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## Social Determinants of Vulnerability of Missing Children: The case of Nairobi Children's Remand Home, Nairobi County, Kenya

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### Abstract

The situation of missing children is one of the most emotional social issues worldwide. Children go missing throughout the world as a result of human trafficking, organised crime, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, illicit adoption among other reasons. The main objective of this study was to establish the social determinants that influence vulnerability of missing children in Nairobi Children's Remand Home, Kenya. The study was anchored on the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner. This study used the concurrent mixed methods approach where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected, specifically adopting descriptive designs. The target populations were children officers, parents of missing children, missing children, and police officers. The sample size was 61 children sampled using the census sampling technique. Purposive sampling was also used to select respondents from the other categories. Data was collected using questionnaires, FDGs and interview guides. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of SPSS Version 22, while qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. Quantitative data results were presented using charts, tables, and graphs, while qualitative data results were presented in narratives. From the study, majority of the missing children (52.4%) were of the age of 7-12 years and majority were boys (68.7%). However, between the ages of 13-18 majority were girls with 62.1%. The parents of the respondents were mainly single (61.1%), most lived in informal settlements (80.4%) and were casual labourers (60.7%) with low incomes. The main reasons why the respondents left home included child abuse (23.3%) and running away (40%). Income generated by the missing children's parents or guardians was not significantly different across the different marital statuses since a  $p$  value of 0.443 was obtained, which was more than the study  $p$  value, which was 0.05. Government protection systems for missing children were seen to be inadequate as there were no laws, policies, and guidelines that deal with missing children. The study recommended that the Government come up with guidelines/policies and laws for missing children, a national database for all missing children, enhanced reporting systems for abused children, as well as economic empowerment for parents with low incomes.

**Key terms** | Missing Children, Informal Settlements, Government Protection Systems

## Introduction

### *1.0 Background to the Study*

The situation of missing children is one of the most emotional social issues worldwide. Children go missing throughout the world as a result of human trafficking, organized crime, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, and illicit adoption, among other reasons (Koudelová, Dupej, Brůzek, Sedlak & Velemínská, 2015 and International Commission on Missing Persons, 2014). The search for, and identification of, missing children is hampered by the fact that the facial morphology of long-term missing children changes as they grow. Every year, children are reported missing, yet little is known about how many they are, why they leave, and what happens to them when they go missing (Alberts & Alberts, 2016). The words “missing child” call to mind tragic and frightening kidnappings and abductions reported in the media. Thomas et al., (2005), explain that, a child is considered missing if he or she is away from care, when not in the physical custody of the child-welfare agency, home, person, or institution with whom the child has been placed. Missing children include a wide range of situations that span from runaways, to abduction by parents or by third parties, and to unaccompanied migrants and lost children (Missing Children Study, 2013).

The concept of a missing child may seem easily understandable, especially in cases that come to media attention, but careful examination shows that it is complex. (Sedlack, Finkelhor, Hammer, & Schultz, 2002). A child can become missing because of a variety of circumstances, such as running away, being abducted, or being delayed by a mishap on the way home. Best, (1987), noted that in Europe, the fear of kidnapping by strangers propelled the missing children movement into prominence. The movement emerged in 1981 following the intense media coverage of the disappearance of Ethan Pratz, the brutal slaying of Adam Walsh, and the murders of 28 Atlanta school children. The publicized disappearances helped spur new legislation to help find missing children, and it led to mass-mobilization with milk cartons and billboards. As a result, in USA, the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) was formed in 1984. It estimates that 8 million children around the world go missing every year; translating to 22,000 each day. In the European Union (EU) alone, at least 250 000 children are reported missing each year (Ecorys, 2013).

At the regional level, legal instruments such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provide a definition of how “child” is defined (Chirwa, 2002). A child is defined as any person below the age of 18 years. However, there is no similar consensus on how to define “missing child,” or on how to investigate cases involving missing children. Finkelhor, (1990), states that definitional controversies and confusion about the concept of missing children reflect a need to clarify the term. The lack of a harmonized definition of the term ‘missing child’ makes it difficult to know the full extent of the problem regionally, and to determine how best to protect children from going missing (Vermeulen, Vander, Van Puyenbroeck, & Van, 2006).

In Kenya, the Ministry of East African Community, Labor and Social Protection through the Department of Children Services coordinates and supervises services aimed at promoting and protecting the wellbeing of children and their families. The Children’s Act, (2001), Section 38 (2k) indicates that the Director of Children Services has the duty of tracing the parents or guardians of any lost or abandoned child, and returning a lost or abandoned child to his lawful place of residence. Section 119 of the same Act outlines the categories of children in need of care and protection. However, the Children’s Act is silent on missing children as a category of children in need of care and protection. The recent case in May 2017 in Kenya, where Kapsoya Ward aspirant’s three children went missing and were later found dead, brings home the gravity of the situation (Olinga & Kahenda, 2017).

Every child deserves a safe childhood where they are able to grow into healthy and successful adults (Saini, 2013). According to Tavares, Crespo, & Ribeiro, (2017), a child’s disappearance can be characterized by an ambiguous loss, where the child is physically absent but psychologically present. In Kenya there are no known arrangements in place to immediately respond to reports of missing children. In addition, the existing legal framework does not clearly outline/categorize missing children and the appropriate steps to be taken when such cases are reported. This is a clear indication of the need to assess the social determinants that lead to the vulnerability of missing children.

## Theoretical Framework and Empirical Literature Review

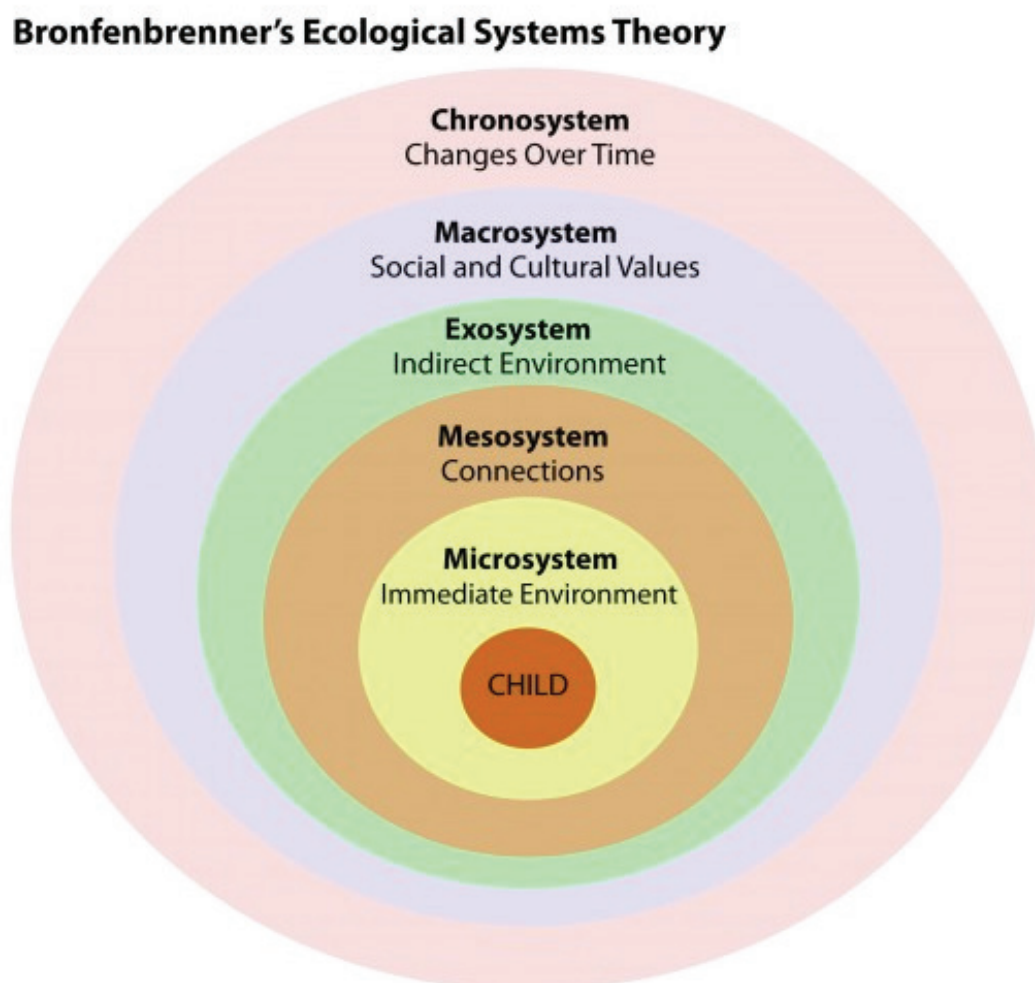
### 2.1 Critical Review of related theories

The study was guided by the Ecological Systems Theory that explains the social factors that influence vulnerability of missing children.

#### *Ecological Systems Theory*

The ecological systems theory recently renamed 'Bio Ecological Systems Theory' was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979. The theory provides a detailed analysis of environmental influences on children's behavior. Bronfenbrenner explained that the developing person is said to be at the center of several environmental systems, ranging from immediate settings such as the family, to more remote contexts such as the broader culture. Each of these systems is thought to interact with the others, and with the individual, to influence development in important ways. The theory emphasizes the important interplay that occurs over time among individuals and systems (Germain & Gitterman, 1996). Bronfenbrenner stated that human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time.

*Figure 2 | Ecological Systems Theory*



Source: (Germain & Gitterman, 1996)

The environment, involves five interrelated systems. The first level is the micro system (Individual level) which is the direct environment a child has in his/her life. It is made up of friends, classmates, teachers, neighbors, and other people who a child has direct contact with. A child who is abused within the micro setting is likely to be more vulnerable as opposed to one who is not. The second level is the meso-system (family level) which is essentially the relationships between the microsystems in one's life. This means that a family experience may be related to a school experience. For example, if a child is neglected by his parents, he may have a low chance of developing a positive attitude towards his teachers and may run away from home as a result. Other factors such as divorce in the family, single parenthood and the level of income may also increase the vulnerability of a child. The exo-system is the third level which is the indirect environment. In the exo-system the child is influenced by actions or people that do not have an active role in his/her life. The macro-system setting is the actual culture of an individual. The cultural contexts involve the socioeconomic status of the person and/or his family, his ethnicity or race. In the macro system the child is influenced by his/her own cultural values and traditions, socioeconomic status, and the laws. The chrono-system includes the transitions and shifts in one's lifespan. This may also involve the socio-historical contexts that may influence a person. The theory is employed to explain the possible factors which may influence the vulnerability of missing children. It addresses an individual's risk factors, norms, beliefs and social economic systems that create the conditions for child abuse to occur. One of the fundamental deprivations which vulnerable children experience that prompt their decision to leave home is missing the attention from close, supportive and loving relationships with adult caregivers. In addition, a child social economic status, the values that his community holds, and available policies and laws, affects their vulnerability. One of the weaknesses of the theory, is that its application leads practitioners to perceive problems with such broad perspectives, that they attempt to plan so comprehensively, that actual effectiveness of the practice gets jeopardized (Henderson, 1994).

## 2.2 Empirical review

### *Family income on vulnerability of missing children*

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, 2006), recognized that children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of the society. It is estimated that at least 600 million children under the age of 18 struggle to survive on less than 1 USD a day representing 40 percent of children in developing countries (UNICEF, 2006). A European study by Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, (1997), found that poor children suffer from emotional and behavioral problems more frequently than rich children. The study further found out that children are dependent on others, and therefore enter or avoid poverty by virtue of their family's economic circumstances. In Africa, poor people are rarely able to insure themselves against shocks and as a result, they cope with their financial problems by selling their productive assets, taking their children out of school, and also by reducing their nutritional intake (Chambers, 1999). The researchers concur with Chambers and add that when children are taken out of school, they are more likely to run away from home or to be abducted. It is worth noting that the school environment does not only promote human capital development, but is also highly protective.

The 2009 Kenya Census estimated there were nearly 20 million children under the age of 18 years in the country. The proportion of poor children was estimated to be about 53.5 per cent which translates into about 10.3 million living in absolute poverty (KNBS, 2010). It is estimated that 2.4 million children are orphans, with 2% of these children having lost both parents. According to Chauhan, Pathak, & Prajapati, (2017), many more children live in households with ailing parents especially due to HIV. Due to the high poverty levels, inequalities and the impact of HIV, an increasing number of children grow up without proper care and protection. As a result, because of lack of coping mechanisms, some may decide to leave their homes. Kenya's development blueprint, the Kenya Vision 2030, recognizes the plight of vulnerable groups that include orphans and children at risk, and also the poorest of the poor, as being faced with multiple challenges such as high poverty levels and various forms of deprivation. The majority of orphans are under the care of elderly grandparents who are themselves destitute (Republic of Kenya 2008). Poverty in Kenya has a predominantly young face (GoK, 2011-

2012) 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Party reports indicate that poverty affects children in physical, emotional, and social ways, and its multi-dimensional nature is not always captured by monetary measurement. The promise of a better life away from constant violence and oppressive poverty that surrounds them tempts parents to send their children away with trusted acquaintances. This is an emerging trend.

### *Child abuse on vulnerability of missing children*

An international study by Krug et al., (2002), found those children who experience violence/abuse by parents and other caregivers have been associated with emotional and behavioral problems in adolescence and adulthood. Stoltenborgh, et al., (2015), asserts that child abuse is a global problem of considerable extent, touching the lives of millions of children. Additionally, every child needs parental love, protection, and care from harmful environments, especially in the early stages of his growth (Williams, 2014). The child's immediate family setting plays an important role in the child's development. It is in this environment where they get nurtured; get a sense of belonging, experience love and acceptance, security and safety, respect and confidence.

Kenya is a signatory of the UNCRC and the ACRWC, which is a commitment towards response and prevention of all forms of violence against children. A study by the government (GoK, 2010), found that violence against children is a serious problem in Kenya. The study pointed out that for children aged between 13-17 years, 11% females and 4% males experienced sexual violence while 49% females and 48% males experienced physical violence. Several studies indicate that a large proportion of child maltreatment is never reported to child protection authorities as evidenced by population based surveys (Cyr et al., 2013; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2009). Generally, children who are raised in stable, married families tend to drop out of school less and are likely to achieve greater economic success than their parents (Fomby, & Cherlin, 2007). By contrast, those whose parents are divorced may show weaker grades at school and are more likely to engage in violence; or leave their homes (Deleire & Lopoo 2010).

### *Government child protection systems on vulnerability of missing children*

Internationally, many governments are increasingly turning to systems approach in order to establish and strengthen child protection efforts (Parton, 2014). In light of increasing cases of missing children, some international States have developed preventive and support mechanisms. For instance, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has put in place mechanisms of creating awareness to members of the society on how to recognize and handle a lost child. The International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC) has also been involved in campaigning about child safety by condemning child abductions and other vices against the child (European Commission, 2013). However, a study by the European Commission (2013), found that most countries do not have a binding legal definition of a missing child.

Sprague, (2013), observes that research studies have shown that law enforcement in the past and present perceives missing and runaway children as status crimes (offences that only apply to children such as skipping school, running away), until the perception becomes a high profile case or a child is sexually molested or murdered. In general entry level, police officers and children officers do not have any type of training on missing children and yet they will be called to handle such cases. Bourdillon, & Myers, (2013), observed that outdated methods of reporting and recording cases of missing children must be done away with. Such organizations and State departments dealing with child protection issues should therefore have an agreed protocol for children who go missing in their area and, when appropriate, agreed protocols with neighboring authorities or administrations. The protocols should be agreed upon and reviewed regularly.

In Kenya, the National Council for Children Services (NCCS), (2011) asserts that the overall purpose of any child protection system is to promote the wellbeing of children and ensure prompt and coordinated action, and that all actions and decisions made are in the best interests of the child. NCCS further asserts that child protection is a complex and multi-disciplinary affair that requires involvement of everyone. As a result, the Kenya Government came up with the Framework for the National Child Protection in 2011, whose overall aim was to promote linkages between different actors and provide coordinated interventions and responses, thus providing effective services for children in need. Kenya's Government therefore has a role to play in protecting the lives and rights of children and this can only be realized through favorable policies.

In Kenya and Nairobi in general, there exists another danger for missing children, occasioned by internal displacement due to political clashes and electoral violence. The Prevention, Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons and Affected Communities Act 2012, compels the government to protect all persons including children during such circumstances (GoK, 2012). These special circumstances must also be planned for so as to ensure comprehensive child protection. In Kenya, there are no known arrangements in place to immediately respond to reports of missing children, which points out obvious disparities in law enforcement and investigative capacities. There is a need to take immediate action in the interest of the child's safety.

### *Community involvement in vulnerability of missing Children*

A global study by Fritz & Altheide, (1997), observed that the process of finding missing children involves avenues such as social media and corporate banner tools. These essentially enable the tracing of children who go missing by contacting a wide community network of friends and colleagues or even strangers, on the web. The Internet thus has an important role to play in cases of missing children. Rosin (2014), asserts that, whereas parents may teach their children not to talk to strangers, many children do not know the parents' names and often even their own, depending on age and social factors. The researchers concur with the writer and add that there is a need to teach children basic information about themselves as well as life skills to assist them in making decisions about their lives.

Regionally, communities have an important role in protecting vulnerable children especially in case they go missing, through providing useful information to relevant authorities (Masten, 2014). Additionally, to prevent children from going missing, there is need for community-based help to support those children from poor socio-economic backgrounds and who are more likely to leave or run away from home (Hughes, et al., 2016). In Kenya, there are formal and non-formal child protection mechanisms. According to National Council for Children Services (NCCS) (2011), formal mechanisms are mainly State driven while non-formal are community-based where families, children, and schools are included. Community involvement in child protection falls under the 'non formal' child protection mechanism.

Although the police hold information on the numbers of people, and locations where they go missing, they cannot take effective action to tackle the issue alone. It is therefore key that the issue of missing children is considered collectively by both community members and State departments. In order to resolve missing cases as quickly and effectively as possible, State departments and community members need a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and need to work together to ensure the best arrangements are in place to deal with cases of missing people (Morewitz, 2016). It is clear that the prompt recovery and safety of missing children is determined by the attitude and approach of concerned agencies and officers charged with responding to cases. The writers concur with (Sprague, 2013) who asserts that the misconception that missing children are just children who do not get along with their parents, has to be eliminated.

## **Materials and Methods**

### *Research Design*

The study adopted a descriptive research design with the help of concurrent mixed methods approach where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected, particularly when concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior. The design provided an accurate portrayal of characteristics of missing children. In addition, the design allowed for the collection of information from a variety of respondents such as missing children, their parents and government and non-government stakeholders. The design involved handing out questionnaires, and interviewing people face-to-face. Another dimension of the research design was the ex post facto design. The design studied how the independent variables (child abuse, level of income) affected the vulnerability of missing children. The design helped in establishing a before and after comparison and looked at events that had already taken place. This was appropriate because the study focused on children who were already considered missing. The researchers examined the past and present reasons that contributed to their vulnerability. According to the Nairobi Children's Remand Home Annual Report (2016), the home had an average of 102 children. Out of the total of 102 children, 31 were in conflict with the law, and 71 were children in need of care and

protection. Among 71 children, 60 were missing children. Due to the small number of the respondents, the researchers used the census method where all the respondents were studied. Key informants were government and non-government officers dealing with the issue of missing children that were purposely selected from the nine (9) sub-counties in Nairobi Remand Home. They included children officers, magistrates at Nairobi children's court, police officers, probation officers as well as non-governmental organizations. Similarly, the police and children officers were stratified according to the sub-counties and randomly selected. The parents of missing children, child protection NGOs and the magistrates, were randomly selected. 15 parents were interviewed at the Nairobi County Children Remand Home and the researchers used the snow-ball sampling techniques to get the remaining five (5) parents.

### *Methods of data collection*

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Quantitative data was collected through structured interviews with respondents. According to Kothari, (2004), the interview method of collecting data involved presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and responses in terms of oral verbal responses. Structured interviews therefore involved the use of a set of predetermined questions and standardized techniques of recording. The researchers also conducted Key Informant Interviews which were qualitative in-depth interviews with people who are knowledgeable in the community and who were likely to provide the needed information, ideas and insights based on knowledge of a particular issue. This included magistrates, police, and officers from non- governmental organizations.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003) defined analysis of data as the "process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming and modeling data with the goal of highlighting useful information, suggesting conclusions and supporting decision making." Data analysis was undertaken for the purpose of summarizing the collected data and organizing it in a manner that answered the research questions (objectives). The first stage of data analysis involved a review of all responses per question and thereafter the researchers categorized the responses per question and coded them. The coded data was analyzed, transcribed, and classified on the basis of common characteristics. Quantitative data was computed and presented in form of frequencies and percentages, in tables and charts. Qualitative data was presented in prose reports and direct quotes.

## Results and Discussion

### *Demographic characteristics of respondents*

The sample respondents of missing children consisted of 33 (54.1%) males and 28 (45.9%) females totaling 61 respondents. A total of 20 parents of missing children were interviewed with 12 (60%) being female and 8 (40%) being male. 3 focus group discussions were conducted during data collection. The groups consisted of 8 persons from the key informants.

**Table 1** | *Age versus gender of the children respondents*

Age (Years)	Frequency	%	Gender		%	Total%	
			Male	Female			
7-12	32	52.4	22	10	68.7	31.3	100
13-18	29	47.6	11	18	37.9	62.1	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>			

Source: Researchers, 2017

Table 1 shows that majority of the children (52.4%) go missing between the ages of 7-12 years. However, 62.1 % of girls go missing between the ages of 13 to 18 years. The findings are in line with the study by Biehal et al., 2003, who found that between the ages of 13 and 17 years, gender-specific trends start to emerge as girls become more likely to be reported missing than boys. It was also interesting to note that the number of boys who go missing in total was higher than girls yet it is a pre-conceived notion that girls are more vulnerable than boys.

**Table 2** | *Children respondents highest Level of Education and Training*

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Primary	44	72.1	72.1
Secondary	10	16.4	88.5
Drop outs	7	11.5	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Researchers, 2017

Table 2 shows that a majority of the children respondents i.e. 72.1% have primary education as their highest education. 16.4% had secondary education and 11.5% dropped out of school at some level before attaining any education certification. This was interpreted to mean that most of the children respondents had primary levels education.

#### *Influence of level of income on vulnerability of missing children*

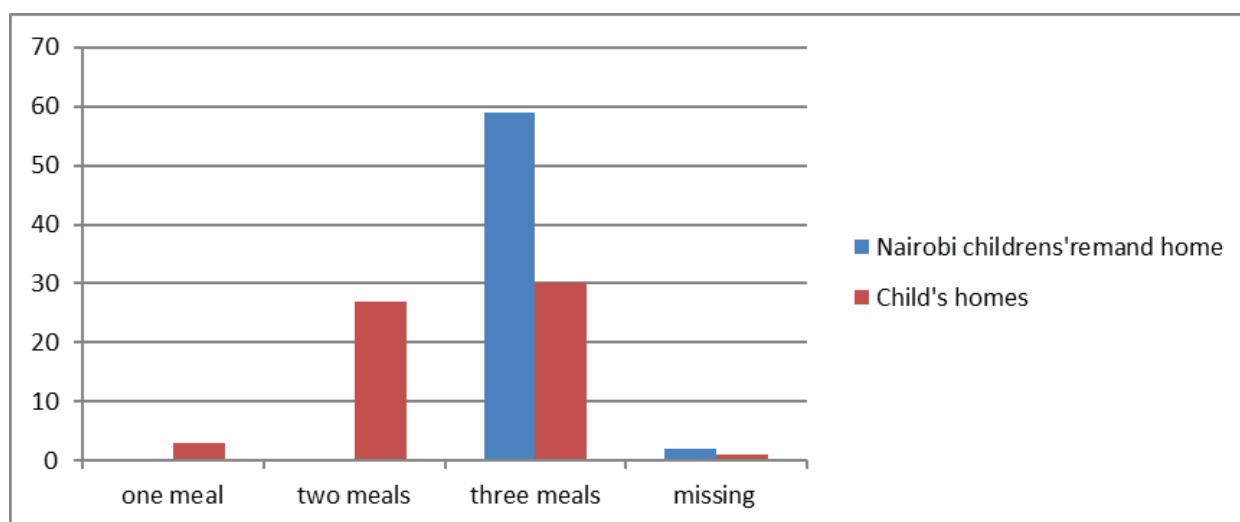
**Table 4** | *Respondent's parents source of income*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Permanent Employment	3	4.9	5.0	5.0
	Casual Labour	37	60.7	61.7	66.7
	Business	9	14.8	15.0	81.7
	Farming	2	3.3	3.3	85.0
	Other	9	14.8	15.0	100.0
	Total	60	98.4	100.0	
Missing	9	1	1.6		
Total		61	100.0		

Source: Researchers, 2017

From Table 4, most of the parents of the respondent earned income from casual labor, followed by business and other unspecified informal jobs (14.8%). 4.9% got their income from permanent employment, and 3.3% from farming. This was interpreted to mean that most respondent's parents at Nairobi Children's Remand Home were casual laborers hence their daily income could not cater for the family's basic necessities, thus increasing their vulnerability and their risk of going missing. The focus group discussion keyed out poverty as the major reason why children run away from home or pretend to be lost. The issues of lack of basic necessities such as meals also contributed greatly to the vulnerability of children. Focus groups noted that housing in informal settlements and especially for adolescents was not conducive.



**Figure 2** | Respondents meals at Nairobi Children's Remand Home versus Child's Home.

Source: Researchers, 2017

From Figure 2 it was evident that 96.7% of the respondents receive three meals at the Nairobi Children Remand Home as compared to the 30 (49.2%) children who receive the same from their specific homes. This means that children at the remand home are fed well. Fig 4.2.2 also shows that a considerable number of children have two meals at their homes (44.3%), while only a small percentage (4.9%) receive one meal per day. This was interpreted to mean that the respondents prefer to stay at the remand home and fail therefore to give accurate information about their homes.

### Hypothesis

$H_0$ : Income generated by the missing children's parents or guardian was equal across all their parents/guardian marital statuses

$H_1$ : Income generated by the missing children's parents or guardian was not equal across all their parents/guardian marital statuses

**Table 5** | Assessment of source of income

#### Parent's source of income

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.418	3	1.139	.908	.443
Within Groups	68.989	55	1.254		
<b>Total</b>	<b>72.407</b>	<b>58</b>			

Source: Researchers, 2017

The analysis of variance Table 4.5 above shows the p-value as being more than 0.05. This means that the income generated by the missing children's parents or guardian was not significantly different across the different marital statuses. This means that irrespective of the parent's status, the children experienced the same income.

*Influence of child abuse on vulnerability of missing children***Table 6** | Respondent's (children) main reason for leaving home

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Abuse	17	27.8	23.3	23.3
	Sent away	3	4.9	5.0	28.3
	Poverty	8	13.1	13.3	41.7
	Was abducted	1	1.6	1.7	43.3
	Got lost	10	16.4	16.7	60.0
	Run away	21	34.4	40.0	100.0
	Total	60	98.4	100.0	
Missing	9	1	1.6		
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Researchers, 2017

From Table 6, 27.8% respondents left their homes due to abuse, 4.9% were sent away, 13.15% left home due to poverty while 16.4% got lost. A small number 1.6% were abducted and 34.4% run away from home. This shows that a large cumulative percentage (62.2%) of the children were either abused or run away from home due to reasons that made them uncomfortable at home. The results are similar to focus group discussions where majority agreed that most of the children who are reported as missing come from dysfunctional families where there is abuse, especially by step-parents. However, it was interesting to note that a few children came from well-up families, and are normally influenced by their peers to leave home. Drug abuse was flagged as a key source of dysfunction in the family and child vulnerability.

**Table 7** | Respondent's Type of abuse

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Physical	12	19.7	70.6	70.6
	Sexual	4	6.6	23.5	94.1
	Emotional	1	1.6	5.9	100.0
	Total	17	27.9	100.0	
Missing	9	44	72.1		
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Researchers, 2017

Table 7 shows that most of the respondents (70.6%) were faced with physical abuse, (23.5%) experienced sexual abuse, and 5.9% experienced emotional abuse. This was interpreted to mean that most respondents i.e. missing children in Nairobi Children's Remand Home, experienced physical abuse. The study found that while 27.9% (17 children) of all the respondents left home because of abuse, only 8 (47.1%) children reported the abuse, as compared to 9 (52.9%) children who failed to report it. This was interpreted to mean that children feared victimization as most of the perpetrators were close relatives. This confirms a study done by (Cyr et al., 2013, Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2009) that most child abuse cases are never reported to the relevant authorities, which directly increases child vulnerability.

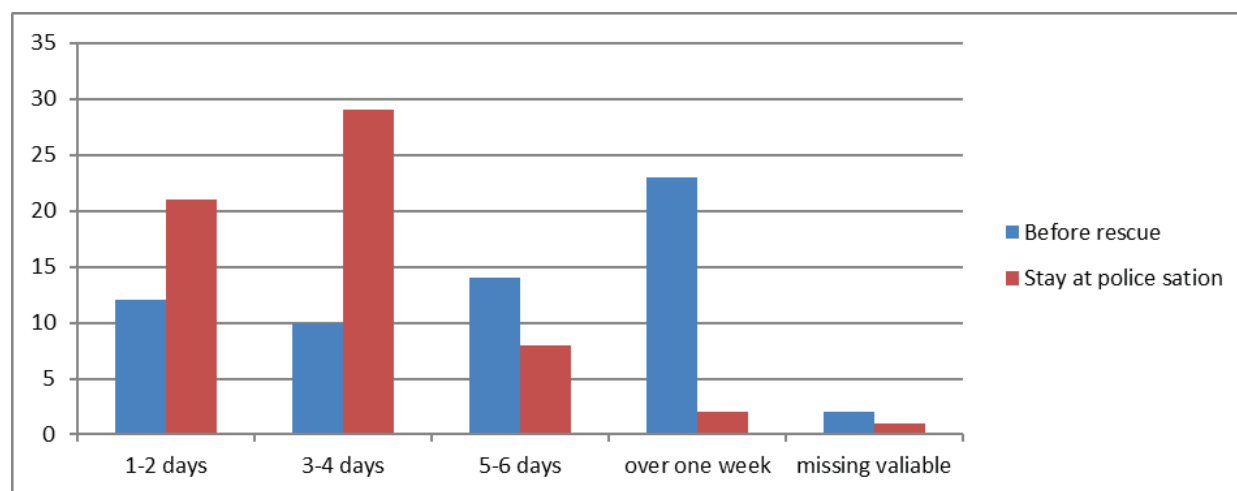
**Table 8** | *Abused, which kind of abuse were you exposed to*

		If abused, which kind of abuse were you exposed to			Total
		Physical	Sexual	Emotional	
Gender	Male	4	1	1	6
	Female	8	3	0	11
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>

Source: Researchers, 2017

### *Influence of government child protection systems on the vulnerability of missing children*

In focus group discussions, all respondents came to a consensus that there was a need for a nationally-accepted and legally-binding definition of the phrase 'missing child'. The members felt that most people had the misguided notion that missing children are only lost children, yet there are other categories such as run-aways, thrown away, and abducted children. Focus group members also recommended that the police and the Department of Children Services should have the core mandate of handling cases of missing children with the assistance from other State Departments and NGOs.

**Figure 3** | *Child respondent rescue time versus court presentation time*

Source: Researchers, 2017

Figure 3, shows the relationship in terms of time between when the respondent (child) was rescued and when they were presented in court. While there seems to be a fast response by the police to take the respondents to court with 50 (81.9%) respondents being taken to court within 4 days, rescue seems to take a bit longer with 23 (37.7%) children being rescued after a week. This can be interpreted to mean that the government response rate in rescuing the children was slow hence increasing their vulnerability when they were missing.

**Table 9** | Respondent's explanations on why they were being taken to court

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	27	44.3	45.8	45.8
	No	32	52.5	54.2	100.0
	Total	59	96.7	100.0	
Missing	9	2	3.3		
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Researchers, 2017

Table 9 above, shows that most of the missing children (54.2%) were not told why they were being taken to court while (45.8%), said that they were given reasons as to why they were being taken to court. This was interpreted to mean that in most cases, the police failed to inform the respondents on the government's efforts to rescue them through taking them to the court, where a proper process of placement would start.

**Table 10** | Respondent's information on whether police tried to locate their parent/guardians

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	43	70.5	75.4	75.4
	No	14	23.0	24.6	100.0
	Total	57	93.4	100.0	
Missing	9	3	4.9		
	System	1	1.6		
	Total	4	6.6		
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Researchers, 2017

Table 10 indicates that the police tried to locate most of the parents/guardians to the respondents (75.4%), while 24.6% said that the police did not try to locate their parents. This was interpreted to mean that the police tried to trace the parents of a significant number of the respondents.

**Table 11** | Respondent's (children) psycho social support at remand home

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	55	90.2	91.7	91.7
	No	5	8.2	8.3	100.0
	Total	60	98.4	100.0	
Missing	9	1	1.6		
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Researchers, 2017

According to Table 11, most of the missing children in Nairobi Children's Remand Home (91.7%) received some psychosocial support while they were admitted at the remand home, while 8.3% said that they had not received any psychosocial support. From the 55 (90.2%) respondents who said to have received psycho-social support, 54 (98.18%) respondents reported to have received counselling support, 1 (1.82%) respondent was referred to a hospital while none received play therapy. This was interpreted to mean that the stakeholders at the Nairobi Children Remand Home found counselling as the most necessary support that the respondents required, for them to overcome the challenges they may have faced when they were missing.

The researchers sought to know if the NGOs and Government provide a tailored, risk-based response aimed at protecting and reducing the risk of harm to children who go missing. From the focus group discussions, it was clear that majority of the organizations did not have a tailored, risk-based response aimed at protecting and reducing the risk of harm to children who are missing. Such organizations dealing with the wellbeing of children are not well-equipped to respond promptly in order to reduce the risks that missing children face. Police officers in the focus group pointed out that they have a service standing order for missing persons though the order is not specific to children. The order stated that one can only be recorded as missing after 48 hours. This is a long period given children are more vulnerable compared to adults and may therefore be at greater risk when missing, than adults are. The focus group agreed that there were no proper policies/laws to deal with missing children. A key issue of concern was the use of social media in the recovery of missing children. Members felt that social media does play an important part in the recovery of missing children but there is need for it to be controlled, since some posts are not authentic and may be avenues of abuse. Further, networking by different State departments and non-governmental organizations was seen as key in reducing vulnerability of missing children.

**Table 12** | *Need to have a national information sharing missing children bureau*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	29	96.7	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	3.3		
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Researchers, 2017

In table 12 above, 96.7% (29) respondents confirmed the need to have a national information sharing center. A cumulative percentage of 76.7% (23) of the respondents said the mandate of handling such data should be with the police and children departments. On the issue of missing children, bureaus, and databases, respondents at the focus group discussion were concerned by the manner in which the police department carries out missing children searches. It was noted that the police record cases of missing children manually and parents search for their children physically. Members felt that the use of available technology could play an important role in the prompt recovery of missing children.

#### *Influence of community involvement in vulnerability of missing children*

**Table 13** | *Rescue of missing children*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Well wisher	30	49.2	50.8	50.8
	Police	22	36.1	37.3	88.1
Valid	Children's officer	1	1.6	1.7	89.8
	Others	6	9.8	10.2	100.0
	Total	59	96.7	100.0	
Missing	9	2	3.3		
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Source: Researchers, 2017

From Table 13 above, most; 50.8% and 37.3% of the missing children were rescued by well-wishers and police respectively. Only 1.7% of the missing children were rescued by Children Officers and 10.2 % were rescued by Chiefs and other persons. This was interpreted to mean that the community is aware of the vulnerable children and responds quickly by rescuing the children and taking them to the police station as is required, therefore, reducing the vulnerability of the children. Respondents at the focus group brought up the fact that even though quite a big number of the cases were rescued by the community, the community was losing grip in terms of its ability to work together to ensure a safe place for children and instead each member of the community was preoccupied with personal interest.

**Table 14 | Respondent's (child) willingness to return home**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	33	54.1	54.1	54.1
	No	28	45.9	45.9	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Researchers, 2017

In Table 14, 33(54.1%) respondents were willing to return home. However, 28 respondents (45.9%) were not willing to return home. This is a significantly large number and this was seen to mean that despite the efforts of the stakeholders at the remand home to conduct counselling to the respondents, there were several other reasons that would hinder the respondents from going back home willingly. When asked what was needed to be done so as to improve the respondents homes and prevent these children from leaving in the future, 22 respondents (36%) indicated that they would like their parents to be more empowered in terms of employment so as to reduce the levels of poverty in their homes. 15 (24.6%) respondents most of whom reported abuse, said that they would like their parents counseled against abusing them while 13 (21.3%) and 10 (16.4%) reported that they would require an improvement in the provision of basic necessities of food and education respectively. This can be interpreted to mean that low levels of income and abuse with a cumulative percent of 60.6% are the major contributors of vulnerability in children. In the parents' questionnaire 80% (16) of respondents recorded that the community had slowly given up its role of communal parenting. People in the community are less concerned about the well-being of the children. Only a small percentage, 20 % (4), thought that the community was actively participating in child protection through alerting the police when they came across a missing child. Majority of the respondents, 13 (75%) thought that it was important to use social media as a tool for locating missing children as this would be faster and reach a greater number of people. However 7 (35%) of the respondents found it unfit to use social media as a tool to trace missing children. This can be interpreted to mean that a large percent of the community would prefer the use of social media as a tool of tracing missing children. On the issue of recommendations to improve the location and protection of missing children, 10 (50 %) respondents (parents of missing children) noted that there was a need for awareness creation among the community on what needed to be done once they came across a missing child. The other 50% (10) recommended a better police-community network and quicker responses by the police when they receive information on missing children.

## Conclusion

The traditional police role has focused on locating missing children. However, a holistic approach encompassing prevention, protection, location, education, and support is needed for a coordinated national policy response across various government departments and community organizations. There is need for proper formulation of missing children policies so as to reduce their vulnerability. The community needs empowerment on the need to care for and protect the children, as well as needing to be made aware on the processes that are provided by the government for recovery of missing children. Available policies do not distinguish between missing children and adults; there is need for a different approach as children are more vulnerable

compared to adults. It is important for the definition of the term 'missing children' by law so as to embrace all categories of missing children. There is a direct relationship between low income and increased numbers of missing children as many of the missing children are from low earning families. Chances of children from such families going missing increases if there is drug abuse in the family. It is clear that children pass through some traumatic events when they go missing as counselling seems to be the most sought out psycho-social service at the remand home. There is little networking between police stations and other departments aimed at reducing vulnerability of missing children in terms of sharing details of missing children from one police station to another. There is therefore need for an Internet powered police database of missing children to enable easy and fast tracing of children.

## Recommendations

It is essential for government agencies to come up with a nationally-binding legal definition of the term 'missing children' and the categories therein. In addition, guidelines on how to deal with cases of missing children should be formulated to enable service providers deliver their services in an efficient and well-coordinated way. Since in Kenya, there is no law/policy that categorically deals with missing children, it is imperative that the government come up with a policy/law that will address this problem. Cases of missing children should be given high priority. The 48-hour waiting period before a child is declared missing should be done away with since it puts the child at risk. There should be a standardized reporting format for cases of missing children at police stations. A national information sharing center that can handle all cases of missing children can help reduce the vulnerability of missing children by informing parents of missing children on the progress of each case and also by reuniting missing children with their parents. The Government and non-governmental organizations should create awareness to members of the public on what they should do in case they find a missing child. This will make the community play an active role in preventing children from going missing and also in protecting them while they are missing. The Department of Children Services that is mandated to coordinate all children services should set up a technical team that involves different stakeholders to deal with cases of missing children. The use of the Internet/social media to help find missing children should be controlled by a State body to avoid victimization of the children. Every missing child who returns from a missing episode should be offered return to home interviewing/counseling/psycho-social support from a counselor or a Children Officer. The government needs to enhance its child protection mechanisms for abused children, as well as scale-up the available social protection mechanisms for poor and the vulnerable groups. There is need for further research on missing children to understand the picture and context of missing children and whether there are any particular locations or venues, which are particularly high risk, and whether there are locations where children are regularly going missing.

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