



Analysis the Samusocial Organisation's Actions for the Social Inclusion and Development of Street Children in Mali

Abstract: According to data taken from Samusocial's annual report, **2,437** Children and Young People Living on the Streets, including **1,154** boys, **1,139** girls and young mothers, and **144** babies under the age of **5**, were cared for in 2024. Despite the various national and international conventions and laws signed and ratified by the Malian government, the streets of major cities are increasingly home to children and young people. The right to education, to belong to a family and healthy food have become luxuries for these homeless people. Day and night, children are often seen roaming the streets and public spaces in search of food, clothing and shelter. Various reasons push them to live on the streets, far from their families. They are exposed to all kinds of violence and exploitation because they are left to fend for themselves in highly precarious conditions. These forms of violence include the exploitation for work without compensation, sexual abuse and corporal punishment of some by others. This situation contributes to the continuous rise in urban insecurity and juvenile delinquency. This study provides an analysis of the initiatives undertaken by Samusocial Mali (the emergency social service) aimed at promoting the social inclusion of the street children.

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Article History:

Received Date : Aug 06, 2025

Revised Date : Aug 20, 2025

Accepted Date : Aug 20, 2025

Published Date : Aug 26, 2025

Keywords: *Action, Samusocial, Social Inclusion, Street Children, Mali.*

1.Introduction:

Theoretically, most national and international legal instruments are ratified and adopted by the Government of Mali. Numerous texts, including the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and Malian laws from 2001 and 2002, provide the legal framework for child protection in Mali (CNDH, 2022). The State also has a national social protection policy in Mali, which is based on four key functions: preventing risks, protecting vulnerable individuals, promoting their reintegration, and strengthening social justice (Unicef, 2023). However, this system remains largely reactive rather than preventive. Article 60 of Ordinance No. 02-062/P-RM of June

5, 2002, establishing the Child Protection Code of Mali, states: « A "street child" is defined as any minor under the age of 18, living in an urban area, who spends all their time on the streets, whether working or not, and who has little or no contact with their parents, guardian, or any person responsible for their care or protection. The street constitutes the child's sole and permanent living environment, as well as the source of their livelihood. The term "street" refers to any place other than a family home or care institution, such as public or private buildings, courtyards, or sidewalks» (Journal Officiel de la Republique du Mali, 2002). Nonetheless, the situation of children remains precarious in terms of their development, as many do not enjoy their right to protection as children (EDUCO, 2017). According to data collected by the Support Module Team (EMA), the number of children and young people living on the streets (CYLS) increases each year, as shown in the following figure (CDI, 2024).

2.Literature Review

Increasingly, the streets of Bamako are home to children and youth who either leave their families or are sometimes expelled from them. Monetary and multidimensional child poverty is a key indicator of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Mali. In 2015, **55.6%** of children were experiencing deprivations in at least three dimensions, according to a report published by the Malian government in 2018 (UNICEF Mali, 2019). Poverty is therefore one of the main factors driving children and youth to the streets.

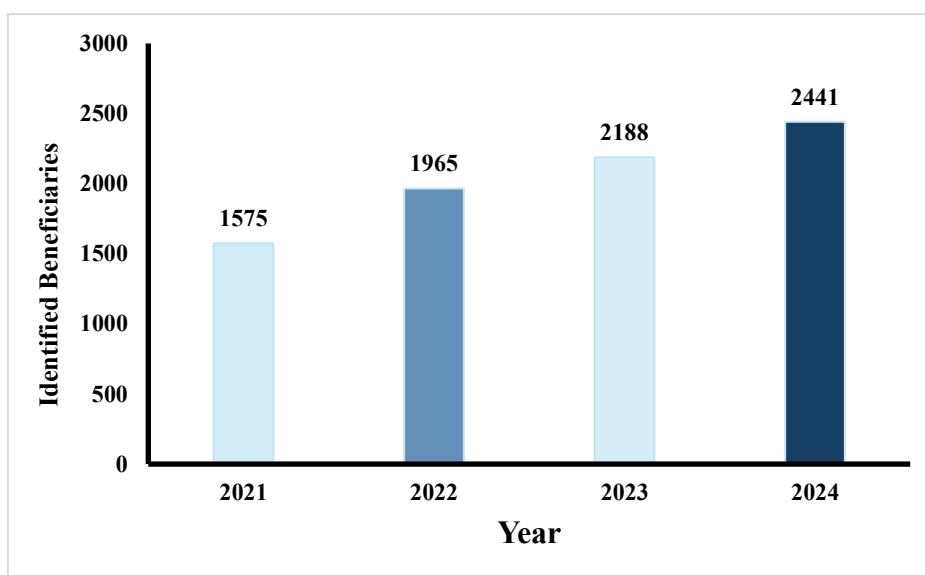


Figure 1 Number of children and young people living on the Street/year (Samusocial Mali 2024)

According to statistics from UNICEF's 2023 annual report, **55%** of Mali's population, approximately **22.4** million people are children under the age of 18. However, **41%** of the **3,343,223** children live in multidimensional poverty (Unicef-Mali, 2023). Several difficulties arise from this life on the streets. According to data from a survey conducted by Samusocial Mali, physical violence is the most frequently mentioned difficulty faced by street children and youth (Samusocial-Mali, 2021). In the context of the street children phenomenon, author Walter de Oliveira describes the street as a place where this category of vulnerable children live, work, fight, steal, fall ill, sell their bodies, and often die (Oliveira, 2001). These are children without family ties who live permanently on the streets. They are often orphans or runaways, and they survive on their own by developing coping strategies (Yusuf, 2020). Considering the difficulties associated with street life, where the strong often dominate the weak, these children are forced to undergo a process of desocialization. This process allows them to survive in an environment that is constantly filled with danger. As a result, they lose touch with societal norms of proper conduct, which negatively impacts their behaviours and exposes them to various forms of violence (Anne Hatløy, 2005). Social exclusion refers to the situation of individuals or areas facing multiple interconnected difficulties, such as unemployment, poverty, poor health, low

education levels, poor living conditions, and family breakdown (Pierson, 2009).

In Bamako, social exclusion is primarily manifested by the presence of children and adolescents living on the streets, without family protection or access to basic social services. They are exposed to numerous physical and psychological difficulties (Clothilde Hugo, Younoussa Touré, Esaie Marshall, 2010). Children living on the streets are in a state of total illegality. They have no identity documents. Some survive through small informal activities that they often engage in (Oumou Diallo, 2015). Others are exploited in illegal activities such as drug trafficking, robberies at night, and so on. This unbearable situation leads to social exclusion and exposes them daily to the abusive consumption of harmful substances, physical and sexual violence, and psychological trauma (Samusocial Mali, 2020).

Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen and clarify the strategy for the prevention and care of vulnerable children, with particular attention to street children. The issue of child abandonment, which is constantly increasing, requires a better understanding through a comprehensive multidisciplinary study. Moreover, the development of numerous reception facilities demands strict supervision and regular evaluation to ensure the protection, survival, and respect of children's rights (Catherine Cormont Touré, 2010). The objective of this study is to analyse the actions implemented by the

Samusocial organisation in Mali to promote social inclusion and the well-being of children living on the streets. The novelty of this investigation will highlight the significant difficulties faced by street children and the strategies implemented by the NGO Samusocial Mali to address the needs of these vulnerable children. Ultimately, this study will serve as a springboard for developing improved solutions to address this phenomenon.

3. Research Methodology:

To conduct this investigation, two data collection tools were employed. Firstly, a questionnaire was addressed to the staff of the NGO Samusocial to collect primary data, and secondary data were gathered from available documents related to the situation of street children worldwide, particularly in Mali. In total, **15** Samusocial staff members have undergone interviews for primary data collection. The secondary data was collected through the reading of Samusocial and other documents, and the activities report related to the program of saving street children.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Information of respondents:

This section provides a brief overview of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. It includes details such as age, gender, profile, duration of respondents in the context of this study to support the analysis of the findings.

4.1.1. Gender and Age of participants:

Based on the responses obtained from the questionnaire sent to the workers of Samusocial Mali regarding the analysis of the organisation's actions for social inclusion and the well-being of street children in Mali, the female gender predominates in the responses. According to the data, **60%** of our respondents are women, while **40%** are men. This demonstrates the level of involvement of women in the cause of these children, who are left to fend for themselves. However, men represent **40%** of the responses.

Furthermore, the respondents' ages range from **30** to **50** years. However, the majority of respondents fall into the category of individuals aged **36** to **40**, accounting for **33%**, and 27% are aged **30** to **35** years. On the other hand, individuals aged **41** to **50** also represent the same percentage, according to the survey responses. These results suggest that the responsible person should be more involved in addressing issues related to street children. They are typically the heads of families and are often at the root of the situation of many children who end up on the streets due to a lack of attention and protection. As highlighted by Okumu O. Eliud et al. in their research article, parental presence ensures a child's secure access to their essential needs and protection against abuse, as well as a stable and secure living environment. In contrast, the absence of a responsible adult exposes the child to social marginalisation and a progressive deterioration of family bonds (Okumu, Ongowo. Eliud, Kibet Ngetich, 2021).

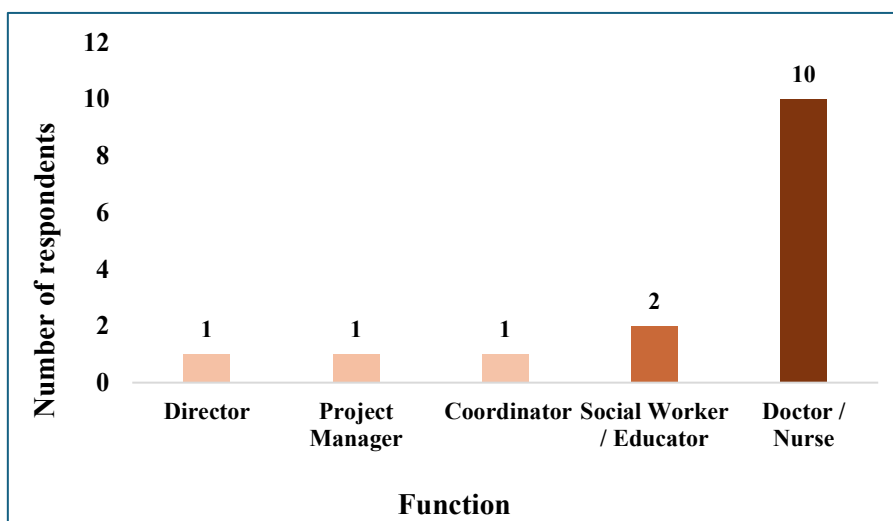


Figure 2 Roles of Respondents at Samusocial Mali

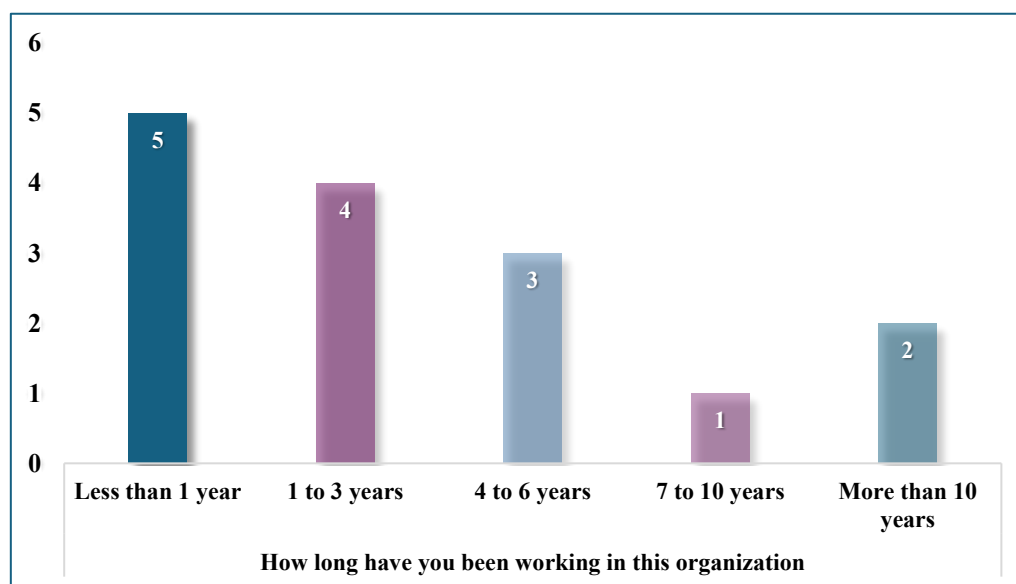


Figure 3 Length of participants' involvement in Samusocial Mali

4.1.2. Profile of respondents in Samusocial Mali

According to the survey results, respondents hold various positions within the organisation, including Director, Project Manager, Coordinator, Social Worker or Educator, and Doctor or Nurse. The data show a predominance of doctors and nurses, with **10** out of the **15** respondents belonging to this category, followed by one Director, one Project Manager, one Coordinator, and one Social Educator. These results highlight how fragile the health of children living on the streets is and how much they need assistance. The various actors within Samusocial work together to provide better services for the well-being of these highly vulnerable children (SamusocialMali, 2019).

4.1.3. Duration of Respondents in Samusocial Mali's Organization

As shown in **Figure 3**, most of our respondents have been working with the Samusocial organization for **1 to 3 years**. Indeed, individuals with **1 to 3 years** of experience represent the majority of responses obtained through the questionnaire, accounting for **40%**. They are followed by those who have worked there for less than one year. Respondents with **4 to 6 years** of experience come in third place. Notably, two individuals have worked within the organization for over **10 years**. Consequently, the **7 to 10 years** category ranks last according to the results presented.

4.2. The main reasons that drive children to live on the streets

This section outlines the process used to identify street children by the NGO Samusocial Mali. It defines the criteria employed to distinguish street children from other vulnerable groups, based on factors such as living conditions, time spent on the streets, and means of survival.

4.2.1. Identification and criteria of Street Children

Identifying street children is a crucial step before any form of assistance can be provided. The data collected from our questionnaire highlighted the various methods used to identify children living on the streets. In **Figure 4**, indeed, **44%** are identified during patrols carried out by Samusocial workers, communities report **29%**, and **27%** are identified through partnerships with other local and national NGOs. These results demonstrate the tireless efforts of Samusocial, which spares no effort in locating and registering these isolated children. The ongoing security crisis in Mali increases children's vulnerability, worsening the street child phenomenon in Bamako, the Malian capital. Samusocial Mali also addresses the situation of street children coming from refugee camps in Bamako. According to the **2024** Humanitarian Response Plan report, the armed conflict in Mali has led to **391,961** internally displaced persons (IDPs), with 66% of them being children (OCHA, 2024).

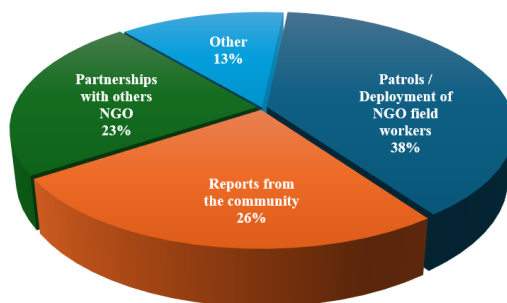


Figure 4 Identification of Street Children

However, the identification criteria are categorized by age, gender, living conditions, and the physical and mental health status of the beneficiaries. The data show that age is the primary criterion, selected by **100%** of the **15** respondents. Living conditions come next, cited by **14** respondents, followed by physical and mental health status with **13** responses, and finally, gender, chosen by **12** respondents. These results indicate that age and living conditions are the most rigorous criteria, as they are key indicators of the children's level of vulnerability.

4.2.2. Reasons that drive children to live on the street

According to studies conducted, several factors contribute to the large number of children living on the streets in Mali. The reasons mentioned include, among others, family conflicts, poverty, abandonment or loss of parents, exploitation, and more. As shown in **Figure 5**, the two leading causes highlighted by most respondents are family conflicts and poverty. All participants identified these two factors. According to the testimony of a street girl, shared by one of the respondents, it was the repeated disagreements within her family that led her to leave home. « *Her father had married another woman in place of her mother. The stepmother would tell false stories about her to her father, which led to conflicts between the girl and her father. Eventually, her father drove her out of the house, and that is how she ended up living on the streets* », a participant testified. In addition, poverty is a key trigger of the phenomenon of street children. In second place, **40%** of respondents stated that abandonment or the loss of parents also leads many children to leave their families and end up on the streets. Another participant shared the story of a child who ended up living on the streets due to the death of his

parents. According to this witness, « *After the death of his parents at the age of 12, his uncles and aunts rejected him. Deprived of food by his relatives, who were supposed to take care of him, he began to beg for food and eventually ended up living on the streets* ». On the other hand, 33% of the respondents also pointed to child exploitation. Indeed, some children end up on the streets due to excessive exploitation within their families. Among the forms of domestic exploitation, it is essential to highlight the specific phenomenon of "little maids," which can be associated with the street children issue, especially when these young girls are expelled by their employers without being compensated for the services they have rendered (AFD and SamusocialInternational, 2011). Finally, **20%** of the respondents cited other causes, including forced marriage, internal migration, parental separation, bad company, sexual and physical violence, and school dropout. This supports the conclusion of the research conducted by Dr. P. Chand Basha, who concluded that all these factors are causes that can lead children to live on the streets (Basha, 2016).

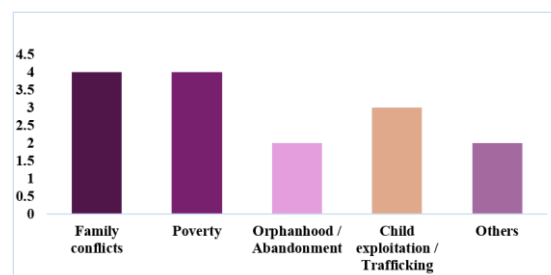


Figure 5 Causes driving children on the streets

4.2.3. The main obstacles to the well-being of street children

According to the results of this research, children living on the streets face significant obstacles. As shown in Figure 6, the top two challenges are

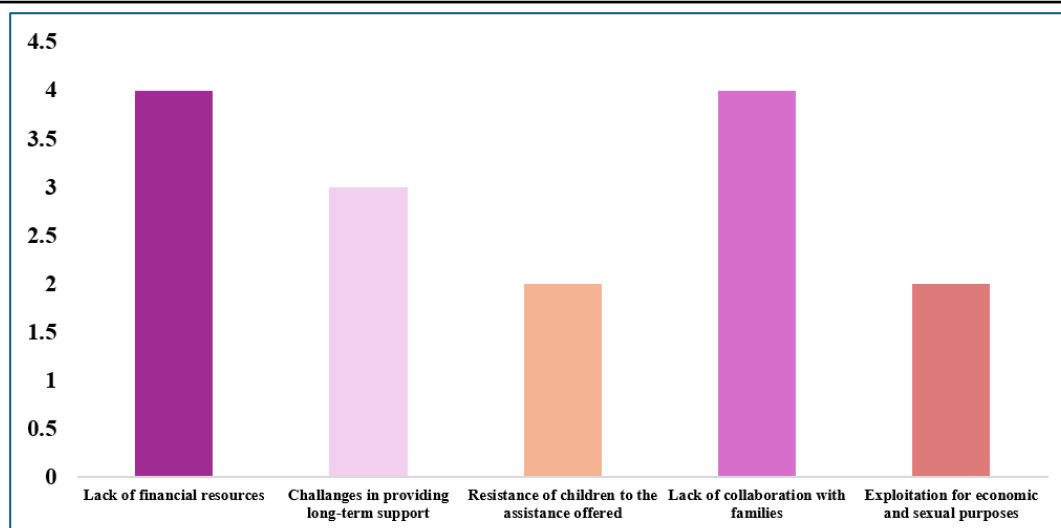


Figure 6 Challenges encountered by street children in Mali

financial constraints and a lack of collaboration with their families. Indeed, the staff of the NGO Samusocial face obstacles in performing their duties. They often lack sufficient financial resources to meet the needs of all the children. In this regard, 83% of the participants highlighted the lack of financial resources and the lack of cooperation from the families of these children. In second place, 66% cited challenges related to ensuring long-term follow-up. This is due to the insufficiency of funding allocated to street children. Finally, 50% of the respondents mentioned the children's resistance to the offered assistance. For these children, there is a significant mistrust towards the agents approaching them. It takes some time for them to build trust.

From the perspective of this data, it is clear that most of the respondents lament the behaviour of some parents who flatly refuse to accept their children back into the family after they have been living on the streets due to the negative label attached to them. This makes their mission quite difficult. The process of reintegration into the family remains very long and requires considerable patience and understanding. This investigation supports the study of Magda A. Mohamed et al. According to him, street children are generally stigmatized and perceived as delinquents or even potential criminals, leading to their social exclusion. Rejected by the communities, they must face multiple difficulties to survive, often resorting to begging, precarious work, or illegal activities to meet their

needs (Magda A. Mohamed, Manal F. Mohamed, Mona A. Hassan, 2018).

4.3. Actions and Support Programs of Samusocial Mali

This part presents the main interventions and support programs implemented by Samusocial Mali to assist street children. It highlights the organization's approaches, including Types of services, medical and psychological care, support towards autonomy and economic Integration, and social reintegration efforts aimed at improving the well-being and long-term prospects of vulnerable children living on the streets.

4.3.1. Types of services offered to street children

Samusocial offers a range of services for children and young people experiencing homelessness. Figure 7 illustrates various activities, including accommodation, medical care, psychological support, food and hygiene, education, family and social reintegration, and vocational training. Indeed, the organisation offers all of these services to its beneficiaries who are on the streets. However, food and hygiene services are not provided to the desired extent, unlike other services. This is due to the financial limitations of the NGO.

These results confirm the studies of Olivier Douville, who wrote that Samusocial intends to expand its scope of intervention beyond immediate emergency needs. The goal was to

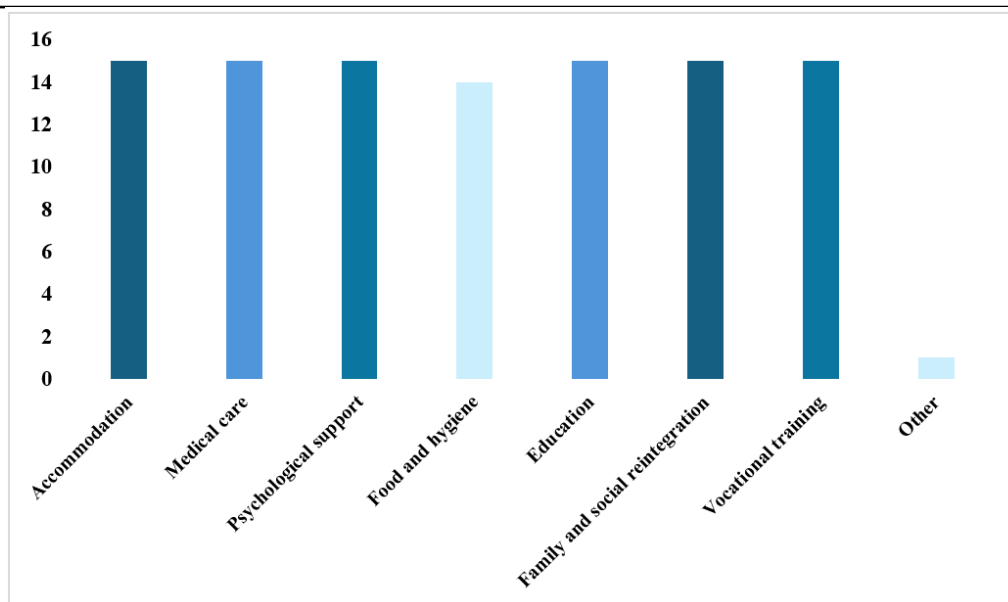


Figure 8 Categories of services provided by Samusocial to street children in Mali

shift towards long-term care, integrating broader dimensions such as schooling, access to vocational training, the development of income-generating activities, as well as rigorous and regular support (Douville, 2011).

4.3.2. Most effective program in promoting social inclusion for street children

Among the many programs and activities, some are more effective in promoting the family and social inclusion of children. As shown in Figure 8, the data indicates that family reintegration is the most effective means of improving the image of these children, chosen by 34% of respondents. This is followed by a significant need for psychological support, chosen by 29% of participants. Moreover, 23% of responses identified vocational training as necessary to help these children stabilise economically. According to them, this solution will prevent them from falling back into delinquency and theft, allowing them to meet their needs. Finally, 14% highlighted the importance of educational programs, enabling children to return to school for a better future. Elena Volpi emphasises the importance of a comprehensive and tailored approach, including individualised support, active participation of children, healthcare provision, involvement of families and communities, as well as coordination of services and advocacy actions, in connection with prevention programs at various risk levels (Volpi, 2002).

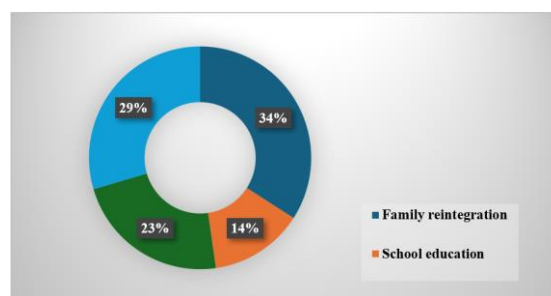


Figure 7 Most effective program for social inclusion of street children

4.3.3. Support Towards Autonomy and Economic Integration

To facilitate the family or societal reintegration of these children, for whom the street has been their home, the Samusocial Mali organisation provides vocational training through income-generating activities (**Figure 9**). These activities include agriculture (21%), carpentry (21%), tailoring (20%), mechanics (20%), and other occupations, which account for 18%. "Others" include learning trades such as hairdressing and beauty, makeup, African and Indian henna, driving school for obtaining a driving license for SOTRAMA apprentices (a means of public transport in Mali), poultry farming, and fish farming. These activities significantly contribute to the professional reintegration of program beneficiaries. Despite the challenges, many street children maintain hope for a better life, underscoring the need to meet their basic needs and provide them with educational and professional opportunities. However, barriers

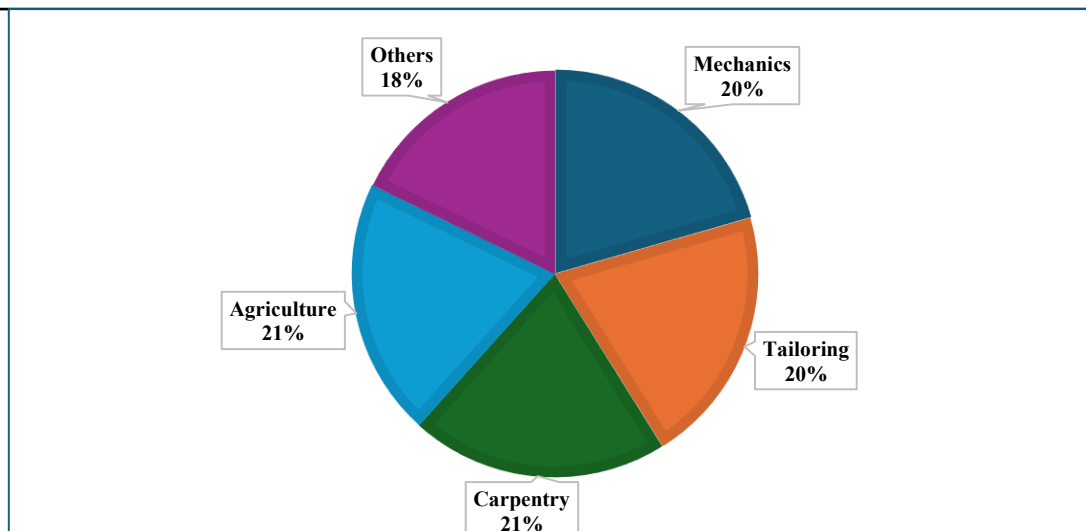


Figure 9 Key forms of training offered

such as a lack of resources and the fear of rejection complicate their social reintegration (Bosle, 2024).

4.4. Impact, Challenges and Perspectives for Improvement

This section examines the impact of the organization's interventions on children living in street situations. It also outlines prospective measures to be implemented in order to prevent this phenomenon, which poses a significant barrier to the future development of these vulnerable children.

4.4.1. The main impact of Samusocial Mali's actions on these children

Based on their experiences, the staff of the Samusocial organization shared the impacts of their activities on street children who have benefited from their programs. As shown in **Figure 10**, the primary direct impact is the improvement in children's health, as reported by **100%** of respondents. However, the reduction in violence and delinquency, as well as increased motivation for social integration, were also observed by **80%** of participants. This is followed by an increase in the number of children reintegrated into their families, and finally, **60%** mentioned the development of social skills among project beneficiaries. According to these results, it is clear that the actions carried out by the NGO have positive impacts not only on the children themselves but also on society as a whole. A participant shares an experience with a street girl who was taken in by the NGO: "A young

mother, approximately 2 months postpartum, was struggling with an addiction to harmful substances and prostitution, which hindered her ability to care for her newborn. To protect the baby, Samusocial reported the situation to the morality brigade after several attempts to guide the mother to a shelter, but she refused to cooperate. During her detention, Samusocial recommended that the newborn be transferred to a pediatric care unit due to health concerns. After several months, the mother was reconnected with her family and later returned for post-reintegration follow-up".

Another respondent explains an experience with a beneficiary: "a child suffering from congenital heart disease, abandoned and living on the streets, was rescued by Samusocial. He received appropriate received medical care and was reintegrated into his family. With continued support, he continued his education, became a certified nursing assistant, and gained autonomy, while continuing his medical follow-up. Unfortunately, after several years, he eventually succumbed to his illness, Samusocial played a pivotal role in his journey". According to the statistics presented by the organization, the number of **138** Children and Young People remains stable for six Months after their reintegration. In their research, Labanya Khanikar and Dr. Kaivalya T. Desai emphasized that street children have limited or no access to these essential services. They assert that every child should grow up in a clean, safe, and healthy environment. Access to clean drinking water, adequate sanitation facilities, and hygiene

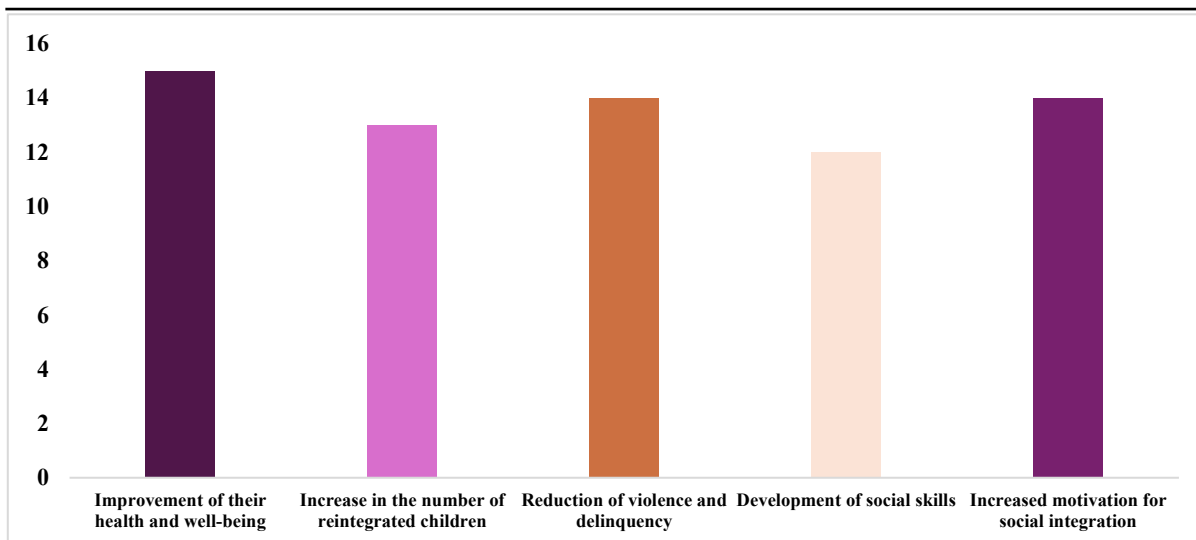


Figure 10 Assessment of the effects of Samusocial Mali's interventions on children

services is a key factor in ensuring their health, well-being, and development (Sister Jeston Shitindi, 2023).

4.4.2. Biggest challenges in supporting street children

Providing support to children who roam the streets is no easy task; it is fraught with challenges. According to the data presented in **Figure 11** the staff of the Samusocial Mali Organization face several major obstacles. Indeed, all respondents (**100%**) reported the lack of financial resources and the difficulty of persuading children to leave street life as the two most significant challenges they encounter. Furthermore, **90%** of participants cited the reluctance of families to reintegrate the children. Social stigma was mentioned by **50%** of the respondents, while **40%** pointed to the lack of adequate facilities.

According to these results, the limitation of the organization's funding can significantly impact

the ability of staff to achieve their mission, which is to meet the needs of all these vulnerable children. It is also striking to observe that many of these children have become so accustomed to the freedom of street life that they are difficult to persuade to return to their families. Parents, on the other hand, often do not facilitate the reintegration process. This unfortunate situation is largely due to societal stigma, which tends to label and dramatize children who have spent time living on the streets.

It would be best if all stakeholders, both directly and indirectly involved in the issue of street children were fully engaged in eradicating this phenomenon through more preventive actions. This is echoed in the investigation conducted by Manish Prasad on street children, where it is highlighted that collective responsibility within care centers fosters stable and nurturing relationships. Adequate training of staff is essential to address the trauma experienced by these children. Their reintegration requires

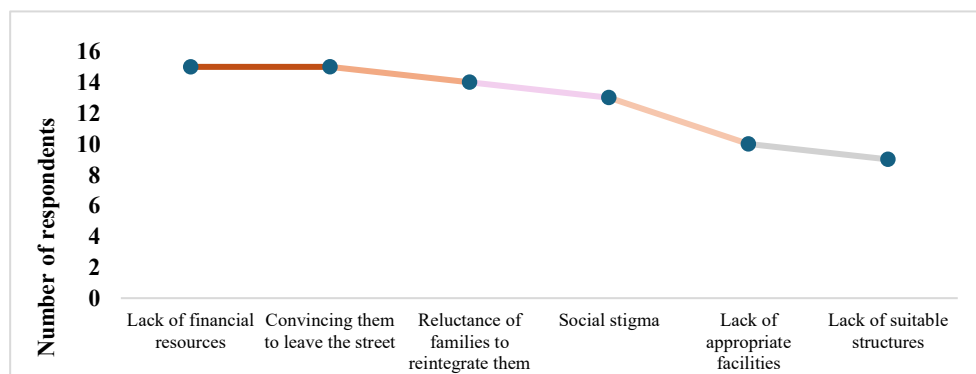


Figure 11 Barriers to the effective support of street-connected children

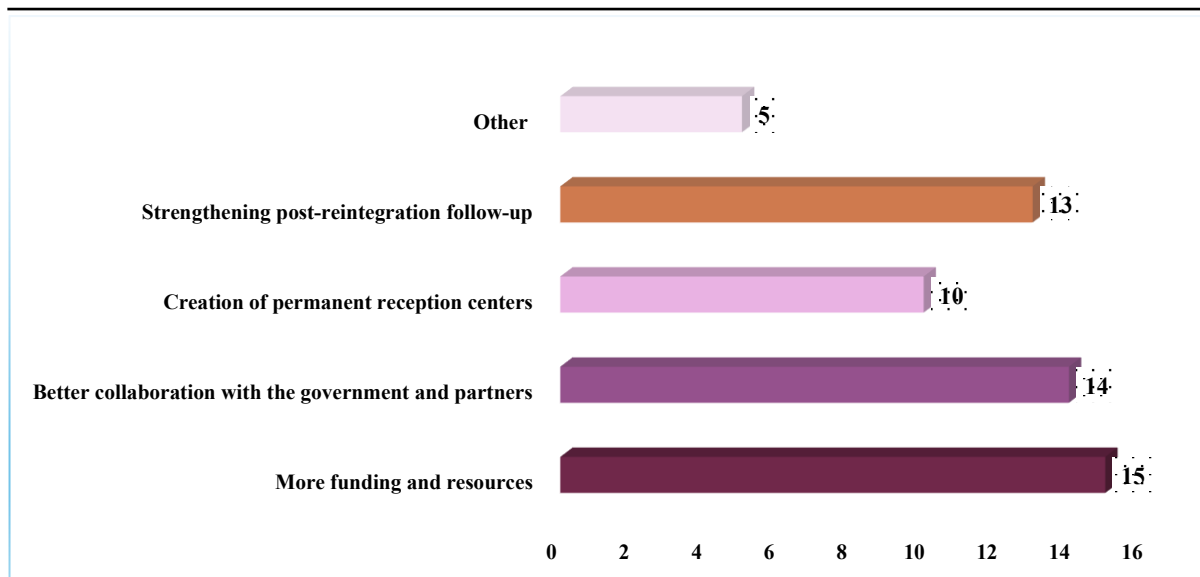


Figure 12 Enhancements to Samusocial Mali's intervention strategies

dignity, financial support, and long-term opportunities for the future (Prasad, 2022).

4.4.3. Respondents' improvements in the actions of Samusocial Mali

The **Figure 12** highlights the key areas for improvement in the organization's interventions to enhance their impact on the lives of street children. Specifically, **20** respondents emphasized the need for increased funding and resources to achieve better outcomes in the field. Following this, **14** respondents pointed to the importance of stronger collaboration with the government and partner organizations. **13** participants identified the reinforcement of post-reintegration follow-up as a priority, while **10** respondents underscored the need to increase the number of permanent shelters to accommodate and protect more children living on the streets. These results clearly demonstrate the critical role of financial support in tackling this issue, as a lack of resources is often what drives many children to the streets in the first place. Greater support from both NGOs and the government is urgently needed to effectively combat this phenomenon. The research of Sister J. Shitindi also emphasized the need for stronger NGO involvement in addressing child abuse, child labor, and human rights violations, in order to contribute meaningfully to the reduction of street children (Sister Jeston Shitindi, 2023).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study conducted on the actions of Samusocial in Mali highlights the main causes that push children to live on the streets: family conflicts, poverty, abandonment, the death of parents, and exploitation. In response to this reality, Samusocial strives to combat this phenomenon through concrete actions. The organisation provides vital support to street children by improving their health, reducing violence and delinquency, and promoting their social and family reintegration. Their interventions include accommodation, medical care, psychological support, food and hygiene assistance, education, and vocational training. However, despite these commendable efforts, many challenges remain. The lack of financial resources limits the organisation's ability to reach all affected children, and many have grown wary or accustomed to street life, making their care more complex. Moreover, some families fail to take responsibility, contributing to the worsening of the problem. To respond effectively to this crisis, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses both the immediate needs of the children and the means to ensure them a better future. Consequently, the government must enforce existing laws, implement awareness campaigns, and establish proper reception centres. Financial partners and NGOs, such as Samusocial, should involve parents more actively in projects to ensure sustainable solutions. Families must fully assume their

responsibilities and never abandon their children. Lastly, communities have a moral duty not to reject these children but to support them, as they are victims in need of attention, respect, and dignity.

6. Acknowledgment

The authors thank the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for awarding Madeleine Dembele's Ph.D. program scholarship.

7. Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare no conflict of interest concerning this manuscript.

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