

Children on the street: an ethnographic perspective from the sustainability of ethics and values. case punto Fijo, falcon state

Abstract

The study centers its interest in the understanding of the phenomenon of children in the streets in the Urb. "Las Virtudes", "Las Virtudes" Recreational Center, Punto Fijo, Falcón State, Venezuela, in correspondence with the training in values that from their homes have been obtained, circumstance that, potentially, would cause some type of damage in their physical, moral and psychological integrity. Research is inserted within the interpretive paradigm, with the use of ethnography and hermeneutics as methodical traditions. The informants are four (04) characters linked directly, with the problem addressed, whose identities remain anonymous due to their status as minors. The interview and the Participatory Observation were chosen as techniques for the collection of the information, being the instruments the Open Questionnaire and the Observation Guide. The results indicate that these children go to the area described above, escaping from the reality in their homes; This situation is experienced throughout the country motivated, largely, the lack of responsibility and sense of commitment of parents with their children.

Keywords: children on the street, values, ethics, morals, punto Fijo, ethnography

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Introduction

The "Las Virtudes" Shopping Center located in the city of Punto Fijo, Carirubana municipality, Falcon state, Venezuela, is currently converted into an escape area for children and adolescents, the permanent presence of a significant number of them is evident, possibly motivated by the lack of love, solidarity, honesty and, above all, the example of morality that their parents and representatives have been able to leave in each of these little ones, a circumstance that leads to the consumption of drugs, alcohol, rape, robbery, pregnancy precocious, diseases, prostitution, sexual relations at a young age, and even the practice of abuse between them. In the current legal framework of Venezuela, there is a set of legal instruments that protects minors, among which stands out the Organic Law for the Protection of Children and Adolescents in its *Article 25. Right to know their parents and to be cared for by them*. "All children and adolescents, regardless of their affiliation, have the right to know their parents and be cared for by them, except when it is contrary to their best interest". Thus, parents have the duty to ensure the physical and moral integrity of their children, a circumstance that at first sight is not perceived in the case of the area under study. Similarly, Article 50. Sexual and Reproductive Health expresses: "All children and adolescents have the right to be informed and educated according to their development, in sexual and reproductive health for sexual conduct and responsible, healthy, voluntary and without risk.

The State must guarantee sexual and reproductive health care services and programs for children and adolescents: they must be confidential and accessible from an economic point of view that protects their right to private life, based on free consent and in timely and truthful information. In the case of adolescents over 14 years of age, they have the right to request for themselves the reception of care and protection services by the competent bodies in the matter. The existence of a legal framework that protects these children in terms of the possibility of leading a sexual life in due time and preventing them through different initiatives is palpable, however, today these infants follow harmful modeling from their parents, family and friends, affecting in many cases their integral health. In this sense,

the presence of girls and boys having sexual encounters late at night in the area under study is observed, a worrying reality that ends up completely disrupting their future, determined, among other factors, by the lack of values and bad examples gestated from the family environments themselves. Article 51. Protection Against Alcoholic, Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances states: "the State, with the active participation of society, must guarantee prevention policies and programs against the illicit use of alcoholic, narcotic and psychotropic substances. Likewise, it must ensure permanent programs of special attention for the recovery of dependent children and adolescents and consumers of these substances". Today there are people who, with an evident lack of moral character, provide alcohol and illicit substances to these minors for their consumption, specifically in the CCR "Las Virtudes" such a reality is palpable, causing irreparable damage to physical health and their morals.

This article exposes the existence of a legal architecture in Venezuela designed for the comprehensive protection of minors, however, the absence of a regulatory framework on the prohibition of spending the night without the accompaniment of adults in establishments where they can purchase products that harm their health is evident. health and incite violence. In this sense, the research corresponds to the possibility of understanding from the sustainability of the values the background present in the homes of those children who roam the streets late at night, specifically in the aforementioned recreational and commercial space. From the epistemological perspective, the research has an interpretative character, intentional in the possibility of revealing the triggering factors of such a problem from within the home itself. The approach is proceeded from the qualitative methodical traditions of hermeneutics and ethnography. Montañón¹ refers that "the term hermeneutic comes from the Greek which means to declare, announce, clarify and, finally, translate What indicates that something is made understandable or brought to understanding". Thus, hermeneutics will be in charge of providing methods for the correct interpretation of the meaning of the moods and emotional states that emerge in children who visit this area, in correspondence with the recognition of the triggering factors of such a complex reality.

To advance in the comprehensive exercise of the problematic outlined, ethnography is also used. Arnal and De Rincón² explain that “it is a qualitative research method that seeks to describe people, their customs and their culture”, this entails the need to get involved with each of them to describe the meaning they give them. they assign to the life circumstances they share on a daily basis. In the context of the research itself, the aim is to create an image as close as possible to the reality shared daily by the studied group. This implies living with the children who are on the street until they become one more protagonist of this event., with the certain possibility of developing a reliable interpretation of the meaning of the actions that each one of these children undertakes, as well as the repercussions caused in them.

Literary review

In the conceptual significance of the phenomenon of children on the street as an ethical-social problem, it is based on the criteria expressed on the Humanium website:³ “They are minors who live (or survive) on the streets. Many times they grow in public landfills, train stations or under the bridges of big cities. Due to the conflicts they have with their families, these children do not want or cannot return home”. In the same way, it is argued that the reasons why a child must or decides to live on the street are varied. The combination of family, economic, social and political factors plays an important role in their situation and, therefore, it is very difficult to pinpoint one or more causes definitively. However, the children who have been asked affirm that family, poverty, abuse or war, among others, are frequently reasons for taking to the streets. The United Nations Children’s Fund-UNICEF,⁴ establishes two categories among children submerged in

this condition, according to the family circumstances from which they come:

Children “on” the street are the largest group. They work on the streets but maintain close relationships with their families. The majority (approximately 75%) maintain their family ties, and although they spend a lot of time away from them, they feel that they have a home. The girls and boys “from” the street (approximately 25%) are homeless and have broken family ties due to instability or disorganization in their families of belonging. In some cases they have been abandoned by them and in other cases they themselves decided to leave. They eat, sleep, work, make friends, play in the street and have no choice but to fight for their lives alone.

It is a living condition that violates the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights, since far from enjoying the right to an adequate standard of living for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, children living on the streetsit suffers the cumulative effects of poverty, hunger, the breakup of families, social isolation, and often violence and abuse. Forced to fend for themselves before acquiring a personal identity or maturing, and because they do not have the stability necessary to achieve self-confidence, nor the skills or education required to face the rigors it imposes on them life, girls and boys living on the streets are in serious danger of falling into prostitution, drug use and various forms of criminal behavior. These activities are sometimes the only means of survival available to them. Because they have not usually dealt with adults in whom they can place their trust, girls.

According to the reviewed literature, among the fundamental rights deprived of these children are:

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| Right to Food | Street children often do not have access to a healthy or sufficient diet. Sometimes, they don't even have food, because living on the streets they don't have the means to produce it, nor do they have the money to buy it. |
| Right to health | The health of children who grow up on the streets is strongly compromised. They do not have access to sanitary facilities and are often dirty and exposed to different diseases due to lack of hygiene. Without a family to care for them, these minors must take care of themselves. |
| Education rights | Street children do not receive an education, not enjoying the same opportunities as other children. In reality, because they cannot count on professional training, they are prevented from finding employment and changing their situation. |
| Right to Non-Discrimination | Seen as marginal, street youth are often victims of discrimination. Adults have prejudices that stigmatize them and, consequently, they are associated with the dangers of the streets, making the process of reintegration into society extremely difficult for these children. |

Conceived from this perspective, it translates into a problem strongly associated with the concepts of poverty and social exclusion: this is how Balam⁵ perceives it:

As such, it becomes a public order problem that involves very young human beings who spend all day wandering the streets without visible family ties, in most cases lacking personal documents such as birth certificates. They do not have their right to food, education and health services, legal representation, or the right to a dignified life guaranteed, not counting on the protection of a family or State instances that guarantee access to themselves. This process of marginalization makes them socially excluded as they find themselves prevented from accessing the set of fundamental rights that, based on family and state obligations, must be guaranteed to every human being, especially in a stage of life as sensitive as childhood.

In the same order of consideration, Rodríguez and Mora,⁶ express concern about the use of certain statements that categorize the behavior and life circumstances of these young people, which end up promoting a greater lack of protection for them by becoming subject to a process of segregationist stigmatization regarding the right they have to be considered individuals endowed with the same recognitions enjoyed by children who do not share their lifestyle, in this regard

they maintain that: UNICEF has pointed out that the use of the term “street child” is problematic, as it can be used as a label to stigmatize them. He affirms that one of the biggest problems they face is that society, in general, considers them a danger and a source of criminal behavior. They highlight that many of the boys and girls who live or work on the streets have adopted the term because they consider that it offers them a feeling of identity and belonging.

This body that worldwide dictates the policies for the treatment and care of the problem, establishes the framework of theoretical consideration for the scientific-formal understanding of it:

1. Children who live on the street, generally separated from their families, in extreme conditions of vulnerability and defenselessness. These can be grouped into those who live and spend the night on the street, away from the family home; They have broken their family ties or these are very weak and develop survival strategies on the street, including marginal income activities such as begging and certain jobs in the informal economy. Others have fled their homes, often as a result of psychological and physical abuse or sexual abuse (2006, pp. 40-41).

- II. Children and adolescents under the age of 18, whose family ties are weak or non-existent. They make the street their main habitat and develop survival strategies in it, a fact that exposes them to different types of risks. Street minors are an urban phenomenon, they are located mainly in large cities (1995, p. 227).

In this sense, the need to establish distinctions between three groups has been suggested:

- I. Children in danger, who live in the house but are likely to flee from it.
- II. Street children, who live on the street more or less permanently.
- III. Children on the street, who spend part of the day on the street, generally working for their parents.

The main causes or triggers of the problem, according to the diversity of criteria of those who have been addressing it in different contexts, can be summarized as:

- I. Extreme poverty, mistreatment, abandonment or rejection by their families⁷
- II. Poverty, social exclusion, family situation, high rates of school failure and work in children and adolescents.⁸
- III. Poverty as the main contributor to child labor.⁹
- IV. Itinerant child labor is a dangerous activity, involving long working hours, with exposure to multiple risk factors.¹⁰
- V. The educational level of the mother and the educational status of the child as determinants of the child's work in the street.¹¹
- VI. The majority of street children work on the street to bring resources to their families.¹²
- VII. Drug use among street children. The drug most used by these children was tobacco, followed by alcohol and marijuana use.¹³
- VIII. Economic problems, abuse, drugs, orphanhood, school boredom, loss of family, friendships, adventure, violence in the area of residence, among others, (INE, 2003-2004)
- IX. Exclusion, large-scale poverty, deficient management of public affairs, abandonment, lack of education, among others.¹⁴

Faced with this sad reality that reflects the moral deterioration of our society, as well as the situation of social exclusion to which street children in Venezuela are condemned, it is necessary to study this problem, considering its special importance for the various political actors. and social involved in the design and execution of effective policies, programs or projects that provide a solution to this crucial public health problem: "The issue of children with experience of life on the street is one of the many typical problems of our current reality. Typical because it is a problem of a social nature that includes many levels of society in its gestation and maintenance. Because it is built, interfered with, traversed by the perceptions coming from different sectors of the country; perceptions that carry with them an important subjective weight. And because it is a problem with so many interrelated variables that it seems to defy any comprehension and unilateral intervention".¹⁵

Consequently and in the context of the need to undertake corrective actions given the seriousness of the problematic situation described in different regions of the nation, Rodríguez and Mora⁶ argue that:

The existence of the NSC in the country constitutes a public problem that requires effective, efficient, effective and immediate

policies on the part of the Venezuelan State. These must be the product of a broad and inclusive study that considers not only the participation, contribution and experience accumulated by various public and private institutions that have worked in the area, but also that of children and adolescents with experience in life in the street. Additionally, they must guarantee high quality in the services offered, wide coverage and consider from the initial phase the definition of objectives susceptible to measurement, monitoring and evaluation.

Therefore, the moment is opportune to reiterate both to the State and to society, that the condition of lack of protection in which children and adolescents in street situations find themselves, does not diminish their ability to demand and enjoy rights as any other citizen; They are Subjects of Rights and society is obliged to be co-responsible for their protection. Likewise, the State must ensure that there are personalized and specialized plans, policies, programs, entities and services so that minors in street situations, from an approach based on the Rights of the Child, as established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the National Constitution and the LOPNNA, can access basic services that guarantee their rights to an adequate standard of living, health, education, recreation, sports, among others. In addition, the Venezuelan State must ensure that the System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents offers them specialized services on the street, in which trained professionals participate, with a solid knowledge of the reality faced by this population.¹⁶

Methodology

The research responds to the paradigminterpretive, focused from the sustainability of ethics and values as the main foundation in the training of children and in the exercise of their daily actions. In this case, it is about understanding the causal factors of the situation experienced by the infants present in the area surrounding the CC "Las Virtudes", located in the urbanization of the same name during the night hours; where, from Kuhn's epistemological conception, this modality of approach "is based on a knowledge process in which there is an interaction between subject and object, it does not intend to make generalizations based on the results; its purpose is to deepen our knowledge in understanding the behavior of the people studied"; This is achieved when interpreting the meaning of the acts and thoughts from the understanding of what has been experienced, from the prolonged interaction with each of the protagonists of the event studied. The research is located within the qualitative approach; in it there are shared convictions to follow to obtain the representation that is aspired to; Arnal and Del Rincón² argue that "ethnography is a qualitative research method that seeks to describe people, their customs, and their culture." In this particular, it seeks to answer the questions concisely, through the collection of information from testimonials in their own context; thus advancing in the recognition of the meaning that children give to the reality they experience and the background that underlies this problem.

In this perspective, the deep and prolonged involvement with these young people, children and adolescents is proposed to experience the circumstances that accompany the situation addressed; This implies being constantly present in the very context of the event to perceive directly what each child feels or lives in their homes, the reasons that cause their presence in that area late at night, as well as the experiences they obtained. during such experiences, at a time when it would not normally be expected to see minors wandering the streets, carrying out acts that are inconsistent with their status as children and adolescents. They are assumed as a technique for collecting informationParticipatory Observation; Guasch¹⁷ argues that it is the "information gathering technique that consists of observing

while participating in the activities of the group under investigation. It becomes a participant when the researcher is included in the group or observed phenomenon to study it from within. The interview is used in the same way; Ferrer¹⁸ states that “it is a technique for gathering information through a professional conversation, with which, in addition to acquiring information about what is being investigated, it is important from an educational point of view; The results to be achieved in the mission depend to a large extent on the level of communication between the researcher and the participants in it”.

Based on the use of these techniques The Observation Guide and the Questionnaire with open questions are considered as instruments for the collection of information, according to the requirements expressed in the formulation of the questions and purposes of the investigation. The operationalization of such procedures implies the need to adequately choose the subjects to be consulted; with whom a relationship of trust must be established so that they open up and express their inner feelings to the researchers. Thus, a set of criteria were considered in the selection of key informants, namely:

- I. Be frequent attendees to the area where the phenomenon studied is evident.
- II. Manifest willingness to share personal information about the reality they experience.
- III. Young children and adolescents of both sexes in compatible circumstances spending the night on the street late at night.

Consequently, the following informants were chosen:

- I. Anonymous (INCE student) under 16 years of age who attends the CCR “Las Virtudes” at night. He states that he is involved in: the consumption of drugs and alcoholic beverages.
- II. Anonymous (6th grade student) under the age of 10. He frequents the CCR “Las Virtudes” at night. He engages in the consumption of alcoholic beverages and morally inappropriate behavior with other children.
- III. Anonymous (8th grade student), under 14 years of age. He has sexual relations with a 17-year-old teenager.
- IV. Anonymous (7th grade student), under 13 years of age who sells his body for money.

Results and discussion

The focus of attention of the research is the problem of children on the street within the Urbanization “Las Virtudes” in the city of Punto Fijo, Carirubana municipality, Falcón state, Venezuela, viewed from the absence of values and ethics as triggering factors. Consequently, the satisfaction of the requirements implied by the scientific treatment of a problem of this nature implies the need to respond to a set of concerns related to the meaning that these children assign to the fact of spending the night at night in the streets adjacent to the shopping center of the same name, as well as the understanding of the family and cultural circumstances that explain the occurrence of such a detrimental event for the physical and mental health of its protagonists and of society as a whole. Based on the sustainability of ethics and values as the main foundations in the training of Boys, Girls and Adolescents, the Organic Law for the Protection of Children and Adolescents -LONAP- in Article 2: it understands by child any person under twelve years of age and by adolescent any person with twelve years or more and less than eighteen years of age. This implies that an individual under the age of 18 is considered within the minority parameter, for which there is a legal basis that protects them in order to protect their health and integrity.

Nowadays, the situation that lives in the homes, motivated, to a large extent, by the lack of attention of the parents towards the children, has caused a serious damage in children and adolescents. This is evident in the “Las Virtudes” Shopping and Recreational Center, located in the homonymous urbanization, on Avenida 6 of “Comunidad Cardón” of “Punto Fijo” (Falcón State), a site that according to the data provided in its magazine, opened its doors almost two decades ago as a family recreational space; However, today it has become a place that is highly visited by minors late at night. This environment has ceased to represent a safe place as a space for recreation, to become an escape area from prevailing situations. in their respective homes, with the approach to inappropriate activities for their age. Since 2017, there has been evidence of the massive influx of minors in that area committing illegal and immoral acts, despite the existence of legal foundations and institutions that, formally, protect this type of population, a circumstance that Not only has it been maintained over time to the present day, but it has spread to neighboring areas such as the “La Puerta de Maraven” Urbanization, which at this time has become an important commercial emporium in the state, but also the seat of a considerable conglomerate. of children and adolescents in conditions of begging under the apparent performance of precarious and informal work activities, a situation that has caused the exacerbation of this disturbing problem.

The LOPNA in Article 32. Right to Personal Integrity, states that all children and adolescents have the right to personal integrity; understanding physical, mental and moral integrity. The right of the child is the guarantee of being able to manifest appropriate behavior in the society where they live; This is how Article 50 expresses it. Sexual and Reproductive Health: “All children and adolescents have the right to be informed and educated, according to their development, in sexual and reproductive health for sexual conduct and responsible, healthy, voluntary and without risk. Unfortunately today the absence of values has led minors to commit immoral acts such as sexual intercourse at a young age, early pregnancy and exhibitionism in the case of girls and adolescents.

The consumption of alcohol, narcotic and psychotropic substances was also evidenced, damaging their nervous system and affecting academic performance, leading them to inappropriate behaviors. The aforementioned legal instrument maintains in Article 51. Protection Against Alcoholic, Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances, that the State, with the active participation of society, must guarantee policies and prevention programs against the illicit use of alcoholic, narcotic and psychotropic substances. Likewise, it must ensure permanent programs of special care for the recovery of dependent children and adolescents and consumers of these substances. Circumstance that in light of the reality shared by the researchers with the protagonists of the event studied. On the empirical level of the investigation carried out from the year previously referred to and supported by the account offered by the 16-year-old informant, he states that his actions are carried out motivated by the fact that the parents are never present at home, being raised by a grandmother and his older brother, who also consumes drugs, says that he follows in his footsteps regardless of being questioned since he feels satisfied with his way of proceeding, which implies the occurrence of imitation of a negative modeling fostered by the absence of maternal and paternal figures. Constituting today one of the most repetitive causal factors in the triggering of the problem, evidenced in the high number of people who have chosen to emigrate abroad.

On the other hand, the 13-year-old informant expresses a feeling of sadness in his eyes, expressing being sexually abused at 7 years of age, for which he makes the decision to offer his body in exchange for

the money that his parents do not offer him. , reports that her mother is an alcoholic and her father is out of the country, for which she does not receive any care, growing up, consequently, in a dysfunctional family without the presence of values and ethical principles; alone with a mother detached from her attention. In this case, the previous circumstance is repeated, aggravated by the occurrence of events linked to an ethical deterioration in the adults with whom the home life is established; situation that leads to devastating effects on the overall health of adolescents. In the same way, there is the testimony of a minor under 14 years of age, who has sexual relations with a 17-year-old adolescent in that area; She herself manifests this behavior as a mechanism of personal satisfaction, since she does not feel that she is committing an inappropriate act; Responding to the question about her home formation, she recounts that her parents think that she is staying at the house of fellow students, not daring to tell them the truth because they are violent people. In this case, the presence of indifferent parents and little interest in transmitting values to the young woman can be evidenced, the simple fact of lying represents the frequent practice of inappropriate behavior without taking into account the damage it causes to her life.

In relation to the minor under 10 years of age used to consuming alcohol gestated in the tavern of that Shopping Center with the support of adults, he says that it is his way of having fun because his parents are frequently traveling. He shows unfriendly behavior and sometimes refuses to respond to concerns and resorts to disrespectful and even risky behaviors, so much so that at some point he even incited other minors to violence, carrying a bladed weapon, at the same time as He drank alcoholic beverages and smoked cigarettes. In this case, the approach to the habit of alcoholism is evidenced as an escape route from the state of abandonment to which they feel subjected at home due to the constant physical absence of their parents, this being a reality that is repeated in the majority of young people. Interviewees. In all these cases it was possible to demonstrate serious disorders in the behavior of the children, both in the moral and social order that borders on criminal behavior at such an early age; With this action, severe damage is caused in the ethical, physical and mental order that will cause consequences that are difficult to overcome in the rest of their lives, in some cases due to not having the guidance and training of the family environment, and in others due to continuing the detrimental modeling of people who encourage an approach to this lifestyle, where vice, sexual promiscuity and crime translate into life parameters internalized as convenient by these children due to the family experiences that they have had to go through in their lives. short years of life.¹⁹⁻²⁵

Conclusion

The most consistent conclusive idea that emerges from the empirical evidence collected during the experience lived with the protagonists of the investigation, is represented by the occurrence of an undesirable and detrimental event for the integral health of a group of children living in the area, a situation that requires awareness and corrective actions by the State, the community, teachers and, above all, parents and representatives of each of these actors in the shortest time possible, as it constitutes a delicate situation where the their life and mental health. Within the reality addressed, it was possible to feel a considerable number of children and adolescents submerged in this circumstance, externalizing immoral and vandal behaviors. It is unfortunate to observe the situation that children live on the street today, it reflects the need to promote a deep collective reflection on the urgency of instilling ethical values and a deep-rooted social sensitivity within homes and educational units, based on the conviction that any training process Significant begins in the family

environment itself; later the school has to strengthen them to fully and safely incorporate them into adequate sociability; being the State responsible for guaranteeing the protection of their fundamental rights, from the operationalization of legal instruments and tangible actions that tend to strengthen the responsibility of parents and the immediate environment of children to guarantee their protection and care during the entire childhood stage, guaranteeing their removal from lifestyles that are counterproductive to their overall health; This would prosecute the correction of the deviations that were felt throughout the development of this investigative process in such a neuralgic topic for the well-being of the population as a whole. Within child development, it is essential to reinvent the existing normative references to enable, through an adequate process of collective self-criticism, the development of processes of social awareness at all levels about the urgent need to transform current mental schemes into a reality that in what Morality should touch us all, especially from our habitual positions of indifference, insensitivity and even false concerns that, in many cases, only project the externalization of behaviors more interested in showing ourselves to others as altruistic beings, when in reality little is done. it does in the concretion of initiatives channeling effective responses, this in all the actors involved, be it family, school, civil and public organizations.

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Conflicts of interest

The autor declares there is no conflict of interest.

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