their gathering causes problems.

M: Do you think their gathering is harmful? Or that they gather to take care of one another?

R1: Some yes and others no.

R2: There are few of that kind.

R3: When they live in a place together some try to work or to beg to support others.

R1: That is rare, they gather to harm others. The street children will never gather to do something good.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

8.3.3 Reasons behind criminal behavior

There was general agreement among the participants that the children's circumstances forced them to commit crimes. Many participants argued that the criminal activities are motivated by the need to get food, that drug use is necessary to be able to bear with life on the street and that they would not commit crimes if they had homes. Some commented that they would have done

the same things, if they would have been in the street child's shoes. There was also wide agreement that their behavior was a result from their upbringing, and from not having been taught right from wrong.

R1: There is no one to tell them no and that drugs is wrong or that it will take them in a different path and cause you harm, no one can do that, so he tries it himself.

R2: In addition to that, he doesn't know halal from haram, anyway he doesn't know if he is stealing.

R1: Anyway he is not to be blamed because no one taught him anything and he doesn't know the permitted from the forbidden.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

However, participants also argued that they engage in crime by choice and because of lifestyle, greed and laziness (see previous section).

8.3.4 Accountability and punishment

Some participants argued that since the criminal behavior of street children is a result of a situation which is out of their hands, and of not being taught right from wrong, they cannot not be held accountable and punished for their actions. Some described them as victims.

R: ...and the concept of catching him if he has made a mistake, I mean that they should firstly know what's halal and what's haram, especially because they don't have a home, I feel that they shouldn't be blamed of committing crimes when they don't have a home.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

R: I think that street children are always victims even when we refer to any of the discussed reasons, they're still victims whether they like it or not, they're forced or not, professionals or not, they are actually victims... If you tried to talk to any of the street children when they try to beg or to sell anything, if you touched his childhood by giving him anything or talked to him, you would find him different. I mean you wouldn't see him being that annoying character who is always nagging you for money, so I feel that they're victims all in all.

M: Victims of what?

R: Victims of society, their parents or upbringing... or even poverty. But all in all they're victims because a street child won't be the person who is responsible for being in such condition. Maybe his family, society, country or the conditions in general, I mean that he's the last one who's responsible since he's a victim.

M: and what about the rest? Do you feel that they're really victims?

[Agreement from other participants]

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

A few participants argued against permissiveness and held that punishment is important to deter criminal behavior.

R: ...if I do something wrong but you don't give me the penalty that I deserve, I will go on. As long as you are leaving him doing the wrong thing, he will go on.

M: Is the government's role only to give you punishment?

R: No it should provide education and many things, but they must take their penalty...

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

However, it was most commonly argued that punishment, in the form of juvenile detention or prison, does more harm than good.

R: Here [in Egypt], in the prison they destroy them, while abroad they rehabilitate them. This is a difference between us and them, they take the bad and repair him, we take the bad and make him worse. If he's sentenced to 10 years in prison at 15, he'll come out at 25 as a complete criminal.

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

R: And as I told you, they're victims so you shouldn't blame him. And if you punished him, where should he go? If he went to juvenile, he would be much worse than before.

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

8.3.5 Police and security

None of the participants had any positive comments regarding their police and their dealing with street children. Many argued that the police treat street children badly.

R1: They are terrible with regular people, so what would they do with these children?

R2: Especially when they don't have any parents, so they will be humiliated. So no, the police will make it worse.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

M: What do you think of the treatment of the police with him [a street child]?

R: They treat the child very badly.

M: How?

R: Beating, insulting, cursing...

(Group 4: F, DE, 23-35)

Other participants argued that the police are no longer targeting street children the way they used to before, and that they chose not to interfere at all except for in particular cases. Some argued that this approach stems from fear of the street children. Participants also claimed that police officers are taking bribes from street children and their leaders.

M: How do the police deal with street children?

R1: In a useless way, even the police are scared of these people. Imagine that the police which is supposed to be in charge of my safety get scared of them, so me as a regular citizen, what can I do?

R2: And you know, the police know their locations and all their gatherings but they don't enter there.

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

R1: They don't deal with them actually, the police doesn't do anything about them so they can't harm them. In other words, there are no campaigns nowadays to catch the beggars like before. You can see a policeman, an officer, and beside them there's a beggar. They can't talk to him as they're containing the problem. [Interpretation of last sentence: the police avoid talking to street children in order to keep the situation stable. To be understood in the post-revolution context, my note.]

R2: He [the street child/beggar] may be asked to hide until the district principal has passed. [laughing]

R1: This is true and he [the police officer] may be asked to clean the area until he has passed.

R2: And then everything returns to like it was before.

R1: And you may have a rich beggar who collects lots of money until the policeman asks him or her to leave the street for whatever reason she accept. For example, I know two or three beggars who are always in the area, if I haven't seen any of them, I know that there's a responsible man [high-ranking official, my note] who is passing somewhere.

M: To this extent?

R1: And bear in mind that they have lots of deals with each other as they earn a lot of money, I mean that the policeman has a percentage.

(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

This notion of making selective sweeps for street children or keeping them out of certain types of areas was mentioned by several participants. It was argued that street children are not permitted in areas where “important” people live, or in affluent neighborhoods, particularly compounds. Although some participants felt like street children can be seen in all types of neighborhoods in the city -poor or wealthy- most argued that they are mostly present in poor or ‘local’ neighborhoods.

R: There are certain places in *Heliopolis* that have no street children, I think that there are some certain places that have no street children because some important characters live there. I live in a place in which there’s no street children, once I move from the area [...]

M: Where do you live?

R: *Al-Waha* in *Nasr City*, where there’re lots of important characters, like three ministers and ambassadors, so no *toktok*⁶ can get into the area, so you feel that it’s well-secured. Then, you can move a little bit to *Sakr Korish* where there’re different kinds of begging. So the government can control the places that it wants to, since the government can’t control the whole areas, except for some certain zones in which they hinder different kinds of begging. The compounds are also void of any beggars or street children, it’s impossible [for street children/beggars to be there]. So, the government is the one who can control this phenomenon if it wants to.
(Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

8.4 Responsibility and solutions

The actors that were most frequently pointed out as responsible for the street children situation, and/or as potential contributors to the solution of the problem, were the government, NGOs and society more broadly, referring to the citizens. Parents and religion was also mentioned in the discussion of responsibility and solutions. The main type of solution suggested by participants was rehabilitation.

⁶ Motorized tricycle, common in relatively poor areas of Cairo

8.4.1 The government

When asked who is responsible for solving the street children situation, the single most common answer among participants in all groups was ‘the government’. Participants argued that the government should provide shelter, rehabilitation and education for street children. It was also argued that they should provide jobs, decent wages and pensions for people in general, as unemployment and poverty among parents were identified as some of the main causes to the phenomenon of street children. However, the call for better employment opportunities were sometimes challenged by other participants who argued that some of the people who are supposedly in need do not actually want to work and that they prefer, or have gotten accustomed, to the lifestyle of the street. Participants also called for free education, since this matter was seen as yet another main cause.

None of the participants had anything positive to say about the government’s performance in dealing with the issue of street children. It was widely held that they do not do anything about the problem, and that they do not care about it.

R: The problem of street children is a very big problem, it is like a ticking time bomb. They say that the government is trying to find solutions, but without any concrete results to the real world. They organize conferences and seminars, and many people speak and share their point of view, but without any concrete results and the problem is exacerbated. Everyday new people, new categories [of people] and new ages join the phenomenon of street children. In fact, this issue has become a huge problem that’s growing every day.

(Group 2: F, AB, 36-55)

M: What do you think that the government does for the society in your viewpoint?

R1: [thinking] [laughing]

M: [laughing]

R1: Nothing but taking money from people through taxes and...

R2: I don’t see that they’re playing any role in this and I’m dissatisfied with this... Just tell me if I’m not right.

R3: Thank God that you’re not a street child, I feel that this is a big thing that you’ve avoided.

R2: But this is related to my family, not the country. I’m not a street child thanks to my family. But the government does nothing for its citizens. Instead it does a lot for itself like promoting its name and so on, but not for our sake.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

Some participants called for a better utilization of the country's resources and potential, and some challenged the notion that Egypt is a poor country, given its various resources.

R: ... Those Ultras guys, don't we take them and make projects with them? We have so much manpower, why aren't we using them?! Our population has young and old people, but mostly 16 or 17 years old, youth age. We are the leading country in tourism and manpower. All the countries in the world wish they had our sun, in Germany they wish they had even a tiny bit of our sun. And we have one third of the world's monuments in Luxor and Aswan and Sharm Al Sheikh.

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

One of the groups discussed at length whether the responsibility should be placed with the government or social/charity organizations. It was argued that since the government do not care about this issue nor take any measures to solve it, it is more realistic to rely on NGOs for a solution. The government was furthermore argued to have more pressing matters to tend to, even though the issue of street children is also an important one. This idea was challenged by participants who argued that the solution to the problem of street children need many measures, and only the government can provide this kind of comprehensive response. NGOs or individuals can only operate on a very limited scale, and are therefore not capable of providing a solution, some participants held. (Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35)

8.4.2 Organizations

Non-governmental organizations, sometimes also referred to as 'social organizations' or 'charities', were brought up by all groups. There were mixed feelings and impressions towards these organizations. They were not always mentioned as a potential solution for the problem, but many times rather discussed and evaluated for the role they are in fact already playing in providing care and shelter for street children. Many participants expressed distrust toward these organizations, and mentioned abuse, money fraud and other type of scams. They also claimed that there is insufficient supervision of shelters and institutions.

R1: They don't make the orphanage to nurture them and care for them, they make money out of orphanages these days.

R2: Like someone opens up an orphanage to make profit out of the donations and not for the sake of orphans. They might give them some simple things but in the end they take all the money.

R1: And they get mistreated as well.

M: Have you seen something like that?

R1: Yes, a lot. I go to a lot of orphanages.

R3: I've seen a video about someone who owns an orphanage and beat up the kids every day, so if there is a kid that lives there he will run away, it would be better for him to beg.

R2: So he wouldn't get beaten up by someone and still he can get money.

M: So there is no authority that supervises such places?

R1: Even if there is, no one will be able to prove anything.

R2: If they know they are being monitored they will take caution so the children wouldn't complain. So they are treated in a good way until the monitoring is over, then everything returns back to normal.

(Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22)

However, in spite of the distrust, participants seemed to regard the organizations as key actors in providing rehabilitation for street children. There were many discussions regarding how they must change and what conditions should be in place for the organizations to successfully rehabilitate street children.

8.4.3 Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation was frequently discussed and appeared to be the most important solution to the problem from many participants' perspectives. Both the government and NGOs were identified as potential or existing providers of rehabilitation. It was often emphasized that the children must be treated well in shelters and institutions, to prevent them from returning to the street. Many participants called for extensive rehabilitation programs, including shelter, education, therapy, vocational training and entertainment/leisure. They also highlighted the need for supervision of the shelters and institutions, to avoid mistreatment.

M: What can the government do about it, since you say it's responsible for this phenomenon?

R1: It can establish an institute where kids would be treated with love, in a human way, and under tight control. That way kids would know they would be treated right.

R2: At least they wouldn't leave the institutes and run back to the street.

R3: No street kid would like to leave the street unless they know they will be treated right.

R1: *Tony Khaleefa* made an episode once about this, where some institutes would cast kids away after a certain age. The kids said they don't know what to do, since they can't cope with the street life anymore, nor do they know where else to go. Even their relatives wouldn't take them in.

R4: They should teach them a profession so that they would find a job.

R1: That's what we are talking about, like when the mom is jailed for example, kids go to juvenile institute, which actually breeds another part of street kids, which means the state is making them.

R4: That's why we say that if the kid finds good food, a profession which would make him some income, maybe through exhibits for their craftsmanship, like 'The Productive Families' exhibits for example.

R5: We keep saying "profession"... They are kids. They don't need a profession when they are little.

R4: They wouldn't go through with education.

R5: Yes, but they must have a life, not work whether instituted or on the streets.

R1: That's exactly the nice treatment I was talking about. That even if they are caught and instituted, they should be put in a very nice place where they are treated very well, with entertainment included: trips, good food, good clothes... A decent life. A near-family life.

R2: There should be multiple-agency supervision.

(Group 2: F, AB, 36-55)

8.4.4 Society

When discussing who is responsible for solving the issue of street children, participants sometimes argued that "we all" must contribute. Sometimes the contribution of society members was understood as giving donations, and sometimes in more general terms as caring about the problem. Some of the groups had discussions on the relative responsibility of the government and the society (often referred to as 'we', referring to the citizens).

R1: This is the responsibility of the government. This is the cause of our problems.

Take the *ashwaiyat*⁷ –who created this problem? This is the government. For 30 years, 30 years you could have built and developed communities in the desert! Instead they

⁷ Urban slums, also referred to as 'informal areas'

left the slums to grow.

R2: But the government didn't build these slums!

R1: How can you say that?!

R2: Who built these slums –the government? No people built them.

R1: Excuse me, are we responsible for the slums –you and I?!

R2: Yes, of course, didn't I [meaning: we, the people, my note] build them?

R1: We built them?!

R2: Yes, who got the cement and steel and started building?

R1: But where was the control and regulation by the government?

R2: What is the bases of these slums?

R1: It's the fault of all government institutions.

R2: No, not all of them! We [Egyptians] are thugs, we don't respect the law. [Brings up the example of the area Nasr City, where the rule that houses could be max four stories high was widely neglected, my note]

R1: This is not the fault of the people, this is corruption, because the government should have overseen that. This is bribery and corruption.

R3: When you were young and wanted to get married, if you could have gone to apply for an apartment and gotten decent housing from the government... But this wasn't the case and everyone just abandoned us, so this is why the slums started. If you would have found alternatives, you wouldn't have done that. Who's responsible for this?

R2: We just choose the easiest way out.

R1: You live in a country and pay taxes, the government should provide solutions.

(Group 6: M, DE, 36-55)

The last quote illustrates two conflicting perspectives where one participant argues that the people should be held responsible for not abiding to the law and for taking “the easiest way out”, while another participant maintains that the government is ultimately responsible for the poverty that the slums exemplify.

8.4.5 Other responsible actors and solutions

As described in a previous section, parents were identified as one of the causes for the issue of street children, and as such, parents were somehow linked to the solution. However, parents' role in solving the problem was mostly seen as a preventative, i.e. their situation, decisions and actions should be changed in order for children not to turn to the street in the first place. Parents were not identified as a key stakeholder in solving the situation for individual children already on the street, nor the phenomenon at large.

Many participants emphasized the importance of teaching children what is haram and halal, but a few went on to explicitly identify religion as an important part of the solution. One participant argued that churches and mosques could contribute in mending deprivations in ethics and behavior among children. It was also argued that children must be taught about religion both in school and by parents.

8.4.6 The future

All participants had a rather gloomy outlook on the future. When asked how they believe that the issue of street children will develop in the future, close to all participants expressed that the situation is deteriorating, as no measures are being taken to turn it around, alternatively, that it will get worse *if* no measures are taken.

M: How do you see the phenomenon of street children developing in the next 20 years?

R: There will be one million, there will be two millions, and there will be a generation not properly educated...

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

M: If it is not getting any better, if it is getting worse, what will be the consequence of this?

R: Robberies will increase, crime will increase, and illiteracy will increase. Generally speaking corruption will increase, and there will be no development.

(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

In the latter quote, this participant expresses that the failure to address and solve the issue of street children will have wider implications for the country and its development.

8.5 Sources of information

When talking about street children, participants drew from first hand experiences or those of family and friends, from observations and from conversations they have had with others. In regards to personal interaction, participants stated that they typically came into contact with street children when they beg, sell tissues or other items, or clean cars, often in traffic or by

traffic lights. Although some participants occasionally give them money, very few had experiences of engaging in conversations with the children. Many stated that they avoid talking to street children due to fear, particularly the female participants, and some had been victimized by street children in different ways (more on this in section 8.4 *Crime*).

While experiences of personal interaction with street children were limited, media was consistently cited as a source of information in all focus groups and by many participants. Notably, most of the examples referred to was fiction, e.g. TV-series and movies. Several participants explicitly expressed their trust in the realism of these series and movies, assuming that they reflect reality. Participants also used TV programs and news as a source of information. The impressions of the media were mixed, some arguing that the children are portrayed in a negative way, while others said that the media try to evoke sympathy for the children. Some argued that TV programs and the news pay very little attention to the issue of street children, unless there has been an incident or crime, in which case street children are easily used as scapegoats. However, many participants made the point that TV programs do sometimes show the hardships street children face, but without providing any solutions to the problem.

R: Nowadays begging is making you gain more money than being employed. If I lead a group of 10 or 20 children who are begging I will gain lots of money, like some movies have shown. And this phenomenon is spreading nowadays, like in the movie about *Belya*, starring *Amr Diab*.
(Group 3: M, AB, 18-22)

R: Media transferred fear for the street kids to us. Movies and TV series always suggest they would steal, betray, or do anything bad as soon as they get the chance.
(Group 2: F, AB, 36-55)

8.6 Public perceptions according to NGO representatives

According to NGO representatives interviewed for the study, the public tend to consider street children as criminals and thugs. (El Manssy 2016, Meshreki 2016, Wadie Ibrahim 2016, El-Badry 2016) According to Wadie Ibrahim (2016), the community tend to blame the children

for being on the street, and they fail to consider the reasons for why the children are there or why they might commit crimes. El Manssy (2016) argues that these sentiments are largely due to a lack of understanding. Since it is very common in Egypt to get beaten up while growing up, people have difficulties understanding why this would cause the children to leave their homes. They do not understand the extent of the abuse that make them run away, she argues. People also tend to be afraid of the street children. “The community doesn’t know them or what to do with them, so we fear them” (El Manssy 2016).

According to Meshreki (2016) and El-Badry (2016), the rejection and maltreatment from the public makes the street children aggressive toward the people they meet. El-Badry argues that the children see the community as responsible for taking away their rights to a decent life, to education and to a living with their parents. They blame the community for all the bad things that have ever happened to them, and thus they tend to hate them. These feelings are amplified by the way they are treated by people, El-Badry argues. “The children on the street are outsiders. They feel that they are not accepted by society, so they hate it.” (Meshreki 2016). This causes the children to behave aggressively, which in turn adds to people’s negative view on them. (Meshreki 2016)

The hostility from the public is illustrated by the strong resistance that some NGOs meet when they open shelters for street children. Representatives from HVS, Banati and Caritas all account for the problems they encounter with neighbors. “In the beginning when we opened the reception center the neighbors used to hate us. They saw us as the cause of the problem, because before they didn’t see the street children that much. But when we gathered them in one place the neighbors saw it as we brought them.” (Labib Abdelsamie 2016) El-Badry (2016) also explains that there is a particular stigma attached to the label ‘street children’. “If we write ‘orphans’ on the sign outside it’s okay, but not if we write ‘street children’. They think that ‘These kids are criminals, they come here to rape us or to kill us!’” (El-Badry 2016). All of these organizations adopt different measures to build relationships with the communities where they are located in order to overcome this hostility.

However, some of the NGO representatives suggest that the children are sometimes also met with sympathy, and that the attitudes from the public are improving. According to El Manssy (2016) and Labib Abdelsamie (2016), there is a change in attitudes and the children are now met by a more accepting and sympathetic public. Meshreki (2016) emphasize that not all

members of the public have a negative perception of the street children. Some understand their situation and feel for them, particularly after having met and talked with them, for instance at the center run by Caritas.

Some of the NGO representatives argue that the public perceptions depend on what they see. In some areas, children fight, are involved in crime and cause problems, and this will contribute to negative attitudes among the community members. (Labib Abdelsamie 2016) However, many of the persons interviewed emphasized the influence of the media in shaping public perceptions. (Labib Abdelsamie 2016, Wadie Ibrahim 2016, El-Badry 2016, El Manssy 2016) “Media portrays them as thieves and thugs. Egyptians love to sit in front of the TV, so this is their main source of information on the issue. It is not from interaction with the children primarily.” (Wadie Ibrahim 2016).

9. Discussion

Throughout the focus group discussions, it was possible to identify a number of representations of the street children. Two of these were what Thomas de Benítez (2011: 11-12, 38) refers to as *'the criminal'* and *'the victim'*. A third representation, which was very prominent in the discussions, were characterized by the questioning of street children's neediness and worthiness, through attributing them with characteristics such as being dishonest, lazy, greedy and immoral in various ways. While comprising various related characterizations, I will here refer to this representation as *'the cheater'*. These three representations connect in different ways to the broader structural and individualistic perspectives outlined in the theoretical framework.

As expected after reviewing previous research, focus group members tended to associate street children with crime to a high degree. The street children were seen as violent, aggressive and dangerous, and it was clear that participants perceived them as a threat. In addition to being perceived as criminals, street children were also seen as a threat to national security and described as *'terrorists'* and *'ticking time bombs'*, due to their involvement in political protests. The NGO representatives confirmed this attitude among the public. Many of the focus group participants explicitly stated that they fear these children, a feeling that for some was reinforced by experiences of being victimized by street children. Participants were notably upset when talking about the street children and crime, and at times outright angry. The combination of fear and anger was clearly illustrated by the participant who accounted for being attacked by a street child, saying that "...these sons of bitches scare citizens." (Group 3: M, AB, 18-22) As noted by Scheingold (1991), crime tend to generate widespread fear and weaken social bonds, and this sense of threat to one's physical security may cause people to assume a volitional approach to crime and criminals.

The suggestion that the Egyptian public see street children as criminal by nature, rather than victims of circumstances (Bibars: 1998: 209), which would indicate a volitional perspective, was, at least in part, challenged by the focus group discussions. While members of the public

are indeed upset, frustrated and scared of the street children and consider them a nuisance in their everyday lives, they frequently added that these children are victims at the end of the day. Many participants expressed a great deal of sympathy for the children and their plight, and commented that they would do the same (e.g. steal or beg) if they were in the children's situation. They furthermore placed a lot of emphasis on the the exploitation of these children, by parents, leaders of gangs and organized crime. Victim-oriented arguments were often used to reject the idea of punishment -since the children are victims of various circumstances beyond their control they should not be held accountable. This representation thus tended to challenge the volitional perspective with its focus on punishment, and to some extent instead highlight structural aspects, such as poverty.

A great deal of mistrust, suspicion and moral condemnation was directed toward the street children during the discussions. It was frequently argued that some people chose the street even though they are not forced to, that it is a lifestyle and that people opt for this because it is easier than undertaking 'real' work (i.e. they are lazy) or because they can make a lot of money this was (i.e. they are greedy). Many assumptions were made in relation to how much money they are making, while it was unclear how participants obtained this supposed information. Many of them referred to movies and TV-series. Organized gangs were also mentioned in this context, as a way to illustrate the 'professionalism' of those engaged in street-based activities, in implied contrast to doing this purely based on need and vulnerability. Participants also brought up lying, faking handicaps or sickness, and dressing up in dirty clothes, to evoke sympathy (i.e. they are dishonest).

In relation to the 'cheater' representation, it is worth noting that participants often moved between talking about street children in particular and people who are street-connected in general, thus including adults. While there were many 'cheater' narratives about adult beggars, for instance, the status of being children often transposed street children who beg to victims. Participants tended to move between a general category of street-connected persons and street children. However, mistrust was also explicitly directed to street children in specific. The 'cheater' narratives stem from an individualistic perspective, seeing the street children/street-connected adults as personally responsible for their situation due to their lack of efforts, their greed and their lack of moral, and as being in their current situation by choice. It is furthermore related to a sense of infringement on the norm of fair play, as described by Scheingold (1991), and thus inspire people to adopt an individualistic/volitional perspective.

The moral condemnation of street children was clearly illustrated by the talk of “decent” and “respectable” street children -those who don’t beg for money and engage in bad behavior such as doing drugs. By implication, those who beg and do drugs are indecent or unrespectable. Street children were often described as “taking the wrong turn” (i.e. making the wrong decisions in life) and their being on the street, begging or engaging in crime was attributed to not having been taught right from wrong. This contradicts the arguments about children being pushed to certain activities and behaviors by their circumstances, as it instead suggests that it is based on poor choices and not knowing right from wrong. This assumption is curious, as one can assume that street children are in fact aware that it is illegal to steal and socially unacceptable to do drugs, for instance. Sometimes, in line with the more victim-oriented narratives, children were exempt from this type of moral condemnation, and judgements were instead made about their parents, who were depicted as selfish, greedy, irresponsible and abusive. While this may often be the case, participants often failed to consider the wider, structural causes behind this.

Participants did not typically adhere to one of the different representations, but often moved between them, challenging or adding to their previous statements. Many expressed various perceptions that were aligned both with individualistic and structural perspectives. For instance, participants reflected structural perspectives when identifying causes such as poverty, unemployment and education, and when holding the government responsible to solve this issue through the provision of jobs, better wages and pensions and free quality education. At the same time, many individualistic arguments, as described above, were presented. Some participants reflected on how individual and structural causes were interrelated, for instance how poverty and lack of education can result in having many children, which the parents cannot provide for, thus resulting in their children ending up on the street. At times the mixing of perspectives appeared contradictory, for instance, people were argued to be on the street due to personal choice and not out of necessity, yet the government was identified as responsible and expected to provide a solution.

Previous research suggests that street children in Egypt tend to be stigmatized and seen as criminals, and this conceptualization was also prominent in the focus groups. According to Thomas de Benítez (2011: 11-12, 38), this tends to be associated with policy approaches that are correctional or repression-oriented. However, the focus group discussions revealed a strong rehabilitation focus, rather than calls for punishment. Though it is worth noting that NGOs

reported to be met by strong resistance from the local communities when they actually try to provide rehabilitation for street children. Perhaps it is easier to embrace the idea in general than in one's own neighborhood. Participants had very little faith in correctional institutions and clearly stated that this will only serve to make the situation worse. The dismissal of punishment as a response may be related to the very low levels of trust for the justice system and police in general, which was expressed during discussions. The view on the government was likewise marked by a high degree of distrust, yet it was identified as having the main responsibility. Organizations were also seriously questioned, due to accusations of money embezzlement and abuse, while at the same time perceived as an important actor in providing rehabilitation for the street children. Given the very low trust for practically all stakeholders related to this issue, it is hardly surprising that participants had very pessimistic outlooks on the future.

Albeit not punitive in nature, rehabilitation still belongs to an individualistic perspective as it addresses the individual and its improvement, rather than structural conditions. Although participants argued that the government must take measures to deal with structural problems such as unemployment, poverty and inadequate education, rehabilitation was more frequently discussed as a solution. It should be considered as a possibility, that participants felt more comfortable talking about this type of solution, rather than engaging in very political and sensitive discussions. However, criticism and dissatisfaction with the government was also expressed during the sessions.

The perceptions of the public, as demonstrated in the focus group discussions, can be seen as both reinforcing and challenging the criminalizing approach taken by the Egyptian state. The representation of street children as 'criminals' contributes to negative or even hostile attitudes towards them and adds to their stigmatization. This may also be reinforced by the representation of street children as 'cheaters', as it portrays them as less needy and thus less worthy of sympathies. As Wernhem (2004) argues, this can contribute to a hostile political and political climate, as well as impact negatively on an individual level. Public perceptions of street children as 'criminals' or 'cheaters' may influence the way they are treated by police officers, judges, and other officials that they encounter. Furthermore, the combined effect of being treated as outcasts by both the authorities and the general public will inevitably make the children feel excluded and targeted. As noted by several NGO representatives, the rejection and maltreatment from the public makes the street children aggressive toward the people they meet, which in turn reinforces negative perceptions of them, thus resulting in a vicious circle.

However, members of the public also challenge the repressive responses by the state. First, views of street children as ‘victims’ connote sympathy for them. Secondly, it does not appear likely that the Egyptian public would applaud the kind of severe police oppression and drastic measures toward street children seen in other countries -such as Brazil- as the public tend to have a very negative impression of the police in general. Many “ordinary” people have also experienced the brutality of the Egyptian police, and based on the focus group discussions they did not seem to perceive the role of the police in this matter as constructive.

As demonstrated, focus group participants drew on both individualistic and structural perspectives. Although individualistic/volitional approaches tended to be centered on rehabilitation rather than punishment, the focus on explanations located at the individual level can distract attention from the broader structural factors that are driving the occurrence and increase of street children. A focus on rehabilitation, albeit necessary for individual street children, risk to amount to firefighting, if structural underlying factors are not simultaneously considered and addressed. As noted by Scheingold (1991), some governments are reluctant to approach crime from a structural perspective as it entails broad structural transformations that are costly, and that might also be ideologically problematic for certain states. Assuming a structural perspective on the issue of street children thus comes with the challenge of achieving bigger political transformations in order to solve the problem. As illustrated by the 2011 revolution, Egyptians are not foreign to the idea of protesting against social injustices and striving for profound changes. The discussion of the prospects of yet another uprising is beyond the scope of this thesis, however.

Egypt’s population is growing and 37,1% are under 17 years old. (Unicef 2010: 5) How they are cared for and educated will determine the future development of Egypt. If the Egyptian state continues to address the issue of street children with symptomatic remedies, characterized by repression, instead of proactive solutions targeting the root causes, the problem will continue to grow and Egypt will face a generation of uneducated, traumatized people with aggressive behavior, alienated from society and without any prospects in life. This will exacerbate the already severe poverty in the country and obstruct a democratic development with equal citizen rights, rule of law and solid law and justice institutions. The already low levels of trust for the government, the police and the justice system, will most probably continue to decline.

10. Conclusions and further research

Three broad representations of street children could be identified in the focus group discussions: ‘the criminal’, ‘the victim’, and ‘the cheater’. These illustrated the various perceptions and feelings members of the public hold in relation to street children in Cairo, including fear, sympathy, moral judgement and indignation, and distrust. The perceptions of members of the public proved to be complex, often simultaneously embracing individualistic and structural perspectives, and at times in contradictory ways. In spite of a strong tendency to view street children as criminals, the punitive values typically associated with individualistic/volitional perspectives were practically absent. Instead, suggestions regarding solutions to the problem were largely rehabilitation focused. The government was identified as having the main responsibility. However, focus group participants expressed a high degree of mistrust of the government’s willingness to address the problem. While the focus on rehabilitation implies that members of the public sympathizes with the street children, it is crucial that such individual solutions do not distract attention from the structural changes required to solve the root causes to this phenomenon. If the Egyptian state continues to criminalize and deal with street children in repressive ways –and particularly if this is approach is reinforced by hostile attitudes from the public- street children will remain a marginalized group in society. This will have severe consequences for Egypt’s development, as it will create an uneducated and severely traumatized segment of the population. This will undoubtedly exacerbate poverty and obstruct the development of democratic cornerstones such as equal citizen rights and a solid, genuine justice system.

Several relevant topics for further research were revealed through the study. During interviews with NGO representatives, it was argued that the public perceptions of street children vary between different social classes. A study on differences in perceptions based on this, as well as other characteristics, would serve to gain a more nuanced picture of the public's relation to street children. Furthermore, the references to media, and notably movies and TV series, was very prominent during focus group discussions. Further research should be conducted regarding the impact of media on public perceptions, as part of an exploration of how perceptions are formed.

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FOCUS GROUPS

Group 1: F, C1C2, 18-22, Cairo, 2016-04-28

Group 2: F, AB, 36-55, Cairo, 2016-04-28

Group 3: M, AB, 18-22, Cairo, 2016-04-28

Group 4: F, DE, 23-35, Cairo, 2016-04-30

Group 5: M, C1C2, 23-35, Cairo, 2016-04-30

Group 6: M, DE, 36-55, Cairo, 2016-04-30

Appendix 1: Interview guide, NGO representatives

GENERAL

- Information about the of study
- Tell me about _____'s work with street children in Cairo.

CAUSES

- What do you see as the causes of the street children phenomena here?

PUBLIC

- What, to your understanding, are the attitudes and opinions of the public to street children here in Cairo?
- How are the street children treated by the public? What do the children tell you? What are their thoughts on the relation to the public?
- What do you think shapes the public's perception of street children? What are their sources of information?
- How are street children portrayed in the media?

STATE

- What is, in your impression, the state's approach to this issue?
- How are the laws in relation to street children?
- How is the police dealing with street children?
- What kind of institutions are available for the children?

SOLUTIONS

- How do you think individual street children should be dealt with?
- What, in your opinion, are the solutions for the street children issue more broadly?

Appendix 2: Interview guide, focus groups

INTRODUCTION

- Introduce ourselves
- Purpose of the study: Examine the public's thoughts and opinions on street children in Cairo.
- Result in a Master's thesis for the University of Lund, Sweden
- All participants will be confidential in the thesis
- Recording: in order to transcribe and translate
- Everyone ok with these conditions? (**Consent**)
- Any questions?

ABOUT THE SESSION

- Purpose is for you to have a discussion with each other.
- Some broad questions + some follow-up questions to clarify or get more details, but in general a free and informal conversation.
- Important: There is no right or wrong – want to hear your thoughts and opinions. All opinions are equally valuable. You can agree or disagree with each other.
- Want to hear everyone's thoughts, so let's try to speak one at a time and hear each other out.

General	What are your thoughts about street children? <i>(Take notes of the topics that comes up, to revisit later. Ex poverty, parents, drugs)</i>
Exposure	Do you meet or see street children in your everyday life?
	-Where? (area of residence, on way to work, etc?)
	-What do you see them doing?
	-What do you think and feel when you see them?
	-Do you ever interact with them in any way?
Causes	Why do you think we have all of these street children?
Responsibility	Who has the main responsibility for this situation?
*Crime	Are the children engaging in criminal activities to your understanding?
	-Why do you think they engage in crime?
	-What kinds of crimes do they commit?
	-What counts as crimes?
	-How should street children who commit crimes be dealt with?

*Poverty	Why are they poor?
	Who is responsible for this?
State	What are your thoughts about how the government is dealing with this issue?
Media	<i>-Show news article about Torbini case-</i>
	Do you remember this case? What were your thoughts hearing/reading about this?
	Have you heard/read about other cases or news relating to street children?
	What kind of stories or news about street children do the media usually tell?
Police	What are your thoughts on how the police are dealing with the street children?
	How do you think they should deal with them?
Solutions	How can the issue of street children be solved?

* Follow up after participants have mentioned it

Appendix 3: Socioeconomic quotas

(Source : Ipsos Egypt 2015)

SEC	Profile
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 15,000 EGP/month income • Holders of University degree and above • Working Status: Member of the top general management, businessmen, merchants (employers with more than five employees), senior government officials, professionals (requiring qualifications of degree standards: doctors, etc)
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 10,001 and 15,000 EGP/month income • Holders of University degree and above • Working Status: Member of the top general management, businessmen, merchants (employers with more than five employees), senior government officials, government administrators, professionals (requiring qualifications of degree standards: doctors, etc)
C1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 7,001 and 10,00 EGP/month income • Completed Secondary/Diploma, up to University • Working Status: Middle management (including junior executives, senior supervisors, etc), professionals (requiring qualification of degree standards) working as employees but with less than 5 years' experience, senior technicians and professionals without university education of a degree standard, middle government officials etc.
C2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 4,001 and 7,000 EGP/month income • Finished primary or part of secondary • Working Status: Small shop owners with no employees, junior government employees, junior (mainly office) employees in the private sector (clerks, typists, office assistants, book-keepers, etc), production supervisors and foremen, primary education teachers, paramedical staff (without university degree, e.g. nurses, laboratory assistants, etc).
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 1,501 and 4,000 EGP/month income • Finished primary or part of it • Working Status: Soldiers, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, small scale farmers and fishermen, doormen, servants/messengers, Street vendors, unemployed.
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 1500 EGP/month income • Finished part of primary, illiterate • Working Status: Soldiers, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, small scale farmers and fishermen, doormen, servants/messengers, street vendors, unemployed.