FORMER STREET-INVOLVED CHILDREN IN RURAL CENTRAL KENYA:
UNCOVERING AN UNDERSTUDIED POPULATION

A Thesis in
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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, programs have been established in developing countries to help reintegrate former street-involved children. However, minimal research has discussed the long-term outcomes of former street-involved children who are part of these reintegration programs. Drawing on a phenomenological study with a group of former street-involved children in Kenya, this research examines the lived experiences of former street-involved children who are now youth and beneficiaries of a reintegration program designed to promote skill building and job readiness. It also explores how the lived experiences of these former street-involved children differ from the lived experiences of a group of former street-involved children who are now youth but did not participate in a reintegration program. At the crux of these findings is the idea that street-involved children require effective reintegration support in order to become socially integrated as they approach adulthood.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to the Consortium for Street Children, approximately 100 million children across the world live or work on the streets. Estimates for Kenya have ranged from 40,000 to 300,000 (Street, 2009). Each and every one of these children live vulnerable lives as they are at risk for abuse, drug use, and other negative behaviors and influences. Community leaders, government officials, and the international community have begun to consider the consequences and potential solutions for this continuously growing problem. However, minimal attention has been paid to understanding what is happening to former street-involved children as they reach adulthood.

The experience of living and working on the street as a child has also gained the attention of researchers and scholars in recent years (Buske, 2011; Kudrati et al. 2008; Huang et al. 2004; Nalkur, 2009). The previous research has demonstrated the fluid nature of street life as children tend to move on and off of the streets and between urban centers (Buske, 2011). We also know from empirical research that street-involved children engage in informal labor activities in order to earn income (Kudrati et al. 2008). While on the streets, these children are exposed to negative influences like abuse and drug use (Huang et al. 2004; Kudrati et al. 2008).

While this previous research has advanced our understanding of the nature and experience of being a street-involved child, more needs to be known. In particular, further work is needed to better understand both the long-term outcomes of street-involved children as well as the efficacy of recently established reintegration programs – programs whose sole purpose is to help former street-involved children gain skills and job readiness. Exploring the lived

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1 The term street-involved children captures and incorporates the reality of children on the streets – those who work on the streets but are not homeless – and adds that to those who live full time on the streets (children of the streets). For parsimony, hereafter I refer to both groups as street-involved children.
experiences of former street-involved children who have participated in such reintegration programs is imperative to our understanding of the efficacy of these programs. In order to fill this gap in the literature and to call for action to support the well-being of former street-involved children, a phenomenological approach is employed in this research to examine the social support networks, perceptions of control, and fertility and family formation aspirations of former street-involved children who are now youth\(^2\) (ages 18 to 30) and beneficiaries of a reintegration program designed to promote skill building and job readiness. The study also examines if and how this sample differs from a comparison group of former street-involved children who are now youth but who did not go through a reintegration program.

This research seeks to better understand the long term outcomes of former street-involved children in reintegration programs in Kenya. To contextualize this research, I will briefly review the setting of Kenya and the challenges the country currently faces. Kenya is a former British colony that gained its independence in 1963 and is now structured as a republic with three branches of government. The over 40 political parties in Kenya are highly influenced by ethnic loyalties. Due to high fertility, the country’s population has grown rapidly and is now home to approximately 41 million Kenyans. Rapid urbanization has led to a large movement of Kenyans to urban centers in search of employment opportunities (Background Notes, 2012). In 2012, the U.S. Department of State estimated that Kenya’s workforce was comprised of approximately 1.95 million formal sector wage earners and 6.4 million informal sector workers. Kenya has the largest economy in East Africa, known for its exports of coffee, tea and horticulture products (Background Notes, 2012). In addition to challenges associated with economic development,

\(^2\) In Kenya, the term youth is inclusive of those individuals who are within their young adult years. In this thesis, the terms youth and young adult are used interchangeably.
Kenya has also struggled in terms of drought related food shortages. Although Central and Southwestern portions of the country are tropical, the arid and semi arid regions of the North and East are known for experiencing significant droughts. Kenya had been considered a fairly stable country until December of 2007 when post-election violence ensued that was fueled by ethnic tensions and election disputes. Although the civil unrest eventually subsided, thousands were killed and many were displaced. Lastly, Kenya has struggled with the HIV/AIDS crisis. A USAID publication released in 2010 estimated 2.4 million children in Kenya were orphans because of the AIDS/HIV epidemic (Pfleiderer & Kantai, 2010).

As a result of high unemployment, family dissolution and a range of other factors, the number of children living or working on the streets continues to grow. In response to the increasing number of children living and/or working on the streets and in other vulnerable situations, the Kenyan government signed in 2001 The Children’s Act to support the welfare of children in especially difficult circumstances (CEDC) (The Children Act, 2001). Two years later, the Kenyan government established the Street Families Rehabilitation Trust Fund “to facilitate and coordinate service providers in rehabilitating street-involved children, youth and families”3.

From the development of this public-private endeavor, reintegration programs were established in later years to provide support to street-involved children and vulnerable youth. These programs vary in their reach and scope, often depending on their availability of funding, which is often limited. Some programs act as shelters while others may provide opportunities for skill building and empowerment.

The reintegration program described in this study acts as a third sector organization. Third-sector organizations are nongovernmental nonprofit organizations that are known for

having proliferated in numbers in many developing countries. These organizations have social
goals usually related to some aspect of individual or community well-being (Crampton, 2001).
Crampton (2001) argues that the third sector provides “services otherwise neglected by the
government and private for-profit sectors” (Crampton, 2001, p 1492). This sector provides
support for that which the market and government do not cover, but at the same time is unable to
fill all gaps and therefore there continues to be inequity. The particular reintegration program
discussed in this study not only provides food and shelter, but also gives children and youth an
opportunity to gain tangible skills, attend school, and engage in activities that promote
empowerment. Although run by paid staff, program participants and particularly older youth
have responsibilities in the functioning of the program. While older youth assist with the
program and acquire skills, children are sent to day schools in nearby communities. Participation
in the reintegration program is voluntary.

A qualitative phenomenology is used to explore the lived experiences of a group of
former street-involved children who are now youth and have participated in a reintegration
program. It also compares those same youth who are engaged in a reintegration program with a
group of former street-involved children who are now youth but who have never been part of a
reintegration programs. Three areas of inquiry will be investigated in the exploration of their
lived experiences. These three areas are 1) fertility and family formation aspirations, 2) social
support networks and 3) perceptions of control. The proceeding conceptual framework provides
a contextual basis for this research, grounds the three areas of inquiry in existing literature, and
provides an overall theoretical structure that informs the methodology of this research. Due to
the limited amount of literature on former street-involved children who are now youth, some of
the literature for this study is comprised of what focuses directly on street-involved children and
other vulnerable populations. Following the methods section are three chapters that speak specifically to the findings for the three areas of inquiry. In each of the three results chapters I go into more depth with the literature that relates to that particular area of inquiry. The results themselves examine how plans for fertility and family formation are viewed among respondents, to what extent they have nourishing social support networks to promote their well being, and to what extent they feel they have control in achieving their goals.
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Contextual Background

Urbanization and the general decline in social policy investment over the course of the last five decades has led to an increase in poverty and economic distress at the household level, which directly impacted the growth in street-involved child populations in many developing countries (Ayuku et al. 2003; Buske, 2011). Urbanization led to overcrowding and unemployment while competition and stratification created marginalized populations. The decline of social policy investment was vital to externalizing the outputs of these issues, such as street-involved children. Granted, previous research has indicated a range of influences on the growth in street-involved children populations (i.e. drought related food shortages, the HIV/AIDS crisis, and political and civil instability) (Ayuku et al. 2003; McAlpine et al. 2010; Buske, 2011), however, the majority of these cited influences are merely links between development regimes, the decline in national social development investments, the rise in urbanization, and the increase of local street-involved child populations.

As a result of these conditions, children often move to the street to work or live for a variety of reasons. In many cases, children feel that they can provide a better life for themselves on the streets than that which their families can offer them (Ayuku et al. 2003; Buske, 2011). In other cases, children are forced to either spend time on the street because they must help provide for their family, they have nowhere else to go, or because they seek to escape abuse. This choice made by children – a choice that may seem micro and minute – is in actuality may be caused by macro-level changes that place severe stresses on the household (Adesina, 2007).

The reintegration program discussed in this paper not only provides a safe environment for both children and youth, but also works to offer them skill development and support to
promote their growth and readiness for the workforce. Although there are examples of how these types of initiatives have improved the livelihoods of former street-involved children (Ochanda et al. 2011; Karabanow & Clement, 2004), the number of children who live or work on the streets continues to grow (Kaime-Atterhog et al. 2008) as reintegration programs are limited in capacity and as the causes of street-involved child populations persist.

The Street-involved Child Population

The experience of being on the streets as a child is not a new phenomenon. Children have been living in homeless situations for centuries, though they were often absent in policy discourse (Mayhew, 1861-1862; Buske, 2011). Slowly over time, this population of vulnerable children has entered the periphery of international policy discourse, most notably because of their growing populations in many metropolitan areas of the world (Buske, 2011). In 1986, UNICEF developed a classification system for street-involved children based on the extent to which they spend time on the streets. *Children on the streets* work on the streets through informal employment or begging during the day, but are not homeless. In contrast, *children of the streets* are those who not only work but also live on the streets (UNICEF, 1986). It has become apparent in recent decades that these static labels are insufficient for a population of children whose statuses change frequently as they may move on and off the streets intermittently (Buske, 2011). In addition, the nature of labeling an individual a “street child” poses issues as the label stigmatizes the individual, especially when many children who work or live on the streets do not identify themselves as such (McAlpine et al. 2010). An alternative is to identify the environment in which a child works or lives, such as “a child who lives or works on the streets” (Buske, 2011). The present study uses a term ‘street-involved children” as it is broad, acknowledges a child’s environment, but is still simple and practical for writing purposes. Lastly,
it encompasses all children who work and/or live on the streets. Therefore, when the term former street-involved children is used, it refers to those individuals who at any point in their childhood lived and/or worked on the streets. The author hopes that any remaining limitations of this term are minimized by the incorporation of the voices and words of the study population.

It is nearly impossible to estimate the number of children who work and/or live on the streets as their status can change frequently and because they migrate frequently to and between urban centers (Buske, 2011), let alone the number of people who were engaged in some form of street life as children. Research has shown that even on the streets, these children develop niches in the informal and marginalized economy (Young & Barrett, 2001), which include such labor activities as odd jobs, begging, stealing, and sex work (Kudrati et al. 2008). They face physical and emotional toils as they attempt to fend for themselves on the streets. In addition to being prone to physical abuse by police officers (Buske, 2011), these children lose out on opportunities for education, socialization, and adequate development (Kudrati et al. 2008). The missing influences of parents, family, and school can have negative impacts on a child’s outcomes (Ayuku et al. 2003). However, impacts differ across groups of children. For example, in a study of current and former Bolivian street-involved children, those who were still engaged in street life fared much worse than those who had left the streets to go to an orphanage. They experience higher rates of robbery, abuse from police, and alcohol and paint thinner use (Huang et al. 2004). Street-involved children are more likely than former street-involved children to experience serious medical problems and less likely to attend school (Huang et al. 2004). Therefore, the impacts and outcomes of being involved with the streets will vary drastically by the amount of time the child spends on the streets and in what capacity they are engaged in street life. This is relevant to this study in that former street-involved children who are now youth may differ
substantially based on many factors. Therefore, I will be looking for general themes and commonalities that arise from the data.

**Areas of Inquiry**

The proceeding section outlines the literature that discusses the three areas of inquiry, which are used to explore the lived experiences of former street-involved children. These areas of inquiry include fertility and family formation aspirations, social support networks, and perceptions of agency and control. In addition they provide insight into experiences and needs of former street-involved children populations in Kenya. By better understanding their social support networks, we can gain insight into how and to what extent they are becoming integrated in their communities – communities that have historically had strong informal safety nets (Mugo, 2004). Analysis of their perceptions of control will shed light on their potential for emotional distress and psychological well-being. And through a close look at their aspirations for fertility and family formation, we can better understand what factors play a role in determining when these individuals seek to build families of their own and how many children they hope to have. If participation in a reintegration program or the drudgery faced as a child involved with the streets contribute to respondents’ aspirations for fewer children, they will be less financially burdened because they will spread their income across fewer children. Each of these areas is vital to understanding if former street-involved children can create improved lives for themselves later in life via the experiences they had as children and/or gain through the reintegration program. Now, each of the three areas of inquiry will be discussed. The literature will be further outlined in each of the results chapters in order to inform the findings in each of the areas of inquiry.
Family Formation and Fertility Aspirations

Little is known about the long term fertility and family formation plans of former street-involved children, a continuously growing portion of the Kenyan population. In response to the concern over the growing population of street-involved children, the Kenyan government passed The Children’s Act in 2001 to support the welfare of children in especially difficult circumstances (CEDC) (The Children Act, 2001). The Act included preventative and remedial efforts to remove children from the streets and provide them with the skills and support necessary to promote their development, such as with the use of what they called “rehabilitation schools” and “remand homes”. There is no discussion in this policy document that deals with the issue of fertility or pregnancy prevention among these vulnerable children. And no scholarly study has considered the impact that these programs, and street life in general, might have on fertility and family formation aspirations.

A high fertility rate is an additional concern that contributes to the large number of street-involved children in Kenya, because of additional stress on the household. Kenya’s population is growing at an accelerated rate due to its high fertility rates and improving mortality rates, indicative of a demographic transition. Often reflective of the development process, this transition is associated with the shift from high mortality and high fertility rates to low mortality and low fertility rates. Mortality rates decline initially and are then followed by declines in fertility (Bongaarts, 2009). Since WWII, Kenya has seen dramatic increases in medical technology that have led to a decline in mortality (Bongaarts, 2008), even despite high rates of AIDS/HIV, malaria and TB. However, fertility levels have not declined at a similar rate, especially among low income populations (ibid.). There was an initial decline in fertility related to the expansion of educational opportunities and access to contraception (Machiyama, 2010;
Sneeringer, 2009), which was followed by a stall in the early 2000s (Bongaarts, 2008). The high fertility rates (Bongaarts, 2009) coupled with a young age structure have resulted in high population momentum and high population growth rates.

At the household level, having a high fertility rate can actually be seen as a coping mechanism for a family. A study of the urban poor found they may choose to have more children in order to increase the income of their household and improve their livelihood, realizing that children and elders can act as resources for attending to domestic responsibilities and even having the potential to earn better incomes (Colletta et al. 1996, p 7 citing Margaret Grieco et al 1994). Others argue that fertility remains high because of a lack of access to contraception and family planning support (Machiyama, 2010). Either way, this slow rate of decline in fertility rates, which in 2010 was at 4.4 births per woman, worries policy makers, academics and the international community (Kenya, 2011; Otieno, 2008). The result of these discussions on fertility and mortality is a very young population where two out of five people are under the age of fifteen (Kenya, 2011). Figure 1 displays the population pyramid for Kenya in 2010. This recent boom of youth, or *flaring out*, places additional pressure on underfunded services, infrastructure and the economy as they move through the life cycle. This stress is also felt among households who struggle to provide adequate resources. Given the past and current factors that have led to a rise in street-involved children populations, it can be assumed that these high proportions of children will continue to fuel this problem. Given the even higher rates of fertility among low-income families, it is imperative to understand the fertility aspirations of former street-involved children who are now youth participating in reintegration programs in order to understand if they desire fewer children so as to experience less socioeconomic distress during their lives – and thus not perpetuating a cycle of vulnerable children.
Social Support Networks

Social support networks play a vital role in promoting emotional and psychological health (Uchino, 2004). For vulnerable populations that may have encountered the negative consequences of street life as a child, it is important to have supportive structures in place to help promote their well-being. The literature that does exist on street-involved children’s social support networks has focused primarily on their connections while on or in the streets. Little attention has been made to the connections and supports these individuals have as they reach adulthood nor when they are part of reintegration programs.

This literature argues that street-involved children still go through a socialization process, despite counter claims by some researchers (Kudrati et al. 2008). In a study conducted in northwest Kenya, street-involved children were found to still be socialized, but under an
alternative social reality (Davies, 2008). Street-involved children demonstrated strong levels of group solidarity and embodied a shared subculture of behaviors and values (ibid.). This subculture can act as a “counter-hegemonic” reaction to society and has its own rules, values and expectations (Davies, 2008, p. 325). Within the subculture are mentor-like partnerships between younger and older children. These relationships are reciprocal, as each individual in the pair fulfills a role (i.e. protection, begging, etc.) that benefits both children (Davies, 2008) and promotes niche formation within a broader network and culture. This is not to say schisms do not exist among street-involved children in regard to method of income generation. For example, another study conducted in Kenya found that children who sell plastic bags, which is a higher paying informal form of income, perceive themselves to be superior to children who beg, as beggars are believed to be lazy. These hierarchical structures can cause tension and limit social mobility among street-involved children (Kaime-Atterhog et al. 2008).

Some studies have commented on the limitedness of social networks between children or that they were characterized by the extent of sharing money earned on the street (Buske, 2010). However, this finding uses a narrowly defined measurement of social networks, using financial sharing as the sole indicator, rather than the extent to which there were networks that provided social and psychological support to one another. There is adequate research to suggest that friends fulfill an important role for street-involved children in providing support when families are absent (Kidd, 2003; Davies, 2008). This literature tells us that street-involved children have skills in developing strong relationships and networks among their peers. The present research will expand this by looking at how and to what extent former street-involved children who have participated in a reintegration program have social support networks for themselves in the reintegration program and in the broader community. Findings on the same topic will then be
explored from the focus group with former street-involved children who are now youth, but did not participate in reintegration program.

*Subjective Agency and Control*

The extent to which individuals feel they have control over their lives is indicative of their level of psychological and emotional well-being (Baron, 2011; Richter, 1988 as cited by LeRoux & Smith, 1998). For street-involved children - many who were in and out of or between homes - findings have varied on this topic (Nalkur, 2009). Previous research on street-involved children indicates that a strong internal locus of control (i.e. feeling control in one’s own life and future) is important to development (Baron, 2011). Those with an external locus of control (i.e. feeling no control in one’s own life or future) are at higher risk of emotional distress and feeling vulnerable to the environment in which they live (Baron, 2011). Conversely, those who have strong internal loci of control feel a strong sense of agency in their own lives and their own ability to protect themselves from harm.

In one Tanzanian study, street-involved children demonstrated differing perceptions of success and goals compared to non-street-involved children. Street-involved children were more likely than children from conventional homes to see their successes and challenges as fatalistic, impacted by external factors, whereas youth in more conventional settings saw their own outcomes as results of their own actions, referring to a degree of agency in their own life outcomes (Nalkur, 2009). In the same study, the researcher also interviewed former street-involved children who expressed a strong internal locus of control. These former street-involved children believed they were able to move away from the streets by taking responsibility for themselves, again, demonstrating confidence in their own agency (Nalkur, 2009). These findings do not suggest causality, but rather indicate that street-involved children are more likely to have
lower levels of agency and more likely to be at risk of emotional distress than their counter-parts who have left the street. These findings also suggest that one’s perception of control may be one predictor of long-term outcomes. In this research, perceptions of agency are probed among a group of former street-involved children who are now youth and participating in a reintegration program and a group of former street involved children who are now youth but did not participate in a reintegration program. Understanding how this population might view their ability to control their future will be informative of their overall and future well-being.

**The Outcomes of Reintegration Programs:**

The recently established reintegration programs in Kenya face challenges. They lack funding and capacity to handle the increasing numbers of street-involved children. Interventions that break apart the social support networks created on the streets may be counter-productive or create more difficulty in achieving success as the children lose important ties built on trust and respect (Kidd, 2003). In many cases youth exit reintegration programs and are left with minimal support systems and skills to become fully integrated into society. Such reintegration programs must consider work integration strategies to help former street-involved children overcome challenges and find employment if they wish to be successful (Ochanda et al. 2011).

With that said, the three areas of inquiry used in this study will provide an understanding of the future of former street-involved children who are now youth and have had the opportunity to be part of a reintegration program. It will also glimpse at a similar population of former street-involved children, but who have not gone through a reintegration program. This study contributes to a much needed conversation about the outcomes of former street-involved children as they enter into adulthood specifically in regard to their perceptions of control, social support networks, and their family formation and fertility aspirations. Although more research is needed,
this study’s attempt to illustrate the lived experiences and outcomes of former street-involved children who participate in a reintegration program during their youth years will be pivotal in leading future research in attempts of advocating for more support to be aimed at effective reintegration programs for former street-involved children.

**Research Questions**

The extent to which previous literature has examined former street-involved children who are now young adults and are participating in reintegration programs is limited. Research that seeks to better understand this population will be essential as community leaders and policy makers consider solutions to and consequences of the growing number of street-involved children. This research begins this much needed conversation and seeks to answer three research questions:

- What are the lived experiences of former street-involved children who are now young adults and are participating in a reintegration program in Kenya?
- What are commonalities of the lived experiences of the former street-involved children who are now young adults and participating in a reintegration program in Kenya in regard to their perceptions of control, social support networks, and aspirations for fertility and family formation?
- How do former street-involved children who are not young adults and participating in a reintegration program in Kenya differ in regard to perceptions of control and extent of social support networks compared to former street-involved children who are now young adults but did not participate in a reintegration program?
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

After studying in Kenya in 2009 as an undergraduate student from the U.S., I was intrigued with both the prospects and challenges that lay before the country and its people. More specifically, I wondered what lay ahead for the thousands of street-involved children and other vulnerable children. Upon entering graduate school at The Pennsylvania State University, I began working with a faculty member who taught an undergraduate Community, Environment, and Development course in Kenya each summer. The course worked directly with former street-involved children in a rural region of central Kenya. Upon partnering and working alongside the faculty member and the course respondents, I saw this research as an opportunity to not only shed light on a marginalized population that plays a major role in Kenya’s future, but also to open the door for other researchers to conduct similar research in hopes of helping this population gain equitable access to resources in Kenya and other developing countries. This reflexive background played a role in my interest in this research topic and how I approached this empirical study.

Qualitative methods are most appropriate to explore my research questions as they preserve the voices and experiences of the respondents, which is also important when working with vulnerable and under-recognized populations (Creswell, 2013). There are no predetermined choices for respondents to use in response to questions. Rather, qualitative methods allow research respondents to answer open and closed-ended questions from their own perspective and with their own words. I also employ a phenomenological approach in coming to this research. Phenomenological research seeks to examine the shared lived experiences of a group of individuals. It attempts to understand, rather than explain, the shared meaning of that experience. By identifying the general themes that emerge from the meanings that respondents place on the
experience, a phenomenology uncovers the shared essence – or the shared knowing - of that experience (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the shared lived experience is being a former street-involved child who is now a young adult. A phenomenological approach is most appropriate because it focuses on the one characteristic that is common among all respondents (i.e. former street involvement) and seeks to uncover the shared meaning of that lived experience, an experience that has received little attention from scholars.

This study uses the phenomenological approach, but does so using a comparison group and attempting to also identify significant deviations in regard to the lived experience. Using a sample of former street-involved children who have been part of a reintegration program, data are collected about these individuals’ shared experiences. A focus group is then used with a comparison group of former street-involved children who did not go through a reintegration program. Comparisons of these two groups in regard to the three areas of inquiry are used to explore potential similarities and dissimilarities. In each of the following sections, I note that participation in the reintegration program is not the only factor that differentiates these two groups. They differ in regard to a range of other factors, including gender. Yet, through use of the phenomenological approach, I still seek to understand the shared meaning these respondents put on their experiences as former street-involved children, some of whom are now part of a reintegration program.

I also use what Creswell (2013) calls a transformative framework in this study. A transformative framework acknowledges that “knowledge is not neutral and it reflects the power and social relationships within society, and thus the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people to improve society” (Creswell, 2013, p 26 citing Mertens, 2003). Therefore, in this study I use the words of the research respondents to call for action to provide more attention and
resources to reintegrating former street-involved children. Former street-involved children are a marginalized population and their position in society is grounded in dynamic power struggles. Although individual respondents did not take part in further parts of the study, board members of the reintegration program provided feedback in an emancipator effort to advocate for former and current street-involved children.

While this study does uncover factors related to the efficacy of reintegration programs, and one reintegration program in particular, this research is inductive in nature. More specifically, the phenomenological approach allows us to understand the shared experiences of these two groups of youth. I allow an understanding of their shared experiences to emerge from the data, as opposed to attempting to fit the respondents’ answers into predetermined categories. From this understanding, I then develop research questions and hypotheses that can guide future research on former street-involved children. These research questions and hypotheses are discussed in the concluding chapter.

Drawing on existing literature, the hypothesis of this research is that former street-involved children who have been part of a reintegration program are more likely to have positive lived experiences, more social support networks and stronger perceptions of control of their lives than the group of former street involved children who did not go through a reintegration program. It is also hypothesized that the reintegration program members will desire a lower than average fertility rate because of their involvement in a reintegration program. These three areas of inquiry provide us with insight into the future of current street-involved children populations in Kenya and call for more support for reintegration programs that seek to help former street-involved children.
Site and Respondent Selection

This research was conducted in a rural northern region of the Central Province of Kenya. The site was chosen based on convenience as formal professional relationships had already been established between faculty members from The Pennsylvania State University and a reintegration program that was situated in the selected site area. The faculty were also able to connect me with a social worker who assisted me in recruitment of former street-involved children who are now youth but had not participated in a reintegration program. This entailed introducing me to a community and faith-based organization of young women who to fit my study parameters.

Sixteen respondents were recruited for interviews from the reintegration program using convenience purposeful sampling. I solicited recruitment by speaking one-on-one with each individual between the ages of 18 and 30 at the reintegration program and received a 95% response rate. These youth were former street-involved children and had been participating in the reintegration program discussed above. Criteria included that respondents were Kenyan citizens, over the age of 18 years and had lived or worked on the streets or had been as extreme risk of being involved in the streets, and had been involved with the reintegration program. 13 of the 16 interview respondents were male.

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, a focus group was conducted with four women from the same region. These women met the same criteria as those in the one-on-one interviews, except that they had not been involved with a reintegration program. Respondents for the focus group were recruited from a newly organized faith organization via a social worker who was involved with the same reintegration program discussed earlier. These four focus group members
resided in a nearby slum and all had at least one child. One focus group member had four children.

It is important to note that these two groups (i.e. those who had been through a reintegration program and those who had not) also differ on other factors, including their gender composition. Gender-based differences are key factors weighing into the responses provided by the focus group and the interviews. However, because of the small sample size for both groups, I was unable to use gender differences in a predictive theoretical model. Yet, I still consider gender in the analysis of the qualitative data, while remaining cognizant of these limitations. In addition, I acknowledge that participation in the reintegration program was voluntary and required that youth follow the reintegration program rules (i.e. curfew, no alcohol or drug use, work contributions, etc.). Therefore, their willingness to abide and participate may be an additional selection bias which could be differentiating those involved in the reintegration program and those who were not.

Research Design

To explore these three areas of inquiry among the two groups of former street-involved children, a phenomenological approach is employed. I draw on data collected through one-on-one interviews and a focus group. One-on-one interviews were used with the respondents who had been through a reintegration program, while the focus group was used with those who had not been through such a program. The choice of a focus group is discussed later. Both the interviews and focus group used open- and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed me to gain a better sense of their lived experiences through their own words, which is imperative since a minimal amount of research has been conducted on this population.
some closed-ended questions were used to streamline the content requested from respondents, such as when inquiring about how many children their mother’s had.

Past research in developing countries and with street-involved children populations has relied heavily on surveys that failed to provide a holistic understanding of their experience (Huang et al. 2004). The present research attempts to overcome that weakness by using a combination of open and closed interview questions. For the interviews, these questions probed at respondents’ social support networks, family formation and fertility aspirations, and their perceptions of control. For the focus group, questions focused on just perceptions of control and social support networks. The content of these questions will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. The full interview instrument can be found in Appendix A.

As the principal investigator I worked to build a degree of trust with interview respondents through interacting with them and involvement in their community-based organization. This building of a relationship between the researcher and the respondents is referred to as “street researchers” (Bemak, 1996). Although Bemak’s (1996) methodological underpinnings were directed toward the research that focused on street-involved children, there is applicability with former street-involved children in attempting to break down barriers of authority and power that may be instilled in the research-respondent relationship (Young & Barrett, 2001). In doing so, I sought to earn their trust as a researcher and as a person in order to help them to feel comfortable being part of the research.

For the sample of respondents who had never been through a reintegration program, a focus group was conducted in order to identify group norms and commonalities. More specifically, I asked the focus group questions that probed at their perceptions of control and their social support networks. Through interaction, as argued by Kitzinger (1994), the
respondents were able to flesh out their common and differential experiences in regard to social network building and locus of control. In addition, by choosing a sample of respondents from the same social group in the community, the respondents feel more comfortable engaging with each other in this type of conversation (Kitzinger, 1994).

Data Collection

Respondents were briefed at the beginning of each interview and the focus group. Only general information was provided about the research study, excluding information about the three areas of inquiry. Verbal consent was given at this point, which entailed reviewing the consent form content and gaining verbal agreement to participate from respondents. I articulated the briefing so as to minimize demand characteristics and not show the dependent variables as favorable or unfavorable traits. This study used a minimal amount of deception. In order to reduce the risk of reactive measurement effects, I only provided respondents with a brief and general explanation prior to the study.

Interview and focus group questions were semi-structured and aimed at exploring the topics and experiences below. This interview guide was not a set interview schedule, but rather a guide for a semi-structured data collection experience. More detail about these are provided below and the full instrument can be found in Appendix A.

- Fertility & Family Formation Aspirations: Aspirations for fertility and family formation were measured through a series of questions that probed when and why respondents would like to begin establishing a family. More specifically, the respondents were questioned about their aspirations and reasons for how old they would like to be when they get married, have children and how many children they
would like to rear. I also inquired about the reasons for their responses. To measure maternal fertility, respondents were asked how many children their mother had.

- **Social Support Networks:** Social support networks were measured through a series of questions that probed respondents’ level of involvement in community institutions, their level of engagement with other people (both inside and outside of the reintegration program), as well as who they felt they could turn to in their community. Along with each of these questions I probed the respondent’s reasons.

- **Perception of Control:** Perceptions of control were measured using a series of open-ended questions that probed respondents’ goals, skills and if and how they believed they had the ability to achieve their goals. I also asked the respondents if there was anything that could prohibit an individual from succeeding.

For the one-on-one interviews, I also asked respondents background questions, including familial questions, how they had come to the reintegration program, and if and how they had been involved with the streets as a child. Some respondents denied being involved in street life as children. However, I confirmed with the program director prior to and after the research was conducted that all of the respondents had been at some point in their lives working on the streets, living on the streets, or at high risk of living on the streets.

All of the one-on-one interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using NVIVO software. The focus group members did not speak English and therefore a translator was used. In addition, the focus group was not audio recorded to respect the cultural beliefs of the focus group members. Instead, I took thorough notes during the focus group and also confirmed notes with the translator promptly after the completion of the focus group. In the results chapters, I use
descriptions and paraphrasing to relay the findings. At the end of each interview and at the end of the focus group, I explained to the respondents the purpose of the research.

**Data Analysis and Management**

The first step of the data analysis process was to code the collected data, which I did using R software. Using the strategy put forth by Coffey and Atkinson (1996), I conducted multiple rounds of coding using both simplification and complication. Simplification allowed me to work deductively with my predetermined categories, whereas through complication I was able to explore new themes in an inductive fashion. As I moved further and deeper into coding, I began pooling and then analyzing the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), looking for relationships and connections in the data. This process conforms closely to the data analysis spiral discussed by Creswell (2013, p 183). In this spiral, the collection, analysis, and writing of data overlap in a nonlinear process. Data are analyzed as it is collected and therefore informs the data collection process. Likewise, writing happens during the data collection and analysis process. The writing is revised and reconstructed as the process continues and as codes are created to begin to provide structure to the data. Moving and revising the structure of the codes allowed me to begin to theorize and develop emerging similarities (and differences) in the lived experiences of former street-involved children.

**Validity and Ethical Considerations**

One concern that is often raised in the assessment of qualitative research is validity. Validity refers to the researcher’s ability to accurately report the research findings. Concerns about validity were minimized by using a strong consciousness of my own authorial position, engagement with the respondents and their environment for a five-week period, and debriefing
with faculty in the field. These are discussed at greater length as I reflect on additional concerns of qualitative research, related to reactivity and researcher bias.

Reactivity can be a concern in the data collection process. Reactivity refers to the potential for research respondents to formulate their responses based on their social positionality to the researcher. Going into the research, I acknowledged my own personal authorial position as a white female American and that my presence could have skewed the responses I received from research respondents. However, I sought to minimize this by engaging in healthy relationships with the respondents prior to data collection. This entailed working closely with the respondents as their peer in a series of workshops as well as in informal settings, establishing trust and respect between myself and the respondents. Though no amount of engagement could allow me to overcome my authorial position in the field, my reflexivity and engagement with research respondents in advance of data collection was a strategy to minimize this issue to a certain degree. At the same time, my positionality as a white westerner may have been advantageous in conducting this research. In particular, my positionality may have better allowed me to gain access to not only the site but also to gaining the trust of respondents. As an outsider, respondents may have been more open to sharing information that could be used to better understand others in their same situation.

Researcher bias can also be a concern in both the data collection and data analysis portion of research and can result in the use of only the data that supports the researcher’s expectations. To mitigate this during the data collection and analysis process, I continuously reported back and debriefed with thesis committee members who were also in the field. This debriefing process included discussing and interpreting data that was emerging in the field. These committee members were more experienced in the context and with the population as they had visited the
research site and worked with the population on several previous occasions. These committee members were able to assist in ensuring the efficacy of the data collection process and that findings were interpreted within the context of the research.

Finally, the proposal for this research was submitted to the Office of Research Protections at The Pennsylvania State University. The research was accepted as an exempt application, meaning the research did not require a full review due to the minimal risk it proposed to research respondents. A full copy of the research proposal was also sent to the director of the reintegration program in Kenya prior to the commencement of the research. The director approved of the proposed research and ensured that a space would be made available to conduct interviews for the research.
CHAPTER 4: FAMILY FORMATION AND FERTILITY ASPIRATIONS

Kenya’s population is growing at an accelerated rate due to high fertility rates and declining mortality rates. The demographic transition has resulted in the traditionally high mortality rates declining more quickly than fertility, despite the prevalence of AIDS/HIV and other diseases like TB and Malaria. By 2010 the total fertility rate for Kenya was 4.5, though this rate continues to decline (Kenya, 2011). The result of these trends is a young population where two out of five people are under the age of fifteen (Kenya, 2011). This recent boom of children and youth places pressure on services, infrastructure and the economy as they move through the life cycle. Even if fertility were to unrealistically drop to replacement level in the next few years, the existing age structure will propel growth via population momentum.

Little is known about how this discussion of fertility relates to former street-involved children and more importantly to those that have been through a reintegration program. The present chapter examines the family formation and fertility aspirations of former street-involved children who are now engaged with the reintegration program in Kenya. Using qualitative methods, this research highlights how a sample of former street-involved children aligns with and deviates from traditional model of the fertility transition. I begin by reviewing in more depth the literature that speaks to fertility and its transition in developing countries, and specifically Kenya. I will then discuss the results. This chapter as a whole begins a much needed conversation about the fertility and family formation aspirations of former street-involved children.

Traditional socioeconomic models for fertility transitions refer to individuals using rational choice in their fertility behaviors in order to increase economic utility for the household (i.e. investing more resources in fewer children produces better utility). The shift from quantity
to quality emphasizes improved household incentives for those with fewer children (Kirk, 1996). However, others, such as the European Fertility Project, have argued that fertility transitions occur across different socio-economic situations, indicating that other factors may be at play (Kirk, 1996). Such additional factors include the spread of formal schooling (Lloyd et al. 2000; Caldwell, 1980) and cultural-ideational beliefs (Pollak and Watkins, 1993). Formal schooling could lead an individual to make the choice to postpone their first child and marriage or to have fewer children via the quantity/quality tradeoff. While strong traditional (e.g. religious, ethnic, cultural) values may sway individuals away from the rational economic choice.

Fertility and perceptions of fertility in Kenya have changed dramatically over time. Traditional religious beliefs prevalent across much of sub-Saharan Africa emphasized the importance of larger families because having more children ensured the continued lineage of a family (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987). Under this belief system, the benefits of having children were grounded in quantity. Because of these strong traditional values, the Kenyan government established family planning programs of the late 1960s that were unsuccessful (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987). The program faced strong traditional beliefs that ran counter to ideas of family planning and contraceptive use (Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987).

After experiencing declining mortality rates due to dramatic increases in medical technology following World War II (Adesina, 2007), fertility also began to decline in Kenya (Bongaarts, 2008; Machiyama, 2010; Adesina, 2007). This shift from high mortality and high fertility rates to low mortality and low fertility rates is referred to as the demographic transition and is reflective of the development process (Rowland, 2008). The initial decline in fertility was related to the expansion of educational opportunities, access to contraception, and the later onset of marriage (Machiyama, 2010; Shapiro and Tambashe, 1997; Sneeringer, 2009; Cohen, 1998).
Contraceptives have also been found to primarily be used more commonly in sub-Saharan Africa for elongating the time between birth spacing, rather than simply limiting the number of total children stopping (Cohen, 1998).

The Kenyan fertility transition stalled briefly between 1998 and 2003. This may have been associated with what Romaniuk (1980) called “time lags” which occur during the modernization process, when improvements in health and technology increase the number of children that can be born to a woman and live to child bearing age, while other factors encourage families to have fewer children. By the early to mid-2000s, fertility rates once again continued to decline, though they are still far above replacement (4.5 in 2010) (Kenya, 2011). One argument for the high fertility rates is that having more children is an economic coping mechanism for families (Colletta et al. 1996 citing Margaret Grieco et al. 1994). The poor may choose to have more children in order to increase the income of their household and subsequently improve their livelihood. Children and elders can act as resources for attending to domestic responsibilities and even having the potential to earn better incomes (Colletta et al. 1996, p 7 citing Margaret Grieco et al. 1994). The relationship between economic stress and fertility is debated. Gurmu and Mace (2008) found a positive relationship between wealth and fertility in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. They found that those who were poor waited longer to have their first and second child, compared to those who were not poor. The authors attributed both the longer birth intervals and a decline in marriage to economic stress. These findings run counter to traditional theories that associate development and improved incomes with lowered fertility. Although the findings from Gurmu and Mace (2008) do not discredit these traditional theories, the findings do suggest that caution should be given to contextual variation, both spatial and temporal.
Drawing on existing literature, the research presented in this chapter seeks to understand the fertility and family formation aspirations of former street-involved children who are part of a reintegration program. These findings are compared to traditionally defined determinants for family formation and fertility quantum and tempo. More specifically, I probed respondents for their aspirations and reasoning for when they hoped to establish a family and how many children they hoped to have. The commonalities or themes of their reasons are then discussed in how they relate to traditional determinants of these life course events.

**Desired Age of Marriage**

In discussing their desired age of marriage and desired age for having their first child, respondents were asked to provide reasoning or rationale. Several points of explanation were consistent across the majority of respondents. Foremost, financial constraints were the most common reason for wanting to postpone marriage and childbearing. One male respondent spoke to his reason for wanting to postpone starting a family.

> [Age] 35... Because I need to work. Need to earn to save for the kids. I just can’t get kids and I don’t know what they’re going to eat, what they’re going to wear.

Respondents were cognizant of a need to prepare financially prior to having children. Respondents who were still in contact with their families felt a strong obligation to postpone family formation until they were able to improve the well-being of their existing family. “So that I can help my family” was a factor that many respondents discussed. One male respondent reflected on this filial responsibility when discussing his reasons for wanting to wait several years before starting his own family.

> The best age to get married? For me, I think when I’m now self-independent. After our family is at a better place. My younger brother is in class eight right now. My sister is in class six. And the youngest is in class
four. So if I get self-independent, I first of all put them at a better place. That is when I can now get married.

These feelings of responsibility to family were primarily focused on supporting the educational outcomes of the respondents younger siblings. One respondents who had found a sponsor to help him complete secondary school commented on the importance of ensuring his younger siblings have the same opportunity.

*It would depend. When I get cash and finish everything with my sister. By that time I think I can marry. Because right now she's in standard 8 and she has one more year. And then she can join high school for four years. So after she is through with her education, since I don't know if she can go to university or college, cuz I want to support her on that.*

Those respondents who were enrolled in school (either secondary school or college level courses) identified the completion of their studies as a key marker that must be passed before beginning a family.

*Because at that time I'll be through my studies. I'll be through with much of my studies and I'll be a bit free. Second I think by that time I'll be mature enough to deal with the family problems and to take care of the wife. Yeah.*

In discussing both their desired age for marriage and desired age for having their first child, several points of explanation were consistent across the majority of respondents. Financial constraints were the most common reasons for wanting to postpone marriage and child rearing. These findings are consistent with traditional socioeconomic models of fertility in that rational choice of financial incentives for waiting is used. Other common responses given during the interviews included a desire to finish their own education and assist their own families before being able to take on the responsibilities of starting a new family.
**Fertility Aspirations**

The desired fertility of the respondents was then compared to the fertility rates of the respondents’ mothers as well as of the national total fertility rate (Tables 1 and 2). The majority of respondents (69 percent) reported a desired fertility rate that was less than that of their mothers, while approximately 19 percent of respondents desired a fertility rate that was the same as their mothers, followed by 12 percent of respondents who desired a fertility rate that was higher than that of their mothers. The mean current completed fertility of respondents’ mothers was 4.7, compared to the national TFR of 4.4. By contrast, the mean desired fertility rate of respondents was 3.0, still above replacement, but decidedly lower than that of their own mothers.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1: Fertility Rates (N=16)</th>
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<td>Fertility Rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Total Fertility Rate (2010) (Kenya, 2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Completed Fertility for Respondent’s Mothers</td>
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<td>Mean Respondents Desired Total Fertility</td>
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<th>Table 2: Desired Fertility Rates in Relation to their Mothers (N=16)</th>
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<td>Percentage of Respondents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desired a lower fertility rate than that of their mother’s</td>
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<td>Desired the same fertility rate than that of their mother’s</td>
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<td>Desired a higher fertility rate than that of their mother’s</td>
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Most strikingly, the proportion of respondents who wished to have fewer children than their mothers provides a face to the transition in Kenyan fertility statistics. Respondents were asked their reasoning for wanting the number of children they stated. Common themes emerged from the respondents’ explanations. The most common reason was related to the financial constraints that are associated with having larger families. “Because life is hard” and “Because 2 [children], I can handle 2 [children] … financially” were common responses related to financial challenges. Another respondent replied more thoroughly, speaking to the harsh realities of providing for larger families.
Taking care of the family is not an easy thing. And you might have a lot of children and you can’t afford to educate them, you can’t afford to take good care of them maybe health wise, anything like that, ... if the wife would want more than five, then as a father if you can only take care of less than five, then she could come in and also support in taking care of the rest.

The final point made by this particular respondent is intriguing in that he acknowledges his own human capital limitations and concludes that he would call on his wife to engage in income generating activities if she desired more children than he could afford to support.

Several respondents also reflected on their own childhood experiences and how they did not want their own children to experience the neglect that they themselves had. This respondent who had received sponsorship to complete secondary school and college level courses reflected on his childhood hardships as having an impact on his current fertility choices.

You know like for me to be brought up in a [poor] family, go without food and the problems we were having, going to school without shoes, sometimes without clothes, sometimes without taking bread first, and I say okay, I want to give my very best to my child, and for me to give my very best, sacrifice everything else to be there for her.

This finding is enlightening in that the drudgery faced as a child actually influences the respondent’s fertility and family formation aspirations. This runs counter to claims that those from lower socio-economic classes have more children. This particular subtopic will be discussed further in the discussion section.

Some respondents noted that if they were able to make more money in their life than they expected to, then they would also try to have more children. This also runs counter to models that support a shift from quantity to quality as the household income increases. Three respondents also noted an interest in having enough children so that they could honor family members, saying things like “two, one for my mom and one for my dad”. These responses can be
classified under a desire to preserve familial lineage. Finally, one respondent wanted to have children who could take care of her as she grew into her elder stage of life.

*You can educate them and they can get jobs so they can help you in your life.*

**DISCUSSION**

The findings from this study indicate that economic incentives do explain a large proportion of respondents’ fertility and family formation aspirations. More specifically, most respondents had a desire to delay starting a new family until they had the financial means to care for a wife and children. The majority of respondents also expressed interest in limiting their fertility because of the costs related to raising children and wanting to “give more” to fewer children. This finding is consistent with the literature that speaks to the shift from quantity to quality in fertility aspirations. Embedded in these economic incentives are lessons learned from their own childhood experiences and a desire to provide more to a few children rather than minimal to several children. With that said, some respondents did acknowledge that if they were to earn more income than they expected they would consider having more children. This, indeed, runs counter to the quantity/quality tradeoff.

Several respondents pointed to their past experiences or the general hardship faced by many who are trying to raise children in poverty. Almost 70 percent of respondents desired to have fewer children than did their mother. Although the results from this study cannot assert causation, the respondents’ experiences as children and in the reintegration program could be factors contributing to their choice to postpone these life events and/or have fewer children. Finally, an additional key finding from this study was the filial responsibility that several respondents held and which they used as rationale for wanting to postpone family formation and
Several respondents felt a strong desire to secure a better life for their existing family, prior to starting a new family. Therefore, having a sense of responsibility and having kin who struggle financially may actually be a factor that contributes to aspirations for later onset of childbearing and potentially fewer children. Further analysis of former street-involved children is needed on an array of factors including how fertility aspirations differ across different policy-developed programs, familial background, levels of education and childhood experience and how strongly fertility aspirations match fertility outcomes.

Conclusion

Results of this study provide important contributions to our understanding of how life on the streets and policies that create reintegration support for former street-involved children may indirectly impact individuals’ future family formation and fertility plans. And importantly, the findings from this study point to the dynamic situation of former street-involved children and the factors that they identify as being important to their plans for establishing families. Understanding how filial responsibilities, childhood hardship, and reintegration programs effect ones aspirations for a family will be key in further research on this population. Lastly, as governments continue to explore options for improving the well-being of street-involved children, sound research that examines the efficacy of such options will be imperative to leveraging resources for such endeavors.
CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Children’s exposure to abuse, drugs, and physical ailments while living on the streets are vulnerabilities that can accumulate and have negative consequences on their mental and emotional health. Having social support networks is crucial to maintaining resiliency and positive well-being. Although previous research has sought to discuss the social support networks of street-involved children, no one has examined these networks among former street-involved children as adults. Understanding what protective mechanisms are in place to promote positive coping and resiliency will be essential to understanding the experiences of former street-involved children as they reach adulthood.

This chapter reports the results of this research that speak to the interview respondents’ social support networks. It also incorporates findings from the focus group of the former street-involved children who are now young adults, but did not participate in a reintegration program. Social support networks can provide emotional or instrumental support (Uchino, 2004) as well as companionship (Sarason & Sarason, 2001). Social support has been found to have a positive influence on an individual’s health and well-being. Not only do positive supportive relationships promote positive mental health, they also have a protective nature for one’s psychological well-being (Uchino, 2004).

The respondents in this study represent a vulnerable population in that they were all raised in unstable circumstances where poverty, abuse, or family dissolution were commonplace. These vulnerabilities put them at risk for negative influences, which can compound to cause deeper levels of emotional distress (Osgood et al. 2005). In addition, the respondents were going through a transition from adolescence to adulthood. The transition to adulthood is one of the most stressful transitions because people quickly move to being responsible for themselves as
well as for the establishment of a new family (Osgood et al. 2005). One could argue that the former street-involved child population has already been on its own for some time. However, in their approach to adulthood, there are accompanying societal expectations that they should now be capable of caring for themselves, expectations that are less present for children. An intersectionality of vulnerabilities, such as those encountered by former street-involved children, can make this transition even more difficult (Banyard & Cantor, 2004).

Mediating these vulnerabilities are the benefits of social support networks. Social support can come in different forms and from different sources (Wills & Shinar, 2000 cited by Collins et al. 2010). The social support networks for street-involved children have been explored in previous literature. In a study conducted in northwestern Kenya, for example, Davies (2008) found that street-involved children demonstrated strong levels of group solidarity and embodied a shared subculture of behaviors and values. Similarly, Kidd (2003) found in a study of North American street youth that friends fulfilled an important role in providing social support when families were absent. Although previous research has found the existence of social support networks among street-involved children, limited attention has been paid to the networks of former street-involved children who are now young adults.

Another dimension of the social support networks of former street-involved children is related to social stigma. Stigma of vulnerable populations may result in communities less willing to show care or support for these vulnerable populations because of their poverty or orphan-status (Thurman et al. 2008). Thurman et al. (2008) found in a study of Rwandan orphans and vulnerable youth, that orphans were stereotyped as unruly and having bad behavior. People viewed this population as having no hope. As a result, community supports were minimal for orphans and vulnerable youth. The authors take note that communities are not always cohesive,
and that civil unrest and division can cause communities to be fragmented. They also found that for those who acted as foster parents, there was an expectation for compensation from the government or non-profit sector. In addition, third sector aid to families who were caring for orphans actually divided poor communities, as those who were caring for partial orphans, vulnerable youth, or just poor families could not be beneficiaries of this aid. Those who do not receive aid saw those receiving aid as unfair (Thurman et al. 2006). Thurman et al. (2006) found that youth who were on their own felt marginalized in their communities. This isolation had negative effects on their overall well being. The Thurman et al. (2006) study reiterates the importance of social support networks in not only protecting individuals from challenges, but also supporting them through challenges. Therefore, this research examines the social support networks of two groups of former street-involved children, those who had been through a reintegration program and those who had not.

Reintegration Program Resources

As stated earlier, interviews were conducted with those individuals who had taken part in a reintegration program. These respondents differed from the focus group members who did not take part in a reintegration program. Therefore, I begin by reviewing how interview respondents felt the reintegration program had affected their lives. Although other factors may have differentiated the interview respondents from the focus group members, it is important to outline if and how the interview respondents felt they had been affected by the reintegration program. After discussing the influences of the reintegration program and its leadership, I will then go into detail about the social support networks of the respondents. I will then compare these to the findings of the focus group members who also discussed their social support networks.
As mentioned earlier, the reintegration program from which this sample was drawn provides youth with not only shelter and food, but also gives them the opportunity to develop skills that could be used in the labor force. Here a respondent discusses the skill he felt he gained at the reintegration program.

When I came here in 2009, 2010, I have ... I was in a welding workshops we had planned for two years. I have gained something from that. Also I have learned about equity. How to budget something. How to plan for your future.

These types of tangible skills were commonly mentioned. Other skills garnered at the reintegration program included welding, farming, making furniture, dress making, and making hay. Here, one male explains how far he had come since he first came to the reintegration program.

When I was coming to the [program], myself, I was not reading, not writing. ... Now I can even be a teacher!

The respondent was referring to his feeling empowered by having gained the ability to read and write while participating in the program.

Non-tangible skills and benefits are also attained through the reintegration program. Empowerment through individual development is an example of one benefit. This focus on development and empowerment is what makes the organization a reintegration program, rather than just a shelter. Here, a respondent discusses how he feels empowered through the reintegration program.

Yeah, I feel more empowered when I'm in the program, because there's more advantages that can help you achieve what you want. There's all the support that you need. The people who are in the [program] are amazing. So you can just go and talk to somebody for a certain program, he will always offer his time. So to achieve anything you can achieve it nicely.
Members of this particular reintegration program were also exposed to people from a range of
different backgrounds as students and volunteers from around the world visited for short and
long term engagement. Here one respondent discusses the impact on his own development of
having visitors from Kenyan and American universities.

And even through the guys who come maybe from Penn State, Kenyatta
University, Moi University, they give... they leave you encouraged because you
see some people achieved what they wanted. So why not me? I can achieve it too.

The exposure to visitors from institutions of higher education and from abroad certainly
impacted respondents. Others spoke about how helpful the reintegration program and its visitors
were for helping provide sponsorship and cover the costs and tuition fees associated with
education.

Like here there are so many opportunities here in the [program] because
everything we are being given for free. So that's a very good opportunity. You can
study from primary to secondary without paying anything. The [program]
sponsors them. Then from there you can get somewhere. That is an opportunity
that some people don't have from the outside.

This idea of having an opportunity that others who are not involved in a program may not have
will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Some of the staff at the reintegration program also had similar backgrounds as the
respondents and benefited through garnering professional development skills through their
position in the program. Here, a staff member who had formerly been a respondent in the
reintegration program speaks further to the exposure that his position has allowed him to gain.

One thing, my current position exposes me to various challenges which give me a
lot of experience and also the people I interact with they... the program exposes
me a lot to various people, business men. So through the experience, through
sharing with these individuals, I get a lot of experience, a lot of knowledge, so if
not for the program I could have not got that knowledge. So if I try to compare
myself now and maybe back in 2008 there's a big difference, yeah. There's a big
difference. The training I've received so far from people who come around, that's
a lot. Yeah. So I've seen a lot.

Reintegration Program Leaders

Of those people that interview respondents felt they could trust or reach out to for
support, the reintegration program leaders were the most frequently cited. Program leaders,
including management and staff play a key role in the lives of the respondents of this study.
When asked who they could turn to, count on, and trust, at least one member of the management
was almost always referred to in some capacity. One respondent referred to them as “the big
fish”, in that he had the resources and power to help them out if needed. Another respondent
explained here why he most trusts the program leader:

... because he paid for my school fees, he keeps me in school. For example, when
I was in need, he come and saved me.

But assistance through capital and tangible resources were not the only forms of assistance
respondents sought from program leadership. Respondents also sought guidance. Respondents
felt that they could turn to the leaders of the program for advice, in addition to financial support.

Because all the time when I have a problem, I go to him and he assists me with
some ideas on what to do.

When probed into why they felt a desire to turn to program leadership for assistance, respondents
felt that the leaders were best able to understand their circumstances and background, and
therefore could guide them accordingly and with sympathy for their situation:

Because they actually give me their time. They listen to me what I want. They are
there when you are doing you're performing good and when you're performing
bad. So they are more friendly to you and more close to you.
As can be seen from the statements above, respondents felt a strong degree of trust toward formal leaders at the reintegration program. These leaders were also the most frequently cited as friends of the respondents. Although these program leaders fulfilled a crucial role as social supports, a substantial amount seemed to ride on their ability as a few to be there for many. This raises uncertainties about the capacity and sustainability of a few leaders to provide mentor-like relationships to so many youth.

For those respondents whose education was being sponsored by someone outside of the reintegration program, they felt that they could trust their sponsors, who were primarily foreigners who had visited the reintegration program.

_Because even when I went back to school my sponsor asked me who I could trust and I've never been out of school because of school fees and he was the one picking up my money and I've never been out of school so I trust him._

One exception was a respondent who was sponsored by a relative. He states here why he can trust his relative and sponsor.

_Cuz he is the one that sponsored me since primary. He has been paying my school fees. Even in secondary he paid part of mine._

**Family**

One might assume that former street-involved children have no familial contacts. On the contrary, most of the interview respondents in this study maintained contact with at least one member of their close or extended family. For many, family was the primary contact that respondents would turn to if they needed support and had to turn to someone outside of the program. Respondents felt they could turn to these family members for emotional support and guidance. Family members that were mentioned by respondents included fathers, mothers,
siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Here, respondents discuss who within their family they maintain contact.

My father, cuz I don't have another person to ask.

[My cousin] cuz he is the one that sponsored me since primary. He has been paying my school fees. Even in secondary he paid part of mine.

This next respondent maintained strong contact with multiple members of his family.

Every evening and every morning maybe. I wake up and I have to call at least every member of my family. There's my brother, my uncle, and most of them with my grandparents, calls for the week, for those members of the nuclear family, I call them each and every day.

Unfortunately, this contact with family was constricted by a lack of funds to call or visit family. Several respondents acknowledged limited visits or phone calls because of limited funds on both their and their family’s end.

It depends on if he has the cash to top up the phone

When I get fare, that's usually when I go visit my grandmother. I used to visit her almost every weekend. And some days before. Also my mom used to call me... just the other day, three days ago she called me. ... It depends on who we are talking to because my grandmother I usually visit her many times. But my mom since she's not here we usually talk three times a month.

These family members were contacted not only to check-in but were also seen as a source of emotional support. Contrary to the assumption that former street-involved children would not have familial support, the majority of these respondents did seek out family support when they were able to financially. Here, one female respondent claimed that when it came to seeking advice, she would call on her sister because of their strong relationship.

Maybe my sister. ... Because we are free, and she is the only one I can tell my secrets.
Here, the respondent uses the word “free” to denote the ease and openness of conversing she has with her sister. Other respondents claimed they could seek emotional support in parents, grandparents and cousins because of the emotional support they had received in the past from these people or because these people had provided care for them in the past.

Giving back and assisting their families was mentioned as part of the past and as a goal for the future. One respondent discussed how he had taken work as the person who collects the fares of public transportation users (i.e. conductor) when he was a child to assist his grandmother financially. In doing so, he was mentored by someone more experienced as the job was risky, dangerous, and one could easily fall in with the wrong crowd. Yet he still took the job in order to help his grandmother.

Yeah cuz being a conductor is not that good here in Kenya. But I had to cuz I had a task to look [out for] my grandmother.

Looking into the future, respondents expressed a desire to assist their families, so that they too could achieve a better standard of living. “So that I can help my family” was a common response from many respondents.

My goals are to achieve more in my life, to do better so that I can help my family. Because I come from a poor family, so that I can help my family. And so that I can educate my sisters. I have two sisters who are in primary school, so that I can support them in high school so that they can continue well with their lives.

In many instances, respondents’ own aspirations for their professional lives were intertwined with their desires to assist their families. Here, we see that a respondent’s desire to have a job in a salon is directly related to his interest in helping his family.

Yeah my goals are to get to a salon and be able to earn some money so that I will be able to help my sister and my parents.
Friends

The majority of respondents spoke of friends of whom they spoke to on a daily basis. However, these friends were predominantly other respondents in the reintegration program. These program friends were often turned to for emotional support or advice. When asked why they turned to their program friends for support, respondents cited the relationships that they had built with these friends.

_Because we've been sharing with them many things, bad and good things._

Here another respondent speaks to the reciprocity of these friendships, in that they support and encourage one another. He also attributes a familial tone to the relationship by referring to his friends as his brothers.

_For me for example at the [program], those people who are very close with them, like... my best friend, I keep talking with. I just keep on giving support. Keep on supporting each other, with words. I just say they are my brothers._

Few respondents had non-relative friends outside of the program with whom they keep in touch. Respondents were engaged in social support networks that extended to family, friends, and most importantly, reintegration program leaders. Although familial contact could be constricted by lack of funds, the majority of respondents had at least one family member to whom they could turn for emotional support. The leadership within the reintegration program played a valuable role in giving respondents someone they could reach out to for advice. In addition to one-on-one relationships, group or community involvement can also be a form of social network support. Next I will review respondents’ involvement in outside organizations, groups, and the broader community.
Community Involvement

More than half of respondents (56%) stated that they did not belong to any organizations outside of the program at the time of the interviews. For those that did, a formal religious organization was most frequently cited (i.e. church or mosque). Two respondents noted that they had been actively involved with their church as youth members but were no longer able to go saying "I used to go" or "I’m a teacher at Sunday school for small kids, but I [did] it but you see, right now I'm in Nyeri." For these respondents, their involvement had to stop due to geographical distance when they moved to the reintegration program. Other organizations that respondents were affiliated with were a boy scout group and a farm-related cooperative.

Respondent’s social support networks tended to be constricted to family, program friends, and program leadership. As these program respondents begin to think about their lives after they leave the program, having an established social support network – or the ability to establish one – will be crucial to their continued well being. Yet, several respondents felt very distanced from their communities as represented in the quotes below.

In my community, I don't feel like I can trust anybody.

I don't know people in the outside.

Outside? I don't know anybody outside.

In my community I don't feel like I can trust anybody, but in here, I trust [a program leader].

Although respondents did not speak directly to having a desire to have community based social support networks, a few mentioned the daunting challenges of being independent outside of the program as an adult and viewed this as more daunting than being independent as a child. This particular next respondent spoke to the fear of adulthood and independence after graduating...
from secondary school and leaving a reintegration program. He referred to this experience as a "nightmare" and believed that it was a more uncertain and worrisome time in his life than when he lived on the streets. He explains this feeling:

\textit{After high school you've reached another level. And you want to realize yourself as a person and you want to be like other people. And so for example you want to dress well, compared to the street [where] you don't bother. The way you are is the way you are. People understand that you are in the street. But now you are not in the street. And if you are not in order people might think something is wrong with you. ... So that is why I saw it as a big challenge. I saw it as something I wanted to achieve, but I didn't have the means to achieve them.}

\textit{It was so harsh. I think that is the [biggest] challenge I've ever faced. Even when I was out in the street.}

Here, the respondent felt societal pressures of expectations of adulthood and internalized them. And importantly here, he felt as if he did not have the means or resources to achieve the status that was expected of his age. Given these vulnerabilities and the risk of social stigma as discussed earlier, establishing social support networks in the community will be essential to respondent’s continued well being.

\textbf{Focus Group Findings}

To reiterate, for comparative purposes, I probed these same issues in a focus group with a collection of young women who were former street-involved children but were not part of the reintegration program. I recognize that apart from the impact of the program, observed differences could be due to gender, the interview mode (focus group versus one-on-one interviews) or other factors. With that caveat, focus group members were asked similar questions about who they felt they could trust in their lives and who they could turn to. When asked who they felt close to, the women first began to discuss those who help them find work or get jobs. They noted that if one of them hears about an opportunity to earn money or to get assistance,
they will go get their friends and bring them along. This type of group solidarity in accessing resources allowed them to establish friendships, trust and closeness. Aside from friends, the only other type of person who the women felt they could trust was their social worker, who had helped them establish a community-based organization in the months prior to the focus group. These relationships were grounded in assisting one another in survival strategies, compared to the friendships described among reintegration program members that were derived from emotional support for one another. Focus group members’ social support networks were grounded in strategic relationships for accessing resources and for survival.

Familial ties were described as being weak among the members of the focus group. Two respondents felt that they might turn to family for assistance when things would get really bad or if they needed to be taken in. However, as one woman described the feeling of being disowned by her own family, the other women in the focus group shook their heads in agreement and then expressed similar feelings. They felt that their families did not bother to even see how they were doing. This is in stark contrast to the majority of interview respondents from the reintegration program who had at least one family member that they felt they could turn to for emotional support.

Finally, the concept of companion social support was raised by the focus group members, but they described it as a cycle of distrust in which they felt stuck. Here, I seek to paraphrase one focus group member’s description of this cycle of distrust.

*First you meet a man and think that he can provide financial security. By living together, you think you can save money. Soon, you get pregnant by the man and then he leaves or does not fulfill his responsibilities. You are left worse off, and with another mouth to feed.*
As she described this perpetual cycle of distrust, the other women nodded and expressed agreement. For these women, this situation happened repetitively in a cyclical nature, each time leaving them worse off and more desperate.

**Conclusion**

The findings from the focus group suggest that those who have not been part of a reintegration program derive their support from relationships that help them survive, compared to the reintegration program respondents who discussed both emotional support based networks as well as tangible assistance from support networks. In addition, although limited, the social support networks of the reintegration program members tended to span a breadth of family, friends and mentors. Whereas for the focus group members, these relationships were less likely to include family or mentors and more likely to be with those in similar situations. Therefore, although social support networks could be improved for both groups examined in this research, those who were not in the reintegration program had narrower support.
CHAPTER 6: PERCEPTIONS OF CONTROL

For those who have experienced vulnerabilities of being involved with street life, it could be assumed that they perceive themselves to have minimal control over their own lives. If this were true, they would also be likely to have poor emotional health. However, this assumption does not begin to articulate the complex paradigm through which former street-involved children perceive their lives. How these individuals conceptualize their own ability to achieve their goals in life is more complex and deserves attention. In this chapter, I present the results of the research that relates to interview respondent’s and focus group member’s ability to have control over achieving their future goals.

These findings speak to what Skinner (1996) calls subjective control. Subjective control refers to an individual’s perceived control, whereas objective control is the existence of actual conditions of control. Objective control may or may not affect ones subjective control. Researchers tend to agree that subjective control is most relevant in research when determining psychological well-being, in that they have control is most relevant (Skinner, 1996 citing Langer, 1979). For example, a cancer patient may feel like they have control over their life because they can choose where they receive treatment (i.e. subjective control). Yet, in reality, that patient is bound to receiving some form of treatment if they wish to live (i.e. objective control). Using the findings from Langer (1979), the patient who feels like they have control over their plan of treatment would have better psychological well-being than a patient who felt they did not have any control over their plan for treatment, even under identical objective control situations. In this study, interview respondents and focus group members reported their subjective (or perceived) control in relation to their ability to achieve their self-identified goals.
The results in this chapter are presented in two sections. I will first use a means-ends approach to better understand respondent’s goals and through what means they feel they can achieve these goals. I compare this to the focus group findings on agency and achieving one’s goals. Second, I use an agency-means approach to examine at what respondent’s viewed as limitations in accessing the means and eventual outcomes (i.e. ends). This is also compared to the focus group findings on the challenges associated with achieving desired outcomes. Together these sections seek to uncover how respondents and focus group members perceive their ability or inability to control their lives and achieve their goals, and if these two groups differ in this regard.

The diagram below provides a visual framework for this two-pronged approach. The diagram is adapted from a model of constructs of control developed by Skinner (1996). In his model, Skinner (1996) fleshes out how agents, means, and ends and their relationship to each other are helpful in analyzing constructs of control, specifically in perceived control analyses. I have adapted this model to explain the two types of constructs of control that were perceived by the respondents in this study. The agent-means and means-ends relations will be discussed in further detail in each of the proceeding sections. For reference, the “External Factors” and “Internal Factors” listed under each of the two phases (i.e. agents-means and means-ends) are factors discussed by interview respondents.
Interview respondents in this study were also at what might be termed a transition point in their lives. By participating in a reintegration program they were engaging in a program that might help them better achieve their goals. Their participation was voluntary and therefore, in their control to some degree. In this way, I was also measuring respondents’ experiences of control. “Experience of control refers to a person’s feelings as he or she is interacting with the environment while attempting to produce a desired or prevent an undesired outcome” (Skinner, 1996, p 551).

Means-Ends Relations

Interview respondents were asked if they had any goals, and if so, to share those goals and what they believed were the necessary steps to achieve them. The goals that they had hoped to attain as outcomes for their lives are what Skinner (1996) calls “ends”. The steps required to achieve their goals are what are called ”means” (Skinner, 1996). Here we analyze the data using a means-ends relationship, which allows us to understand interview respondent’s attribution to causes of potential outcomes. This is then compared to the findings from the focus group where respondents spoke more generally about feelings of control in determining outcomes.
I begin by reviewing the interview respondents’ goals or ends and will then discuss the means they hoped to employ to achieve those ends. In general, respondents’ goals were related to a desire to be employed and have an income. Formal employment and entrepreneurial activities were most often cited. Employment aspirations ranged from becoming a businessman or owning a salon to becoming a seamstress or successful in animal husbandry. Only one respondent stated that they didn’t have any goals: Right now, I don’t have any goals. Two respondents were interested in attaining positions in or opening their own hair salons.

Yeah, my goals are to get to a salon and be able to earn some money so that I will be able to help my sister and my parents.

Others had more specific goals of simple tangible skills that they had hoped to attain while at the reintegration program, welding or carpentry skills, for example. This next respondent said that in order to achieve his goals, he had set a goal to develop the ability to write while at the reintegration program.

To be able to write. Because me myself, I was a street boy. I knew nothing, since I was a small boy. And now I'm growing old.

Here, one respondent pointed to several entrepreneurial activities in which he would like to engage in order to make a life for himself.

My goal I was thinking because bee keeping, furniture making, and making the hay bailer, so I just combine them. So I want to do those things together.

Entrepreneurship was also seen as a technique for diversifying income sources and as a way of ensuring that one could afford to take care of one’s family. Here, one respondent talks about supplementing his or her income with entrepreneurial activities in order to afford a desired lifestyle:
Of course of the thing in entrepreneurship is to supplement our income because there are a lot of things we'd like to do but you can't do them if don't have enough of cash. So the major thing is to supplement the income. You can be employed but still whatever you're getting is still not enough for you. You want to live a better life, to have a very good family, to take care of them well, to educate your kids, to educate yourself so you need to supplement your income. That's the major thing.

The second most common response for goals was respondents’ aspirations to help their own families. These respondents wanted to attain a lifestyle that would allow them to help their existing families. Supporting parents, siblings, and even extended kin who continued to struggle was an aspiration for several respondents. Here one female respondent spoke to her desire to attain a lifestyle where she could assist her own family:

*My goals are to achieve more in my life, to do better so that I can help my family. Because I come from a poor family, so that I can help my family. And so that I can educate my sisters. I have two sisters who are in primary school, so that I can support them in high school so that they can continue well with their lives.*

Another respondent reiterated this, but did so by placing filial pressure on himself to achieve a higher standard of living so that he could assist his family that remained poor.

*To do my best to help myself and help also my family, my mother and my father, who are [poor] also. My brother also. I must help them. So as I was saying, I have to help my siblings also and help myself also. I need to go back to school and earn a degree and a diploma.*

Respondents were asked what was required and what steps had to be taken in order for them to achieve their stated goals. Their responses were the means to their desired outcomes, or ends. Initial responses almost unanimously focused on their own internal drive or motivation. Although challenges may exist, perseverance was a trait that was held in high esteem for several respondents. The idea of perseverance was often embedded in the respondents' rhetoric.

*All I need is determination. Determination. And support. Which I get through the program.*
One male respondent spoke of the importance of continuing to strive even after failure. He states:

*For example, you might start a business, invest in the business, do whatever is required, but maybe at the end of it you just get a loss. Maybe you're dealing with perishable items and maybe they were not bought in time and they go bad. You get a loss. You worked hard but you didn't succeed. So you don't give up. You just keep on trying, keep on trying. You may even try in a different way. Still people can work hard and they don't succeed. But the reason you don't succeed in the first trial, you don't give up. You just try the second trial. Maybe you do it in a different way. And to try to see if it will be...*

Working hard was also viewed as a core value of perseverance. When asked if people are able to achieve their goals, a common response was:

*Yeah, if they work hard enough they can achieve their goal, if only they commit yourself to what you want to do.*

Here, another respondent speaks to not only working hard, but working smart, that one must use their physical and mental capabilities in order to succeed:

*Yeah, one thing, you can receive nothing if you don't work hard. If you depend on work... but you can't just say that luck will just come. So you have to wake up, you walk, you find something to do, you do it better so you succeed. So if you work hard, not only working hard, but also working smart. Because you can work hard pushing a wall, but it will never move. But you can work smart and hard by using maybe a machine to push that wall... it will move. But if you're just pushing it like this, it will never move. So you work hard and you work smart. Meaning you work hard in an appropriate way you will succeed.*

Finally, God played a vital role in respondents’ perceptions of their own and other’s success in achieving goals. It was articulated in a way that God himself as a third party did not intervene to ensure their success but rather believing in God was key to being able to strive through challenges and achieve success.

*Only if you put God first, that is how you can just get what you deserve.*
Even when discussing the role that God might play in their success, respondents saw this within their control, that they could succeed by putting God first. The majority of respondents viewed success and achievement of their goals as requiring means that were within their own control, demonstrating a strong internal locus of control in means-ends relations.

This strong internal locus of control in achieving one’s goals is now compared to the findings from the focus group. When asked if they felt if they could achieve their goals, the group discussion focused solely on the concept of “fate”. They felt that there was little hope and that the experiences in their lives were fatalistic. In achieving the outcomes they desired in life, these focus group members had external loci of control. One focus group member gave the example that she will take work to do laundry for women and then the women say the laundry is not clean enough and will therefore not pay her for the work. This example is similar to the perishable items example used by one of the interview respondents. However, in this case, perseverance was not mentioned in any way.

Life is difficult for these focus group members with countless unknowns each day. Not knowing how food and household goods would be acquired was commonplace. One woman even discussed the constant worry of coming home to find her house locked up because she could not pay the rent and then having nowhere to go. These types of challenges were daily for the focus group respondents and left them with undoubtedly external loci of control and feelings that the outcomes of their lives were solely in the hands of fate, a fate of which they were not positive beneficiaries. I reiterate that factors other than membership in the reintegration program may also be at play in these differences.
Agent-Means Relations

I will now report the findings that relate to agency-means relations (Figure 6.1). I asked respondents if there was anything that restricted or prohibited an individual from achieving their goals. This question probed at agent-means relations, or if there were factors that limited one’s access to the means to succeed. It was here that responses were raised that related to external forces and challenges that were more aligned with an external locus of control. For example, lack of opportunity was acknowledged as a broad disadvantage that many people face and that ultimately leads to their inability to succeed.

Yes, I think everybody has the ability to achieve their goals. What they don’t have is the opportunity.

Another respondent spoke in more detail saying that success was determined by both opportunity and motivation and, therefore, a balance between internal and external factors. However, he notes that motivation is nothing without opportunity. He says:

I think success is determined with a lot of factors. One is opportunity. Two is motivation and how you work when you have the opportunity. So one thing is maybe they have not gotten the opportunity. Somebody can work extra hard, but you don't have the opportunity to work. So maybe the person is very good in business but there is no capital. So something like that, he can not exist long. So this is a hard working person without an opportunity to work. So I think the major thing is the opportunity. So if you give two different people the same opportunity, now you can judge them. But if they have different opportunities you can not judge them. For example you cannot compare me with a president's son. A president’s son has automatic opportunity. He's exposed to a lot. But somebody who don't have a good father somewhere doesn't have the opportunity. So he have to work even hard so he can get opportunity that he can [give?] opportunity to others. So that's what prevent people from success. Hard work comes after but opportunity is the first thing.
This response noted key issues like class, status, and inheritance that go to the core of opportunity inequity. The next respondent also spoke to individual backgrounds (e.g. family, home environment) that restrict the ability to achieve ones goals:

Some of them it is because of their backgrounds, cuz maybe their parents cannot be able to help them to achieve their goals, maybe go to colleges, yeah, I think most of the people I think that why they don't achieve their goals.

Yeah, many difficults, because even when I was in school, there were very many challenges because we have to go the tuition in April, I didn't make it go to in the tuition because of a lack of money. So many things, I have many challenges of getting money. So my father, he is a very big drunkard. So he do not support my family. So I'm trying as best I can to help my family. Because my father is a very big drunkard. He drink a lot.

Experience and resources were the two things that were most often cited as being needed before they could achieve their goals. One respondent spoke to the lack of financial resources for achieving his goal: “For now, now it is funds, it’s the challenge, it is funds”. Not having access to start up cash was a hurdle faced by many respondents. Here, a respondent discusses the interconnectedness of needing both resources and experience.

I have to go for a course first. Which first, so far I haven't got money to get to any college or any course. So I can earn that. So first I need first of all need to go to a course so I can maybe start a small salon or join one of the salons in town.

Needing both experience and resources simultaneously was a challenge that made it difficult to move toward ones goals. Others attempted to move forward by reaching out to find people who might be willing to give them a loan.

I'm trying my best, ya know, I'm trying to talk to people you know who can help me here and there. Also, I'm trying to find a way that I can take a loan. In that, to take a loan to help or take a loan to start a business which can be running when I'm in school.
Respondents saw a lack of capital as integral in stymieing the ability to succeed. This next respondent connects these two necessities that capital is needed for the training or resources that are necessary:

*Ya know, to achieve your goals, you need funds to help you achieve your goals. You need funds, someone to help you. And you need resources. Funds and resources.*

Another respondent reflected on the importance of opportunities for achieving goals and acknowledged the opportunities afforded to him through his participation in the reintegration program. Even though he himself could be identified as disadvantaged, he explained that he is lucky compared to others who do not have access to such opportunities that come through involvement in a reintegration program:

*Like here, there are so many opportunities here in the [program] because everything we are being given for free. So that's a very good opportunity. You can study from primary to secondary without paying anything. The [program] sponsors them. Then from there you can get somewhere. That is an opportunity that some people don't have from the outside.*

This is an important point in that these respondents may be more prepared for adulthood than other former vulnerable children based on the skills, empowerment, and exposure they have received through the reintegration program.

The point of education has been mentioned briefly in the above responses. I will discuss this topic more thoroughly here in that it was viewed as something that was limited and inequitable as a means to achieving one's goals. First, respondents saw education as key to achieving their goals. These responses will be discussed more thoroughly here, since it was such a central point for so many respondents. Education and/or training was seen as the primary way
of achieving a higher standard of living and was therefore a goal mentioned by several respondents, a goal toward achieving longer term goals.

*Like personally, I’m going like, to go back to school to follow my studies. Come next month, distance learning and still be working and still learning. Or like in the next few years, I’d like to, I want to have my own business... to achieve those goals, I want to go back to school and work harder and then if I attend the grades, get a promotion or get a job to earn more so I can get money I need to save and then I start my own business. In the next two or three years.*

Unfortunately, education is not universal in Kenya. Although primary schooling is free⁴, secondary is not. This respondent speaks to the poor outcomes of those who do not have the means to continue on to secondary school:

*But if they go [to] primary [and] secondary education at least, you can't do much but at least you can do something. And maybe you can pass well and get yourself into college. Get a government scholarship and continue with your education. But currently those who are doing that I think it is like 40% finish primary school and go up to university. 60% either they drop out, they go up to high school, or they are just done.*

*Because somebody with primary education can do very little.*

Unfortunately, the respondents in this study spoke of how being able to cover the costs of education were what resulted in them not being able to attend school when they lived with their families.

*Yeah, like when I was in class 8, my mom could not give me the money for the exam, so maybe I could not go to school so that I could get the money for the examination.*

We see here that access to education as a means for improving one’s life is very limited and can result in one not achieving their goals. The consequences of not earning an education in

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⁴ Kenya established free primary education in the early 2000s. However, many barriers still exist before children can attend primary school. These barriers include paying additional fees, having a uniform, and acquiring supplies.
Kenya have become more severe. Even though a primary education is now technically free, continuing on to secondary school, let alone college, limits an individual’s ability to achieve their goals.

*In Kenya, if you don't get a better education, there's no better life.* ... *College, I mean college. Going higher, cuz now'a days, even a diploma is like someone who has just done form four, can't get a job in Kenya. You need to get something higher to get at a better place.*

Educational opportunities were of the most common avenue mentioned for achieving financial security, following getting a job. When asked how he had improved his life from living on the streets to earning an income through the reintegration program, one respondent said:

*Through learning. Through education. Because if I didn't go to college, I wouldn't be here.*

These limitations in accessing the means to achieve ones goal were echoed in the focus group with the respondents who were not fortunate enough to be part of a reintegration program. When asked what barriers stop people from achieving their goals, all of the focus group members’ responses were external factors, and importantly, factors that the focus group members felt they could not control. These challenges included extreme poverty, a lack of food, and a lack of education. Four of the five women spoke specifically about a lack of money in being able to achieve their goals. The women brought up at several points the challenges associated with sending their children to school. They wanted to send their children to school, as it was seen as a way out. And yet, they could not afford the fees (i.e. uniforms, levies) associated with a free primary education. One woman said that she feared that because she could not send her children to school, they too would lead the same life she had.
Conclusion

The interview respondents in this research have strong internal loci of control when asked about their abilities to achieve their goals. They felt that they had the control to overcome obstacles in order to have success in their lives. However, when probed as to why some people do not succeed, respondents began to acknowledge strong external forces that can limit access to the means to succeed. Opportunity, resources and funds were the three areas in which they felt limited in their ability to succeed.

I recognize that apart from the reintegration program, observed differences could be due to a range of other factors including gender, mode of interview, and backgrounds. For the focus group members, their acknowledgement of external challenges paralleled their fatalistic perceptions of their ability to control their futures. In contrast, interview respondents spoke with a strong internal locus of control, which has been linked to positive psychological well-being. However, they were very familiar with the limitations and challenges before them. To what extent this will stymie their continued development in the future, especially as they face challenges, is unknown.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

As the number of children who are engaged in some form of street life continues to grow in countries across the world, policy makers and community leaders must be poised and prepared to help these children enter adulthood. One solution employed by some countries, such as Kenya, has been to develop reintegration programs that provide support to current and former street-involved children. Knowing to what extent and how these programs are successful in giving children and youth the tools necessary for having productive lives that do not perpetuate a cycle of street life will be vital to understanding how to ameliorate this challenge in developing and developed nations around the world.

Overview of the study

This research has sought to uncover the lived experiences of a group of former street-involved children who are now youth in a rural area of central Kenya. Drawing on a phenomenological methodology, I used one-on-one interviews with a sample of former street-involved children who are now youth and are part of a reintegration program, as well as a focus group of former street-involved children who are now youth but did not participate in a reintegration program. I acknowledge that these two samples of youth may differ in a number of characteristics other than their participation in a reintegration program (i.e. gender, background, etc.). Therefore, study findings do not assume causality, but rather open the door to more research and a much needed broader conversation about the long-term outcomes of former street-involved children in Kenya and in other areas of the world.

The phenomenological approach used in this study was most fitting as I sought to examine a common lived experience (i.e. former street involvement) among research respondents. This approach allowed me to examine this phenomenon using the words and
stories of the research respondents to draw out commonalities and dissimilarities. This approach is also appropriate for studies that work with vulnerable or under-recognized populations. It allows for the voices of the respondents to be used in calling for more attention and action to be taken in support of the population’s needs. Although the primary focus of the research was on the 16 one-on-one interviews with those youth who had been through a reintegration program, the focus group of those youth who had not been through a reintegration program was used to draw out comparisons in two of the areas of inquiry (i.e. social support networks and perceptions of control).

The findings from this study were separated into three areas of inquiry: family formation and fertility aspirations, social support networks, and perceptions of control. These three areas of inquiry provide us with insight into the needs of former street-involved children in Kenya. By uncovering how their aspirations for fertility and family formation parallel or differ from conventional models of fertility, we can better understand if there might be unique experiences among this population. And by better understanding the extent of their social support networks, we can gain insight into how and to what extent they have supports and safety nets in place to help them actually reintegrate into the community and be resilient in future challenges. And finally, analysis of their perceptions of control shed light on their potential for emotional distress and psychological well-being. Those former street-involved children who are now youth and participating in a reintegration program were asked questions that probed at each of these areas of inquiry while the focus group of former street-involved children who are now youth but had never been through a reintegration program were asked only questions related to social support networks and perceptions of control.
Results

*Family formation and fertility aspiration*

The first results chapter of this thesis sought to better understand how the sample of former street-involved children who are now youth and part of a reintegration program conform to or deviate from traditionally defined determinants of fertility and family formation aspirations. The data showed that respondents desired to postpone family formation and having children due to financial constraints, which aligns with traditional socioeconomic models of fertility that focus on rational choice. Interestingly, though, respondents also desired to ensure that their existing family was in a better place prior to starting a new family. Respondents put a priority on ensuring that their siblings completed school and that family was cared for. This is less often discussed in fertility literature and worthy of further study.

In terms of desired fertility, the majority of respondents (69%) desired a completed fertility rate that was less than that of their mothers. The average desired fertility rate of respondents was 3.0, compared to the national total fertility rate of 4.4 and the average completed fertility for respondent’s mothers, which was 4.7. Respondents reasoned their desired fertility levels with discussions of financial constraints and reflections on the drudgery they had faced as children. Although economic incentives and a shift from quantity to quality explain a large proportion of respondents’ fertility and family formation aspirations, embedded in these are lessons learned from their own childhood experiences and a desire to provide more to their children. The long-term implications of these findings are that if respondents do fulfill their aspirations of having fewer children, they may be less likely to experience socioeconomic distress and thus not perpetuate a cycle of vulnerable children. To what extent these aspirations become reality for these respondents is unknown.
Perceptions of control

The second results chapter discussed the findings that spoke to respondents’ social support networks. After reviewing the literature on how social support networks are crucial to maintaining resiliency and positive well-being, I reviewed the findings from the interviews with the former street-involved children who are now youth and participating in a reintegration program, and then compared these findings to those of the focus group with former street-involved children who are now youth but did not participate in a reintegration program. Among reintegration program respondents, the majority maintained connections with at least one family member. Family was contacted or visited whenever financial means allowed. Outside of family, the majority of respondents also spoke to how much trust they had in the leaders of the integration program. The extent of how many children and youth relied on these few individual leaders raises questions related to capacity and sustainability. Friendships were confined to the program, as the majority of respondents felt that they had no connections with anyone outside of the reintegration program, aside from family. The extent to which these youth will be prepared with safety nets and supports when they leave the reintegration program is key to their ability to be resilient and maintain a positive well-being.

The focus group findings on this topic differed in that all of the focus group members felt that their families had abandoned them in regard to being supportive. Their primary supports were each other, which most often manifested itself through sharing information about employment and aid opportunities. The focus group members – who were all female – agreed on one member’s description of a “cycle of distrust” that they felt caught in when it came to having companion social support. These women felt as if they were continuously let down by potential long-term partners who would consistently leave after impregnating them. The focus group
members appeared to have fewer support networks and were less trustful of others than the reintegration program respondents.

*Social support networks*

The final results chapter outlined the findings that spoke to respondents’ perceptions of control. I focused on perceptions of control as these are more relevant as indicators of psychological well-being than measures of objective control. For the interview respondents who were part of the reintegration program, determination and hard work were seen as vital to achieving one’s goals in life. With these values, respondents believed that one could control their life. Their responses to these questions were similar to motivational speeches, and embodied an internal locus of control. Only when probed as to what can stymie or prohibit someone from achieving their goals did respondents acknowledge external factors. These were most often cited as resources (i.e. capital and financial means) and opportunity. In comparison, the focus group members expressed more fatalistic views of their lives. They felt they had little, if any, control in their lives. Their ability to improve themselves or their children was limited by lack of funds, resources, and even a lack of educational opportunities. To what extent these differing perceptions of control will affect their ability to maintain positive psychological well-beings in the future is yet to be seen.

**Theory of the Three Areas of Inquiry:**

As the results speak to the general themes that emerged from the data, it is helpful to call on a broader theory to conceptualize how these results across the three areas of inquiry converge under a broader theory. Although Robert Merton’s Anomie Theory has received a substantial amount of criticism, particularly its assumptions of differential deprivation between social classes and its definition of deprivation (Thio, 1975), part of the Theory is helpful in
understanding how the three areas of inquiry of this research relate to one another as we think about the long-term outcomes of former street-involved children. The part of the Anomie Theory that is most useful here is Merton’s discussion of aspiration and outcome disjunction in relation to relative deprivation.

Reintegration programs are capable of instilling empowerment and promoting high aspirations among participants. To what extent these raised aspirations will lead to greater relative deprivation in the face of minimal opportunities is unknown. If these youth desire to have low fertility and set ambitious life goals, to what extent will they be able to achieve these aspirations given structural obstacles? Or can reintegration programs compensate for the objective deprivation that may stymie youths’ aspirations (e.g., family planning and birth control, start-up cash, social support networks)? Given the harsh realities these youth have and will continue to face, we do not yet know whether they will achieve their goals, family formation aspirations, and emotional well-being. The correspondence between their aspirations and outcomes is for the future to decide. However, what we do know is that for those involved in a reintegration program, achievements might well fall short of aspirations which may lead to higher levels of relative deprivation.

**Recommendations and Policy Prescriptions**

First and foremost, the findings of this thesis open a door to a much needed conversation about the long-term outcomes of former street-involved children as well as one of the solutions that has been put forth to reintegrate this population. More research is needed, specifically larger longitudinal surveys that track former street-involved children over time and assess the efficacy of different solutions on their ability to have positive life outcomes and not perpetuate a cycle of street life. This phenomenological study was also rather inductive in nature, allowing for the
development of hypotheses and research questions that emerged from the general themes and shared knowledge. Further research should explore the following questions:

- How do the experiences of street involvement as a child impact men and women differently as adults? Does early child-bearing and/or sex work exclude women from accessing familial supports? Does child-bearing place an additional burden on women that is optional for men?
- What characteristics of former street-involved children predict involvement in a reintegration program?
- How do fertility aspirations and outcomes compare among former street-involved children? Does a disjunction exist between aspirations and outcomes?
- What role do familial responsibilities play for reintegration program alumni in achieving their goals?
- What have been successful models of preserving program support networks after program involvement?
- How do reintegration program alumni differ across various types of programs (e.g. shelters, empowerment centers, skill development programs)?

Beyond research recommendations, this thesis also calls for further government and third-sector investment in this population. In addition to the need for more reintegration programs, existing and future programs should improve their efficacy by providing holistic support to former street-involved children, including skill development, empowerment, health and family planning education, and maintenance and development of social support networks in and outside of the program. Plans for how to transition youth successfully out of such programs while sustaining social support networks are also essential. Although this would require a
substantial amount of social and financial investment, the benefits of such a course of action would certainly outweigh the consequence of inaction which has already manifested itself in larger street-involved child populations and even street-involved families.
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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Understanding Trust and Engagement in the Social Infrastructure of Rural Communities among Former Street Children in Kenya.

Interview Questions

Date: 
Time of interview: 
Place: 
Interviewer: 
Interviewee: 

B. Briefing Script: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. The purpose of this research study is to explore young adults’ perceptions of community in Kenya. It will take about 45 minutes to complete this focus interview. Anything you say in this interview will remain confidential. I would like to record our conversation so that I can be sure to accurately record what you tell me. However, you can still participate even if you prefer that your responses not be recorded. Only I will have access to the recordings. Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Introductory Questions:

Q1. Which town/city in Kenya are you from?
Q2. How old are you?
Q3. How many children did your mother have?
Q4. How much schooling did you complete? How much vocational training did you complete? Did your schooling/training help you in earning an income?
Q5. How long have you been at the CBO/CYEC?
Q6. How did you come to be here?

Aspiration/Agency Questions:

Q7. What are your long term plans?
Q8. Do you have any goals for your future? What are they? How do you hope to achieve those goals?
Q9. Have you gained skills since you came to the CYEC/CBO?
   What skills?
   Are those skills going to be useful in your future?

Q10. Do you think everyone has the capacity or ability to achieve their goals?
   Why or why not?
   Do you think you have the capacity or ability to achieve your goals?

   **Family Formation Questions:**

Q11. Are you married?
   Do you hope to marry someday?
   At what age do you hope to marry?

Q12. Do you have children?
   Do you hope to have children?
   At what age do you hope to have children?
   How many children do you want to have?

   **Community Questions:**

Q13. If you wanted to ask someone for a loan, who would you turn to?
   Who is ______?  
   Why do you go to these people in particular?

Q14. If you wanted to ask someone for a job, who would you turn to?
   Who is ______?  
   Why do you go to these people in particular?

Q15. If you wanted to ask someone for a favor, who would you turn to?
   Who is ______?  
   Why do you go to these people in particular?

Q16. Who do you go to when you’re facing work or personal problems?
   Who is______?  
   Why do you go to these people in particular?

Q17. Who do you feel that you can trust in your community?

Q18. How often do you help other people?
   Can you give an example?

Q19. How often do others helped you?
   Can you give an example?
Q20. Do you belong to any organizations or religious groups that you belong to or participate in?  
Prompt: sports group, boy scouts, etc. 
Prompt: How many times do you participate in that group each month? 

Q21. How often do you interact with people not like yourself? 
Prompt: 

Q22. How often do you get together or meet with the following types of people? 
Prompts: 
- Family? 
- Close Friends? 
- Acquaintances? 
- Neighbors? 
- Community Groups? 
- Other social groups or organizations? 

Background Questions 

Q23. Have you ever lived on the streets? / Have you ever been homeless? 
How old were you when you started living on the streets? 
For about how many years did you live on the streets? 
Are you in touch with anyone in your family? 

Q24. How do you earn money? Do you have a job? 
Why did you choose this specific work? 
Are there any other ways you earn money? 

Former Street Child Experience Questions: 

Q25. Have you faced any challenges in finding jobs or employment? 

Q26. What barriers do you face in earning money? 

Closing Questions: 

Q27. Is there anything else you would like to share with me? 

(Thank the individual for participating in this interview. Assure him or her of confidentiality of responses.) 

*take note of where they’re living and gender