

CHILD ABANDONMENT AND HOMELESSNESS IN HONDURAS

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the boys and girls of Villa Soleada, Honduras. *Porque mis pies siempre me van a llevar a ustedes.* In loving memory of Abigail Sierra Amador.

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I would like to thank my friends and family, old and new, for their endless support during my Masters program and dissertation. I would especially like to thank my parents and my brother Spencer for their patience and understanding, and for supporting me throughout the program. Without you guys, I never would have had this opportunity, or many other opportunities that I have had throughout my life. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations and Symbols	viii
Abstract.....	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review	5
Background Information.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Honduras General Information.....	7
Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness.....	10
Poverty and Unemployment.....	10
Lack of Education.....	12
Gender Inequality and a Masochistic Society.....	13
Violence.....	14
Abuse and Family Relations.....	15
Organizations.....	17
State Institutions.....	17
NGO Institutions.....	18
Failed Organizations.....	21
Risks of Living on the Streets.....	22
Violence Against Street Children.....	23
Unlawful Incarceration.....	26
Turning to Drugs and Alcohol or Crime.....	28
Risks to Females.....	29
Psychological Effects.....	31
Health Problems.....	32
How to Further Address the Issue.....	33
Chapter Three: Research Methods	40
Introduction.....	40
Research Design Overview.....	40
Literary Research.....	42
Institutional Review Board Certification.....	43

Interviews.....	43
Chapter Four: Case Study One	46
Background Information about Nueva Esperanza.....	46
Data.....	50
Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness.....	50
Additional Information about Nueva Esperanza.....	51
Pre-Fire.....	51
The Fire in November 2011.....	53
Post-Fire.....	53
Recent Events.....	55
Analysis.....	56
Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness.....	56
Additional Information about Nueva Esperanza.....	57
Pre-Fire.....	57
The Fire in November 2011.....	60
Post-Fire.....	61
Recent Events.....	64
Chapter Five: Case Study Two	66
Background Information about the Villa Soleada Children's Homes.....	66
Students Helping Honduras.....	66
Villa Soleada Children's Homes.....	69
Data.....	70
Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness.....	71
Immediate Causes.....	71
Root Causes.....	72
Additional Information about the Villa Soleada Children's Homes.....	74
How the Issue Could Be Further Addressed.....	75
Analysis.....	77
Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness.....	77
Immediate Causes.....	77
Root Causes.....	79
Villa Soleada Children's Homes.....	82
How the Issue Could Be Further Addressed.....	84
Chapter Six: Case Study Three	87
Background Information about Our Little Roses.....	87
History.....	87
The Need for Such an Organization.....	87
Our Little Roses Today.....	88
Data.....	91
Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness.....	92
Immediate Causes.....	92
Root Causes.....	92

Additional Information about Our Little Roses.....	93
How the Issue Could Be Further Addressed.....	96
Analysis.....	98
Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness.....	98
Immediate Causes.....	98
Root Causes.....	99
Additional Information about Our Little Roses.....	100
How to Further Address the Issue.....	102
Chapter Seven: Synthesis.....	105
Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness.....	105
Immediate Causes.....	105
Root Causes.....	106
Organization Information.....	107
How to Further Address the Issue.....	110
Narrow-Based Solutions.....	110
Broad-Based Solutions.....	111
Who Should Confront the Issues?.....	113
How and Why the State Can't Care for Children.....	115
State Can't Care for Citizens.....	115
Absolute Deprivation of Freedoms.....	119
The Role of NGOs.....	122
Chapter Eight: Conclusion	127
Review of the Project.....	127
Weaknesses.....	129
How to Extend the Project.....	130
References	132

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

American Dollar	\$
Childhood, Adolescence and Family Directorate.....	DINAF
Christian Children’s Fund	CCF
Early Stimulation Program	ESP
Honduran Lempira	L
Human Immunodeficiency Virus.....	HIV
Institutional Review Board	IRB
Instituto Hondureño de la Niñez y la Familia	IHNFA
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights	IACHR
International Labour Organization	ILO
International Monetary Fund	IMF
Intrauterine Device	IUD
National Institute of Vocational Training	INFOP
Non-governmental Organization.....	NGO
Office of Research Integrity and Assurance.....	ORIA
Our Little Roses.....	OLR
Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.....	PRSP
Public Administration Reform Program	PRAP
Reach Out Orphanage Ministries.....	ROOM
Structural Readjustment Program.....	SAP
Sexually Transmitted Infection	STI
Students Helping Honduras.....	SHH
United Kingdom	UK
United Nations.....	UN
United Nations Children’s Fund.....	UNICEF
United States	US

ABSTRACT

CHILD ABANDONMENT AND HOMELESSNESS IN HONDURAS

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George Mason University, 2014

Thesis Director: Dr. Mark Goodale

This thesis describes the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. It includes the causes of the issue, several past and present organizations dedicated to the issue, the physical and psychological effects of living on the streets, and what can be done to address the issue. In the process of researching and writing this thesis, the researcher conducted a literature search and a comparative analysis of three different children's homes in Honduras.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Honduras is a country located in Central America that boasts lush jungles, white sand beaches, and a tropical climate. There is no shortage of palm trees or fresh fruits, and Latin music infused with elements of reggaetón can be heard in any public area or home. Yet Honduras has been wracked by violence, poverty, and uncertainty for decades. It is the third-poorest country in Latin America and the second-most unequal in reference to distribution of wealth.¹ Most often, those who suffer the most are children. Due to poverty and unemployment, many Hondurans cannot afford to care for their children, and are forced to abandon them, either to the state or to the streets. In other cases, children are orphaned as a result of gang violence or are forced to flee abusive homes. There are thousands of children living on the streets of Honduras, and yet the Honduran government does little to help them leave the streets and become productive members of society. Without adequate welfare and social service government programs, these children are left with few options.

This researcher spent the year following her undergraduate graduation working in a rural village in the northern region of Honduras. She spent most of her

¹ Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle, "The 2009 Coup and the Struggle for Democracy in Honduras." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 44, no. 1 (Jan, 2011): 16-21,40.

time working with a small children's home in the village, home to twelve boys of various ages. Some were orphans, some had been removed from their parents' care, and some had run away from abusive or otherwise un-ideal living conditions. The boys the researcher worked with were some of the luckier ones. In the city nearby, one could always see children, usually young or adolescent males, sleeping on the street or sniffing glue. The researcher began to wonder exactly why there were so many children that were abandoned or homeless in Honduras, and what was being done to address the issue.

This thesis compares literature on child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras, provides data from a variety of qualitative research interviews, and a comparative analysis of three children's homes in Honduras. The literature review investigates the immediate and root causes of child abandonment and homelessness and lists and briefly discusses a variety of present and past organizations that have attempted to address the issue. The literature review then discusses the physical, mental, and psychological implications of child abandonment and homelessness, and provides suggestions from scholars and researchers regarding how to address the problem. Unfortunately, this subject has been significantly under-researched. Since the mid-1990s, the international community's focus in Central America has largely been related to gang activity, violence, and drug trafficking. Therefore, there is little scholarly material available on the topic of child abandonment and homelessness.

Following the literature review, the study has a research methods section describing the process of the entire study, as well as data and analysis of the qualitative research interviews. A qualitative research study focusing on interviews was best for this project because it provided the researcher with in-depth responses to questions regarding the issue, from a variety of individuals who are very involved in working with abandoned and homeless children in Honduras. After the research methods section, there are three case studies of different children's homes in Honduras dedicated to assisting abandoned and homeless children. These sections contain detailed information about the organizations, a data section that includes summarized responses to the interviews, and an analysis of the interviewees' responses. The interview questions were focused on the causes of child abandonment and homelessness, the structure and organization of the homes, and how they think the issue of child abandonment and homelessness could be further addressed. Following the three case studies, there is a synthesis section that compares and contrasts the data acquired from the three homes, and compares these findings to the information from scholars in the literature review. Also in the synthesis chapter is a section about how and why the Honduran government cannot care for these children or its citizens in general, and how this leaves parents unable to support their families. The synthesis concludes with the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in developing countries.

The thesis concludes with a brief section that includes an overview of the project, including findings from the interviews and literature review regarding child

abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. The conclusion also explores the weaknesses of the thesis, as well as how the project could be expanded in the future.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background Information

Introduction

In Honduras, there are two types of orphans: true orphans, who have no living relatives, and social orphans, children who have been abandoned or abused by their guardians.² In 2006, UNICEF released an estimate that there were more than 180,000 orphans in Honduras, both true and social, and predicted an increase of at least 65,000 in the upcoming five years.³ More often than not, these children end up living on the street or in children's homes.

UNICEF defines the term "street child" as "one for whom the street more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults."⁴ As of 1992, UNICEF estimated that there were approximately 100 million street children throughout the world,

² María del Carmen Ayes Cerna Licda, "Tercer Informe periódico sobre la situación en el cumplimiento de la Convención de los Derechos del Niño: Escenario y Desafíos," Tegucigalpa, M.D.C., Noviembre del 2005.

http://www.ihnfa.hn/Documentos/Informe_sobre_cumplimiento_de_la_CDN.pdf.

³ UNICEF, "State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible," 2006

⁴ UNICEF Executive Board, "Exploitation of working children and street children," U.N. Doc. E/ICEF/1986/CRP.1983; 1986.

and 40-50 million in Latin America alone.⁵ And yet there is a very important distinction to be made regarding the classification of “street children.” Irving Epstein argued that there are three types of street children: those who merely work on the street and then return home to their families, those who maintain ties with their families but live independently on the streets, and those who have no contact with their families and live independently on the streets.⁶ UNICEF had two similar classifications; on-the-street children, those who may work on the street or spend an ample amount of time there but still sleep at home, and of-the-street children, those who spend the majority, if not all, of their time on the street.⁷ Yet children that live independently on the streets are not necessarily orphaned. A study cited by Marcela Raffaelli showed that many homeless youth have relatives even within the city in which they are living. However, the study in Brazil showed that homeless youth rarely have contact with relatives, and feel no sense of protection or assistance from these family members.⁸

Catherine Panter-Brick claimed that the generic phrase “street child” is much too simplistic. She argued that it does not adequately encompass the diversity of the individuals’ backgrounds, and does not represent the views of the children

⁵ Irving Epstein, “Educating Street Children: Some Cross-Cultural Perspectives,” *Comparative Education* Vol. 32, No. 3 (1996): 289-302

⁶ Epstein, “Educating Street Children: Some Cross-Cultural Perspectives.”

⁷ Jessica Woan, Jessica Lin and Colette Auerswald, “The Health Status of Street Children and Youth in Low- and Middle- Income Countries: A Systematic Review of the Literature.” *Journal of Adolescent Health* Vol. 53 (2013): 314-321

⁸ Marcela Raffaelli, “Homeless and Working Street Youth in Latin America: A Developmental Review,” *Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology* Paper 105 (1999): DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska- Lincoln

themselves. Panter-Brick also stated that the language used by the UN and other organizations is often confusing or ambiguous. For example, she mentioned UNICEF's definition of a street child as one lacking direction from responsible adults. What constitutes a responsible adult? The term, like many others such as "abandoned" and "homeless," is too subjective. The definitions and categorizations for terminology related to street children is constantly being adjusted and modified.⁹ For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher will be focusing on children that live independently on the streets, although they may have occasional contact with their families, and children who have been relocated to children's homes.

Honduras General Information

Honduras is located in Central America, bordered by Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Honduras has a population of approximately 8.6 million, 97% of which are of the Roman Catholic faith.¹⁰ Seventy-three percent of its citizens live in poverty and 53% in extreme poverty. While there is a 73% literacy rate according to Friends of El Hogar, the national average for years of formal schooling attended is only two years. About half of the population is under the age of 18.¹¹ The Honduran government and various children's rights organizations have estimated the number

⁹ Catherine Panter-Brick, "Street Children, Human Rights, and Public Health: A Critique and Future Directions," *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 31 (2002): 147-171

¹⁰ CIA World Factbook, "Honduras," last modified June 17th, 2014.

¹¹ Friends of El Hogar, "Street Children in Honduras."
www.foeh.org.uk/street_children_in_honduras.php

of children living on the street in Honduras to be around 20,000.¹² The majority of street children in Honduras live in Tegucigalpa (the capital) and San Pedro Sula, a large city in the northern region of the country.¹³

Rachel Nizam, citing Vasanthi Raman, explained how poverty rose significantly in Honduras over the past few decades. The debt crisis of the 1980s led to structural readjustment programs (SAPs), which significantly cut the country's social services. This led to widespread poverty, as well as increased child labor and high drop-out rates for primary and secondary education.¹⁴ Additional factors contributing to the abject poverty in the country are "slow economic growth; the unequal distribution of income; the low level of education; and the weakness of local governments."¹⁵

Over the past 30 years, urbanization has increased significantly in Honduras. James Wright stated that this is a result of poor soil, outdated farming practices, and the desire to search for a better standard of living. This, in turn, has led to overcrowding in cities as well as individual households, which may house upwards of 10 members of the same family. The poor quality residences, called *barrios*, are quickly constructed along the outskirts of the city, and may have electricity, but

¹² U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Human Rights Reports, 2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," March 8, 2006

¹³ Friends of El Hogar, "Street Children in Honduras."

¹⁴ Rachel Nizam, "Child Labour in Honduras," in *The Political Economy of New Slavery*, ed. Christien van den Anker (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 144

¹⁵ Leslie Groves, "Implementing ILO Child Labour Convention 182: Lessons from Honduras," *Development in Practice* Vol. 14 no. 1/2 (February 2004): 172

rarely adequate plumbing or running water. The government takes advantage of citizens living in these types of homes. Because the homes are illegally constructed, the government does not have to provide social services or programs that they would normally have to implement.¹⁶

Honduras also has a very high birth rate. According to Wright, women in Honduras frequently have half a dozen children during their lifetime, which he says are viewed as an economic resource because they represent another worker to bring in an income. This, combined with the rural-to-urban movement, has led to significant overcrowding in cities, the majority of which are children.¹⁷ Wolseth and Babb argued that the youth in Latin America are a marginalized group, because the state views them as non- or partial-citizens.¹⁸

This researcher is interested in understanding what programs have been implemented, by the state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. Unfortunately, the subject of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras has been under-researched, and there is little scholarly material on the topic.

Children's homes are a band-aid solution to a much deeper-rooted issue in Honduras, that of child abandonment and homelessness. Giving them food and shelter and even counseling is addressing the problem after-the-fact, instead of

¹⁶ James D. Wright, Beth A. Rubin, and Joel A. Devine, *Beside the Golden Door: policy, politics, and the homeless* (New York: Aldine Transactions, 1998) p. 195-208

¹⁷ Wright, et al., *Beside the Golden Door*.

¹⁸ Jon Wolseth and Florence Babb, "Introduction: Youth and Cultural Politics in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* Vol. 35 no. 4 (July 2008): 3-14

addressing the root causes. Heather Montgomery argued that the state and society are primarily responsible for child abandonment in developing countries. Society in developing countries offers parents “no support or encouragement other than the threat of punishment if they fail.” In nations with widespread poverty, struggling parents are left without many options to provide for their families.¹⁹

Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness

Poverty and Unemployment

The number of homeless youth in Honduras rose sharply in the 1980s and continued to rise due to extreme poverty and rapid population growth. With a current unemployment rate of nearly 25%, many families are left unable to provide for their children, forcing the children to leave home to survive on the streets.²⁰ In the early 2000s, the World Bank estimated that around 90 million children in the region were living in poverty. In Honduras and Nicaragua, it was estimated that eight to twelve percent of all minors were living and/or working on the streets, revealing an astonishing eightfold increase in Tegucigalpa alone during the 1990s.²¹ Irving Epstein stated that the majority of youth living on the streets are first-born, showing that families cannot handle the economic situation and are forced to

¹⁹ Heather Montgomery, “Abandonment and child prostitution in a Thai slum community,” in *Abandoned Children* ed. Catherine Panter-Brick and Malcolm T. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 196.

²⁰ Robert Collier, “Project Provides Hope to Street Kids of Honduras,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Sep 20, 1987.

²¹ Yvette Collymore, “Migrant Street Children on the Rise in Central America,” *Population Today* 30, no. 2 (Feb, 2002): 1-1,4+.

abandon their eldest children.²² While the population in Honduras has continued to grow exponentially, the government has failed to respond appropriately with increases in available housing, educational opportunities, and access to medical care.²³ Indeed, the President of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, Andrés Pavón, stated that "...we live in a country in which there is a tendency to criminalize poverty..."²⁴ This cycle of poverty continues for generations, because Hondurans do not have the opportunity to rise out of poverty.²⁵

A study by Armstrong et al. argued that most orphans in Honduras are orphans as a result of social factors that contribute to poverty. The study cited street situations, unemployment, inability of the parents to care for the child, abuse, and mental or physical disabilities. All of these factors are related to or directly contribute to poverty in Honduras. This results in what Armstrong et al. calls "the orphan cycle." Children in this type of situation significantly lack access to basic development opportunities, such as food, shelter, and a stable family atmosphere. Without the opportunities necessary to succeed, they perpetuate the orphan cycle.²⁶

²² Epstein, "Educating Street Children."

²³ Elizabeth A. Kuznesof, "The House, the Street, Global Society: Latin American Families and Childhood in the 21st Century," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 4 (Summer, 2005): 859-872

²⁴ Casa Alianza, "Extrajudicial Executions of Children and Youths since 1998," *Amnesty International*, September 2002

²⁵ *Children in a Jar*, directed by Andrea Campbell (2004; Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Natural Light Films, Inc., 2004), documentary.
<http://www.naturallightfilms.com/index.html>

²⁶ Ruth Armstrong, Matt Dull, Sabrina Milous, and James Verner, ed. by Remer Brinson, "Caring for the Needy: A Desirable Paradigm Shift in Honduran Orphan Care"

Lack of Education

The quality and the availability of education in Honduras, as well as most of Latin America, is quite low. According to a study by Lopez and Valdes, Honduran farmers only received an average of three years of formal schooling. The study included data from five other Latin American countries, and data from those five indicated that one additional year of schooling could significantly benefit the farms. In Honduras, it made no difference. This showed that in Honduras, there was little incentive for children of farmers to continue their education. Lack of contraceptive education leads to larger families, and the poor among them sometimes cannot afford to provide for all of their children.²⁷ Children are often forced to leave school at the primary level to help raise younger siblings. Some families cannot afford the cost of uniforms or enrollment, or even transportation costs.²⁸ A 2006 report by the US State Department cited “high dropout rates, low enrollment at the secondary level, unbalanced distribution of government spending, teacher absenteeism, and low quality of education in the classroom” as fundamental issues within the Honduran educational system that need to be addressed.²⁹ Author Duncan Green revealed the severity of the education problem in Latin America. While he

²⁷ Ramon Lopez and Alberto Valdes, "Fighting Rural Poverty in Latin America: New Evidence of the Effects of Education, Demographics, and Access to Land," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 49, no. 1 (10, 2000): 197-211.

²⁸ James D. Wright, Martha Wittig, and Donald C. Kaminsky, "Street Children in North and Latin America: Preliminary Data from Proyecto Alternativos in Tegucigalpa and some Comparisons with the U.S. Case," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 28, no. 2 (Summer, 1993): 81.

²⁹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Human Rights Reports, 2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices."

acknowledged that education has expanded, the quality is extremely insufficient. There are high dropout rates, many instances of grade repetition, and increasingly short school hours. Green referenced one study regarding school dropouts, which revealed that half of the students surveyed after receiving six plus years of school were still illiterate.³⁰

Gender Inequality and a Masochistic Society

A 2005 study by Speizer et al. investigated the issues of gender relations in Honduras. Based on their findings, the study revealed that in Honduras, couples often disagree about the use of contraceptives and the number of children they plan to have. The study showed that more often than not, men end up making most of the reproductive decisions for the family. This masochistic atmosphere can result in women having more children than they want or can effectively care for, which leads to instances of child abandonment. This is especially true in rural areas, where the women tend to have lower levels of education and household income.³¹ Duncan Green echoed the impact of gender inequality in Latin America. Due to the high rate of unemployment, men in Latin America suffer from a loss of identity and self esteem in the sense that they cannot effectively provide for their families. According to Green, this has resulted in increased alcoholism among males and increased

³⁰ Duncan Green, *Hidden Lives: Voices of Children in Latin America and the Caribbean* (London: Cassell, 1998), 154

³¹ Ilene Speizer, Lisa Whittle, and Marion Carter, "Gender Relations and Reproductive Decision Making in Honduras," *International Family Planning Perspectives* Vol. 31 No. 3, (September 2005)

domestic violence in the household, as well as complete abandonment of the family.³²

Violence

Gang activity is a major issue in Honduras, as well as most of Central America. By a 2004 estimate, there were approximately 300,000 gang members in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. There are two major gangs that frequently have violent conflicts, the 18th Street gang (also known as Mara 18 or Barrio 18) and the Mara Salvatrucha. Both were formed in Los Angeles by Salvadoran immigrants, who were then deported back to Central America in the mid-1990s. Violence in the region exploded, and continues today.³³ In 2012, UNICEF estimated that 60 percent of gang members in Honduras reside in San Pedro Sula, and 21 percent in Tegucigalpa. Gang members that participated in a survey stated that most joined between the ages of 11 and 20.³⁴ Hondurans, whether involved with the gangs themselves or being threatened with extortion by the gangs, or merely being in the wrong place at the wrong time, have left many children orphaned.³⁵ Casa Alianza

³² Green, *Hidden Lives*, 12

³³ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Human Rights Reports, 2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices."

³⁴ "UNICEF-supported study sheds light on gangs in Honduras," updated 2 July 2012, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/honduras_65204.html

³⁵ Jos Eduardo Mora, "Honduras: Rights Groups Protest New Anti-Gang Police Measures," *Global Information Network*, Dec 31, 2004.

estimated that approximately 21,000 children in Honduras have lost a parent as a direct result of gang violence and criminal activity.³⁶

Not only does violence occur between gang members, but also in attacks on civilians. The gangs extort local businesses, and when the businesses don't pay, punishment is swift and lethal. That is what happened in a January 2011 bomb explosion on a Guatemalan bus that killed nine people. There was a dispute regarding extortion payments between the owner of the bus company and the Mara 18, and the gang used a cell phone to detonate a backpack filled with explosives on the bus. In Tegucigalpa in December 2010, members of Mara 18 set fire to a bus as punishment for failing to provide extortion payments. Fortunately, there were no victims in this incident.³⁷

However, Casa Alianza argues that the increase in the number of gang members in Honduras and other countries in Latin America is a result of other factors. These factors are the same factors that cause public insecurity, such as poverty, weak family structure or disintegration, unemployment, and lack of opportunities.³⁸

Abuse and Family Relations

Abuse is also very common among the lives of children living on the street in Honduras. These children often suffered physical or sexual abuse at the hands of

³⁶ Kay Valle, "Orphaned by Violence in Honduras," *Infosurhoy*, October 4 2013, http://infosurhoy.com/en_GB/articles/saii/features/main/2013/10/04/feature-01

³⁷ Danilo Valladares, "Central America: "Mutating" Gangs Sow Terror," *Global Information Network*, Jan 18, 2011.

³⁸ Casa Alianza, "Extrajudicial Executions of Children and Youths since 1998,"

relatives, leading them to the decision to leave home.³⁹ In a study by Woan and Lin, children living on the streets often cited familial conflict such as abuse, drug use by one or both parents, domestic violence, and neglect as major reasons for leaving their homes.⁴⁰ Parents can also be involved in drug dealing and the drug trade, which creates the desire to leave for the children.⁴¹ Also mentioned were remarriage of a parent, followed by the subsequent discrimination by a step-parent and/or abandonment by the parent.⁴² A study by Armstrong et al. stated that very few government services exist to help children in Honduras that are suffering from abuse, which results in many children ending up on the streets.⁴³ The documentary *Children in a Jar* claims that family abuse and mistreatment is largely a result of economic problems.⁴⁴ Another documentary, *Honduras: The War on Children*, also indicated high levels of physical and sexual abuse by guardians or relatives of children in Honduras. This, coupled with extreme poverty, leads to children living on the streets.⁴⁵

³⁹ Colleymore, "Migrant Street Children on the Rise in Central America."

⁴⁰ Woan and Lin, "The Health Status of Street Children and Youth in Low- and Middle- Income Countries."

⁴¹ *Honduras: The War on Children*, directed by George Waldrum (2007; United Kingdom: Unreported World, 2007), documentary.
http://watchdocumentary.org/watch/honduras-the-war-on-children-video_96966c4c7.html

⁴² Woan and Lin, "The Health Status of Street Children and Youth in Low- and Middle- Income Countries."

⁴³ Armstrong et al., "Caring for the Needy."

⁴⁴ *Children in a Jar*, 2004 documentary.

⁴⁵ *Honduras: The War on Children*, 2007 documentary.

Weak family structure and family disintegration can also be a cause of child abandonment and homelessness. Wright et al. argued that weak family organization can be a result of the rural to urban migration, and the family is therefore no longer a protective and stable entity. Children, especially older males, often leave their homes, which are seen to be dysfunctional and unstable, in order to live on the streets.⁴⁶ One 12-year-old girl in the *Children in a Jar* documentary stated that she was living on the streets because her mother had run off with another man, which resulted in her father becoming an alcoholic who was physically abusive to this girl and her siblings. Her two sisters also lived on the streets with her, ages 15 and 16, and they added that their father was also very neglectful in providing food, water, and clothing to his children.⁴⁷ The documentary *Honduras: The War on Children* also referenced family breakdown as a major reason that children in Honduras end up living on the streets.⁴⁸

Organizations

Both the state and non-governmental organizations have attempted to address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness over the past few decades. And yet there are still not enough institutions to accommodate the vast numbers of homeless children in Honduras.

State Institutions

⁴⁶ Wright, Rubin, Devine, *Beside the Golden Door*.

⁴⁷ *Children in a Jar*, 2004 documentary.

⁴⁸ *Honduras: The War on Children*, 2007 documentary.

Irving Epstein claimed that state institutions dedicated to the issue of child abandonment and homelessness are often “immature or incomplete and are unable to fulfill mandates that would offer the promise of broad social and political inclusivity.” This was due to unequal distribution of wealth within the state, reliance on foreign aid, or internal civil conflicts.⁴⁹ This was also the case in Honduras, where the Honduran government set up the Instituto Hondureño de la Niñez y la Familia (IHNFA). IHNFA is an agency similar to Child Protective Services in the US and removes children from unsafe home environments and places them in state orphanages or foster care.⁵⁰ After her visit in 2014, UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children, Najat Maalla M’jid, expressed concern that “the protection provided by the state to child victims continued to be insufficient due to multiple gaps in the comprehensive care services.” She stated that initiatives taken by the state continued to be uncoordinated and failed to follow up on the impact of the programs.⁵¹

NGO Institutions

There are many non-governmental organizations dedicated to assisting street children in Honduras. They tend to focus on education and vocational training, both very important to the future of the children. Some are dedicated to

⁴⁹ Epstein, “Educating Street Children.”

⁵⁰ Teodolinda Pineda, “Honduras, Government of the Honduran Republic, Frame of the Second World Congress on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children,” accessed January 28th, 2014.

⁵¹ “United Nations Expert on Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children Asks Honduras for Measures to Effectively Protect Children,” *Targeted News Service*, Apr 28, 2014.

street children specifically, providing housing, health care, and drug rehabilitation and counseling.⁵² Many of these organizations are funded by religious institutions. One of these is Sociedad Amigos de los Niños, founded by Sister Maria Rosa Leggol, who is fondly called the “Mother Teresa of Central America.” Leggol’s goal, like many others with a similar cause, was to give street children a safe home, while at the same time providing education and preparing them for a future in the workforce.⁵³

Casa Alianza is an NGO that rehabilitates and defends street children in Honduras. It is a branch of the Covenant House, located in New York. Casa Alianza is a major advocate for homeless children’s rights, and often speaks out on allegations that the Honduran government has initiated a social cleansing program designed to eradicate street children. Between 1998 and 2002, Casa Alianza recorded about 1,500 murders of Honduran minors living in the streets. Casa Alianza claims that the government has been both actively and passively involved in the murders of street children as police, armed forces, and civilians target the homeless minors.⁵⁴

Proniño is a large children’s home located in El Progreso, in the northern region of Honduras. Proniño was opened in 2000 by George and Betty Mealer, both American citizens born in Honduras. The home rehabilitates street boys in four ways: by building trusting relationships, through drug addiction treatment if

⁵² Colleymore, “Migrant Street Children on the Rise in Central America.”

⁵³ John L. Allen Jr., “Sr. Maria Rosa of Honduras: Faith and an iron will,” *National Catholic Reporter*, April 20, 2007, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Reddy Shrivanti, “Honduran Government Complicit in the Murder of Street Children,” *Digital Freedom Network*, December 17, 2002

necessary, vocational training, and finally through job placement and living independently. There are four Proniño centers: Nueva Vida, which provides drug rehabilitation; Los Vencedores, where the boys transfer to from Nueva Vida to receive individual counseling; Amor y Paz, which provides housing and education for the majority of the boys; and Grandes Heroes, where the older boys receive vocational training and learn to live independently. The boys are given clean clothes, food, and a place to sleep, and education.⁵⁵ Proniño offers the boys opportunities to assist in cooking meals, work in the bakery, help with farming, and other jobs that help sustain the home. Discipline is important at Proniño to keep things running smoothly. Drugs and violence are not tolerated, and punishments for violations are implemented accordingly. Proniño has an experienced and professional team of employees, including psychologists and counselors that plan fun and interactive activities for the boys. Volunteer groups also visit Amor y Paz at various times during the year.⁵⁶ Last time the researcher visited, in December 2012, there were approximately 100 boys living at Amor y Paz.

Interestingly, a study by Armstrong et al. found that communication between orphanages was quite limited, both regarding state orphanages and private NGO organizations. Directors were interested in forming relationships with other nearby organizations, but had made little effort to formulate such communication and

⁵⁵ Liza Matia, "Long helps needs children in Honduras," *The Progress News*, February 21, 2009 www.theprogressnews.com/default.asp?read=16446

⁵⁶ "Pronino USA: Creating Brighter Futures for Latin American Street Children," accessed June 30, 2014. <http://www.pronino.org/default.aspx>

interaction. The study stated that there was a sense of distrust among directors of the homes, possibly a result of an “individualistic view of orphanage missions.”⁵⁷

Failed Organizations

Unfortunately, many children’s homes were closed due to lack of interest and lack of funding. Lisa Lopes, a member of the female singing group TLC, was inspired when she visited Honduras in the 1990s. She began an organization called the Lisa Lopes Foundation and hosted fundraisers in order to build a children’s home called “The Home of Love.” But after her death in 2002, support waned. A fundraiser hosted by her brother, Ronald Lopes, raised a mere \$5,000. While that amount of money goes a long way in a developing country like Honduras, high-profile celebrities could have donated more money.⁵⁸ Today, the children’s home is no longer in operation. The Lisa Lopes Foundation still raises money for educational resources in low-income communities. The website does not specify if the fundraising is for Honduras or the US.⁵⁹

In 1987, UNICEF operated a pilot program for housing abandoned children in Honduras. The project, called the Diamond Project, housed approximately 60 boys, with plans for expansion to house around 500 boys by the early 1990s.⁶⁰ However, upon investigating for more recent news on the home, the researcher could find

⁵⁷ Armstrong et al. “Caring for the Needy.”

⁵⁸ Kaylyn Kendall Dines, “Lisa Lopes Foundation Fundraiser Helps Orphans in Honduras,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Aug, 2007.

⁵⁹ Lisa Lopes Foundation, accessed June 30, 2014.
<http://www.lisalopesfoundation.org/mission.php>

⁶⁰ Collier, “Project Provides Hope to Street Kids of Honduras.”

nothing other than the original newspaper article from 1987. UNICEF does not list the Diamond Project as one of its ongoing programs in Honduras, so one can assume that the project was eventually terminated.

An organization based in Tegucigalpa called Proyectos Alternativos lasted only two years during the early 1990s. During its operation, it provided health education, health care, a nutritional program for undernourished street and market children, and informal activities such as education and recreational activities. It operated out of six locations in Tegucigalpa, and was composed of a staff that included educators, a doctor, a nurse, a psychologist, and a social worker. It was unclear as to why the organization was dismantled.⁶¹

But just because these children's homes close does not mean that these children automatically disappear. They still desperately need a home where they feel safe and cared for.

Risks of Living on the Streets

“He is the child most rejected and, at the same time, most in need of acceptance; the most difficult for adults to love and the most in need of adult affection; the least trusted and the most in need of trust; the most abandoned and the most in need of family; the most repressed and the most deserving of freedom; the most forgotten and the most worthy of our remembrance; the least helped and

⁶¹ Wright, Wittig, and Kaminsky, “Street Children in North and Latin America.”

the most in need; the least fed and the most hungry; the dirtiest and the least able to find a good bath.”⁶²

Violence Against Street Children

Children living on the streets of Honduras are not treated kindly. They are often referred to as criminals, “street urchins,” vagrants, glue-sniffers, or delinquents.⁶³ In the documentary *Children in a Jar*, the narrator mentioned the “dehumanization of [street] children.” By this, he meant that street children in Central America are not seen as human beings, and are not of any worth to society.⁶⁴ Not only do they face the obvious threats of hunger and exposure, they are subjected to violence, both at the hands of civilians and the government. Life on the streets is difficult at its best, and deadly at its worst. According to human rights groups, between 1998 and 2000, at least 1,000 youths were murdered in Honduras, referred to as “extrajudicial killings” and “summary executions.”⁶⁵ Death by violent means is now the leading cause of death for youths aged 15-25 in Central America, and in some areas of Honduras, 54% of deaths within this age range are murders.⁶⁶ Most street children survive by begging for money, carrying bags for shoppers at

⁶² P. Tacon, “MyChild Minus One,” Unpublished UNICEF report, 1981. Quoted in *Abandoned Children* ed. Catherine Panter-Brick and Malcolm T. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 148

⁶³ Panter-Brick, “Street Children, Human Rights, and Public Health: A Critique and Future Directions.”

⁶⁴ *Children in a Jar*, 2004 documentary.

⁶⁵ Mora, “Honduras: Rights Groups Protest New Anti-Gang Police Measures.”

⁶⁶ Bruce Harris, “Child Murders in Central America,” *The Lancet* 360, no. 9344 (Nov 09, 2002): 1508.

nearby grocery stores, or by stealing. Some are fortunate enough to come across kind strangers, who offer them a hot meal or a place to sleep for the night.⁶⁷

An Amnesty International UK press release from 2003 showed that the murders of street children in Honduras remained a serious human rights concern. In several cases, witnesses provided accounts that pointed to police or armed force involvement in the murders. However, higher authorities took no measures to investigate the crimes.⁶⁸ According to Casa Alianza, nearly 60 percent of these murders were inadequately investigated.⁶⁹ Between 1998 and 2002, Casa Alianza reported around 1,500 murders of street children, and yet there was not a single conviction for the crimes. Inadequate investigations are a clear violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Because of Casa Alianza's vocal persistence on the issue, the Honduran government has attracted the attention and scrutiny of the United Nations.⁷⁰ As of the early 2000s, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights were investigating several murders of children that remained uninvestigated by local authorities.⁷¹

Amnesty International also expressed concern that these murders could be part of a larger "social cleansing" program designed to rid Honduras of a serious

⁶⁷ Collier, "Project Provides Hope to Street Kids of Honduras."

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, "New Report Calls for Action on Killings of Street Children," 25 February 2003

⁶⁹ Harris, "Child Murders in Central America."

⁷⁰ Shrivanti, "Honduran government complicit in the murder of street children."

⁷¹ Laura Vargas, "Rights-Honduras: Toll of Murdered Street Children Keeps Rising," *Global Information Network*, Sep 04, 2002.

social issue that the government has deemed a nuisance. Amnesty declared that until the Honduran government effectively investigates these crimes and provides adequate protection to children living on the street, the government will face complaints from the international community.⁷² Wolseth and Babb referenced a World Bank Urban Peace Program paper by Caroline Moser and Bernice van Bronkhorst that claimed “any poor, young person found on the streets—even if working or spending leisure time rather than living there—is coded as a threat to public safety and the national image.”⁷³

The police chief himself is claimed to be “as dangerous as the criminals.” Juan Carlos Bonilla is a five-star general with a controversial past. In the early 2000s, he was accused of running death squads, and even today many detainees disappear while in his custody. He of course denies the allegations, but he was acquitted of several of his previous charges, and many were never fully investigated. Bonilla’s police force is often accused of human rights violations, and the bodies of known gang members are often found discarded on the streets. This led to allegations of a social-cleansing campaign to rid the streets of criminals in Honduras. Street children that turn to gang activity for protection have also found themselves at risk.⁷⁴

⁷² Amnesty International, “New Report Calls for Action on Killings of Street Children.”

⁷³ Wolseth and Babb, “Youth and Cultural Politics in Latin America.”

⁷⁴ Alberto Arce, “Controversial Honduras general denies death squads,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 2, 2013

In many instances, prosecutors and judges involved in human rights cases in Honduras are at a great risk themselves. They often receive threats of violence or death, are harassed, and some have even been killed for their involvement in investigating human rights violations. In 2002, the Head of Internal Affairs Unit of the National Police, Deputy Commissioner Maria Luisa Borjas, made statements speaking out against police involvement in the murders of street children, and indicated that she was going to pursue charges. She was subsequently dismissed from her position.⁷⁵ In the documentary *Honduras: The War on Children*, Maria Luisa discussed the evidence that indicated government and police involvement in the murders of street children. Since being fired from her position as Deputy Commissioner, she has received death threats, her husband was directly shot at, and her two sons were unrightfully imprisoned, but were later released without charges.⁷⁶

Unlawful Incarceration

Some minors find themselves incarcerated, even though the Honduran Constitution states that minors cannot be imprisoned in prisons or jails. In 1999, Casa Alianza filed accusations that at least 200 minors were being held in prisons throughout Honduras alongside adult prisoners, and were routinely subjected to physical and sexual abuse. Casa Alianza accused the state of violating several international laws related to the detention of minors, including incarceration

⁷⁵ Casa Alianza, "Extrajudicial Executions of Children and Youths since 1998"

⁷⁶ *Honduras: The War on Children*, 2007 documentary.

alongside adults, failing to provide attorneys, and unlawful imprisonment.

According to Human Rights Commissioner Dr. Leo Valladares, some of these youths were imprisoned for reasons such as vagrancy, sniffing resistol (a solvent-based glue) or taking other drugs, and for being orphans. Incarceration was assumed to be a better option for these youths than living on the streets.⁷⁷ And yet besides the threat of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of adult prisoners, prison fires are also a very real threat. In 2004, a fire that was deemed the result of an electrical short-circuit killed more than 100 youths in a prison in San Pedro Sula. Although not the actual cause of the fire, extreme overcrowding was to blame for the number of deaths that occurred. The prison, meant to hold only 800, was housing around 2,200 inmates at the time of the fire. Even more appalling was the fact that the majority of inmates were never convicted of a crime, and were being held merely under suspicion of criminal activity.⁷⁸ And yet, the 2004 fire was not the only occurrence of such an incident. In 2003, 61 prisoners perished in a prison fire in La Ceiba, and most recently in 2012, more than 300 were killed in a prison fire in Tegucigalpa. As before, overcrowding was the most serious issue, as well as

⁷⁷ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Organization of American States "Minors in Detention, Honduras," Report No. 41/99 Case 11.491 (March 1999): accessed April 8th, 2014

⁷⁸ Diego Cevallos, "Honduras: Death of 100 Youths in Prison Fire Held Predictable," *Global Information Network*, May 18, 2004.

physical and sexual violence against other inmates, inadequate sanitation conditions, and malnutrition.⁷⁹

Turning to Drugs and Alcohol or Crime

In coping with life on the street, many adolescents turn to sniffing glue and consuming alcohol or other drugs. Woan and Lin's study found that youth living on the street turned to drugs for a variety of reasons: "to fit in on the street; cope with street life, sexual abuse, violence and/or survival sex; numb emotions; curb hunger; keep warm; induce or prevent sleep; feel pleasure; or for entertainment." Drug use often started between the ages of 10 and 13, and was more prevalent among males. Inhalants, including the solvent-based glue used in Honduras, are popular in low- and middle-income countries because they are inexpensive and easy to find.⁸⁰ This same type of glue is illegal in many parts of North America and Europe precisely because it is so toxic.⁸¹ In addition to sniffing glue, many street children inhale paint thinner or gasoline. Regular and extended use of these drugs causes damage to the central and peripheral nervous systems, and even major organs.⁸²

Children living on the streets are not only vulnerable to violence from gangs, but recruitment as well. To a child that has no home, and presumably little clothing

⁷⁹ Mariano Castillo and Elvin Sandoval, "More than 300 killed in Honduras prison fire," *CNN*, February 16, 2012

⁸⁰ Woan and Lin, "The Health Status of Street Children and Youth in Low- and Middle- Income Countries."

⁸¹ *Children in a Jar*, 2004 documentary.

⁸² Donald C. Kaminsky, "Street Children," *World Health* 48, no. 4 (07, 1995): 26.

and food, gangs provide both physical and emotional security.⁸³ The Honduran government has inadequately dealt with the issue, instead choosing to use violent measures to try to control or eliminate the gang members, some as young as nine years old. And yet many of the youths that turn to gang activity do so out of necessity to survive in the poverty-stricken region.⁸⁴ Gang members who participated in a study by UNICEF stated that they “were adopted” by the gang. Individuals who decide to leave the gang are often killed by members of that same gang. In the event that these individuals are able to leave the gang, they find few employment opportunities because of their lack of education and the stigma associated with participation in gang activity. Reintegration into society is not so easy as to just leave the gang.⁸⁵ In order to adequately address the issue of youth turning to gangs in Honduras, the government needs to address the deeper social issues that contribute to poverty and unemployment.⁸⁶

Risks to Females

Girls living on the street face even worse horrors. Many are sold into prostitution and trafficked into neighboring countries. They suffer rape from civilians and police, and are at a significantly higher risk of contracting HIV and other sexually acquired diseases.⁸⁷ Vasconcelos stated that street girls “disappear. They are arrested or they die. They die from venereal diseases, they are sent to

⁸³ Epstein, “Educating Street Children.”

⁸⁴ Mora, “Honduras: Rights Groups Protest New Anti-Gang Police Measures.”

⁸⁵ “UNICEF-supported study sheds light on gangs in Honduras.”

⁸⁶ Mora, “Honduras: Rights Groups Protest New Anti-Gang Police Measures.”

⁸⁷ Colleymore, “Migrant Street Children on the Rise in Central America.”

mental institutions, they die from abortion, or in childbirth, or they kill themselves.”⁸⁸ As of the Second World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 2001, IHNFA did not have any programs dedicated specifically to the care of sexually exploited children.⁸⁹ A study by Scanlon, Scanlon and Lamarao found that girls on the street were harassed from a young age, often only 12 or 13 years of age. If they chose to engage in prostitution, it was merely out of desperation, and their discomfort was evident in their stories told from a third-party point of view.⁹⁰ The UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children, Najat Maalla M’jid, raised concerns after visits in 2012 and 2014. In both instances, she stated that certain risk factors, if unaddressed, directly contribute to child abuse and exploitation. These factors include “poverty, unemployment, insecurity, violence, and proliferation of firearms, migration, and social intolerance.” While some positive changes were made between her visits, there were also some alarming negative changes. The special police force specializing in trafficking was dismantled, as well as the “Breaking the Silence” national complaint hotline. She urged the Honduran government to take increased

⁸⁸ Raffaelli, “Homeless and Working Street Youth in Latin America: A Developmental Review.”

⁸⁹ Teodolinda Pineda, “Honduras, Government of the Honduran Republic, Frame of the Second World Congress on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children,” accessed January 28th, 2014.

⁹⁰ Tom Scanlon, Francesca Scanlon and Maria Luiz Nombre Lamarao, “Working with Street Children,” *Development in Practice* Vol. 3, No. 1 (1993): 16-26

action to protect children from sexual exploitation, violence, and abuse.⁹¹

Psychological Effects

These children who have lived on the street do not merely require food, shelter, and clothing. Oftentimes, they have experienced trauma either prior to their time on the street or during that time. They are in desperate need of psychiatric counseling and emotional support. According to a study conducted in a children's home in Honduras, abandoned and homeless children "often experience psychological difficulties prompted by feelings of rejection, guilt, anger, abandonment, and shame," which often led to "behavioral and relational problems."⁹² Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is common among street children, and they are at a higher risk for depression, feelings of hopelessness, self-harming behaviors, and suicidal tendencies.⁹³ A study by Médecins Sans Frontières conducted from 2005 to 2009 in a multidisciplinary care center in Tegucigalpa showed that more than half of minors who visited the center experienced feelings of depression or hopelessness, while 78 percent reported significant feelings of anxiety and tension. Nearly a quarter of participants responded having suicidal thoughts.⁹⁴

⁹¹ "United Nations Expert on Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children Asks Honduras for Measures to Effectively Protect Children."

⁹² Laura B. Debiasi, Annette Reynolds, and Ellen B. Buckner, "Assessing Emotional Well-being of Children in a Honduran Orphanage: Feasibility of Two Screening Tools," *Pediatric Nursing* 38, no. 3 (May, 2012): 169-76.

⁹³ Woan and Lin, "The Health Status of Street Children and Youth in Low- and Middle- Income Countries."

⁹⁴ Renato Souza, Klaudia Porten, Sarala Nicholas, Rebecca Grais and the Médecins Sans Frontières Honduras Team, "Outcomes for street children and youth under

They often have very low self-esteem and poor opinions of their fellow street mates, who are deemed outcasts by society. Studies have shown that street children themselves can be very racist and prejudiced.⁹⁵ Yet Catherine Panter-Brick strongly argued that street children are not to be seen as incapable and helpless minors that need to be rescued. She stated that they are resilient and resourceful, and that interventions should focus more on involving the children and listening to what they have to say rather than just doing things for them.⁹⁶

Health Problems

Homeless youth are also more at risk for health problems. In a study of Brazilian street youth, researchers discovered that many had parasites, scars, or accident-related injuries. Children living on the street are also at higher risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV, Hepatitis B, and for females, pregnancy and miscarriages. Many girls in the study also reported having at least one abortion.⁹⁷ In Honduras, abortions are illegal, but that doesn't mean that they don't still happen. Illegally performed abortions are often done in a manner that is medically unsafe for the woman, and death from an abortion attempt is not uncommon.

multidisciplinary care in a drop-in center in Tegucigalpa, Honduras," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* Vol. 57 no. 6 (September 2010): 619-626

⁹⁵ Scanlon, et al., "Working with Street Children."

⁹⁶ Panter-Brick, "Street Children, Human Rights, and Public Health: A Critique and Future Directions."

⁹⁷ Raffaelli, "Homeless and working street youth in Latin America."

Living on the street carries high risk of accidental injury such as being struck by an automobile or work-related injuries such as burns, cuts, and even amputations. According to a study by Woan and Lin, of-the-street children often had stunted growth or lower than normal body mass indexes, emphasizing the malnutrition that accompanies living on the streets.⁹⁸ However, a study by Catherine Panter-Brick yielded the opposite results. According to Panter-Brick, of-the-street children were nutritionally healthier than children living at home and working on the streets, as well as children who lived at home in a nearby rural community. Panter-Brick stated that this could point to a new social trend among lower-income communities. The children left their homes in order to be better off on the streets than at home.⁹⁹

How to Further Address the Issue

So what can be done to address the issue? According to Sonia Nazario, author of *Enrique's Journey*¹⁰⁰, creating more jobs in developing countries would

⁹⁸ Woan and Lin, "The Health Status of Street Children and Youth in Low- and Middle- Income Countries."

⁹⁹ C. Panter-Brick, A. Todd and R. Baker, "Growth status of homeless Nepali boys: Do they differ from rural and urban controls?" *Social Science Medicine* Vol. 43 (1996): p. 441-451

¹⁰⁰ *Enrique's Journey* is one of the most well known books on immigration in the US. It is the story of Enrique, whose Honduran mother left for the US for work when he was five years old. While Enrique was financially provided for his entire childhood, he struggled with his mother's absence. After more than 10 years, he decided to make the journey to the US to find his mother, a perilous journey through Central American and Mexico on the tops of trains. Not only did he face the danger of falling off or being crushed by the trains, but gangs routinely preyed on migrants making

help solve several issues at the same time. Creating more jobs decreases unemployment, leading to a decrease in poverty and malnourishment, which would mean less children ending up on the streets due to the parents' inability to provide for their entire family. And, as in Enrique's case, it would mean less Central American mothers migrating to the US for employment and financial stability to provide for their children that they have left behind. Nazario also recommended providing more microloans to struggling mothers to start businesses, emphasizing education for girls, and trade policies in the US that would give priority to goods from these developing countries. There must be a push for more democratic governments, and wealth desperately needs to be redistributed in the region. Stimulating economic development in these countries would be much more effective in the long run than investing in "useless things like walls." Nazario pointed out, "What if, instead, each developed country took on the task of job creation for women in the handful of countries that send them immigrants? Imagine if the United Nations worked to coordinate a small percentage of the \$406 billion in yearly remittances that flow from migrants in developed to developing countries to produce projects that create jobs."¹⁰¹

Marcela Raffaelli recommended a two-part approach. First, there needs to be more institutions that help children living on the streets immediately, providing

the journey, who often carried with them their entire life savings. The migrants included what Nazario called "mobility orphans," children on a voyage to track down their mothers in the US.

¹⁰¹ Sonia Nazario, "Enrique's Journey," *UN Chronicle* 50, no. 3 (2013): 40-43.

food, shelter, and clothing. To supplement these, there should also be long-term preventative programs that keep children off the streets, including education and recreational groups.¹⁰² The study by Armstrong et al. supported this approach, emphasizing the need to focus on prevention of the issue of orphaned and abandoned children.¹⁰³ Mental health counseling is also a very important part of rehabilitating children who have lived on the streets. Many have suffered traumatic experiences, and all are separated from their families. Counseling is a healthy way for the children to cope with their feelings of anger, depression, and stress. Raffaelli stated that these can be achieved in group children's homes or institutions.

Secondly, Raffaelli stated that there must be deeper structural changes. While she acknowledged that it is unlikely that a few researchers will be able to correct the issue of child homelessness, she suggested that researchers focus on and study the root causes of the problem. In this way, they can raise awareness and present their findings to policy makers and program interventionists.¹⁰⁴ Author Duncan Green also insisted on addressing the root causes of the issue. In order to reduce poverty, there must be significant improvements in education and health care.¹⁰⁵

Thomas de Benitez suggested that programs aimed to reduce domestic violence could prevent more children from turning to the streets. Similarly,

¹⁰² Raffaelli, "Homeless and working street youth in Latin America."

¹⁰³ Armstrong et al., "Caring for the Needy."

¹⁰⁴ Raffaelli, "Homeless and working street youth in Latin America."

¹⁰⁵ Green, *Hidden Lives*, 177

providing vocational training and youth group activities would make children less likely to turn to gang activity or other criminal activity on the streets. These types of programs are referred to as “broad-based,” designed to affect as many people as possible. Thomas de Benitez recommended a rights-based approach, which focuses solely on the well-being of the children and is preferred by UNICEF and other international organizations. Rights-based initiatives often include housing, access to education, and access to adequate health care for homeless youth. Involvement of the children themselves is essential throughout all phases of these initiatives, from planning to implementation to feedback. Structural reforms, including educational and health care reforms, take significant amounts of time because they are major changes in the way the state operates. In order to address both the individual and national levels, Thomas de Benitez stated that NGOs and local government authorities need to work together on the issue.¹⁰⁶

Studies support de Benitez and Raffaelli’s claims that there should be more organizations dedicated to helping homeless and abandoned children immediately. In the study by Médecins Sans Frontières, results showed that the multidisciplinary care program led to a decrease in negative emotions as well as substance abuse among the youth that visited the center. Additionally, minors who consistently visited the center throughout the duration of the study were observed to have moved to safer areas, although still living on the streets. This center, while not a

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Thomas de Benitez, “Reactive, Protective, and Rights-Based Approaches in Work with Homeless Street Youth,” *Children, Youth, and Environments* Vol. 13, No. 1 (2003): 134-149

permanent residence for the children, provided access to laundry, medical care, counseling, showers, recreation, and a place to rest between the hours of 10:00 and 2:00. This shows that even facilities that provide limited services can directly and indirectly help homeless children living on the streets.¹⁰⁷

Casa Alianza argued that it is essential to implement policies and programs that will reduce poverty, violence, and public insecurity in Honduras. The organization stated that the most important aspect of this is to focus heavily on the youth, developing programs to help children on the streets or in otherwise un-ideal living conditions. The children must have access to more resources, including education and future employment opportunities. Casa Alianza recommended that this effort be conducted by the state as well as human rights organizations operating in Honduras.¹⁰⁸ Similar to this view, Leslie Groves' study analyzing the ILO Convention 182 regarding child labor in Honduras showed that NGOs and the government can efficiently work together to combat issues. In this case, both the state and non-governmental actors had equal participation in beginning to address the issue of child labor in Honduras.¹⁰⁹

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) currently has an ongoing poverty-reduction program in Honduras. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) outlines the plans for the program, the duration of which is from 2001 to 2015. The

¹⁰⁷ Souza, et al., "Outcomes for street children and youth."

¹⁰⁸ Casa Alianza, "Extrajudicial Executions of Children and Youths since 1998"

¹⁰⁹ Groves, "Implementing ILO Child Labour Convention 182: Lessons from Honduras," 179

primary goal of the PRSP is to reduce poverty by stimulating “economic growth whose benefits are distributed more equitably through greater access by poor people to the factors of production, including the development of human capital, and to social safety nets.” The PRSP also aims to improve the quality of and access to education, and reform the justice system. Since the implementation of the program, there have been improvements in the social sectors, specifically in the areas of education, health care, housing, social security, and availability of potable water. However, the improvements have been minor and the statistics regarding these areas are still unsatisfactory.¹¹⁰

A follow-up study by the Christian Children’s Fund¹¹¹ (CCF) provided information that indicated that their Early Stimulation Programme (ESP) in Honduras created more stable households and a better quality of life. The CCF initially studied two rural villages in Honduras, one control village and one village that received ESP training and implementations in 1998. These included early child stimulation in the form of preschool, improved education, nutrition, access to potable water, access to toilets, medical care, vocational training, and empowerment. The results of the 2002 follow-up study indicated that the ESP had a positive impact on the children as well as the community as a whole. Relations between the children and their parents were significantly better in the ESP group

¹¹⁰ International Monetary Fund, “Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Honduras,” (2001) <http://www.imf.org/external/np/prsp/2001/hnd/01/083101.pdf>, accessed August 20, 2014. p. ii-1

¹¹¹ The Christian Children’s Fund is now known as ChildFund International.

than the control group. The parents in the control group used punishment often, viewing it as necessary to make the child understand. On the other hand, parents in the ESP group were more willing to listen to their child rather than immediately inflict punishment. Similarly, children from the ESP group had more positive feedback from teachers, both regarding academic performance as well as social and communication skills. Children in the ESP group also had fewer health issues and more positive self-esteem and optimistic views for the future.¹¹²

Based on the information the researcher has gathered throughout the literature review, the next question is how are different organizations in Honduras interpreting and addressing the issue of child abandonment and homelessness?

¹¹² Cristina Nufio de Figueroa, Myrna Isabel Mejía Ramirez, and José Bohanerges Mejía Urquía, "The Future Will Be Better: A tracer study of CCF's Early Stimulation Programme in Honduras," *Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections* 21 (November 2004)

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The following is a summary of the methods for my project. I am studying child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras because I would like to know what could be done to alleviate the suffering of children in the region. Next I give an overview of my research design, describing what data collection and analysis methods I found useful for my literature review. I then discuss a sampling scheme and where I found my data.

Research Design Overview

This research project is a comparative analysis of three different children's homes in the northern region of Honduras. The project has a focus on interviews with staff or volunteers from the children's homes or the organization that runs each one. I decided to focus on two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and one state-run institution. I chose to focus on two NGO facilities and one state institution because I wanted to highlight the differences between them. First, I chose the Villa Soleada Children's Homes, run by Students Helping Honduras (SHH), because of my prior experience with the organization. Presumably, friends and former colleagues would be more willing to participate in interviews with someone

that they know and trust. Secondly, I chose to perform interviews with the staff of Our Little Roses (OLR), or Nuestras Rosas Pequeñas, because of connections that were made through one of the George Mason professors. And lastly, I selected to conduct interviews with the staff at Nueva Esperanza, run by the Instituto Hondureño de La Niñez y Familia, or IHNFA. IHNFA is the government organization for children and families in Honduras.

I conducted interviews with as many individuals as were willing to participate from each organization in order to acquire as much information as possible on the issue. Staff members of each organization were selected because they have a thorough understanding of the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras and the various causes that contribute to it. The participants work directly with children who have been abandoned or homeless and are familiar with the children's personal stories as well as the social situation of Honduras. As representatives of their organization and children's home, the participants explained in their interviews how each facility is structured, what they believe are the causes of child abandonment and homelessness, and what they believe could be done to further address the issue.

I decided against interviews with children living in the homes for a few reasons. First, to conduct interviews with minors required additional paperwork with the Institutional Review Board that would take more time for approval. And secondly, I was uncomfortable with conducting interviews with the boys I had

worked with in the Villa Soleada Children's Home. I felt that this would be an invasion of their privacy and did not want to damage our relationship.

Literary Research

First, I performed a systematic search of 11 databases, including Worldcat, ProQuest Research Library, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Ethnic Newswatch, JSTOR, Google, Google Scholar, International Newsstand, Factiva, PAIS International, and ProQuest Social Sciences. The first eight proved very helpful, while the latter three did not yield many usable results. Initially, searches were conducted using various combinations of the key words *child, abandon, homeless, Honduras, government, state, policy, and program*. Later into the research, searches were performed that included combinations of the key words and phrases *Students Helping Honduras, Our Little Roses, Nuestras Rosas Pequeñas, Instituto Hondureño de La Niñez y Familia, IHNFA, and Honduran Institute of the Child and Family*. There was no specific time range used in searches, but most of the sources used in the literature review were published after 1990. I also consulted university libraries at the University of Malta, Old Dominion University, George Mason University, Christopher Newport University, the College of William and Mary, and Virginia Wesleyan College. In the literature review, a variety of different sources were used. These included scholarly journals, books, documentaries, newspaper articles, government documents, and international organization reports that were either found online or that were cited in other sources. While conducting research, the names Catherine Panter-Brick and James Wright came up often, either as authors or

cited in other works. I frequently consulted their works regarding abandoned and homeless children and used several of their references for further research.

Institutional Review Board Certification

I began the process of approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) with George Mason University's Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) in November 2013. Unfortunately, the approval came just a few weeks after my most recent visit to Honduras in December 2013/January 2014, so I was unable to conduct interviews while I was present in the country.

Interviews

I contacted several former colleagues working with Students Helping Honduras to ask if they would be willing to participate in an interview regarding child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. I explained that all responses would be confidential, and that only I would have access to their responses. These requests were sent through email, and all consented to the interviews. I then prepared my interview questions, both in English and in Spanish when necessary. In the interviews, open-ended questions were used in order to allow more detailed responses than just yes or no answers. The interview questions were focused on the root causes of child abandonment and homelessness, the structure and organization of the children's home, and how they think the issue of child abandonment and homelessness can be further addressed. The same procedure was followed for recruiting interviewees from Our Little Roses and Nueva Esperanza. Interviewees from Nueva Esperanza were former colleagues from my

experience with SHH, and a George Mason professor referred interviewees from OLR to me.

Interviews were conducted with a total of twelve individuals, both Honduran and American, who have or currently work with homeless and abandoned children in Honduras. They included adults who were abandoned as children and raised in state-run orphanages and adults who work for NGOs that provide a safe living environment for abandoned and homeless children. There were both male and female interviewees between the ages of 20 and 73. I interviewed individuals who work with Students Helping Honduras, Our Little Roses, and individuals who have spent a significant amount of time at Nueva Esperanza. I was unable to conduct interviews with the staff at Nueva Esperanza after several attempts to contact them. Later on, I concluded that this lack of communication was a possible result of the dismantlement of IHNFA by the Honduran government.

The interviews with SHH and the Nueva Esperanza volunteers were conducted via Skype between the months of February and June 2014, and the interviews with Our Little Roses were conducted via phone in July 2014. Interviews conducted via Skype and telephone lasted approximately 25-30 minutes each and consisted of ten to twelve questions. Ten interviews were conducted in English, and two were conducted in Spanish. The materials used were a Mac Book computer, the Skype computer application, Microsoft Word, a telephone, a notebook, and a pen. Following each interview, I reviewed my notes and added initial thoughts about the interview and the information that was received. I then typed up all of my interview

notes on my computer, and the interviews for each organization were grouped together in separate folders.

This research design was best for the project because focusing on interviews and a comparative analysis approach helped me to understand what Hondurans and Americans who work with abandoned and homeless children think about the issue and how to resolve it. Through understanding the core issues of the problem and the functions of these three organizations, I can compare and contrast the different interpretations and approaches to the care of homeless and abandoned children.

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY ONE

Background Information about Nueva Esperanza

IHNFA, or the Instituto Hondureño de la Niñez y la Familia, was the state agency in Honduras that is similar to Child Protective Services in the US. According to its website, IHNFA had three main programs of operation. Familial Community Development provided childcare while parents were working, as well as provided some food and vocational training and youth groups for both the youth and their parents. This was a mainly preventative branch. In Protection and Social Intervention, children could be removed from their parents' care if it was deemed an unsafe living environment, and the children were placed in a state-run orphanage. Lastly, IHNFA provided reeducation in the form of juvenile detention for adolescents who were involved in criminal activity.¹¹³ IHNFA had a total of 37 children's homes throughout Honduras for minors between the ages of 0 and 12.¹¹⁴ This included Nueva Esperanza, the children's home located in San Pedro Sula.

IHNFA's website listed the following ten functions of the institution: 1. To design and implement plans and programs for care of families who need special support for the development of children and teens. 2. Study and develop, in

¹¹³ Pineda, "Second World Congress on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children."

¹¹⁴ IHNFA, "Instituto Hondureño de la Niñez y la Familia," <http://www.ihnfa.gob.hn/>. Accessed January 31, 2014

coordination with the judicial authority services, alternative methods of placement of children and adolescents in conflict with the law, or who are part of families that are in conflict with the law. 3. Develop legal services, psychological and social care and/or medical care to families in general, and to children and adolescents in particular to protect their rights and the exercise of those rights. 4. Establish protective measures to children age 12 and younger who have broken the law. 5. Implement, in coordination with state or private entities, programs and specialized services for children and adolescents with disabilities to integrate them into society, incorporating the family and the community. 6. Design and implement programs in coordination with the National Institute of Vocational Training (INFOP) for children under their care and to young workers. 7. Designing, implementing, and coordinating policies and actions to address emergency unforeseen situations that jeopardize the safety, physical integrity, and welfare of children and adolescents. 8. To fulfill the duties of guardianship over the children and adolescents under their care. 9. The regulations relating to the family, and in particular the childhood and adolescence in the areas of health and education, require the assent of the Honduran Institute of the Child and Family (IHNFA) in order to take effect. 10. The property and income of the Honduran Institute of the Child and Family (IHNFA), as well as actions and contracts authorized by IHNFA, shall be exempt from state and municipal taxes.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ IHNFA, “Instituto Hondureño de la Niñez y la Familia.”

There had been significant criticism of Nueva Esperanza and IHNFA from private organizations and Honduran citizens for years. Even IHNFA's own employees were critical. Walter Blanco, a caseworker for IHNFA in 2004, stated that the institutions were poorly managed and lacked adequately trained staff members. After his working hours, Blanco often patrolled the streets of San Pedro looking for abandoned and homeless children to provide them with a place to stay. Nueva Esperanza wasn't an ideal location, but it was better than the streets. Sometimes Blanco visited the children living on the streets just to make sure they had something to eat and shelter for the night.¹¹⁶

Over the years, various Honduran politicians acknowledged the corruption and mismanagement of IHNFA and its children's homes. In 2004, then-first lady Aguas Ocario de Maduro pledged to reform and revitalize IHNFA. Maduro wanted to improve conditions through creating "higher standards of medical treatment, sanitary conditions, individual bedding, water service, staff training, educational curriculum, and accountability," and planned to present these plans to the Honduran Congress in July of 2004.¹¹⁷ It is unclear what changes occurred after the publishing of this article, although due to the continued criticism of IHNFA and its institutions, the conditions did not significantly improve.

Members of the organization Proyecto Victoria declared the conditions of IHNFA's children's homes to be inhumane. Proyecto Victoria claimed that physical

¹¹⁶ Sam Cranston, "Partners in Hope: Helping the Children of Honduras," *Daytona Beach News Journal*, May 23, 2004.

¹¹⁷ Cranston, "Partners in Hope."

abuse was common in the residences, and the higher level personnel were pocketing about 90 percent of government funding that should have been used for the children's benefit. Members of Proyecto Victoria added that they had been trying to bring these deplorable conditions to light for years, but had not been successful.¹¹⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children, Najat Maalla M'jid, visited IHNFA institutions for the first time in 2012 and cited serious violations of the rights of the child. She declared that despite efforts from the Honduran government, the state funded institutions were inadequate in dealing with abandoned and homeless minors. M'jid stated that IHNFA was unsustainable due to lack of coordination, institutional flaws, and a significant lack of resources. She emphasized the immediate need for adequate protection and care of minors by the state, and strongly condemned the explosion in underage prostitution over recent years. M'jid stated that the causes of the surge in prostitution were sexual abuse by family members and lack of sexual education.¹¹⁹

On June 2, 2014, Honduran President Juan Orlando ordered the dismantlement of IHNFA and the creation of a commission to investigate irregularities and violations of the rights of the child within the organization. The Honduran Council of Secretaries approved the intervention. This action came following a visit in April 2014 by UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual

¹¹⁸ "Denuncian El Uso De Niños Hondureños Como Sicarios y En Tráfico De Drogas," *EFE News Service*, Nov 09, 2011.

¹¹⁹ "ONU Recomendación Armonizar Leyes Contra Explotación Infantil En Centroamérica," *EFE News Service*, Sep 07, 2012.

Exploitation of Children, Najat Maalla M'jid. M'jid again expressed concern regarding the violation of the rights of children in several institutions run by IHNFA.¹²⁰ The Honduran government has created a new agency to address the needs of minors, the Childhood, Adolescence and Family Directorate (DINAF). Executive Secretary of the Council of Ministers for Honduras, Ebal Diaz, stated that the Honduran government will "disburse some 500 million lempiras (about \$23.8 million) to different municipalities to 'attend in a direct manner to children and adolescents.'"¹²¹

Data

I conducted interviews with three individuals who have spent a significant amount of time volunteering at Nueva Esperanza and are familiar with IHNFA's organization and policies. The interviews were conducted via Skype between the months of February and June 2014. The interviews were composed of approximately ten questions and the Skype calls lasted about 25 minutes each.

Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness

According to Participants 7 and 9, some of the children at Nueva Esperanza were dropped off by their family members at the institution. Some were picked up off the streets by the police, where the kids were either living independently or were begging for money for their parents. Some infants were abandoned in public

¹²⁰ "Intervienen En Honduras El Instituto De Niñez Por Presuntas Irregularidades," *EFE News Service*, Jun 03, 2014.

¹²¹ "Honduras Creates New Agency to Aid Children," *EFE News Service*, Jun 04, 2014.

places and were brought in by the police. Participant 9 responded that babies are often abandoned at hospitals shortly after birth in Honduras.

All three participants cited poverty and unemployment as root causes of the issue of child abandonment and homelessness. Participant 7 said that these two factors leave parents unable to provide for their children, forcing them to surrender their children either to the state or to the streets.

Participant 7 was adopted from Honduras as an infant. At the age of approximately three months, the participant was found abandoned along the side of a ravine by police. The participant was brought to an IHNFA children's home in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. At this time, Honduran parents or relatives had six months to come to the institution to claim their child. This did not occur for Participant 7, and an American couple adopted the participant shortly after through a private adoption agency. More recently, if Honduran relatives wanted to claim their child, IHNFA staff were required to inspect the home to decide if it was a safe living environment for the child.

Additional Information about Nueva Esperanza

All of the participants discussed Nueva Esperanza in two time periods, before the fire in November 2011 and after the fire.

Pre-Fire

Participant 7 stated that the building was only meant to hold about 150 children, but in March 2011 housed more than 300 kids with less than a dozen full time staff members. Participant 9 also stated that the facility was far too

overcrowded for a safe living environment. Participants 7 and 9 responded that most of the children slept in the same room, and were confined in their rooms for most of the day due to lack of staff members to supervise them. The children did not have toothbrushes or toothpaste and the bathrooms barely functioned. Skin conditions and communicable illnesses were common amongst all of the children due to inadequate hygienic practices. There was no specialized care for children with disabilities, and some mentally disabled children as old as 18 just lay in their cribs all day in diapers with no attention. Some engaged in self-harm practices such as pinching, scratching, and hitting their heads on hard surfaces. Babies in the nursery often had dirty diapers for several hours or even days, and stayed in their cribs nearly the entire time. Participant 9 responded that Nueva Esperanza severely lacked resources for the children, including staff, educational materials, and even food. The participant said that children ate rice for nearly every meal.

Unless volunteers came to visit, children received no form of education, activities, or interaction. According to Participant 7, Nueva Esperanza was similar to a prison and was a terrifying environment for the children living there. There was no form of discipline by the staff, and oftentimes the older and stronger children intimidated and abused the younger kids.

Participant 9 also mentioned that there was a significant shortage of staff members at Nueva Esperanza, witnessing only about five staff working with the children. There were more personnel in the offices at the institution, but they rarely left their offices to help with the children. The participant stated that not only was

Nueva Esperanza understaffed, but also the staff that they did have was under motivated to adequately care for and engage the children.

The Fire in November 2011

In November 2011, a fire partially damaged Nueva Esperanza and the building was forced to close temporarily. According to Participant 7, it was unclear how the fire started. Eventually it was declared an electrical fire, as reported in the local newspapers. However, Participant 9 was informed that two children at Nueva Esperanza set the fire, and it badly damaged one of the upstairs rooms. Fortunately, there were no fatalities or injuries, and all the children and staff were safely able to evacuate in time. About 60 children were placed in other children's homes according to Participant 9, but those who remained were forced to sleep on the floors of nearby churches and buildings. Participant 7 stated that some of the children escaped during this time. Nueva Esperanza was repaired and reopened at the end of the following summer, summer 2012.

Post-Fire

After reopening following the fire, Nueva Esperanza held anywhere from 100 to 150 children at any given time according to Participants 7 and 8. It was a large two story concrete building, surrounded by high walls topped with barbed wire. Participant 8 mentioned that Nueva Esperanza resembled what they would imagine a prison looks like. The rooms were locked up, most of the building was dark, and the windows all had bars on them. Participant 8 also mentioned that outside of the building, there was a large open area with a play set and a small soccer field for the

children, but they were rarely allowed outside unless volunteers were present. Participant 9 also reiterated that the children were rarely allowed outside due to lack of staff to monitor the kids. There was still the nursery for newborns and mentally disabled children. Participants 7 and 9 responded that Nueva Esperanza housed children from the ages of newborn to approximately 13 years. After that, girls were sent to another IHNFA children's home called Casitas Mujeres, and boys were turned out on the street to fend for themselves. According to Participant 7, there were approximately 150 children in Nueva Esperanza as of December 2013.

Participant 7 stated that the conditions of IHNFA's children's homes were not much better than living on the streets. Some of the rooms were incredibly dirty, unsafe, and in some instances, abuse took place. According to the participant, children often did not receive enough food, hygienic tools, and physical and mental stimulation for healthy childhood development. The children in these homes were treated like inmates. Participants 7 and 8 both stated that many kids were confined to their rooms for almost the entire day, and most children were kept in just a few rooms. Overcrowding was still an issue and there was a shortage of suitable bedding for the children. The same issues related to hygienic standards were still present. While the bathrooms were slightly more functional, there were still not enough supplies such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, and soap. There continued to be inadequate medical care, and skin conditions and communicable diseases continued to be an issue. Violence between the children continued to be a problem, and fights were common, according to Participants 7 and 8.

In the nursery, babies still had dirty diapers for long periods of time. There was still no specialized care for mentally disabled children, and some were restrained in their beds to keep them from wandering around. Participant 8 said that the nursery was the only air-conditioned room in the entire building, and there were usually staff members present. The participant mentioned that these women were very nice, but were obviously overwhelmed from having to tend to 20 or more babies at one time.

After the fire, some basic educational courses were added to the institution, but due to lack of staff members, children of all age groups were often in the same class. There was still little interaction and activity for the kids unless volunteers came to visit.

There were more staff members after the fire, but still not enough to efficiently manage the children. Participant 8 stated that when visiting, a staff member rarely greeted volunteers, and sometimes there were no staff members present at the institution other than one individual to open the metal gate at the entrance. The staff members often went on strike and did not attend work because the government had not paid them. Participant 9 also emphasized the need for more staff members who were adequately trained to care for the children.

Recent Events

Participant 7 also provided the first mention that IHNFA had been recently dismantled and that Nueva Esperanza was being closed. The participant disclosed

that the Honduran government had plans to create a new, better facility to house orphaned and abandoned children in the country.

Participant 9 provided more information on the situation. Nueva Esperanza has not yet closed, but the Honduran government has shut down IHNFA. The government is currently in the process of giving all of IHNFA's responsibilities and work to a variety of nonprofit organizations, including relocating the children from the state orphanages. Nueva Esperanza and Casitas Mujeres, the IHNFA home for adolescent girls, will eventually close. A new head director has taken over at Nueva Esperanza, and within a matter of weeks placed most of the children in new homes. According to Participant 9, there are only about 25-30 children at Nueva Esperanza, most of them mentally disabled. Finding homes for children with special needs in Honduras is a difficult process, as many children's homes are not equipped to do so. There are currently two or three staff members working at the facility with the remaining children. A private nonprofit organization called Reach Out Orphanage Ministries, or ROOM, has been helping to hire and pay the staff.

Analysis

Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness

The participants listed a variety of scenarios regarding how children ended up in Nueva Esperanza. The fact that many parents abandoned their child (or children) at the facility shows just how desperate the parents were. The parents could not provide for their children, and they believed that they would have a better

life in the state orphanage. While their beliefs were not necessarily well-founded, it showed that Hondurans still had at least some faith in their government to take care of them. For those parents who abandoned their children in public places or in hospitals, this was also a display of desperation. They were so overwhelmed at the prospect of caring for a child that they left them where they had no idea if or when the child would be found. This showed substantial disregard for the child's wellbeing. This could have been an action taken in a moment of panic, or could simply be because the parents genuinely did not want or care for the child.

All three participants listed poverty and unemployment as fundamental issues contributing to the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. As individuals who have spent a significant amount of time in Honduras and Nueva Esperanza, they had access to information that was not necessarily available to outsiders. Not only did they get the children's perspectives and stories, but also had the opportunity to speak with the Honduran staff when they were present. Because of this, they had the chance to hear what Hondurans believe are major problems in their country.

Additional Information about Nueva Esperanza

Pre-Fire

The living conditions in Nueva Esperanza before the fire in November 2011 were deplorable, according to the interviewees' testimonies. Overcrowding was a major issue, with more than 300 children housed in a facility meant for only 150. The sheer number of children in the building automatically created an unsafe living

environment, because housing more than double the building's capacity created a fire hazard. Given the circumstances, it was a miracle that there were no fatalities or injuries during the fire and that all the children were safely evacuated.

The fact that so many of the children had to share rooms was also a major point of concern. Lack of beds and the accompanying bedding meant that many kids had to share mattresses on the floor, or on the floor itself. The children were not allowed outside unless volunteers were present, and were instead confined to their rooms for most, if not all, of the day. This lack of physical activity can cause serious developmental issues in children, hindering their motor skills and coordination as well as affecting their physical health.

Inadequate hygienic practices were also a major health concern. One participant mentioned the lack of toothbrushes and toothpaste for the kids. Almost all of the children had multiple cavities, and some had teeth blackened with rot. Rotting teeth or abscesses can cause infections that can be severely painful, or in some cases even fatal. At such a young age, it is imperative for kids to learn to practice correct dental hygiene. If they do not learn proper practices as a child, it can cause irreparable damage for them as adults. While the interviewees did not have information on how frequently the children bathed, it is probable that it was not very often. Participant 7 also mentioned that the toilets in Nueva Esperanza were dirty and barely functional. This, as well as lack of soap for hand washing, undoubtedly contributed to the spread of communicable illnesses such as the flu and the common cold, as well as infectious skin conditions. The babies in the

nursery were often left with dirty diapers for long periods of time, which is unsanitary and can cause a variety of skin problems. The infants, while they received more attention than most of the children in Nueva Esperanza, were still inadequately cared for. Multiple studies have shown that the most important time for a child's mental and emotional development is the first five years. These babies spent all day in their cribs and received little to no physical and mental stimulation from staff members. Because of this, they were all developmentally disadvantaged in relation to other children.

The psychological effects of Nueva Esperanza were just as disconcerting. Many of the children resorted to violence as a means of solving their problems. Some of the older and bigger children used intimidation as a tactic to harass the younger, smaller children. There were instances of physical, mental, and sexual abuse between the children. The interviewees were especially disturbed by the living situation of the mentally disabled children. Some of the children had Down's Syndrome or various stages of mental retardation, and received no specialized treatment for their disabilities. A few of these children were in their early and late teens, and were usually only clothed in a diaper. They spent their day lying in their crib or bed, staring at the walls, with little attention from staff members. This lack of emotional and physical stimulation left no chance for them to mentally or physically progress. Some of the children engaged in self-harm practices with no interference from Nueva Esperanza personnel.

One participant mentioned that the lack of resources was a major issue in Nueva Esperanza before the fire. The children did not have toys or educational materials that would assist in mental and physical development. Classes were not offered at the facility due to lack of educators. Even nutritional resources were significantly lacking. The participant stated that many times the children would have rice for every meal, which does not meet general nutritional standards.

Most of these problems were a result of the biggest issue in Nueva Esperanza, the lack of adequately trained staff members. All interviewees stated that there were less than a dozen staff members at any given time in the facility, and that this had a significant impact on the quality of childcare. Because of the shortage of staff members, the children were unable to play outside or even leave their rooms, and were instead locked inside for most of the day. Inadequate supervision and discipline resulted in various forms of abuse among the children, or instances of violent conflict. At times, even staff members themselves abused the children at Nueva Esperanza. Childhood abuse can have devastating mental and emotional effects. More often than not, children living on the streets and kids addicted to drugs have had some form of childhood trauma or abuse.

The Fire in November 2011

I found it interesting that all three participants discussed Nueva Esperanza in two time periods, pre-fire and post-fire. Even though the fire only damaged one of the upstairs rooms, it was obviously a major disruptive event for the children's home. The way it was discussed, it seemed as if it was a pivotal moment for Nueva

Esperanza, with the potential to be a major turning point. And yet, not much changed regarding the conditions and quality of care. Whether the fire was caused by an electrical issue or was intentionally set by the children, this should have been a red flag to the Honduran government that the facility was unsafe and required immediate attention.

Post-Fire

Unfortunately, not much changed at Nueva Esperanza after the fire. According to the participants, overcrowding was still an issue, but this time not because of exceeding capacity. While the large size of the building was a positive characteristic, not having adequate furnishings for the number of children significantly affected the quality of the structure. The high concrete walls with barbed wire were intimidating and give the impression of a prison, as mentioned by two of the interviewees. The barred windows also contributed to this image. While one of the purposes of the bars and the walls was to keep other people out of the facility, it could also give children the feeling of being trapped or incarcerated. This can lead to the desire to escape, which many of the kids did over the years.

Just as before the fire, the children spent most of their day locked inside their rooms. Lack of physical activity can have multiple negative effects on children, physically as well as mentally and emotionally. The interviewees again reported that unsanitary conditions were still a major issue after the fire.

Violence and abuse among the children at Nueva Esperanza persisted after the fire. The kids resolved conflicts through violent means, through fighting or

striking the other children with their fists or other objects. The older children still used intimidation tactics to scare and harass the younger kids. As children that had been abused, orphaned, or abandoned, many of them would have benefitted immensely from counseling to learn how to deal with their feelings. However, Nueva Esperanza did not even have enough staff members to provide basic care for these children, making a trained psychologist seem like an impossibility. And so, violence was the only way the children knew how to express their emotions. Due to the shortage in staff members, no disciplinary system was enforced. There was still no specialized care for the mentally disabled children, and some were even restrained in their beds to keep them from wandering around the building.

Volunteers aesthetically improved the nursery room for the infants and mentally disabled children, as noted by Participant 8. The volunteers built more cribs for the infants and painted the walls with colorful murals. Yet the nursery, as well as the facility in general, was still understaffed and overcrowded. One participant stated that the babies didn't bother crying anymore. They had learned that crying did not bring comfort or attention from the personnel, and that they would have to suffer their discomfort that was the result of a dirty diaper, hunger, or pain.

The participants responded that Nueva Esperanza still lacked adequate resources for the kids. After the fire in 2011, Nueva Esperanza did add some primary education classes. However, due to the number of students and the

shortage of staff members, children of various ages were often in the same class, and the quality of education was insufficient.

Although there was an increase in staff members in the years since the fire, there were still never enough to manage all of the children. When the government often stalled in dispensing their paychecks, the personnel would go on strike and there would be no one attending to the children in the building. Abuse still took place in Nueva Esperanza after 2011. When the personnel caring for children are not appropriately trained, they may be unsure of how to enforce discipline and can be quick to react emotionally. Striking a crying infant or a misbehaving child can seem to be an appropriate reaction, especially if it achieves the desired result the first time. Most of the time, the staff is unaware of the consequences of their actions toward the children.

As the children grew older and became adolescents, IHNFA did not have an appropriate system of relocating them. The girls were placed in another IHNFA-run institution, called Casitas Mujeres. While this was a step in the right direction in order to keep the girls off of the streets, the conditions in this home were unsatisfactory as well. Casitas Mujeres also did not prepare the girls for living independently, leaving the girls with few options when they reached the age of 18. On the other hand, once boys reached adolescence, they were turned out onto the streets to fend for themselves. Without an education or any form of vocational training, the boys were left with even fewer options than their female counterparts. They could choose to return home to their parents if possible, but they had either

run away from or been removed from these same homes. Therefore, most of the boys ended up living on the streets or joining gangs for a sense of security and protection. While this researcher heard that in the past that there was a home similar to Casitas Mujeres but for adolescent boys, this establishment was shut down after several bodies of teenagers from the home were found buried nearby.

In summary, the information provided on the IHNFA website did not remotely match the testimonies given by interviewees. Complaints from UN employees, other organizations in Honduras, and the interviewees portray Nueva Esperanza in a very different light than was represented on the organization's website. The website was misleading regarding the actual conditions of its facilities and the organization's methods of operation.

Recent Events

The disintegration of IHNFA by the Honduran government came as a surprise to many, including the researcher. Considering the horrendous conditions of its facilities and allegations of violations of the rights of the child, this was a positive move for Honduras. It showed that the Honduran government acknowledged that the quality of care in Nueva Esperanza and other IHNFA institutions was inadequate and unsafe for the children. Unfortunately, it also showed that the government still does not have a good system for dealing with abandoned and homeless children.

The Honduran government was quick to establish a new organization dedicated to children's welfare and a commission to investigate IHNFA's practices within its facilities. However, it remains to be seen whether the new organization

and its facilities will be an improvement. The newly established commission needs to follow through with its promise to fully investigate IHNFA and its facilities. The new organization, the Childhood, Adolescence and Family Directorate, or DINAF, will need to be closely monitored by international organizations in order to ensure adequate quality of care and living conditions for the children. The visit from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children in April 2014 and this year's surge in unaccompanied minors entering the US illegally from Central America has garnered the attention of the United Nations, and especially the United States.

CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDY TWO

Background Information about the Villa Soleada Children's Homes

Students Helping Honduras

Students Helping Honduras is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization started in 2007 by brother and sister duo Shin and Cosmo Fujiyama. Shin, a Mary Washington University graduate, was first inspired by a weeklong service trip to Honduras in 2004. He was shocked by the extreme poverty he witnessed, and appalled that so many children didn't have access to primary education or even clean drinking water.

SHH's initial project was to relocate the village of Siete de Abril, a shantytown located along the banks of a river near El Progreso, prone to frequent bouts of flooding and gang violence. Houses were primarily four walls and a roof, all of which was constructed of corrugated tin roofing, plastic, or cardboard. Shin and Cosmo decided on a plot of land about 20 minutes from the El Progreso center on the highway towards Tela Beach. SHH purchased this land from the Honduran government and began construction. All that Shin and Cosmo asked of the Hondurans from Siete de Abril was their participation in the construction of the village, named Villa Soleada. They wanted to make it clear that these weren't handouts, but that the families would have to put a lot of work into the project,

which is what they called sweat equity. Almost 80 families began the project, but many decided that they no longer wanted to participate in the work and returned to Siete de Abril. Today, the village of Villa Soleada houses 44 families, and has electricity, clean running water, and a plumbing system.¹²²

College and high school students visit Honduras with SHH on weeklong service trips during school breaks, primarily winter break, spring break, and summer break. They can of course extend their stay to two weeks or longer if they choose to do so. Volunteers help with the construction of schools in rural villages near El Progreso, from mixing cement to carrying cinderblocks and working on rebar. But the service trip isn't all work and no fun. Volunteers also have afternoons free to play soccer with the children, a visit to an indoor soccer arena, a visit to San Pedro Sula's largest open air market Guaymitas, a trip to Tela Beach for a day, and salsa lessons at a nearby club. Private security guards are with volunteers at all times to guarantee personal safety.

Since the organization started, almost 100 universities and high schools throughout the US have created SHH student club chapters, dedicated to raising money for Honduras through bake sales, penny drives, and various other fundraisers. During the fall semesters, students raise money in order to fund their trips to Honduras, usually in December or January, or occasionally spring break. The cost of the weeklong service trip is \$650 plus airfare, but if a volunteer has participated in at least four service trips with SHH in the past, the cost is only \$450.

¹²² Students Helping Honduras, <http://ceciskids.org>, accessed July 9, 2014

Many volunteers have no trouble in fundraising enough money in order to cover both the trip cost and airfare. In the spring, students participate in fundraising to complete the projects they started in Honduras, usually a school in a nearby rural village.

Volunteers also have the option to participate in a month-long intensive Spanish learning program. These programs take place during the summer, and the volunteers live with a host family in Villa Soleada. Daily classes take place with a bilingual teacher that is an employee of SHH, and there are weekend excursions to visit other parts of Honduras. In the past, these students have visited Pulhapanzak waterfalls, the Mayan ruins of Copán, the coastal city of La Ceiba, and the stunning Cayos Cochinos, small islands located off the coast of Honduras.

Since the beginning of the organization, SHH volunteers have stayed in hotels between the El Progreso center and Villa Soleada. Taking advice from some of the Hondurans, Shin built a volunteer lodge in Villa to cut the cost of accommodation for volunteers and so that the volunteers could spend more time with the community. The lodge was constructed by volunteers, and had six rooms complete with two bathrooms in each room, wifi Internet, and snacks, beverages, and small crafts for purchase. When it first opened in December 2011, the lodge housed about 30 volunteers. However, the number of volunteers visiting Honduras through SHH has grown exponentially, with almost 300 volunteers during some breaks. Therefore, many of the volunteers still stay in hotels when there are a large number. The volunteer lodge was a great investment, and they have already completed one

expansion of the building by adding on three more rooms, raising the total capacity to 50. SHH also provides employment to local Hondurans with jobs in the construction of projects, and some of the women sell crafts such as purses and jewelry to visiting volunteers.¹²³

SHH's primary goal is to build 1,000 schools across Honduras by the year 2020. But they also have several other projects running simultaneously. In August 2012, the Villa Soleada Bilingual School was opened for grades K-2, with an additional grade added on every subsequent year. The teachers are yearlong volunteers from the US, usually recent college graduates. SHH also runs a college scholarship program for several adolescents in El Progreso. Through their website, you can contribute donations toward the construction of the schools, sponsor a child studying in the bilingual school, or join the monthly donation program called One Cup of Coffee, in which the amount you would spend on one cup of coffee (\$4) is donated each month to help fund the children's homes.¹²⁴

Villa Soleada Children's Homes

SHH also wanted to provide orphaned and abandoned children a safe place to live and grow up without fear. In November 2011, the first Villa Soleada Children's Home opened to 10 boys between the ages of 7 and 14. In August 2013, a girls' home was opened directly across from the boys' home, welcoming four girls and a two-year-old boy (a sibling of three of the girls, siblings are required to be

¹²³ Students Helping Honduras, <http://ceciskids.org>, accessed July 9, 2014

¹²⁴ Students Helping Honduras, <http://ceciskids.org>, accessed July 9, 2014. To join One Cup of Coffee, go to www.onecupofcoffee.org.

kept together under Honduran law). A few months later, four more girls arrived at the home. Today, there are 13 boys in the boys' home and 7 girls and a young boy in the girls' home. Each of the homes has a housemother that keeps the homes running smoothly, cooking meals, washing clothes, and general cleaning. A director oversees all daily activities, from purchasing food for the homes to enforcing discipline. All of the children at the children's homes are provided with three meals a day, clothing, and education at the bilingual school, or in the case of the older children, at private schools in El Progreso. Many participate in the community soccer team, and some prefer other activities such as martial arts, painting, and vocational work. The older children are required to participate in household chores such as washing clothes, sweeping, or mopping. Many of the children have suffered traumatic experiences, so they meet with a specialized psychologist frequently.

The children's homes also have fruit trees and vegetable gardens that the children tend to and will soon open a tilapia pond. By providing education through the university level or a form of vocational training, SHH hopes that these children will become self-sufficient adults. With that said, the organization recognizes that each child develops at a different rate, and the age limit for residency is flexible. SHH is in the process of building another home for the older boys, where they can stay until they are ready to live independently outside of the homes.¹²⁵

Data

¹²⁵ Students Helping Honduras, <http://ceciskids.org>, accessed July 9, 2014

I interviewed a total of six individuals who either currently work for or have worked at the children's home in the past. I personally know all of the interviewees from my experience in Honduras and interviews were conducted via Skype between the months of February and June 2014. The interviews were composed of about ten questions and the Skype calls lasted approximately 25 minutes.

Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness

Immediate Causes

Participant 1 cited fear as a main factor leading to child abandonment by parents. Fear that the parents would not be able to provide for their child, that they would not have a good life, fear for the child's future, or in the case of deformity or sickness, fear that the child would not be accepted in their community. According to Participant 6, these fears lead to stress and anxiety that lead the parents to feel like they are stuck in a predicament with few choices. Their only options are to throw their child out on the street, place the child in a relative's care, or place the child in the state's care at a government run orphanage.

Participant 1 stated that some parents abandon their children because they just aren't ready for children yet, either due to age, marital status, or financial situation. Participants 3 and 6 also shared this view, emphasizing that a major reason that children are abandoned in Honduras is because many women become mothers at a very young age and are not emotionally or financially prepared to raise a child. Participant 1 also mentioned conception as a result of rape as a potential reason for a mother to give up their child. Participant 4 approached the issue

somewhat differently, placing more responsibility on the parents. The participant stated that the main causes of abandonment are child abuse by the parents or the disintegration of the family, which was also cited by Participant 3.

Participant 5 provided a more in depth scenario that is commonly found in Honduras. Couples marry young, have several children, and then face financial troubles. The husband feels ashamed for not being able to provide for his family, and leaves. The woman, having no means to support herself and her children on her own, has little choice but to remarry. The new stepfather often refuses to accept another man's children living in his house, and the children from the previous marriage are cast out onto the streets or to children's homes.

When drug abuse is a factor among one or both parents, sometimes IHNFA intervenes and removes the child from the household. Participant 4 was removed from their home at a young age due to the mother's problems with alcohol addiction. The participant was placed in a children's home, where they lived for almost 19 years and received education through the university level. Participant 2 also mentioned drug and alcohol addiction, as well as disease as contributing factors.

Root Causes

All of the interviewees stated that one of the root causes of child abandonment and homelessness is poverty. Participant 1 stated that due to extreme poverty in Honduras, many homes have several relatives living in the same house. The added stress and financial strain of a baby is daunting, and can cause the

parents to think that giving the child up would provide him/her with a better life. Participant 6 placed most of the blame on the Honduran government. The government does not have any welfare programs in place to help the millions of its citizens struggling in poverty, which directly contributes to the issue of abandoned and homeless children.

Both Participants 1 and 2 cited gang violence as a core issue that contributes to child abandonment and homelessness. IHNFA may remove children from unsafe environments because of parents involved in gang activity, and gang violence often leaves children orphaned with nowhere to go. Several participants also mentioned unemployment as a significant root cause of child abandonment. According to Participant 4, because of their economic situation, some parents relocate or immigrate to other areas looking for more financial stability, leaving their children with relatives. Participants 3 and 5 also mentioned lack of education as a cause of child abandonment, as well as a masochistic society. Participant 3 stated that some men do not allow their partners to decide how many children to have, and women often end up with several children they may not be able to care for. Participant 6 stated that lack of education regarding reproductive health is a major factor contributing to child abandonment.

Participant 5 also raised the issue of birth control in Honduras. Honduran society is heavily influenced by the Catholic religion, leading many citizens to be opposed to any form of birth control, even preventative such as the standard birth control pill, the morning after pill, or intrauterine devices (IUDs). As previously

mentioned, abortion is illegal, although it still takes place. All of this leads to many Hondurans having more children than they can manage financially and/or behaviorally.

Additional Information about the Villa Soleada Children's Homes

Participant 1 supported that the first Villa Soleada Children's Home was opened in November 2011 and welcomed ten boys at its inauguration. Since then, a girls' home was opened in August 2013, and the total number of children residing in the homes combined today is 21. Some of the children had been living on the streets, but most had come from the state orphanage, Nueva Esperanza, run by IHNFA. Participant 1 has worked primarily with the boys' home over the past two and a half years with activities such as tutoring and soccer practice. Participant 1 emphasized the importance of being a friend and role model to the kids by providing comfort, listening to their background stories, attending special events, assisting with educational activities, offering praise or discipline when necessary, and being involved in their everyday lives in general.

Participant 4 mentioned that some of the families of the children at this home gave them up for reasons such as not being able to control them or not having the resources necessary to raise a child. Some of the children had run away from home for various reasons and were living on the street before coming to the children's home.

Participant 2 provided more information on the disciplinary system within the homes. The director of the children's homes created a list of the rules for the

homes, any possible violations of the rules, and the accompanying punishments for each violation. The entire list was discussed with the children, and each child of appropriate reading age was presented with a copy of this document for reference. Both the director and the housemothers administer disciplinary measures, and do so fairly and consistently.

How the Issue Could Be Further Addressed

Participant 1 emphasized that not many people in Honduras are looking out for the wellbeing of these children. Although there are many organizations dedicated to helping homeless and abandoned children, they cannot cope with the sheer numbers. Participant 1 suggested that there need to be more private organizations dedicated to the issue as well as significant government assistance in order to make an impact. It is also important to adequately monitor these institutions to make sure that there is no abuse taking place and that the children are getting the care that they require. There needs to be significant improvements to the quality of care in IHNFA institutions such as Nueva Esperanza, and more communication between IHNFA and NGOs that operate children's homes.

Additionally, the international adoption channel is constantly being closed to foreign adoptions of Honduran children, which makes the process lengthy, expensive, and ultimately, nearly impossible. Fixing this issue is not something that can be done overnight. Therefore, Participant 1 suggested reaching out to Hondurans that could provide foster care to some of these children. Many

Honduran citizens are aware of the situation and are willing to help, but do not know how to get involved.

As far as long-term solutions go, Participant 1 stated that the Honduran government as well as NGOs need to address the issues of poverty, drug abuse, and gang activity. By addressing these root causes, it will lead to a decrease in the number of children that are abandoned and living on the street. Several participants recommended significant improvements in the accessibility and quality of education, specifically sexual education and family planning. Participant 3 also stressed the need for educational programs regarding alcohol and drug addiction prevention, as well as more drug treatment and rehabilitation centers. As with Participant 1, Participant 2 agreed that resolving the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras needs to be a joint effort between public, private, and NGO organizations. Participant 3 had a similar response, and also recommended help from volunteers.

Somewhat differing from other responses, Participants 4 and 6 felt that the government should be principally responsible for addressing the issue of child abandonment and homelessness. The government should be creating a better future for the children, and does not currently have effective programs to do so. Because of this, private organizations are often more efficient in caring for these children. Participant 6 stated that the government should address the issue of poverty in order to alleviate the number of abandoned and homeless children. The participant emphasized the need for Hondurans to feel that their government cares

for them and their wellbeing, and one way to do so is to set up an effective welfare system for families struggling with poverty. This participant's view was that Honduras needs to help itself, and not rely on foreign NGOs to solve the existing problems. While there will always be a gap between the rich and the poor in Honduras, Participant 6 argued that there is no need for the gap to be as wide as it currently is. The Honduran government could implement policies if they chose to do so that would significantly help the population, in the opinion of Participant 6.

Analysis

Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness

Immediate Causes

The participants mentioned various immediate causes of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras, including being unable to care for the child, not wanting a child, child abuse causing the child to be removed from the home or run away, drug abuse, and the disintegration of the family. Parents can be unable to care for their children for several reasons, such as not having the income to support a child, not having a safe living environment for the child, or not being of adequate health to care for the child. In a developing country such as Honduras, most women do not receive adequate prenatal care, leading to birth defects or illness of the child. For women who cannot afford to care for a healthy child, a sick child is often too much to handle. Many children with physical deformities or mental disabilities end up in the state orphanage. Some of these mothers have health issues themselves.

Several participants mentioned that many women become mothers at a very young age, and are not emotionally or financially prepared to have children.

Some women simply do not want children, which raises the question as to why they would become pregnant in the first place. In a developing country, it is not so simple as “just don’t get pregnant.” One cause of this is the lack of access to and the social stigma regarding birth control, to be discussed later on. Only Participant 1 proposed the possibility of women giving up their children as a result of rape. After such a traumatic experience, the women cannot face their child without being reminded of the incident, which leads to abandonment of the child.

Child abuse, surprisingly, was only mentioned by one participant. Having spent a significant amount of time with children formerly living on the streets, this researcher has found that many stated that their parents or relatives had physically abused them. In cases of child abuse within the home, there are a few things that can happen. IHNFA can become aware of the situation and, using a judge specializing in children’s affairs, remove the child or children from the home and place them in a state institution. In many cases, the children simply decide to leave. They run away from their homes, instead preferring to live on the streets.

Several interviewees also mentioned familial disintegration. In Honduras, the legal age to marry is 21. However, families are often started earlier. A man and a woman can easily move in together and begin a family without any form of government interference. Without many educational or job opportunities, the financial strain of the growing amount of children takes a toll. The father cannot

support his family, and as Participant 5 portrayed it, in his shame, abandons his family. The mother, often lacking an educational background and unable to find employment due to her obligation to raise her children, has few options. If she remarries, there is always the possibility that her new husband will not accept her children from her previous relationship. The children end up on the streets, with relatives, or in state orphanages.

I found it surprising that this participant took such a sympathetic view of the parents. The participant, using the phrase “in his shame,” seemed to imply that the father had no choice but to leave his family, evoking sympathy from the reader. How do his actions help anyone involved except himself? It only serves to free him from his family and responsibilities. And the mother is equally selfish. If she remarries, presumably to provide a better life for herself and her children, why would she allow her new husband to cast out her children? The participant also did not account for the fact that some men can provide for their families, and simply choose not to.

Root Causes

All of the participants cited poverty as a fundamental cause of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. The stress of being unable to provide for their children lead parents to abandon them. The participants mentioned various emotions that the parents experienced during these times, including stress, fear, anxiety, shame, and insecurity. I found it interesting that Participant 1 focused on fear so much. The interviewee stated that many parents abandon their children

in Honduras because they fear they will not be able to provide for them, they fear that their child will not have a good life living with them, and the fear that if their child is sick or deformed they will not be accepted. All of these fears stem from the core issue of poverty. One of the interviewees brought up the fact that the Honduran government has no type of welfare program designed to help citizens struggling in poverty. This causes Hondurans to feel like their own government does not care about their wellbeing.

The fears mentioned by Participant 1 are also a result of the issue of unemployment in Honduras, which was mentioned by several of the interviewees. Without a job or job prospects, parents are financially unable to support their children. Participant 4 also reinforced this as a cause by explaining what often happens with unemployed parents in this situation. They move or immigrate to other regions or countries, leaving their children behind with relatives. Even though they have found employment elsewhere and are able to send money home to support their children, the children feel abandoned by their parents. More often than not, these children begin spending more and more time on the streets, and sometimes end up living there.

I was surprised that only a few, and not all, of the participants labeled gang activity and violence as a root cause of child abandonment. Gang activity is an enormous issue throughout all of Central America, especially El Salvador and Honduras. Parents who are involved with the gangs can have their children taken away by the state because of the unsafe environment. Even parents who are not

involved directly with the gangs can be threatened or even killed for refusing to pay extortion money. San Pedro Sula, only about 45 minutes from Villa Soleada, currently has the highest murder rate in the world outside of an active war zone, largely a result of gang violence. Approximately 19 people are murdered every day in San Pedro Sula.¹²⁶ Killing one person has a domino effect, inevitably affecting the victim's families, and therefore their children. Gang members have orphaned countless children in Honduras due to the murder of the children's parents.

Several interviewees brought up lack of education as a contributor to child abandonment and homelessness. In Honduras, many citizens only complete a few years of formal schooling, and some never even attend. The accessibility and the quality of education in Honduras is a major concern both nationally and internationally. When teenagers should be attending school, they are instead having children. The government does not have any system in place to monitor and ensure school attendance. Additionally, there is little sexual education or education regarding reproductive health in Honduras. This can lead to confusion regarding how children are conceived. One teenager the researcher encountered denied paternity of his child, insisting that the baby couldn't be his because he was in love with a girl that wasn't the mother of his child.

As Participant 5 mentioned, Honduran society is heavily influenced by the Catholic faith, and therefore many Hondurans are against any forms of birth control.

¹²⁶ TIME, "Honduras is Still the Murder Capital of the World," <http://world.time.com/2014/02/17/honduras-is-still-the-murder-capital-of-the-world/>, accessed July 11, 2014

This, combined with inadequate education regarding reproductive health, leads to many women becoming pregnant, whether they desire children or not.

Villa Soleada Children's Homes

The structure and organization of the Villa Soleada Children's Homes is significantly better than what the children would have experienced in a government run facility or on the streets. While they are small children's homes, currently only housing 21 children, those are 21 children that otherwise could be in a very different and even dangerous living situation. For example, if these children were still at Nueva Esperanza, several of the boys would have been turned out on the streets because of their age, and some of the girls would have been separated from their siblings to be placed in other homes for older girls. Also, the Villa Soleada Children's Homes are very new facilities, and SHH itself is still a young organization. The homes have plans to expand to house more children in the future.

The responsibilities that the children have in the homes are also essential to their futures. They are required to attend school, and in the case of some of the older boys, participate in vocational training such as carpentry and mechanics. Participating in household chores and having an effective system of discipline teaches the children a lesson in personal responsibility for their actions. The director and housemothers implement disciplinary actions according to a list that contains house rules, any possible violations of rules, as well as the accompanying consequence for each. The fact that all of the children have a copy of this list and are aware of the rules ensures that punishments are fair and consistent. Providing an

education for these children, which they might not receive under other circumstances, is the best investment SHH can make in the kids' futures. Instead of ending up uneducated and unemployed, these children now have the opportunity to become successful self-sufficient adults.

Meeting with a psychologist to discuss past traumas and current problems is also very important for the children. Many of them have anger management or behavioral issues, and being able to speak to someone about their feelings provides them with an outlet to express themselves. Participation in sports such as soccer and martial arts is also a useful tool for working through their emotions, as well as a good form of physical exercise and social interaction with peers.

The volunteers play an interesting role in the children's lives. Forming friendships with the volunteers can be both a positive and negative experience. On the positive side, the children have more social interaction with people outside of their culture, have a new friend to play soccer or other games with, and genuinely look forward to specific volunteers returning in the future. On the negative side however, the fact that the volunteers are only there for a short period of time and then return to their home countries can be very destabilizing for the kids. This can cause the feeling of being abandoned, which these children are already familiar with. The departure of a volunteer that a child has formed a close friendship with can lead to outbursts and other behavioral issues. However, in the researcher's experience, these negative results of interactions with volunteers have been minimal.

How the Issue Could Be Further Addressed

Opinions on how to resolve the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras varied. Some participants felt that the government should be addressing the issue, while some felt that it should be a combined effort between the government and NGOs. For those who felt that private institutions should be as involved as the Honduran government, the interviewees emphasized the need for more children's homes throughout Honduras. Surprisingly, only one interviewee insisted on the importance of monitoring these institutions to make sure that the care is adequate and appropriate for the children. Additionally, Participant 1 brought up the issue of international adoptions. The adoption process between Honduras and other countries is constantly being closed and then re-opened, making adoption extremely difficult. Correcting this system will take significant time and resources before it is sorted out. The interviewee's suggestion regarding reaching out to Honduran citizens as foster parents is a good idea, but it seems unlikely that there are enough Hondurans willing to take in foster children, especially considering the staggering amount of children in need of a home.

Yet all of these recommendations are merely band-aid solutions to the issue, addressing the effects caused by the root problems. The participants also provided ideas for how to address the root causes of the problem. Several interviewees suggested that the Honduran government and NGOs need to address the issues of poverty, drug use, and gang violence in order to affect the number of children who are abandoned or end up homeless. Some participants recommended improving the

educational system in Honduras, as well as providing sexual education and family planning programs. It is important for these types of education to begin at an early age. One participant recommended more drug addiction and rehabilitation centers to curb the amount of youth and adults abusing drugs. This would be a very good improvement, but only if the treatment centers are accessible and affordable to those who need them.

A few interviewees felt that only the Honduran government should be creating policies and programs to address these core issues. They acknowledged that the government does not currently have an effective way to address the problems, and NGOs play a significant role in assisting homeless and abandoned children, families living in poverty, and availability and quality of education. These participants stated that the government could address the issues if they chose to do so. Participant 6 suggested that the Honduran government set up a welfare system in order to assist families in poverty. However, in the researcher's opinion, the idea that Honduras needs to help itself is too idealistic. The current system of government in Honduras does not invest enough resources into policies and programs to address these issues. Therefore, NGO assistance is essential to the future of Honduras.

None of the participants offered solutions to the issues of a masochistic society and gang violence in Honduras. This could be indicative that the interviewees do not know how to address these particular issues, or that they

merely felt that addressing poverty and educational reforms would be enough to make a significant impact.

CHAPTER SIX: CASE STUDY THREE

Background Information about Our Little Roses

History

Our Little Roses, or Nuestras Rosas Pequeñas as it is known in Spanish, is a children's home that is ministry affiliated. The home is located in San Pedro Sula, in the northern region of Honduras. The original home, dedicated specifically to girls, was opened in 1988 by Dr. Diana Frade and housed 26 girls in a small house. Two years later, in 1990, government officials in San Pedro donated land to the organization to build more shelters for the girls. Our Little Roses Ministries completed construction of the two buildings to house at-risk girls as well as offices for the organization's staff members in 1992.¹²⁷

The Need for Such an Organization

Our Little Roses Ministries was started because of the lack of social services and welfare programs for children in Honduras. Children in Honduras suffered violence, poverty, illnesses, and government oppression, and desperately needed the opportunity for a better future. The website states that in 1988, as well as today, parents were unable or unwilling to care for their children, who were faced with a

¹²⁷ "Our Little Roses," <http://www.ourlittleroses.org/index.html>. Accessed May 16, 2014.

variety of difficult situations. Some children were forced to try to survive living on the streets, many were abused by family members, and nearly all girls did not receive an education because of having to care for younger siblings at home. Our Little Roses was dedicated to providing a safe living environment for the girls, as well as an exceptional education and love.

Stories and videos on the website gave several examples of how the girls end up in Our Little Roses. Most of the girls are sent to the home by the local juvenile court system. The girls have been removed from their parents' care because of poverty, differing forms of abuse, or because they have been abandoned by relatives. Some girls cited parent separation as a reason they were brought to the home. The videos provided a look at what could happen if the girls did not have the opportunities that they have at OLR. Girls in Honduras often become pregnant at an early age, and may have several children throughout their teenage years. Some live on the streets and can become involved with drugs or form sexual relationships as a way to seek the love that they did not receive from their parents.¹²⁸

Our Little Roses Today

According to their website, OLR currently houses 76 girls in their children's homes. In the main home, they house girls from the ages of infant to 18 years. The two buildings for the girls are the main residential home and the transitional home. The main residential home, built to house 35 children, currently houses around 65

¹²⁸ "Our Little Roses," <http://www.ourlittleroses.org/index.html>. Accessed May 16, 2014.

girls. Overcrowding can be a serious issue in children's homes, but OLR currently has plans to build a two story addition to the main residential home to alleviate the problem. The transition home is for the older girls who attend university. Also known as the Ginger Buice House after the Reverend Bill Buice's deceased daughter, the transition home always has a staff member present to assist the girls. The website also mentions an additional transition home located near the university that was donated to the organization. Presently, there are 14 girls attending university that reside in the transition homes.

OLR encourages persons who wish to help to sponsor a girl living at the facility through monetary contributions. Sponsors receive a certificate and a photo of the girl that they are sponsoring, and are encouraged to communicate. The cost to sponsor a girl at Our Little Roses is \$720 a year, or \$60 per month. OLR also relies on donations for financial support for the girls' education, and encourages contributions from any who are willing to donate. The yearly cost for pre-school age girls is approximately \$1,000, and for primary and high school girls, their school fees and costs are about \$2,000. However, OLR Ministries encourages donations of any monetary amount, because every little bit helps. All donations are tax deductible.¹²⁹ The website also has a Wish List of donations for the home, either from visitors or those who wish to contribute. Besides funding for expansion projects or general and educational sponsorships, there are a lot of everyday

¹²⁹ For more information about educational donations or to make a donation, visit www.ourlittleroses.org/news.htm and click on the Education Fund Flyer on the right hand side of the page. It provides a form and mailing address to mail checks.

supplies that the girls require. School supplies, clothing, shoes, and bedding and bath supplies are always in demand.

Since the organization began, it has also added the Holy Family Bilingual School, a chapel, and a B&B Hostel for visitors. OLR is dedicated to the girls' futures, and they do this is by investing in the girls' education and preparing the girls to live independently once they have reached adulthood. The girls attend primary and secondary school at the Holy Family Bilingual School. The organization provides school uniforms and the necessary school supplies for the girls. The girls also have the opportunity to attend university if they choose to pursue further studies, but are required to work part-time jobs and assist the girls' home. OLR assists the girls in finding employment and housing after university graduation as well.

Our Little Roses focuses on providing education, health and mental care, and nutritious meals for the girls. It values love and acceptance above all else. OLR hopes that all of the girls in the homes will grow up to lead healthy, productive lives.

All of the girls at the institution attend church. Additionally, many are actively involved with the church choir, and are youth fellowship leaders and church assistants. In the videos on the website, many of the girls referenced God and religion throughout the dialogue, stating that "God has blessed them" and "God is here with us." God and Christianity are also mentioned frequently throughout the various pages of the website.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ "Our Little Roses," <http://www.ourlittleroses.org/index.html>. Accessed May 16, 2014.

The organization also works in cooperation with several other ministries in San Pedro Sula. The other ministries include community health and dental clinics, a housing facility that also provides some education to single mothers, several public and private schools, a retreat center for visiting volunteers, and the Jubilee Center for justice issues.

Volunteers visit throughout the year from all over the United States and Canada. They aid in construction and work projects organized through OLR and spend time with the girls, socializing and going on outings in the community. For people who are unwilling or unable to travel, OLR provides other means of assisting, including sponsoring a girl living in the home or providing tuition for school. OLR also offers the opportunity for visitors to come and learn Spanish at the Holy Family Language School. Spanish learners live within the OLR compound in San Pedro. The program emphasizes language regarding clergy, medical, mission, and social services staff. The language program generally takes place over four weeks and includes room and board, but alternative time frames are available upon request.¹³¹

Data

I interviewed a total of three individuals who currently work with or have worked with Our Little Roses. All of the participants have been volunteering or

¹³¹ "Our Little Roses," <http://www.ourlittleroses.org/index.html>. Accessed May 16, 2014.

working with OLR for at least several years and became involved through the church.

Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness

Immediate Causes

Participant 10 began involvement with Our Little Roses beginning in 1994, after the Honduran bishop visited the US in 1993. During the visit, the bishop requested help for orphaned and abandoned children in Honduras, and specifically mentioned Our Little Roses as a good organization to support. Both participants 10 and 11 stated that many of the girls are brought to the home through the juvenile court system, although some are brought in from the streets. Participant 11 explained that the juvenile court system removes children from their parents' care for a variety of reasons, including physical and sexual abuse or various forms of exploitation. Participant 11 responded that some of the girls are dropped off at OLR by their parents, sometimes literally "handed out the car window," while some show up at the home of their own volition looking for a place to stay or searching for their siblings. This interviewee stated that girls could also come to OLR from IHNFA children's homes. In almost all cases, the parents are unable to adequately care for their children. Participant 12 also mentioned family disintegration as a reason that many girls come to OLR, as well as escaping gang recruitment. Gang members recruit both young girls and boys for various tasks, and if the children refuse to join they can be killed.

Root Causes

Regarding the root causes that lead to the issue, Participant 10 cited poverty, lack of education, unemployment, large families, violence, drug trafficking, and a masochistic culture. Participant 11 also mentioned poverty and large families as causes. Participant 12 cited abject poverty, lack of education, lack of health care, gang activity and violence, and drug cartels as root causes of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras.

Additional Information about Our Little Roses

Participant 12 stated that Our Little Roses was started in 1988 as an NGO for at-risk girls in Honduras. Back then, alcoholism and poverty were the main causes of child abandonment. The Honduran government has to approve an NGO before it can operate within the country, and OLR was established through an Act of Congress in Honduras. The organization is approved for education, housing of at-risk girls, health care, and agricultural activities. Participant 10 responded that there are currently about 60 girls living in the home, while Participant 12 stated that there are approximately 70. The reason for this discrepancy is that the number of girls living in the home varies. After graduation from high school, girls move out of the main home. They can choose to live independently or move into a transition home to pursue university studies. Participant 11 added that the girls residing in the homes have a significantly better life than they would live on the streets or in the state orphanage. They have exceptionally better educational opportunities, are well dressed, and receive adequate medical attention.

The girls have a variety of responsibilities within the homes. According to Participant 11, they are required to assist with household chores such as cleaning, laundry, and cooking. They are also required to attend school, and all participate in church. Participant 12 responded that the girls' day begins early, and all attend school and participate in chores, and the girls are all together for dinner. Additionally, during summer vacation, many volunteers come to visit. The girls enjoy spending time with the volunteers and participating in a variety of activities and outings.

According to Participant 10, many of the girls attend the bilingual school, the Holy Family Bilingual School, which includes primary and high school level of education. Participant 11 added that the bilingual school has been active for approximately five years. After completing primary and secondary education, the girls have the option of continuing their education at a university. Participant 12 provided a lot of detail about the girls' educations. OLR utilizes several schools in San Pedro, both public and private. The bilingual school is for girls who come to the home at a very young age, around 5 years old, and OLR staff continually assesses the child to make sure she can cope with learning two languages at once. For those who do not attend the bilingual school, OLR sends girls to two public primary schools in San Pedro. Following primary school, there are two public high schools and one private high school that the girls can attend in San Pedro. There are also two universities for the girls that are studying at the university level that OLR provides sponsorship to. Additionally, there is a special needs school in San Pedro for the

girls at Our Little Roses that have mental disabilities or require special teaching. This interviewee mentioned that OLR has had girls go on to study a variety of specialties in university, including business administration, dentistry, electrical engineering, and law.

All interviewees stated that religion plays a major role in the girls' lives. Participant 12 emphasized that Our Little Roses was founded on religion, so religion and spirituality play a huge role in the girls' everyday lives. They participate in daily prayer together at bedtime, and the older girls help the younger girls to learn and remember their prayers. Participant 10 responded that they all regularly attend church at the chapel that is present on site, which Participant 12 stated was on either Saturday or Sunday night each week. There is a priest at the facility every day to provide counsel and advice to the girls. Participant 11 provided that bible study is a part of the girls' regular activities. Participant 10 also mentioned Father Spencer Reece, who visits OLR frequently. He encourages the girls to tell their stories and express their emotions through poetry.¹³² Participant 12 voiced that the girls have a monthly visit to a church near the beach. This way, they get an outing and are also able to participate in church. When mission group volunteers visit in

¹³² Father Spencer Reece will be featured in a film called *Our Little Roses*, which focuses on the Our Little Roses homes. The film is being directed by Brad Coley, and produced by Cassidy Friedman and James Franco. Filming began in December 2012, and is being funded through donations to OLR Ministries. For more information about the film, to view the teaser trailer, or to make a donation, visit <http://ourlittlerosesfilm.blogspot.com/>.

the summer, they also bring religious books for the girls and participate in religious activities such as singing or crafts.

How the Issue Could be Further Addressed

To address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras, Participant 10 declared that first, the root causes need to be addressed. The root causes that the interviewee mentioned previously included poverty, lack of education, unemployment, large families, violence, drug trafficking, and a masochistic culture. The interviewee insisted that there needs to be a better education system in Honduras, one that is more affordable and accessible to all children, with better quality of teaching. Participant 10 also recommended better birth control in Honduras. Participant 10 argued that addressing the issue of child abandonment and homelessness and the root causes that contribute to it needs to be a joint effort between the Honduran government and NGOs. The interviewee stated that the government is there out of necessity, but that it does not function well. Participant 11 agreed with the statement that the government does not function well, and that it is currently impossible for the government to address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness. This interviewee stated that the fact that there are so many NGOs helping the country is the main reason why there hasn't been a complete revolution in Honduras.

Participant 12 supported most of these suggestions. This interviewee insisted that Honduras needs financial support to build a better infrastructure. They need to eliminate poverty through housing projects, social programs for

children and families, more employment opportunities, and improvements in health care and education.¹³³ Participant 12 implied that if the Honduran government had the money and other resources necessary to address the problem, it could do so.

Participant 11 had a more pessimistic view of the situation. The interviewee stated that the Honduran government is so dysfunctional and corrupt that it is currently impossible to address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness. The police force, the military forces, IHNFA, and the government are so corrupt that until they are completely reformed, nothing can be done regarding child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. The interviewee added that the educational system is completely inadequate, and that the numbers of public school teachers is significantly lower than the government reports. Participant 11 mentioned “phantom teachers,” where the government reports that they are paying a certain number of public school teachers, most of which do not actually exist. The interviewee stated that the Honduran government is an oligarchy composed of 12 families, who use Honduran citizens as a cheap form of labor. The participant

¹³³ This participant has a significant amount of experience in Honduras. The interviewee has lived in the country for 43 years and has been working with OLR since it began. The interviewee stated that when they first arrived, Honduras was a poor, relatively unknown country with minimal violence. The Contra Wars completely destabilized the region, including Honduras. The US contributed millions of dollar in aid, but instead of investing in building the infrastructure of Honduras, the US provided aid in the form of military aid and support.

declared that nothing within the government has changed following the 2009 coup, and that it intentionally relies on international NGOs for support.¹³⁴

Analysis

Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness

Immediate Causes

The interviewees described a variety of reasons why girls are brought to OLR, as well as how they are brought to the home. Many are placed at OLR by the juvenile court system, which removes the girls from their homes because of physical or sexual abuse, or because their parents simply can't care for them. Some are brought in off the streets, where they could be abused or exploited.

The most shocking scenario for arrival is when the girls are dropped off by their parents, sometimes as one participant stated, "handed out the car window." This statement caused the researcher to wonder, "What kind of person does this?" The researcher's initial thought was that the parents care very little for the child's wellbeing and are giving them up because they simply don't want them. They leave their child with strangers, without even exiting the car to say goodbye or make sure

¹³⁴ Participant 12 insisted that the 2009 ousting was not a military coup. Former President Zelaya was caught stealing millions in US aid money from Honduran Central Banks for his own personal use. Additionally, Zelaya called for a referendum to allow him to be reelected as president, but marked ballots were discovered before the election. The military never took over the government, the Honduran government ousted Zelaya. The President of Congress took over as acting president. According to the interviewee, all of this was legal under the Honduran Constitution, but would not have been so under the US Constitution, so the international community wrongly declared the act an illegal coup.

the home is a safe place to live. However, thinking longer about this kind of situation provided a few other possible scenarios. Maybe the parents are sincerely distraught to abandon their child, and doing it quickly is the most painless for both parties. It's possible that the parents cannot afford to care for the child, and are simply borrowing a car from a friend. Or the neighborhood in which the parents live is frequently plagued by violent gang activity. One of the interviewees mentioned family disintegration as a cause of child abandonment, as well as escaping gang recruitment. Our Little Roses has been active for more than 20 years, and the parents could be aware that it is a safe organization where their child will have a better life than they would living at home, with many more opportunities for a successful future.

Some of the girls show up at the home of their own free will looking for shelter, or are looking for siblings already residing in the home. Some girls were relocated from IHNFA, which has a history of severe overcrowding. However, Honduran law supposedly states that siblings must be kept together. It seems unlikely that all of the girls in OLR are only children or only have female siblings. If this is the case, what happens to the girls' brothers? And why is OLR an exception to the rule? It is also possible that this law, if it does exist, is not strictly enforced.

Root Causes

The participants all had similar answers for the root causes of child abandonment and homelessness. Poverty was mentioned by all of the interviewees, and lack of education, large families, gang violence, and drug activity were all

mentioned more than once. This shows that all of the interviewees from OLR are identifying the same types of root causes of child abandonment, which strengthens the argument.

Additional Information about Our Little Roses

The history of the organization that Participant 12 provided was quite thought provoking. The fact that the Honduran government has to approve an NGO before they can operate within the country seems reasonable enough. But if the government is as corrupt and dysfunctional as Participant 11 suggested, will the Honduran government really allow in NGOs that could create significant positive change in the country? Based on Participant 11's views, the government only allows NGOs to operate within its borders when it is in the government's best interest.

Our Little Roses has two homes, the main residential home for younger girls and the transition home for girls who are studying at the university level. It is important that the older girls have a separate home because it teaches them how to live independently. Although there is always a staff member at the transition home, the older girls learn how to become more self-sufficient by doing most of the cleaning, cooking, and housework. Also, studying at the university level requires a lot of work outside of the classroom, which could be difficult to complete with more than 60 young girls in the same building. The transition home provides them with the privacy that they require to focus on their studies.

An education is the most valuable resource that the girls can have. Our Little Roses provides various options regarding education for the girls, and each girl is

individually evaluated. By making the whole process personalized instead of generalized, OLR addresses each girl's needs individually. It is important to do so, because just as two children are never the same, each child learns differently and at a different pace. Girls who are enrolled in the Holy Family Bilingual School are regularly monitored to make sure that they can effectively learn two languages at the same time without falling behind academically. The other girls attend various schools in San Pedro that are attuned to their interests and skills. For the girls with special needs or learning disabilities, OLR utilizes a special needs school in San Pedro. Here the girls can receive the appropriate attention and specialized teaching that they require. For older girls who wish to further their studies at the university level, they are allowed to choose their degrees based on their own personal interests.

The chores that the girls have within the home are very important. It teaches them responsibility and accountability for their actions. The girls studying at university are required to work part time and assist at the main home as well. While it seems like a lot to balance, it teaches the girls time management skills and emphasizes to them that the investment in their university education is not a free ride. They must comply with their obligations to the organization in order to continue their studies.

The girls at OLR get to make their own choices regarding their futures, which provides them with a sense of control over their lives, something that they may not have experienced up until this point. While they are required to attend school

through the primary and secondary levels, after that they are allowed to choose their own path. They can choose to live independently, and OLR assists them with finding employment and housing. Or they can choose to move to an OLR transition house and continue with their studies at the university level. The girls studying at university level can choose what degree they want to pursue for their futures, whether it is engineering, teaching, or medical.

Religion plays a very major role in the girls' lives at OLR. They participate in daily prayers, attend church regularly, and have access to the chapel and a full time chaplain at the premises. Participant 12 stated that, "abandonment is total rejection, and is something that is very difficult to cope with." At OLR, the girls are taught that God will never abandon them, and their relationship with God is based on love and forgiveness. The mission trip volunteers that participate in religious-based activities with the girls also indicate to the girls that people outside of their country can have similar beliefs and values. It is a common ground that both the girls and the international volunteers can share and build upon.

How to Further Address the Issue

In addressing the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras, two of the interviewees emphasized the need to address the root causes of the issue. First and foremost, extreme poverty needs to be eradicated. Participant 12 recommended doing this by building a better infrastructure in Honduras. By investing in housing projects, social programs, creating jobs, and improving health care and education, the cycle of poverty can eventually be broken. Participant 10

also insisted upon improvements in the educational system and better access to birth control for families. By increasing access and affordability of birth control in Honduras, parents will not be having several children that they cannot afford to care for. All of these recommendations are valid and would be beneficial to the future of Honduras and its citizens. Once again, the interviewees did not provide suggestions regarding how to address the issue of gang violence and drug trafficking.

Participant 11 strongly emphasized that the Honduran government is incapable of addressing both the issue of child abandonment and homelessness as well as the root causes that contribute to it. The current system of government, as well as the police and military forces, are corrupt and dysfunctional. Unless the entire government is reformed, the problem of child abandonment and its causes will remain unaddressed. The interviewee was convinced that these essential changes will never happen, and that the same problems will remain.

One of the interviewees recommended a joint effort between the Honduran government and NGOs to address the issue of child abandonment and the root causes. Another participant stated that the government should be responsible, but that it currently does not possess the resources to do so. Yet how would the government acquire such resources? The interviewee did not address this point, which leaves the answer open to interpretation. Would the government rely on international aid, and if so, how would it be appropriately monitored to ensure proper distribution?

The participants had varying degrees of pessimism regarding whether the issue of child abandonment and homelessness could be addressed, and differing opinions of who should be responsible for doing so. This shows that there is no clear answer as to how to further address the issue. However, all had similar responses for the causes of the problem, and agreed that the girls at OLR have significantly better lives and opportunities than they would in other situations.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SYNTHESIS

Causes of Child Abandonment and Homelessness

Immediate Causes

As seen in previous sections, multiple sources listed the inability to care for the child, abuse, and familial disintegration as immediate causes of the problem. The fact that interviewees from different organizations and scholars all mentioned these issues indicates that they are visible and common problems directly related to child abandonment and homelessness. While the other responses, such as drug abuse and escaping gang recruitment, could be just as valid, the fact that they were only mentioned by participants from one organization and during the literature review could indicate that they are not considered as prominent as the other causes. This could also be due to different locations of the organizations, or that the other interviewees simply forgot to mention them. Additionally, SHH is a fairly new organization, so interviewees may not be as familiar with the issue and its causes. In contrast, OLR has been active for more than 20 years, and interviewees have witnessed the political, social, and economic changes over the past few decades.

However, scholars and some interviewees listed drug activity and trafficking and gang violence as root causes of the issue. This shows differing interpretations of

at what level these factors affect the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. Drug abuse by parents is at the individual level, but is tied to the larger international issue of drug trafficking in the Western hemisphere. Parental involvement in gangs or death of a parent(s) due to gang activity may only affect one or a few children, but gang violence is a major concern of the international community. Some of the same problems that lead to child abandonment and homelessness every day in Honduras are also major international concerns.

Root Causes

All sources listed poverty and unemployment as root causes of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. Additionally, lack of education, gang violence, inadequate access to birth control resulting in large families, and a masochistic society were mentioned more than once. The testimonies from interviewees align with the views of researchers and scholars studying the issue, strengthening the argument that these factors are indeed the root causes of problem.

The remaining responses, the absence of government welfare programs and lack of adequate health care, are related to the previous responses. The absence of government welfare programs contributes to the cycle of poverty in Honduras. Without assistance from the government, Hondurans living in poverty rarely have opportunities to improve their lives or the lives of their children. Lack of adequate health care is related to the prior response that inadequate birth control leads to child abandonment and homelessness. Lack of adequate birth control resulting in

large families is part of the issue of insufficient health care, but the latter is more inclusive of other possible scenarios. Because of inadequate health care, children may be orphaned by sick parents who cannot get the treatment they need. In other cases, children are abandoned or taken away from parents who suffer from mental illnesses or drug and alcohol addictions. Instead of addressing these health care issues directly, the Honduran government merely adds to the number of children living on the streets or in orphanages.

All of the interviewees and scholars had identical, or at least very similar, views of the immediate and root causes of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras. This, combined with the fact that the literary sources are not nearly as current as the interviewee responses, shows that the issue of child abandonment and homelessness and its causes are not new in Honduras.

Organization Information

In comparing the three organizations, the Villa Soleada Children's Homes and the Our Little Roses homes stand out. They are very similar in structure and function, providing not only necessities such as food and clothing, but also exceptional education and opportunities for a successful future. Both homes provide a balance of education, recreational activities, and household chores that teach the children responsibility while still allowing them to enjoy being a child. Yet there are notable differences between the homes as well. The Villa Soleada homes are still very new and are located in the community of Villa Soleada, which houses

more than 40 families and includes a bilingual school. This means that the children at the homes have constant interaction with other children within the community who live with their families. This is important for the children to develop social skills with other children as well as adults. The OLR homes have been in operation for more than 20 years, but are more isolated from the surrounding community. However, the girls still have the opportunity to interact with other children at school or during outings. Additionally, religion plays a major role in the girls lives at OLR, something that was not mentioned by the SHH interviewees. It is unknown whether strong religious influence, or lack thereof, has an effect on the children's development and futures.

The Nueva Esperanza children's home was nearly the complete opposite of the other case studies. There was a significant shortage of appropriately trained staff members, little or no education, a significant lack of resources, little physical or social interaction, abuse, and incredibly unsanitary living conditions. All of these combined to be critically detrimental to the children's physical and mental health. Additionally, Nueva Esperanza and other IHNFA facilities did not prepare the kids for living independent successful lives. They had little education and few skills, and boys were turned out on the streets in their early teenage years. The interviewees' testimonies as well as information gathered during the literature review contradict the information that IHNFA provided on its website regarding its facilities and methods of operation. While it is a positive step that the Honduran government recently dissolved IHNFA and has been closing its facilities, it remains to be seen

whether the government will create a better system of addressing the needs of homeless and abandoned children.

Throughout the literature review, several different organizations were discussed. Scholars and reporters mentioned the state organization, IHNFA, and raised concern regarding the conditions of its facilities. Several NGO organizations were mentioned as well, which provided a variety of resources. In addition to food, shelter, and clothing, many of these homes provided various combinations of health care, counseling, education, vocational training, independent housing, and job placement assistance. The literature review also discussed several organizations dedicated to homeless and abandoned children that are no longer in operation. These organizations provided many of the same resources as the organizations that are still active.

So why do some programs succeed while others fail? Does the structure of the organization make a difference in whether it survives? Several of the case studies and organizations mentioned in the literature review provided the same resources to children. Currently active organizations and organizations that were shut down provided education, recreational activities, and health care to the children that they housed. Their staff is or was composed of counselors, psychiatrists, and educators. Both state organizations and NGOs have failed. Based on the research gathered, the structure of the organization is not a predictor of success as long as there are adequate resources and there is no abuse taking place.

So does it just come down to money and funding? The research gathered during this project is not sufficient to provide an answer to this question.

How to Further Address the Issue

Suggestions regarding how to further address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness varied. This synthesis does not include suggestions from Nueva Esperanza interviewees because IHNFA has been dismantled and its facilities are in the process of closing. The following information is divided into two sections, narrow-based solutions directed at the issue of child abandonment and homelessness itself, and broad-based solutions directed at addressing the root causes that contribute to the issue of child abandonment and homelessness.

Narrow-based Solutions

Both researchers and interviewees from the Villa Soleada Children's Homes emphasized the need for more children's homes in Honduras with sufficient resources to provide safe housing and opportunities for the future. There is no instruction manual for how to best raise a child, especially one with a traumatic past. However, it is undoubtable that providing food, shelter, clothing, education, health care, and counseling is the best way for these organizations to give the children a better life. Additionally, scholars recommended preventative programs to keep children from ending up on the streets in the first place. These programs

included recreational youth activities and programs to reduce domestic violence in the household.

Interviewees from SHH also recommended a more effective government strategy for dealing with the issue of homeless and abandoned children, and significant improvements in the quality of care in government-run institutions. There also needs to be more communication between state institutions and NGO organizations regarding the issue.

Broad-based Solutions

According to author Duncan Green, “improving street children’s lives or reducing their numbers in any sustainable way cannot be achieved without improving living conditions in the homes and communities from which they have fled.”¹³⁵ This means addressing the root causes of the issue of child abandonment and homelessness. Participants from both SHH and OLR, as well as scholars, recommended addressing the root causes of the issue in order to make a significant impact. For both organizations and researchers, these included poverty, drugs, lack of education, inadequate health care, a masochistic society, and gang violence and activity. The interviewees and scholars included recommendations for several of these root causes, several of which were similar. These included improvements in the educational system and the health care system, as well as government welfare programs that would provide housing, social programs, and employment opportunities. Scholars also recommended stimulating economic development

¹³⁵ Green, *Hidden Lives*, 87

through favorable trade policies with the US that would favor goods from developing countries and providing more microloans to small businesses. Author Sonia Nazario argued that stimulating economic growth would lead to decreases in poverty and unemployment.

The fact that interviewees from both organizations and researchers had similar responses regarding the root causes of the issue, as well as sharing the idea that the root causes needed to be addressed in order to make substantial change, shows that this may be the best way to address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness.

However, a masochistic culture was listed as a root cause of child abandonment and homelessness by interviewees from both organizations and scholars, and yet no suggestions were presented by either side regarding how to address this issue. The same applies to the issue of gang activity and violence. Neither interviewees from SHH, OLR, or researchers had suggestions for how to confront this issue. This could indicate that there is no clear answer for how to address these particular issues. However, based on Casa Alianza's claim that the number of gang members in Latin America is increasing due to socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, weak family structure, and lack of opportunities, addressing these issues could be a possible way to curb the number of individuals turning to gang activity.

Only Sonia Nazario recommended stimulating economic growth as a way to address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness and its accompanying

root causes. This seems to be an obvious way to address the issues of poverty and unemployment, which would lead to a decrease in the number of abandoned and homeless children. Yet none of the interviewees specifically mentioned economic development and growth. Additionally, none of the interviewees or scholars mentioned capitalizing on tourism as a way to stimulate the Honduran economy. Honduras is a beautiful country with waterfalls, jungles, mountains, and tropical beaches. The Bay Islands on the Caribbean side already host numerous tourist resorts, which have a substantial amount of visitors each year and provide jobs to locals. With clear waters and breathtaking tropical reefs, Honduras has some of the most beautiful snorkeling and scuba diving in the Caribbean. On the mainland, Honduras is home to the ancient Mayan ruins of Copán, the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve, and the Lago de Yojoa, a large natural lake with scenic views and hiking trails. Popular tourist activities in Honduras include white water rafting, hiking, visiting coffee and banana plantations, and exploring caves and hot springs. Yet the gang and drug violence has led the US State Department to issue a Travel Warning for Honduras, which has undoubtedly impacted tourism.¹³⁶

Who Should Confront the Issues?

One of the biggest differences among interviewees' responses was regarding who should be responsible for addressing the issue of child abandonment and

¹³⁶ "Honduras Travel Warning," US Passports & International Travel, US Department of State, last updated June 24th, 2014. <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/honduras-travel-warning.html>.

homelessness and the root causes that lead to it. Several agreed that it should be a joint effort between the Honduran government and private NGO organizations, with assistance from volunteers. However, a few participants said that the government should be principally responsible for addressing the issue instead of relying on NGOs. Honduran citizens need to feel that their government has their best interests at heart, and to do this the government needs to step up in alleviating poverty and unemployment in the country. These interviewees recommended government welfare programs in order to help citizens struggling in poverty.

Scholars cited in the literature review also had differing interpretations of who should be responsible for confronting these issues. Thomas de Benitez declared that addressing the issues should be a joint effort between the government and NGO organizations. Marcela Raffaelli did not specify whether the government or NGOs should be confronting the issue, while Sonia Nazario placed more responsibility on the international community. By suggesting trade policies with the US that favor goods from developing countries and encouraging developed nations to aid in job creation in developing countries, Nazario implied that addressing the issues should be a collaborative effort between NGOs, the Honduran government, and the international community. Yet assistance from international organizations has thus far been minimal and unsatisfactory. The International Monetary Fund has implemented a 15-year Poverty Reduction Strategy program designed to improve social sectors in Honduras, beginning in 2001. The program focuses on

improvements in education, health care, sanitation, housing, and social security, and yet improvements thus far have been minimal.¹³⁷

There are many possible explanations for the discrepancies between responses in this area. Different interviewees and scholars have varying years of experience in Honduras, and there was a large age range among interviewees. Additionally, individuals may be more focused on one area of expertise, i.e. social climate, but are not as familiar with political or economic factors. While interviewees from these organizations had different opinions on who should be responsible for addressing the issue of child abandonment and homelessness, they all agreed that the current system of government in Honduras is ineffective and incapable of immediately doing so. In order to confront the issue of child abandonment and homelessness and the root causes that contribute to it, there must be significant governmental reforms in Honduras.

How and Why the State Can't Care for Children

State Can't Care for Citizens

Honduras, as well as the rest of Central America, has experienced significant destabilization over the past several decades. The Contra Wars and subsequent US involvement led to expansion of poverty throughout the region. The structural

¹³⁷ IMF, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Honduras," (2001) p. ii

adjustment programs that followed only escalated inequality and poverty, while reducing government services dedicated to education and health care.¹³⁸

According to Duncan Green, urbanization has played a large role in the rise of poverty in Latin America. Cities usually have better access to education and health care, as well as more employment opportunities. Families migrate from rural areas to the cities, but poverty has now risen exponentially in urban areas as well due to government cuts in funding to schools and clinics.¹³⁹ Honduras is no exception in this general trend in Latin America.

The Honduran government has thus far proved to be unable to sufficiently take care of its citizens. Without government assistance, Hondurans are on their own when it comes to caring for themselves and raising a family. Oftentimes, this leads to child abandonment, or the child leaving home in search of better living conditions. The Honduran government has failed to alleviate poverty, implement social welfare programs, improve education and health care, create stable employment opportunities, and adequately cope with the rising levels of violence in the region.

According to the IMF Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the Honduran government has consistently failed in proper “administration of justice, the efficiency of legislative activity, and the participation by the poor in the definition of policies.” There is a deep history of distrust between the citizens of Honduras and

¹³⁸ Green, *Hidden Lives*, 131

¹³⁹ Green, *Hidden Lives*, 20

the government, which has been exacerbated by frequent corruption and makes it difficult for the government to effectively implement policies and programs. The Honduran government has lost substantial credibility in the eyes of its population, and the IMF acknowledges it as ineffective and inefficient. Therefore, many of its citizens are increasingly turning to irregular channels, such as gang activity and drug trafficking, in order to survive. Ultimately, there is little citizen participation in policy-making, something that the Public Administration Reform Program (PRAP) has unsuccessfully tried to resolve.¹⁴⁰ In addition to these deficiencies, government funds that are allocated for the poorer sectors of society are often diverted for illicit purposes, adding to the general distrust of the government and continuing the cycle of poverty.¹⁴¹

Some scholars go so far as to claim that the Honduran government is effectively waging war on its own citizens, specifically the poor and marginalized societies. Adrienne Pine focused mainly on health care in Honduras, but also mentioned education and economics. In the United States in the 1980s, President Reagan's economic policies were largely focused on privatization, which then began to appear in Central America. Over the past few decades, the Honduran government has cut funding to public services, which has had an extremely detrimental effect on the poor. Private schools and private medical facilities expanded, widening the gap between the rich and the poor in Honduras. Oftentimes, health care is a luxury that

¹⁴⁰ IMF, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Honduras," (2001) p. iii

¹⁴¹ IMF, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Honduras," (2001) p. 48-49

most poor cannot afford. The public hospitals are falling into ruin, creating extremely unsanitary conditions in places where hygiene is of utmost importance. The wealthy of Honduras can afford to go to private hospitals and clinics, while the poor are left with no option but to go to “*el matarino*” or “the killer,” the nickname for the public hospital in San Pedro Sula. Due to the hospital’s severe overcrowding and lack of funding, Hondurans are wary of seeking health care in this facility, which they believe could leave them permanently injured or dead. Pine argues that the lack of resources is not due to lack of funds, but instead misappropriation of funds by the government.¹⁴²

Pine also discussed the explosion of the maquiladora industry in Central America. US President Reagan’s Caribbean Basin Initiative, which was an economic incentive package to provide funding to the Contras, had an unexpected side effect. It led to an explosion in maquiladoras, or factories, which produced tax-free cheap goods for international export. While this new industry held the potential to provide jobs and stimulate economic development, these jobs were “exploitative” and low-wage, extremely dangerous, and generated little profit.¹⁴³

Pine stated that, “ ‘the vicious cycle’ of low economic growth is not a result of violence. Rather, violence is part and parcel of the concentration of economic

¹⁴² Adrienne Pine, “Waging War on the Wageless: Extrajudicial Killings, Private Armies, and the Poor of Honduras,” in *The War Machine and Global Health* ed. Merrill Singer et al. (New York: AltaMira Press, 2010), 241-249

¹⁴³ Pine, “Waging War on the Wageless,” 249

wealth.”¹⁴⁴ By this, Pine means that to blame the slow progression of development in Honduras on gang activity and violence would be inaccurate and unfair. Instead, the enormous gap between the rich and the poor contributes to violence. Without government welfare programs to help citizens struggling with poverty, many are forced to turn to irregular channels in order to survive, as shows in the IMF poverty reduction paper. Dr. Sophie Yacoub addressed the issue of state violence against minors in Honduras. While the government was taking action to (in their view) eradicate a problem, the negative effects of their actions were often much more extensive than just at the individual level. Yacoub argued that violence against minors has societal and economic effects for the entire country, in that it “disables the workforce, discourages tourism and foreign investment, which perpetuates a vicious cycle of low economic growth and high prevalence of violence.”¹⁴⁵

Absolute Deprivation of Freedoms

Amartya Sen argued that an individual’s freedoms, and therefore capabilities, are limited by the social, political, and economic opportunities available to them. He stated that poverty itself is not solely low income, but a deprivation of basic capabilities such as education and health care.¹⁴⁶ In order for development to occur, citizens must have access to as many freedoms as possible. Sen calls for the removal

¹⁴⁴ Pine, “Waging War on the Wageless,” 254

¹⁴⁵ Sophie Yacoub et al., “Violence related injuries, deaths and disabilities in the capital of Honduras,” *International Journal of the Care of the Injured* 37 (2006): 434

¹⁴⁶ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2000) Kindle edition, loc. 463

of “unfreedoms” such as poverty, poor economic opportunities, systematic social deprivation, and neglect of public facilities.¹⁴⁷ He lists five instrumental freedoms: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security.¹⁴⁸ According to Sen, various types of unfreedoms can contribute to and build upon other types of unfreedoms. For example, economic unfreedoms such as abject poverty can contribute to social unfreedoms, and vice versa. The same concept applies for freedoms. Political freedoms can contribute to economic security, while social freedoms such as basic education, health care, and female empowerment can lead to greater economic participation. Put more simply, individuals who receive basic education and health care services are more likely to be more involved in the economic sector, through employment or starting businesses.¹⁴⁹

Many of these unfreedoms are highly visible in Honduras today. I argue that Honduras experiences deprivation of all five of Sen’s instrumental freedoms. There is significant deprivation of economic and social freedoms, specifically lack of economic opportunities, inadequate education, gender inequality, and inadequate health care. Sen argued that with the empowerment of women through educational and employment opportunities, countries experience decreases in birth rate, higher levels of gender equality in society, and more emphasis on adequate child care.¹⁵⁰ If

¹⁴⁷ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 98-196

¹⁴⁸ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 760

¹⁴⁹ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 269-320

¹⁵⁰ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 3616-3717

gender equality were emphasized in Honduras, this would result in higher numbers of educated and employed women in society, which according to Sen, would improve the quality of child care. This would result in fewer children being abandoned or choosing to leave their homes. Another point that Sen did not address was the effect of women's empowerment on instances of domestic abuse. Through emphasizing gender equality, women would have an equal status in the household, which could lead to a decrease in domestic abuse.

Honduras also experiences lack of transparency, both at the individual level and the national level. There is deep distrust of the government, and even among citizens themselves due to high levels of violence and gang activity. Political participation among the poor is minimal, and citizens are often uninformed due to illiteracy or unavailability of information in rural areas. And finally, there is little protective security in Honduras in the form of social safety nets. The poor among Honduran society are socially deprived and receive no government assistance, and there is little opportunity to rise out of poverty. Much of the population is lacking in adequate housing and clean water. The issue of unemployment in Honduras not only contributes to poverty, but also has significant psychological effects such as loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, and even affecting physical health.¹⁵¹

Sen argued that, "greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world, and these matters are central to the

¹⁵¹ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 473

process of development.”¹⁵² Sen addressed the false view that a country should wait until a country is more financially stable to expand public social services such as education and health care. He argued that waiting is unnecessary, and because economic, social, and political sectors are so interdependent, addressing social issues will actually lead to economic growth. Strengthening the social sectors in poorer countries actually requires less money than it would a richer country, so waiting until the country has grown richer will actually make the process more expensive.¹⁵³ Sen stated that ensuring the availability of these instrumental freedoms, and therefore development, can be a joint effort between public and private institutions, as well as NGOs. But most important is the involvement of the citizens themselves. He argued that the people should have a hand in creating their future.¹⁵⁴ Sen stated. “through education, learning, and skill formation, people can become much more productive over time, and this contributes greatly to the process of economic expansion.”¹⁵⁵ Therefore, Honduras needs to alleviate poverty by guaranteeing more freedoms for its citizens. The government needs to significantly expand social and economic opportunities, increase transparency to create trust, and create social welfare programs to aid families struggling in poverty.

The Role of NGOs

¹⁵² Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 431

¹⁵³ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 938-960

¹⁵⁴ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 1034

¹⁵⁵ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, loc. 5496

Organizations like SHH, OLR, and those mentioned by scholars in the literature review are largely focused on providing care and education to children who have been abandoned or homeless. So what can these organizations do about addressing the other root causes, such as poverty, health care, and unemployment?

SHH is already involved in helping reduce poverty and providing employment. Just by building the village of Villa Soleada and relocating the families from the dilapidated Siete de Abril, SHH helped 44 families out of extreme poverty and into a village with electricity, a plumbing system, and potable water. The families were required to work in the construction of the infrastructure and homes of the village. While this is not necessarily a form of paid employment, it provided jobs that the families had to participate in to receive housing. Additionally, SHH employs Hondurans from Villa and neighboring villages in its children's homes and bilingual school. When volunteers come down on trips, local men are employed for construction projects with the volunteers, and women are hired to cook for volunteers, clean the volunteer lodge, and sell crafts. During weeks when there are more visitors than the volunteer lodge can house, SHH places the other volunteers in hotels in and around El Progreso, bringing in money for the hotels. In addition, volunteers having outings to the Guaymitas market in San Pedro Sula, Tela Beach, and a nearby nightclub. The money spent by volunteers at these locations helps small businesses and families and helps to stimulate economic growth in Honduras. In order to provide employment when the volunteers are not present, SHH has a partnership with the La Ceiba Microfinance Institution. La Ceiba provides loans to

small businesses in and around El Progreso, including Villa Soleada.¹⁵⁶ SHH has also assisted residents of Villa in finding employment in El Progreso, including jobs as mechanics or construction workers.

There are similar characteristics with the Our Little Roses Ministries. OLR employs local citizens in their girls' homes and bilingual school. By sending some of their girls to outside schools and universities, they are helping those schools to maintain enrollment and revenues, and therefore continue operating. And the Holy Family Bilingual School is not strictly reserved to the girls at OLR. It offers affordable tuition prices to children and families who live nearby. OLR also partners with other ministries in San Pedro Sula, including health and dental clinics. The girls at OLR and citizens from neighboring communities have access to these clinics, often at a more affordable price than other private clinics charge. If the girls at OLR continue with their education through the university level in these fields, they can pursue employment opportunities in these same clinics, or find employment as lawyers or engineers. Otherwise, the organization helps the girls from their homes to find housing and employment once they reach the age of 18. In these ways, Our Little Roses is helping to reduce poverty in the area for all residents through better education, access to health care, housing and employment assistance, and supporting schools, clinics, and businesses in the community.

The Christian Children's Fund and their Early Stimulation Programme has showed remarkable results. By providing improved education, adequate sanitation

¹⁵⁶ More information on La Ceiba can be found here: <http://laceibamfi.org/>

services, improved nutrition, and health care to a rural community, the CCF noted significant improvements in the quality of life for citizens in the community. When parents do not have to worry about providing enough food for their children or being able to afford their education, they are able to focus on other aspects of life and development, such as finding better employment. This led to better familial relations and fewer instances of abuse. Children in the ESP group were found to have fewer health issues, while also having better social skills and academic performance. Empowerment was also an aspect of the program, and the results indicated that children who participated in the ESP had higher self-esteem and more optimistic views for their futures. While the CCF's research has been limited to two villages (one participatory and one control), if their results could be expanded and replicated, this could be monumental for Honduras. Other NGOs could implement Early Stimulation Programs, which would significantly expand the range of research and effects on the communities.

So are NGOs merely band-aid solutions to the issue of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras, or can they actually help to solve major issues? I argue the latter, that NGOs can make significant impacts in helping to solve major problems in Honduras. While the children's homes themselves are band-aid solutions, NGOs like those referenced in this study have made positive impacts in addressing the root causes of the issue. In addition to providing care and education, NGOs in Honduras can provide affordable health care, create jobs and assist in

finding employment, and stimulating economic development by supporting local businesses and issuing microloans.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras is a major issue that not only affects Honduras and its citizens, but the international community as well. I began this research project with the intention to learn more about what programs had been implemented in Honduras to address the issue. After acquiring information throughout the literature review, I revised my research question to be more specific. The subsequent question was regarding how different organizations in Honduras were interpreting and addressing the issue of child abandonment and homelessness. The project is a comparative analysis of three different children's homes in the northern region of Honduras with a focus on interviews.

Review of the Project

In this research project, I performed literary research using various databases in the George Mason University Library. I compiled appropriate data from various sources into a literature review that discussed the causes of child abandonment and homelessness, past and present organizations in Honduras that are dedicated to the issue, the physical and mental ramifications of being abandoned and living on the streets, and ideas from scholars regarding how to alleviate the issue.

Following the literature review, I outlined my project in the Research Methods section. For my project, I conducted interviews with twelve individuals who currently work with or have worked with abandoned or homeless children in Honduras. These interviewees were from three different children's homes, Nueva Esperanza, the Villa Soleada Children's Homes, and Our Little Roses. The interviewees from Nueva Esperanza were not employees, but instead were frequent volunteers at the establishment. I was unable to conduct interviews with Nueva Esperanza staff because they did not respond to my attempts to contact them, possibly due to the dismantlement of IHNFA and the process of closing down all facilities. The data gathered from each organization was presented in three case studies, one for each of the children's homes. Each case study included background information, a data and interviews section, and an analysis section. Interview questions were primarily regarding the structure and organization of the children's homes, causes of child abandonment and homelessness, and ideas for how to further address the issue.

After the three case studies, I compiled the findings into a synthesis section. I compared and contrasted the three children's homes and the interviewees' interpretations of the causes of child abandonment and homelessness and how to further address the issue. I then compared these findings to those provided by researchers cited in the literature review. Scholars and interviewees provided many of the same answers regarding the causes of child abandonment and homelessness in Honduras.

The next section in the synthesis compared the organization and structure of the different children's homes. While there were a few differences between the Villa Soleada Children's Homes and the Our Little Roses homes, they were generally quite similar. In contrast, Nueva Esperanza was run by IHNFA, the government organization for children and families in Honduras. The conditions in Nueva Esperanza were incredibly unsanitary, and the facility lacked appropriately trained staff members. I then compared findings about how to further address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness. This section compared and contrasted responses from interviewees from SHH and OLR, as well as suggestions from scholars. These responses varied, but generally concluded that in order to address the issue of child abandonment and homelessness, one must first address the root causes of it.

The last section of the synthesis provided deeper explanations as to why the Honduran government cannot care for these children, or even its own citizens in general. This results in the need for NGOs to step in and assist, and the synthesis concludes by discussing the role of NGOs in developing countries.

Weaknesses

The biggest weakness of this research project was that I was unable to conduct interviews with Nueva Esperanza personnel. I attempted several times to contact the staff through the contact email address on IHNFA's website, but received no responses. I instead interviewed three individuals who had spent a substantial

amount of time volunteering at Nueva Esperanza. However, these interviewees could not best provide Nueva Esperanza staff's opinions on what the causes of child abandonment and homelessness are and how to address the issue. While interviews with Nueva Esperanza personnel would have been more detailed and accurate, interviews with Nueva Esperanza volunteers were the best alternative option.

Additionally, I misjudged the amount of time necessary for approval by the Institutional Review Board. I began the process approximately a month and a half before a brief visit to Honduras in December 2013/January 2014, and I was not granted approval for interviews in time. Therefore, I was unable to conduct interviews in person, as I would have preferred. However, all interviewees were willing to participate in interviews through Skype, phone, or email. In the future, I will begin the approval process well in advance of any planned trips involving research.

How to Extend the Project

There are several ways to extend this research project. One option would be to conduct more literary research on the topic. There is always more information available, and this project only utilized databases that were located on the George Mason Library website. More information could be found in other databases on the George Mason Library website, or through other university library websites if access is available. Additionally, while this topic is currently under-researched and

there is not a significant amount of scholarly work available, I believe that this will soon change. With this year's surge in unaccompanied minors from Central America crossing into the US, more scholars will be focused on why these children are leaving their home countries.

This project only included three case studies, which focused on three children's homes. To extend the project further, one could conduct interviews with more children's homes in Honduras. All three children's homes included in this project are located in the northern region, so consulting homes in other parts of Honduras could provide more extensive information. The more children's homes that participate in interviews and provide similar answers to those acquired in this study, the stronger the arguments regarding the causes of child abandonment and homelessness and how to address the issue will be. Or interviewees from other homes could provide new information, which could even be contradictory to that presented in this project.

One last suggestion for extending this project would be to follow up with the Childhood, Adolescence, and Family Directorate (DINAF), the government organization that has replaced IHNFA. While the organization is currently in its initial stages of operation, it is imperative that DINAF succeeds where IHNFA failed. The Honduran government still does not have a successful method for addressing the issue of child abandonment and homelessness, as shown by the disintegration of IHNFA. Hopefully, DINAF will be a significant improvement over prior experiences.

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