
Social Reconstruction Through Altruism: Implications from Life Experiences of Help-Seeking People in Makedonia Helping Center

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate the life experiences of the elderly, bedridden, and mentally ill people receiving help in Makedonia helping center. It was mainly aimed at answering three basic questions: What life-challenges did the help-seeking people face before their exposure to street life? What were the major life crises the help-seeking people were facing on the streets? What life changes do the help-seeking people achieve in the helping center? The study employed qualitative research approach to answer the research questions. Ten help-seeking people and one co-founder of the center were chosen for interview using purposive sampling. The study also employed observation and document analysis methods to collect the data. Thematic analysis was used for analyzing the data. The findings showed that the majority of the respondents faced several life challenges before their exposure to street life which includes separation from one's spouse, death of spouse, fired from job, early retirement because of reason other than age, illness, separation from one's children, experience of rape, constant disagreement or quarrel with close relatives or caregivers, dropping out of school, peer pressure, denial of freedom and overwork. Most of these problems pushed the respondents to the streets. However, these problems became severe during their street lives. The center has been fulfilling the survival needs of the help-seeking people. All of the informants have mentioned that all the problems related to basic needs which they faced on the street have been resolved after they joined the helping center. Moreover, medical and hygienic services as well as psycho-social treatments with love and care were among the services provided to the help-seeking people by the center. The study concludes that altruistic behavior plays a significant role in positively changing the life of the help-seeking, abandoned people and strengthening the social reconstruction endeavor. It is also found that altruistic behavior among members of a given society is helpful to achieve social reconstruction by helping and enabling the help-seeking, abandoned people to fulfill their basic needs, achieve their physical and/or mental wellbeing and to revive from their psychosocial debilitation.

Keywords: Altruism, Social Reconstruction, Help-Seeking People, Makedonia Helping Center

1. Introduction

Life (individual and/or societal) is in between 'ups and downs', 'good and bad', 'strengths and weaknesses', 'opportunities and threats', 'pro-sociality and anti-sociality', etc. Both the individual and society can pass through these opposites but complementary poles of life. In the pro-sociality versus anti-sociality poles of human behavior, for example, intentions and actions could be directed toward other individuals or groups either to help or hurt them. While pro-social behavior is thought as a "social glue" that enables people of different ages to live together peacefully and

productively (Lay & Hoppmann, 2015, p. 1), antisocial behavior, along with its different manifestations, is harmful that causes general distress to the community and educators (Alloway et al., 2013). Altruism and aggression are typical indicators of pro-sociality and anti-sociality, respectively. The concept of altruism has been defined differently by people from different fields. For example, biologists define it as a "behavior that cost the actor and benefit the recipient", whereas psychologists conceive it as selfless motives with the intention of helping another (Curry, et al., 2013, Egilmez & Naylor-Tincknell, 2017). Some people argue that altruism is a typical of pro-social behavior (e.g., Lay & Hoppmann,

2015) and to its strict sense, it extends up to self-sacrifice to benefit others (e.g., Li et al., 2014).

A Medieval Iranian poet by Sa'adi, as inscribed on the United Nations headquarters' entrance gate, states: "*The children of Adam are limbs of each other; having been created of one essence. When the calamity of time afflicts one limb, the other limbs cannot remain at rest. If thou hast sympathy for the troubles of others, thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a man*". This poet metaphorically reveals that pain and failure of an individual is not merely a matter of one person's life, but a matter of the entire human species' life. It postulates that the individual person's agony is the whole human species' agony; and the individual person's happiness is the whole human species' joy as well. Consequently, letting life of a single person be in favorable or unfavorable condition is letting all Adam's children be in favorable or unfavorable life situation.

Furthermore, the poem underlines the issue of common humanity. It urges the individual, the group, the society, and the whole world not to neglect pain and failure of the other individual, group, society, or any other part of the world as there is a common chain of humanity. Sa'adi's poetic work is found interestingly congruent with Monroe's statement:

Altruists have a particular perspective in which all mankind is connected through a common humanity, in which each individual is linked to all others and to a world in which all living beings are entitled to a certain humane treatment merely by virtue of being alive (Monroe, 1996).

The aforementioned poet is also expressing altruistic behavior among humans as it urges the whole world to consider pain of anybody (that is, individual person, group, society, or country) across the globe and provide with appropriate help to ease the pain. It does not talk about the benefit that the helper should derive from her/his helping behavior; rather, it implores the world not to overlook problem of anybody as there is a common chain of humanity across all Adam's children. It shows that the world has learned, at least, unfairness of keeping silent while others are in trouble.

Indeed, unlike a relatively common belief in the egoistic nature of human behavior, several studies from different fields have repeatedly and compatibly been assuring that altruism is part of human nature and an inevitable paradigm shift in viewing the nature of human behavior has been made (e.g., Lee et al., 2013; Menon, 2013; Li et al., 2014; Batson, 2011; Monroe, 1996). Furthermore, Durrant and Ward (2013) have even argued that altruism is a pro-social norm, which indicates that members who do not show altruistic behavior might be seen as destructive in their respective groups. To this end, several studies have been conducted on pro-social behavior in general and altruism in particular. Several studies across different fields have been conducted on altruism and related phenomena (e.g., Batson, 2011). Especially, scientific research in "altruism in humans" was begun in 1960s, indeed with contradictory theoretical and empirical literature (Feigin, 2014).

Nevertheless, little attention has been given to the role

altruistic behavior plays in the maintenance and enhancement of a given society and social life, regardless of the fact that human being is a social animal. Although there are some scholars who noted that altruism increases in income (Hofman cited in Mujcic & Frijters, 2011) and promote individuals' reproductive potential (Egilmez & Naylor-Tincknell, 2017) to indicate the role it plays, the researcher strongly believes that the attention given is not adequate. Consequently, scholars who tried to touch the importance of the issue have either believed that it has limited role in social life (e.g., Scott & Seglow, 2007) or heavily relied on the challenge it presents against the traditional and commonly held belief in the selfish nature of human behavior (e.g., see Monroe, 1996). Indeed, there are studies that noted the potential benefits of altruistic behavior (see Batson, 2011).

Despite the Ethiopian government's claim that the country is registering fastest economic growth, there is much evidence revealing that the majority of the society is under poverty and no less than 30 percent of the society is under abject poverty (e.g., Amha, 2012). The report released by Oxfam in 2014 indicates that the country has a lot of challenges ahead of it to secure food and lift its citizens out of poverty. The report revealed that Ethiopia is the world's second worst country to eat (Oxfam, 2014). Moreover, anyone can see that there are a number of elderly, mentally ill, children and women thrown out into streets of the country. It is true that many people are abandoned. Indeed, different historical, political, and social causes could be attributed for our destitution, but inability to lift our citizens and our society as a whole out of it is an undeniable fact.

Hence, the survival of our society is much threatened; and has to be reconstructed with a better image, living standard and status. To this end, the study explored the experiences of the help-seeking people in *Mekedonia* helping center located in Addis Ababa city. Currently, the center is taking care of elderly, bedridden and mentally ill people. It has been established by one selfless man and his co-founder in 2011.

In light of this, the study has attempted to answer the following fundamental questions:

1. What life-challenges did the help-seeking people face before their exposure to street life?
2. What were the major life crises the help-seeking people were facing on the streets?
3. What life changes do the help-seeking people achieve within the helping center?

Consequently, the main intention of the study was to draw an implication on the way how altruistic behavior could contribute, depending on the positive life changes of the help-seeking within the center, to social reconstruction process. The study investigated how such a society could be reconstructed with altruistic behavior of members of the society. Social reconstruction is conceived here as a process of changing the currently threatened society with a better image, living standard, and/or status for the future by changing the life-status of individual members of that society.

In conceiving this study, it is assumed that the act of

helping by *Mekedonia* helping center to the help-seeking people is altruistic or deserves to be altruistic behavior. The assumption was not held haphazardly. The center's act of collecting the elderly, bedridden and mentally ill people from different streets and helping them to get better was believed to be an altruistic act/behavior. The helping center has been established by a person who left his relatively better life in the US and came back home to help such destitute people. He founded the center along with his co-founder who was a nun for a long period of time in convent to offer an organized form of help. After they (the founder and his co-founder) have established the helping center and began collecting destitute people from streets, other people have begun to join them to work in the helping center for free.

It might be pure altruism [fulfilling all the criteria of altruism set by Monroe (1996, pp. 6-7) or quasi-altruism (missing some of those criteria)]. As Monroe (1996) states that human behavior is not only either pure egoistic or pure altruistic; rather there is also quasi-altruistic behavior that lies between them.

The founder has been using his family's house to shelter the help-seeking and he has been spending day and night with them, eating what they eat and sleeping where they sleep. Voluntary workers of the helping center were also found serving the center without any payment except the food they share with the help-seeking people in the center.

An unforgettable experience was observed in a conference when a doctor speaking on the stage, full of tears, saying that the founder of the center is going to die, as he was seriously ill, for the sake of others. Hence, the assumption that act of the helping center deserves to be altruistic has been held with such a grounded experience.

2. Research Method

In this study, qualitative approach has been employed. It is known that quantification would help little in digging up and interpreting the lived experiences of humans as deeply as qualitative approach. More specifically, interpretive hermeneutical phenomenological research method has been employed because it enables to investigate the lived experiences of the research participants (e.g., Arunasalam, 2018; VanLeeuwen et al., 2017; Paul, 2017; Tuffour, 2017). This method was also selected because the intention of the study was to go beyond description of the lived experiences of the study participants by interpreting the phenomena, and draw on possible implications that could show the ways through which altruistic behavior could reconstruct a threatened society with a better future image.

This study also fall under the cross-sectional research design since it investigates a given phenomenon at a single moment in time (see, for example, Ruane, 2005). One cofounder and ten help-seeking people in Mekedonia center were selected to explore their lived experiences (both before and after they joined the center) and see if there was any positive changes in their lives. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select both the help-seeking people and the

co-founder. The research participants were selected among those who stayed at the center for at least two years. This criterion was mandatory to explore the individual participant's life experiences, particularly after joining the center, and see the changes each help-seeking person has achieved.

Interview, observation and documents have been employed as data collection instruments. The interview method was semi-structured, in-depth form that helped the researcher in setting some questions in advance and making flexible depending on the response of the participants. There were also two photographs of each help-seeking person. One of the photographs was taken during the time they were being collected from street (to show the situation they were living in) and the other was taken after they were brought to the center and showed improvement (to show the changes they achieved). Observation was conducted to see the services being rendered by the helping center to the help-seeking, the way workers of the center treat the help-seeking, the way the help-seeking people spend their time in the center, the way they interact among themselves and the like. The collected data have been analyzed thematically.

3. Findings

Based on the research questions, three distinct themes have been categorized *aspre-street-life experience, street-life experience, and life experience in the helping center.*

3.1. Profile of the Informants

Regarding the age of the respondents, the majority (five) were within the range of 61 and 83 years old; two were between 22 and 24 years old; and three of them were between 35 and 36 years old. Concerning sex of the participants, six were males and four were females. In terms of religion, all of the respondents were Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Regarding their educational status, two respondents did not attend formal school; seven of them were from grade one to grade ten; and one had a diploma qualification. Concerning their marital status, two were unmarried; other two were separated; four were widow; and two were divorced. Their length of stay on street ranges from two to twenty years.

3.2. Pre-street Life Experiences

Participants of the study have revealed that they have passed through different ups and downs as children. While many of them became ill-fated since they were born, some were lucky to grow up with their biological parents or close relatives and get the opportunity, as children, to be cared and be sent to school. One of the ill-fated persons as a child was SO, 83 years old, who lost his both parents early and became orphan. Regarding this, SO stated as follows:

"I lost my father and my elder brother when I was three or four years-old as Italian invaders killed them (that is, during Italian invasion of Ethiopia, 1936-1941). My mother had also

died a year later because of the unbearable sorrow she faced due to the loss of her husband and eldest son. I then became orphan as a child with no relative to take and raise me up. Finally, I was taken and raised by an old, non-kin mother with inadequate care. I did not get what I had to as a child."

Similarly, GI, 35 years-old, narrated his childhood experience as:

"My father was a soldier and died during the civil war (that is, the 17 years of war fought between the current government and the previous socialist government of Ethiopia) when I was a child, 5 years-old. My mother had also died naturally when I was 7 and I was left helpless as I had no other brother and/or sister who could help me. After the death of my mother, a household which used to be a neighbor took me and raised me up till I reach the age of 12. However, I was being abused by the household as a child... working different chores such as herding and farming. When I get tired of those chores and became uncomfortable, I left to urban with no idea what to do and how to live there."

Except three respondents, all of them have told that their upbringing experience was unpleasant and full of challenges. Losing one or both biological parents early; being left with no other relative (s) who could raise and care him/her properly; being taken and raised by non-kin guardians after the loss of biological parents and became victim of identity crisis; being victim of child labor; unable to get parental love and treatment as a child; and lack of opportunity for education as a child. TS and BE, 22 and 64 years-old, respectively, have told that they lost one or both of their biological parents as children and could not get any opportunity for education. TS described her childhood experience with a bit lengthy statement as follows:

"Because my mother had died as early as I was infant, it was my grandmother who took me and reared me up to my 4 years of age. My father married another woman and did not want to take me and be with him. After I lost my grandmother at 6, thus, my uncle took the responsibility of looking after me. It was after this time that I was being made to work many things beyond my age and capacity such as looking after cattle, fetching water and firewood, grinding grain with a stone, and looking after my uncle's children. As my uncle's wife was used to hate me, she was beating me day and night because of nothing or very silly reason. She did not want to send me to school, while her children were going to school. I never went to school while I was in my uncle's house. As the suffer was unbearable, I went to my father, finding no other option, though I was aware of that he did not want to see me. As I expected, he did not welcome me and began to treat me as harshly as my uncle's family. He also told me to leave his house as he did not want me to live with him anymore. It is, therefore, after this moment I was forced to come to Addis Ababa, where I ended up being a street resident."

AB and DA, 36 and 61, respectively, have also shared similar experience when they were children. They told that they have passed through tough situation during their childhood time and they could not complete their education due to lack of support from other people.

Many of the respondents dropped out of school due to absence of support. For instance, SO dropped at 10 and his life was diverted instantly in the way he did not intend and/or like due to absence of support. He said:

"I was compelled to drop at grade 10 and join the national army because the non-kin woman who was helping me could not help and send me to school anymore. It was one of the hard decisions (joining the army) I made in my life."

Childhood is one of the critical periods of human's life to lay the foundation for bright future. It is during this time that proper parenting style should be followed; strong attachment should be established between the child and the caregiver or the parent; the child should get adequate parental love; and parents should send their child to school. When the upbringing/childhood time is found with ungracious experiences, thus, these all opportunities would be lost. Children who would not grow with their own natural parents that, in turn, leads to absence of love and attachment; they would not get the chance to go to school; they would be exposed to different abuses and the like.

In contrast, there were respondents who reported that their upbringing/childhood experience was pleasant. They were raised up either by one or both of their biological parents, or by someone else such as grand parent who could give them desirable care. AK, 65, has, for example, told me the following story about his upbringing experience:

"I have been brought up in a warm family getting all treatments as a child. My biological parents were eager to send me to school and provide me with services I need as a child and as a student. They were following up my progress until I complete grade 12 and joined college. I really have nothing to regret about my childhood life. I believe I have got what I had to with the help of my parents."

Similarly, MI, 24, narrated that her childhood experience was pleasant enough. She revealed that she was brought up by her grandmother receiving the treatments she needs to. MI narrated her childhood experience as follows:

"Since my mother died when I was a little kid, discussing with my father, my grandmother had taken me with her for my advantage. I was comfortable and happy with the life I had in my grandmother's house. She was devoted to send me to school and was fulfilling all the materials I was in need of. I do not remember any unpleasant feeling because of being motherless as she was capable of treating me like a mother. I was also pursuing my education attentively until I quarreled with my grandmother and dropped at grade 8."

ZE, 78, has also told me that he grew up with his natural parents facing little or no problems as a child. However, even these people have gone out to street at a certain time and experienced all the terrible things there on the street like those with ungracious childhood experiences did. Their pleasant upbringing did not guarantee them from becoming a street resident. It is not uncommon to have opportunities and challenges in different moments of life.

Some respondents also told the opportunities or favorable conditions they had before they were exposed to street life. LE, 36, said that despite the hardships she had during her

childhood, she was able to find job in one big hotel with relatively good salary.

She continues:

“After I found a job in that hotel I was able to fulfill needs beyond the basic ones. More than this, I get acquainted with someone whom, after some time, I did get married with; and... (she sighed) my life became very different and I was happy more than I can tell you right now. We got a child and our family became fully happy.”

ZE, 78, also said that he was happy and hopeful when he was living with his wife and children. He assured me that his family was having gracious life. He added that “I was able to make enough money and manage my family properly until the moment things went wrong. I was sending my children to school without any problem and my family was living happily.”

As life is not a pile of pleasant experiences only, it is not surprising when challenges that threaten one’s survival take place in one way or the other. For instance, MI narrated that conflict reigned when she reached grade 8 and she could not agree in many cases with her grandmother. She believed that her grandmother was strict in her parenting style and both were not happy with each other. Her grandmother was not happy because MI was not fulfilling the demands expected of her and MI herself was not happy, too, with the way her grandmother began to treat her. This crack in their relationship caused a serious problem. MI said “I finally left my grandmother and my home to be free of my grandmother’s constant nagging; I did really get tired of it.”

ZE told that unprecedented death of his spouse was the major crisis he faced. He continued to describe the situation as follows:

“I do not know why crises pile up over and over once you get trouble. Soon after the death of my wife, I became ill and three children were left helpless and no one was there to look after them. I consecutively faced three crises: loss of my wife, loss of my health, and separation from my children after they were taken by their mother’s parents following my illness. It was shocking event and it is only due to help of God I am here, alive.”

SO and AK have also described unpleasant life experiences in their lives. They lost their jobs; the former was fired while the latter was retired. The former was also separated from his wife because of her disappearance whereas the latter lost his spouse in death. Regarding the crises he encountered, AK said:

“Though my childhood experience was good and I was able to find my own job, I have experienced some troubles after some time. The first serious crisis in my life was very early retirement as a soldier. I was high ranking official in the army, but forced to retire early because of the serious injury I received at war. It was very tough situation to survive. I thought as if everything was over. I was happy with my job and I felt sorry when I lost it. The other crisis, perhaps the most terrible one that led me to unwanted situation or life was death of my wife. After I lost her, I was really hurt; I felt lonely. Life became unbearable for me. And

eventually I went to unwanted life (sighed)... I went to street.”

Apart from this, worst and heartbreaking story came from TS who said that she did not have any good experience in her life till she was picked-up from street and taken to the helping center. She said the following with her own words:

“I could say I am one of the most unfortunate persons as I experienced bad life situations only with very limited pleasant events in my life. Right from the time my grandmother was died, I have not seen any good experience in my life until I was brought here (to Makedonia helping center). My life was full of crises. Before I left my relatives to street, I had bad experiences such as frequent insults and physical punishments from my father and uncle’s wife, total denial of education, denial by my father as if I am not his child, and being a victim of overwork (herding cattle, fetching water and firewood, looking after children etc.). It was disgusting life.”

Another respondent, AB, has also described the tough situation or time she had before exposed to street. She revealed that she was raped by someone when she was 16 and she thought this experience was terrible enough to leave indelible scar on her life. She said:

“Since I lost my parents as a child, I was raised by people whom I have no blood relationship with. But when I was 16, attending grade 9, I faced the most shocking event: rape by son of my caregivers. I totally hated myself and decided to leave that house. I then dropped at grade 9 and began another life as a domestic worker. I believe my hope was snatched by one guy.”

Enormous unpleasant life events experienced by the respondents were found out. Denial of freedom, separation from one’s spouse, death of spouse, fired from job, early retirement because of reason other than age, illness, separation from one’s children, experience of rape, constant disagreement or quarrel with close relatives or caregivers, dropping at a certain grade because of incapability to continue, overwork, and others. Some of these crises were inherited from the bad upbringing or childhood experience that the people had, whereas some life-crises were found independent of childhood’s life experiences; they just happened to the people with no connection to their prior life during childhood. Similarly, while some of the crises faced at this level were found immediate or actual causes for exposure of the people to street life, others were found potential ones to the eventual exposure of the people to life on street.

3.3. Factors or Events That Led the People to Street Life

Obviously, many varying factors that caused street-life have been presented by the people. Of the life crises discussed earlier, no doubt, many of them were found actual and/or potential causes that led, in one way or the other, the people to street. If we take TS’s story, for instance, it was all the maltreatments and/or horrible experiences she was receiving from her caregivers (that is, her uncle’s family and

her father) during her childhood and even right before her exposure to street-life that pushed her away to street. Regarding the factor(s) that led TS to street, she said:

"I believe many things have contributed their parts for me to end up on street, especially the bad treatments I had while in my uncle's house. All the crises I told you earlier have forced me to go and search my father. But after I found my father as cruel as my uncle's family, I lost everything. Though I tried to tolerate all the challenges, my father straightly told me to leave. He was totally unhappy with me as his wife (her step-mother) was uncomfortable with my presence. It is after this event that I lost my hope of living with any of them and I decided to leave."

Of the ungracious life events he described earlier, AK admitted that it was the death of his spouse that actually caused him street life. He said "I did not know what happened after that event (that is, after the death of his wife); I lost my mind and I found myself on street being sheltered under plastic tent." This respondent has previously described several life crises in addition to the death of his spouse, but none of them did lead him to street. It is only the death of his spouse that was found critical crisis to lead him to street.

Another respondent, MI, believed that it was an accident that had exerted a direct pressure on her to go to street. Actually, her exposure to street has got major potential reasons from behind. Just to consider what she said with her own words:

"When I reached grade 8, the quarrel between I and my grandmother reached boiling point. Her control over me became stricter than ever that eventually took away my freedom. When I talked about this situation with my friends they advised me to leave and start my own work. They were constantly telling me as if I would have my own job and be free from any altercation with my grandmother. Finally, I trusted them and left as they told me, taking money and other items away from my grandmother."

The above saying is unequivocally indicating that wrong parenting style of the grandmother and peer-pressure were the potential factors that initiated MI to leave her house and grandmother. This action, leaving her grandmother and her house, has, in turn, laid the foundation for her eventual fall onto street. It is because when her caregiver forbade her freedom that she requested advice from other people, her friends and became victim of their pressure.

It is common, especially among adolescents, to be pressured and diverted from one's own way of life by peers. DA, SO and ZE have also told that it was their illness that pushed them away to street. All of them have passed through tough life experiences during childhood and/or later life, but it is their illness that forced them to give up and live on street. Though it is natural for any human to get ill, lack of personal financial-capacity or absence of potential helper would exacerbate the problem and cause him/her to give up. The above three respondents strengthened this idea. They went out to street not because of their age, rather than it was because of their illness. Illness was the immediate factor that pushed them away to street life.

DA, for example, said the following regarding the factor that led him to street life:

"It was after I became ill that I stopped working. If you do not work, you will have nothing to pay the house rent and you could not even feed yourself let alone feeding others. It was then the street I found as my last option to live in free of charge and survive through begging."

Similarly, ZE narrated how he ended up on street as follows:

"Though my childhood experience was great and without serious problem, I have faced many challenges in my later life. In fact, it was after I got nerve disease everything seemed over. I already spent huge amount of money, which I collected earlier when I was healthy, for medication. But no healing or improvement at all; and I left empty hand. What else would be left after this? Only going to street! It was in this way I went out to street."

AB also told that it was her illness that actually put her onto street though there were potentially bad experiences that changed her life in unexpected and unwanted way. The rape she faced some years ago that eventually forced her to drop at grade 9 and the divorce experience have really exerted their own pressure on her life. She believed these were horrible life events that paved the way for her failure. She said:

"After I was betrayed by the one whom I ever trusted (her husband) and get divorced, I began to worry excessively. I told to myself I am worthless. I was also getting sick frequently because of my worry. I stopped working and I had nothing to eat and pay house rent. I then began stretching my hand for alms and I was sleeping out on street."

The respondents have mentioned a lot of factors that had potential and/or actual effect on their exposure to street at a certain moment of their respective lives. The respondents have come up with immediate factors such as illness, loss of spouse, accident, strict parenting style, peer-pressure, abuse or maltreatment by caregivers and the like for being exposed to street life. Ravenhill (2008) states "routes into roof lessness are complex, multiple and interlinked".

3.4. Street-Life Experience

Challenges of street life, as reported by the respondents, were found a bit different and quite harsher than the crises faced and reported before street life. Almost all of the informants reported that they had lack of basic needs such as food and shelter. LE reported that lack of basic needs was very common experience during her stay on street. She just said "let alone hunger, thirst and lack of shelter, there were some strange and painful experiences I faced on the street."

SO has also supported LE's idea that lack of basic needs was one of the serious problems he was facing on street. He said: "It was common to spend the whole day and night without any food; there were many circumstances in which I was spending day and night not even getting a slice of bread." DA, GI and BI have admitted that lack of basic needs was serious problem that caused them various crises. It was the major factor causing them illness and/or aggravating their

illness. They also told that absence of shelter was making them be exposed to terribly fluctuant weather which, in turn, was causing them strange disease and/or exacerbating the illness they had. BI, for instance, said: "my illness was aggravated as I had no food to take, no home to shelter in, and no money to visit a doctor and buy a drug." MI and TS have also accepted acuteness of the problem, that is, lack of basic needs, during their stay on street. MI said:

"It is known that hunger is the primary manifestation of street-life. Your survival will be questionable, especially if you are young or if you look so, as alms givers will assume that you can work and feed yourself. They will not feel compassion for you."

TS also added: "I could say I have suffered much from hunger and absence of shelter while I was on street. I was so hungry and thirsty the first day I joined street life as I do not know how or where to find food. I was simply keeping silent and spent day and night without tasting any kind of food." ZEREported:

"Though I was facing lack of food, it was absence of shelter that was causing me stress. I rarely was getting hunger as my ex-colleagues and other alms givers were pity for me and were providing me with food and coins. But they were not willing to provide me with shelter. I found many people being generous of food and even their own cloth, but not shelter."

AK also shared the experience of ZE and believed that food was not that much a problem, as shelter was, for him during his stay on street. He said:

"I do not think I had food problem as I came to the helping center with weight heavier than the weight I had just before I went onto street. It was lack of shelter that was causing me much pain as I was sleeping out so that my injured leg was feeling much cold at night."

All the informants told that they were suffering from consistently changing weather condition during day and night. SO said: "there were terribly fluctuant cold and warm conditions causing me pain as I had no shelter and cloth to be protected from; since I get old enough, the changing weather on the street was very difficult for me to adapt." AB also told that she was living in a harsh weather, causing her discomfort and illness. She told the following story regarding this:

"The change of weather now and then was also another problem I had on street. As a street resident, you know! You will not have enough cloth or blanket to protect yourself from chilly condition. There were days I was getting numb with the extreme chill when I wake up in the morning. I would say the bad weather on street was causing me discomfort and illness."

AK and ZE also reported that there was unpleasant and unpredictable weather worsening their illnesses. They both told that they had health problems such as leg injury and nerve related case before they were exposed to street life and so that the bad, consistently changing condition on the street was aggravating their illness. AK said: "It was lack of shelter that was causing me much pain as I was sleeping out so that my injured leg was feeling much cold at night. I was afraid of

the changing weather than lack of food." ZE also told the following story:

"I was imploring any person I know to take me to their homes and shelter me. I was really impatient with the harsh weather I was facing on the street. It was difficult for me to tolerate the extreme cold and warm conditions because I was getting older and my nerve problem was getting worst, too."

DA also reported that fluctuation of weather was common on the street. He said:

"One of the difficult experiences of street life was change of weather. Rain was falling onto me at night when I was asleep and the cold condition was making me tremble. There was also hot weather in the day. It was difficult to adapt the condition as it was not consistent; the day is very hot and the night is chilly. The problem also gets worst when you get older because you will not have capacity to resist it."

The other, perhaps the most challenging and shameful experience faced by street residents was rape. Four of the respondents, one male and three females, have reported that they have been victims of sexual assault while living on street. The female victims (TS and MI) have reported that they have faced unplanned pregnancy as well. LE, one of the victims of rape, narrated the rape experience she encountered follows:

"It was the experience of rape that really hurt me. I was raped two times during my stay on street. I had no worry about any other problems I was facing there; it was rather the rape experience that caused me excessive anxiety. I feel very sad even now when I remember that terrible experience. Those nights were the cursed ones in my life."

LE was lucky to escape the unplanned pregnancy that could have occurred because of the unsafe sex she had with men during rape, unlike her fellow street residents (MI and TS). MI narrated her story the rape experience:

"After I spent one peaceful week on the street, things began changing. I was raped for the first time by two men at midnight and it was unbelievable that I was raped. I cannot exactly tell you how many times I was raped in my stay on the street. I had also faced unplanned pregnancy due to unsafe sex several men had with me through rape at different times. It is really hard to explain to you what happened after this situation; I went crazy. I stopped fighting against the rapists as I totally became powerless and hopeless. Many men were raping me even when I was pregnant. After some time, I lost my mind and do not know what really happened to me until the Mekedonia helping center picked me up and helped me recover from my problem."

Similarly, TS narrated the challenges she was encountering while she was on street:

"After some time, something worst happened to me; I was raped and lost my virginity. I would be really happy if I could forget that night. Rape became my part of life on street after this event. Because I became like a zombie, I could not protect myself from rape. I thought as if I am disgusting and worthless person. I have also faced unplanned pregnancy. Because the fetus was died within my womb, it was totally painful life; I could not eat, could not sleep, and there was

harsh pain in my body. I barely escaped from death and people saw me and took me to hospital."

GI reported that he was raped by men and was victim of homosexuality. Actually, he did not tell this case by his own initiation during the interview; it was after I asked him whether it was true that he was raped while living on street and he admitted. It was after the co-founder of the helping center has told that there were many people, both females and males, who have been victim of sexual assault mentioning some of them. He reported that rape was his shameful experience he ever faced. He narrated about that situation as follows:

"I was awakened from my deep sleep by the fight of two young men against me to take my clothes off. I could not understand first what was going on and I was surprised why they were doing so. But I got their intention later on and I tried to shout. Nevertheless, one of them has shut my mouth and the other person forced me to have what he wanted. It is difficult how I was shameful about myself at that time. I was suspicious that everybody was talking about me. I hate that life."

The above stories show that rape was reported by the informants as the most terrible experience that caused them a lot of adverse effects such as unplanned pregnancy and psychosocial deterioration.

The other major crisis participants faced during street-life was illness or loss of a state of wellbeing. All of the informants have been found physically and/or mentally ill. While some of the informants have told that they became ill before they were exposed to street life, some have reported that they became ill after they were exposed to and began living on the street. ZE told that he was sick for a long period of time before he went out to street and his illness has been worsened after his exposure to street life due to the lack of basic needs. He said:

"I got sick soon after the death of my wife. I was doing everything I could to get better, but nothing was improved regarding my health. I spent all I had for medication and became empty handed at the end. I then went out to street with all my illness because I had no money to rent house and buy food. My illness even became extremely worst after I was exposed to street because of the challenges there. I was waiting for death as my illness was becoming serious and I thought I could not be cured unless God pardon me."

Similarly, BI told that he was facing different illnesses both before and after he fell onto street. He said "all the problems I mentioned earlier (such as lack of food, shelter, and bad weather) were aggravating the illness I had before and were causing me another illness. I was frequently getting sick on the street." GI also told that he was seriously sick while he was living on the street and he was certain that he would have died from his sickness had not he been brought to the center. He said:

"I was very sick while on the street. I was bleeding heavily, but did not know why; I could take food in. It was after I came here (to the helping center) I have been told that my disease was tuberculosis. After I have been sexually

assaulted by the cursed men, my health began to deteriorate. Since I was feeling bad for being assaulted, I became desperate when I became ill and much blood was flowing out from my body. Every day was painful for me. I am very thankful to God and the center for being here after all the terrible illness and pain happened to me."

SO was also another informant who was physically ill during his long stay on street life. He believed that illness is very inevitable experience as far as someone is living in unsuitable and harsh environment like street. He narrated the life he had on street as:

"I was relatively OK during the few months of my street life, compared to my later life on street. But I began to face more illness, in addition to the health problem I had before, and it began to be worsened as many problems were there. I was sick to the extent of unable to stand and/or walk. As I was lame due to my serious illness, I was getting toilet where I used to sleep; I was using the same place for sleep and toilet. It was difficult time, especially the last four years before I am brought to the center. My fate would be undoubtedly death."

In addition to physical illnesses discussed above, there were mental problems faced by some of the informants. AK, for example, said that he had lost his mind and went out to street right after his wife had passed away. He narrated the story as:

"I was not myself for about two years on the street. I faced mental problem after I lost my spouse and I was living on the street with this problem. But I do not think I was insane because I did not completely lose my mind. That might be the reason I recovered very quickly after I have been brought here without going to any hospital and taking any drug. But I remember my problem was getting worst from time to time. I was having much anxiety and irritation when people were gathering and talking about my past."

TS was also another victim of mental illness. She became mentally ill after she was exposed to street life. She believed that she had no such a problem before her exposure to street though she had been encountering a lot of challenges even before. She narrated:

"More than the problems of lack of food, shelter, and harsh weather, it was the rape experience that led me to mental problem and caused me very tough life on the street. Especially, after I got unexpected pregnancy, I began to face serious anxiety and sadness. I was, as a result, losing my mind and could not think with stable mind how to protect myself and escape the problem I had."

Similarly, MI also told that she was mentally ill. MI's exposure to mental illness was due to sexual assault by several men and unplanned pregnancy following this assault. She said:

"I could say I was almost insane person. It was because of the bad experiences I had on the street that I became mentally abnormal. In addition to hunger and homelessness, I was being raped almost every night. This experience caused me serious disturbance and I began to lose my mind day after day. I was very sad to be raped inhumanely. I began to

consider myself as animal because I lost any sense of being human in my life. I did also face unplanned pregnancy and my life became topsy-turvy. I began to have serious anxiety and situations were worsening; I reached the stage of knowing nothing about myself and became seriously ill. I do not know even when and how I was brought here. It was later, after I recovered from my problem, the co-founder of the center told me everything."

The informants reported that physical and mental illnesses were major crises on the street. Indeed, these crises did not happen by themselves, they have been caused by other factors. Lack of all basic needs, bad weather, rape and other sexual harassments have caused physical and mental illnesses against the people. These experiences also resulted in psychosocial crisis. All of the respondents admitted that they were desperate and extremely unhappy with the life they had on the street. Some were even longing for their death due to painful and meaningless life they had. For instance, LE narrated:

"I was unhappy and hopeless. How could I be happy or hopeful!? If I have nothing to eat and nothing to wear, how could I be happy and long for future life!? If I get raped and if how to spend the night becomes my worry, why should I be hopeful and happy to continue alive!? What for!? It is when you have something to eat and to wear that you will have hope and courage to change your life... I had no worry about any other problems I was facing there; it was rather the rape experience that caused me excessive anxiety. I feel very sad even now when I remember that terrible experience."

The above narration clearly indicates how psychosocial status of the person was affected due to difficult life experiences she had on street. She deemed, by then, as if her life was over and trying to be hopeful was something like fooling herself. Another informant, TS, also shared more or less the same story. She told that her feeling was hurt terribly and she was totally hopeless at her future. She narrated:

"I believe I am very unfortunate person. My life has been full of troubles starting from my early childhood. I never thought I would escape from the existing trouble and reach this stage (being in the center). I just thought that everything was over after I was raped for the first time and lost my virginity. I could not tell you how I felt after I got raped; it was something shocking. When several men were having sex with me forcefully and I found myself very incapable and helpless to protect from, my heart has been broken. There were several times I considered myself as an object, just an object; saying nothing while being hurt... ugly life I never wish for anybody, even for an enemy."

This is heartrending story to hear from the mouth of a young lady, just 22 years-old. How hurting it is hearing that she did lose even a drop of hope in her life. It was a serious psychosocial crisis that the informant was having. AB also revealed the influence of street-life on her psychosocial status. She told that she passed through a lot of disgusting and desperate life situations during her stay on the street. She said:

"I was suffering much whenever the life I had before my exposure to street came to my mind. I used to compare that pleasant life I had before street with the life I had on street. Before I became street resident, I was married and I used to live happy life. But things changed overnight and I went out to street. It was, therefore, very much painful when I remember and compare my previous life with my street life. You know how it feels when you lose something that was yours, especially when you lose opportunity of your life just like me. I thought I am ill-fated."

AK and SO also told another truth with regard to their psychosocial crisis on the street. Both have served their country as soldiers at different times. They extremely felt pity for being leftover after long period of service to their country and society. They have been convinced that they were thrown away and forgotten during the time of urgent help from their government and/or society. SO said:

"It is really shameful and piteous act that I was forgotten where I have been after I served my country and my society as a soldier for more than 30 years. I was asking myself 'was for this all (being leftover and street-resident) I spent my precious time and energy serving my country and my society? Is it all what I deserve?' My feeling was hurt. Imagine what could be the feeling when you have no money to buy bread. I was sad when I used to think of it; yeah, I was very sad."

BI also admitted that he was in fearful situation. He told that he was worrying that he might not be buried as a human when he dies on the street. He narrated:

"I was excessively worrying that I would not be buried like human being as I would die and be left on the street. It was difficult to be street resident at that age (old age) and I was regretting deeply. I was thinking that I should not have faced those challenges at that age; rather I should have rested peacefully and be helped."

MI was another young lady who reported that her psychosocial status was affected due to the challenges she was encountering on street. She admitted that she had nothing to hope and long for while living on the street.

"I was feeling that I already lost the right track of my life after I went out to street. This feeling became stronger and stronger when I was having very tough life situations during my stay on street. I was getting remorse for leaving my house because of my friends' wrong advice and I was weeping each night I was raped. I was also thinking that I spoiled my life and my bright future by myself and I was feeling guilty."

During the observation in the center for more than five times, there were opportunities to observe the overall activities of the center. For example, there were a lot of pictures of many help-seeking people posted on big boards in the helping center. Those pictures were images of the help-seeking both before (while on streets) and after joining the helping center. When anyone observes pictures of the help-seeking, taken while they were on different streets, it is convincing in what type of harsh life conditions the people (including the informants) have really been. It was difficult to believe those pictures were real images of the people who were living in the center. Those pictures show how

easily human being is fragile. The pictures, taken while the people were on street and posted on walls of the helping center's compound, have been disturbing. The people looked like very weak and seriously ill on their previous pictures.

The interview with the co-founder also provided huge amount of information regarding life of the people and the challenges they were facing on street. As she was the one who collected the people from street, she knew their status (at least their physical status) on the street very well. Hence, she assured that the people who have been collected from different streets were very weak and who deserve pity or compassion. She said:

"The situation they were all living was extremely touching. We found them in a very devastating situation. While some were unable to speak a single word because of severe hunger, some were unable to rear their heads up and walk because of their illness (physical illness). There were also people who were insulting and even beating us as if we are their enemies going to hurt them (mental illness). They were living in garbage areas with extremely unhygienic status (lack of hygiene), wearing faded and torn up, due to long time service, clothes (lack of basic need). We found many of them in pitiful situations; their finger and toenails were long, dirty and scary; their hairs were like forest and full of flies; their clothes were full of lice; and their bodies were not clean."

The co-founder of the helping center clearly indicated that the people (including the informants) were in adverse conditions while living on different streets. All the crises the informants have reported were also indicated by the co-founder.

3.5. Life in the Helping Center

The center has been fulfilling the survival needs of the informants. All of the informants have mentioned that all the problems related to basic needs which they faced on the street have been resolved after they joined the helping center. They said that they began getting meal four times a day including snack. GI said that he is being provided with adequate basic needs service. He said:

"I did not face any hunger or lack of shelter since the day I am brought here. I am getting my basic needs fulfilled adequately. I have been getting meals four times a day (i.e., breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner). I do not have any problem of basic need because the center is providing me with it whenever I am in need of it. I have also very comfortable shelter with clean bed. All my basic needs, which were totally denied on the street have been now fulfilled. Glory to God and founder of the center I am now comfortable with everything here."

DA and BI also reported that they have been freed from hunger and homelessness after they joined the helping center. They said that the center is providing them with adequate basic need services and they are living with no problem of fulfilling those basic needs. DA said:

"The primary service the center provides me with is filling my belly up. I am free of hunger and any other lack of basic

needs, like shelter. The center does also give me clothes and shoes. I have adequate clothes and shoes to wear. Comfortable shelter is also secured to all of us. I do not believe there is a question of belly and/or any help-seeking with a problem of filling his/her belly up in this center, thanks to the founder of the helping center."

Many other informants (AK, TS, MI, AB, ZE and LE) also reported that the center is providing them with quite adequate basic need services. They all reported that there is no question and/or difficulty of getting basic needs as the center is providing them with adequate food, shelter with clean bedroom and other facilities, clothes and shoes. A slightly different report was found from SO, who reported that the food he is getting from the center is not quite enough for him. His complain was about the quantity of the food only, he has no complaint with the other basic need services. He said "I am getting many nice services such as food, cloth, shelter, and bedroom which I had none of it before. Except inadequacy of the food, everything else is satisfying... yeah, the food is a bit smaller in amount."

Medical service has been found another type of service the helping center was providing the help-seeking with. Since many of the informants were physically and/or mentally ill while living on different streets, they are getting good medical services either by going to different hospitals or the health professionals would go to the center and treat them. LE told that she was able to get medical treatment right after she arrived in the helping center. She narrated:

"As soon as I arrived in the center, I was diagnosed by health professional and drugs were prescribed to me. After I took the prescribed drugs, my health status has got better. And sometimes, I do visit a doctor and get treatment in a psychiatric hospital. I am getting good medical services with the help of the center and my health has been improved greatly since the time I was collected by the center."

GI also reported that the center provide him with satisfying medical service. Since he was seriously ill on the street, the center let him be diagnosed immediately after being collected from the street. He said:

"I was extremely ill on the street. And when I was brought here, I was directly sent to hospital for a quick diagnosis and I was diagnosed with a tuberculosis disease. After the diagnosis, the center has let me start medicine immediately. The center has sacrificed much to let me be cured from the deadly disease I had and I thank the center very much. I assure you the center provides every person here with any possible medical services. It could even offer you medical services for serious illnesses like mine, let alone for other simpler illnesses."

ZE also told that he was sent, by the center, many times to different hospitals for treatment. He believes the center has tried its best to offer him better medical service, but he was already told that his illness (nerve related problem) could no longer be cured. He said "until I was told by the doctor that I could not be totally cured, the center was providing me with all possible medical services; and I have even brought significant improvement as a result."

AK reported that the center is dedicated to serve the help-seeking people with all it could. He said that the center is providing a lot of services to the help-seeking including the medical one. He confidently told that it is possible to get medical service at any time without any delay. He said “you could ask the center for medication whenever you feel any discomfort, even when you catch the least painful cough. Medical service is very easy and open for all in this sacred helping center.” SO underlined “if you ask me what else service the center is providing me with, it is the medical services. I have been going to several hospitals for treatment since I came here, with all the costs covered by the center.” Similarly, the other informants (MI, BI and TS) confirmed that medical service is being rendered by the helping center as significantly as basic need services. They reported that the center is trying its best in rendering health care services to the help-seeking and they believed that the center is helping many ill people get their health status back soon after their arrival in the center.

MI told that she had mental illness to the extent of being unconscious and she narrated:

“It is with the help of medical treatment the center arranged for me that I reached to this status. I have greatly been treated medically with the persistent effort of the center and I have shown great change in my mental health, though I am still taking drug for it.”

Moreover, the co-founder of the center told that MI has shown significant change in her mental status after she was collected from the street and got medical treatment.

Hygienic service was also another type of service the helping center begins to render immediately during the moment of fetching the people from different streets. The informants told that they were washed all their bodies and were made wear new clothes during the time they were collected from the streets by workers of the helping center. SO narrated:

“Service of the center was begun while I was on street. Workers of the center have come to me and asked me whether I would like to go to somewhere to get help. And after I told the workers that I am ready to go to anywhere to get help, they lifted me and took all my clothes off to wash me. It has been long time since I washed my clothes and my body. My clothes and my body had nasty smell. But now I am being served in the center with full of hygiene. No more dirty clothes and unclean body. Workers of the center wash my clothes, blanket and bedclothes anytime the clothes look unclean. They also wash my body twice a week. What could I say for all this!? I thank all workers of the center and God bless them all.”

BI told that his hygiene is being kept after joining the center. He admitted that he had unhygienic life for a long period of time on the street and it is only after he was brought to the center that he is being served hygienically. Similarly, all the female informants reported that the center is providing them with hygienic services that deserve them. After recalled the unhygienic life they were leading on street, they told that hygiene is as equally fulfilled as basic need services in the

center. AB said:

“A woman needs highly hygienic life because of the biological nature. It was, however, very difficult for me to keep hygienic life while living on street. It is after I was brought here I began receiving hygiene. Workers of the helping center are there to keep all the help-seeking people in the center clean. My clothes are always clean; my bedroom and bedclothes are also so; I wash my body at anytime I need.”

The co-founder of the center also told that keeping hygiene of the help-seeking is one of the major services the center renders and the people are being helped to have clean life. She said that the center strives to overcome the hygiene-related problems once the help-seeking had on the street. She said:

“Since the center believes hygiene is critical for healthy and enjoyable life of the help-seeking, much attention is being given to it. Especially, those who are terminally ill and who could not control themselves (in withholding and expelling their feces) are being made to wash their clothes and body every day. There are around 80 bed-ridden and terminally ill help-seeking who need two diapers a day. The workers wake up at early morning (4 AM) and start washing body of those terminally ill people who could not wash by themselves. Their clothes and bedclothes are also being washed.”

In addition to the survival or basic, hygienic and medical needs provided by the center to the help-seeking people, the informants reported that services such as encouragement, hope, mental rest and emotional treatment are being rendered by the center, mainly by the founder and/or co-founder of the helping center. AK told that he had received encouragement and great promise from the center. Since he used to translate books (from Amharic to English) before he went out to street, he was then encouraged by the founder of the center immediately after his arrival in the center. AK said:

“After I was collected from the street and brought to the helping center, a lot of advices were given to me by the founder and co-founder of the center. Those advices were to make me safe and stable. Especially, founder of the center was coming to me and motivating me to be strong. He promised me that the center will cover any cost for publication if I write or translate a book. The center then sowed my heart with great hope to publish my translation work.”

ZE also reported that the helping center provides the help-seeking with love, heartfelt and genuine treatment. He revealed that workers of the center, especially founder and co-founder of the center, treat him with full of concern and love. He said “what makes this helping center special is its way of treating all the help-seeking here; everything is heartfelt and with full of love.” Similarly, DA told that the helping center does provide the people with hope and satisfaction because of the way it cares all the help-seeking in the center. He narrated:

“To your surprise, the center’s biggest service is love. It provides all of the help-seeking with motherly treatments; it

does not matter whether the person is HIV positive, insane, or infected with any other disease. I personally, for example, experienced this treatment when I was sick some months ago. I went to the co-founder and told her that I am a bit sick. She was excessively worried and coming to my room repeatedly to ask whether I need anything until the nurse arrives. She comes and massages my hair calling me 'father' when I get sick (i.e., emotional treatment). Though in terms of age perhaps she (co-founder of the helping center) is my granddaughter, she is like a mother to me. The love I am getting really outweighs the physical services."

Other informants, LE and TS, also reported that the helping center is giving them mental peace and satisfaction. LE said "in addition to all the services (the physical services such as basic and medical needs), I am being provided with satisfying care." TS also said "I am getting mental rest because of the center's love and care. The center is caring me with love, which I did not have for a long time. I believe love is the great service I and fellow help-seeking are getting in this center." GI also reported that the center is offering love and care without any discrimination, because of their problems/diseases, among all the help-seeking people by saying:

"The center gives equal service to all help-seeking with love and care. Whatever problem the person has, workers of the center treat without any abhorrence and discrimination. They (workers of the center) wash people who are with terrible sores on their bodies with no sense of disgust or abhor. My emotion gets renewed when I often see the center treating the help-seeking like that."

The co-founder of the center also told that the center renders loving treatment and emotional attachment as most of them were isolated and/or leftover anywhere. She stressed that human being needs "face rather than hand" by telling me the Ethiopian saying 'smiley face of the person is better than the material s/he offers you'."

During the observations of the center, workers of the center, especially the co-founder, were treating any person with grievance in a very motherly manner. The mentally ill people do cry and sometimes disturb the center, but she approaches them smoothly and calms them down with loving care. Many people, even people as old as 70 and 80 years of age, were calling the co-founder "mother." It was not only because of the materialistic services the center and the co-founder rendered to them, it was something beyond that; that is, the loving care and emotional attachment the center and/or the co-founder offered.

It is found that the help-seeking people collected from different streets and being helped in the helping center have achieved their well-being. The helping center has been persisting to provide the help-seeking with adequate treatments including the medical treatment and the help-seeking people have, as a result, achieved a lot of positive changes as an individual person. Achievement of physical and mental well-being has been found then one of those positive life changes the help-seeking have experienced.

Another big change the help-seeking have brought is

safety. Their safety has been ensured after they joined the center. Indeed, they were insecure on the street and, as a result, many evil things have been occurring in their life. Rape was one of the bad experiences some informants have experienced because of the absence of shelter and insecure life on street. GI, for example, told that street by itself is insecure place where many unexpected life experiences could occur to anyone. TS also reported that street was very unsafe place that leads to unsafe life events or experiences. She told:

"Street is a place where you do not have safety of survival. No one is there to help you when you face problems like rape. My life was then unsecure the day I began to live on the street; particularly, after I have been raped. If God have not helped me, I might have been even infected with sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. However, such an insecure life has been ended after I was brought to the helping center. I am now safe as I have nothing to worry about. The worry about getting raped by hooligans and drunken people, and be infected with different diseases has now been overcome."

The other most critical life change the help-seeking have achieved after being collected from street and brought to be cared within the helping center is psychosocial eminence. The help-seeking were abandoned and were lonely on the street. However, it is found that they have been lifted out of street and their psychosocial status is significantly improved. They told that their feeling was hurt when they found themselves on the street with no one to approach and ask them about their problem.

SO told that he was desperate and pessimist of nearby people while they were seeing him getting unbearable suffer, but did nothing to help him. He pitifully said that he had bad feelings about the nature of human being when he was on the street with very difficult life situations, but helpless and no one beside him. His narrated:

"I have to be honest that I was very pessimist about human nature while I was on the street. It is now after I see what the founder of the center is doing for the sake of help-seeking people that my feeling and/or belief is getting changed. Before I came here, I was convinced that human is cruel and helpless because no one was there to help me while I was suffering from hunger and illness for many years in one place. But I am now with a different feeling that all humans are not the same after I see works of the helping center. I used to be hopeless that I would be helped and reach this stage. But be glory to God and workers of the center I am saved."

GI also confirmed that he was lonely and shameful about himself after he was sexually assaulted on the street. He said that he did not talk with anyone on the street fearing them as if they knew what happened to him. His feeling was changed for good only after his arrival in the helping center. And he is currently free of any shame and unpleasant feelings as he is forgetting the scene. He revealed that he is forgetting it because he is able to contact and spend good time playing with other help-seeking people who have different life experiences.

AK reported that his mental health has been improved due to mental rest and good feeling he got in the center. He assured that he did not take any drug for his mental problem. He just recovered after his feeling was boosted with the provision of loving care and encouragement by the helping center. He said:

"I do not think it is because of the medical treatment that many people are being cured and recovered here; I rather believe that it is because of the loving care and safe way of handling by the center that they are getting better. I guess it is mainly through renewal of their feeling, hurt during street life, in the center that they are getting better. Playing together about many things is not easy. We were alone, talking with no one because of our problem and we had emotional distress. But after we are brought here, many things have been improved, and feelings and hopes have also been renewed. I get better, for instance, not because I get medication, but because I am encouraged and filled with hope. I then get good feelings and became better off soon."

AB reported that the emotional distress she had on the street has been eased after being provided with necessary treatments (physical and emotional) in the center. She told that the emotional hurt (despair and pessimism) was more harmful than hunger or illness on the street. And when she was lifted out of street, brought to the helping center and provided with humanely treatments including medication, she felt good and did quickly recover from her problem. She said that she stopped worrying about both significant and silly problems and became confident that her life will be changed even more than this. She is dreaming that she will have her own, independent life; and she believes that she will establish happy family once again as she has been given second chance by the helping center.

Similarly, TS described that she is with very good feeling and she admitted that it is after she joined the helping center that she began to live freely and happily since the moment she lost her grandmother as a little kid. Heartrendingly, she narrated:

"I do not know what happiness is before I came to the center. I grew up with total ignominy and abuse in my uncle's house after I lost my mother and my grandmother. I was just his (her uncle) servant. The street life was extremely worst, too. I could say I became human and be treated as a human in this center. I am getting the treatment I never got since my grandmother's death. (Her eyes were filled with tears)... the day she collected me (co-founder of the center) is the most blessed day in my life. I reached the stage of looking after and treating other patients and elderly in the center. I am very much happy and lucky person to be like this as I know very well which life situation I came from."

The co-founder also told that MI's feeling has significantly been improved after some months' intensive emotional and medical treatments. She added "she is now quite happy and hard worker in the center. She is serving other help-seeking in the center." She also told that it is when their feelings begin to improve, the help-seeking quickly get better.

As collective life is very common in Ethiopian society,

individualism has little room (Abebaw, 2013); being helpful among one another is considered socially desirable behavior in the society. When individual members face a problem or failure, it will be inevitable to expect assistance from their society to reverse their failure. Otherwise they will point their fingers on the society (perhaps as equally as they point on themselves) for being failed and/or abandoned. In such social orientation (collectivism), psychosocial life will easily be fragile whenever such hardships are faced by individual members of the society. Their feeling will be hurt. Weinstein (2004) states that there are theories supporting the role of altruism in mitigating, if not solving, many social problems such as homelessness and health problems. He also states "intolerance, homelessness, and many other of today's social problems are caused or intensified by egocentric, self-interested behavior and the perception of some people that others are less than human". This implies that social problems will be at least eased if people are helpful instead of being self-interested in their behaviors.

4. Conclusions

Many of the help-seeking people have gone through tough life experiences as children. Their childhood life was found with several difficulties such as absence of parental love or care (due to early loss of biological parents), physical and labor abuse as a child, and denial of education. The major challenges of the informants before their exposure to street life were denial of freedom, separation from one's spouse, death of spouse, fired from job, early retirement because of reason other than age, illness, separation from one's children, experience of rape, constant disagreement or quarrel with close relatives or caregivers, dropping at a certain grade because of incapability to continue, and overwork. Hence, the reasons or causes that led the informants to street life were physical and/or mental illness, loss of one's spouse, accident, strict parenting style, peer-pressure, and abuse or maltreatment by caregivers.

The major life crises faced by the informants on the street were absence or lack of basic needs (hunger, thirst, absence of shelter, and absence of hygiene), rape and unplanned pregnancy, terrible fluctuation of weather, physical and/or mental illness, and psychosocial debilitation. Therefore, the services the help-seeking people began to receive right after they were collected from street were all basic needs (food, cloth, and shelter), medical and spiritual treatments, protection from any danger like sexual assault, and hygiene. They were also found receiving intangible services such as care or love, attachment, affection and encouragement from the helping center.

5. Implications for Social Reconstruction

The primary positive life change that the informants have achieved within the helping center is that fulfillment of their

basic needs. This fulfillment of basic needs such as food, cloth and shelter will help individual persons abstain from going out to street for begging and eventually become victim of several life crises on the street. When people are helped to fulfill their basic needs, exposure to street will significantly decrease. For instance, unplanned pregnancy is one of the street life challenges women face. As absence or lack of basic needs push women away to street, they will be exposed to various types of attacks including the sexual assault or rape. Besides the danger of being infected with infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, rape is an immediate cause of unplanned pregnancy among street women. Needless to say, unplanned pregnancy, in turn, will precipitate the birth of 'unplanned children.' Large number of children will be thus born on the street, without responsible person to raise them with desirable and adequate care. They will be born simply for painful life. Consequently, unplanned pregnancy caused by sexual assault against women on the street will precipitate the birth and expansion of poor and helpless street children. That is, the poor and dependent women are bearing other poor and dependent offspring. It is 'duplication' of beggars or poor people as well as poverty within the society. There will be high growth rate of population in general and population in poverty in particular.

Moreover, the children born on street will face numerous crises. Identity crisis is one major problem they might face. When they know that they are born to poor parents who could not raise them properly, their feeling (in addition to physical pains of hunger, shelter and illness) will be hurt. Furthermore, since their mothers might get raped by several men on the street and bear them through unplanned pregnancy, the children will not perhaps know who their respective biological fathers are; and this will have another huge psychological impact on their future life. Such kind of bad feeling and identity confusion among children and adolescents will unquestionably harm the society. It is because the society will be carrying hopeless and identity-losing generation.

When help-seeking people get help to escape street life and fulfill their basic needs, the aforementioned actual and/or potential threats of the society will be significantly reduced, if not avoided. If the destitute people are helped to get their basic needs fulfilled before they resort to street life or early after their exposure to street life, the society will not see such a large number of people living on the street. If the number of people living on the street is reduced, the degree of crisis such as sexual assault will be significantly reduced, too.

Assisting helpless people before their exposure to street life or, if already exposed, to escape as early as they are exposed will help them avoid all the crises of street life. Escaping from street life and avoidance of the crises among destitute members of the society will, in turn, save the society from facing all the aforementioned actual and/or potential social ills.

It has been found that the help-seeking informants have achieved their physical and/or mental well-being after they

have been brought to the helping center and received help within the center. This well-being achievement by the previously mentally ill and bedridden people will have, therefore, actual and/or potential merits to the entire society. When individual members of the society get ill and/or become bedridden, well-being and productivity of the society will inevitably face challenge.

It is not only the victim citizens/members who will become unproductive, but also the people (perhaps their relatives) who look after or care the victims. When idleness is intensified among members (ill people and their relatives) of the society due to physical and/or mental illness, the society will become less productive; and economic, social, and political crises might reign.

Apart from this fact, there is also another potential challenge to the society when individual members get ill and become helpless or without care giver. As it has been found among informants of this study, people will more likely resort to street life for begging when they get critical illness and have no other people beside to help or care them. When they go to and start life on the street, then there will be high degree of transmitting their diseases to other people; especially, when they are infected with infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. These diseases will easily be spread out among other people due to several reasons such as unhygienic life situations and unsafe sexual experiences (both willing and rape) on the street. As found out in this study, unhygienic life situation and sexual assault or rape are some of the common manifestations of street life. There will be, as a result, widespread of diseases and multiplication of ill individuals within the society; and this situation will, in turn, endanger the society.

However, the experience of *Mekedonia* helping center (that is, collecting abandoned people – elderly, bedridden, and mentally ill – from different streets and helping them in one center/institution) can play a significant role in easing, if not avoiding, social crises of our society. Physical and/or mental illness of individuals is one of the major social problems that can cause dependence and unproductiveness among members of the society.

Consequently, helping the physically and mentally ill members of the society, as *Mekedonia* helping center has been doing, so as to get their well-being back will make the society beneficiary. Besides its role in helping the terminally ill people get their well-being back and enabling them become productive members of the society, it will hold the patients and keep them from transmitting (knowingly or unknowingly) the diseases to other healthy members of the society.

It seems true that people revive from their debilitated psychosocial life when they get their basic needs fulfilled and their well-being significantly improved with the help of other people. Since people will believe that there is no one beside to help them to get out of their problem, if they spend long time suffering alone (as just informants of this study), their psychosocial life will inevitably be in crisis. And this crisis, in turn, might make the victim(s) insensitive to the problems

of other individuals in particular and to the problems of their society in general. Perhaps they believe that they have nothing to deal or share with their society and might reject any societal responsibility or national call during emergency. Not only the victims, but also other people who know the victims might be dissatisfied with what happened to the victims. If former soldiers (like SO and AK) are abandoned on the street with no one to help them after their long time's service to their society and/or country, who else will be happy to serve the society and/or country as a soldier or as any other professional? Grievances might rise among victims and other members of the society against their government and/or society because of what is happening to the help-seeking people on the street.

Feelings of the public might be hurt badly. And the grievances as well as bad feelings of the public might cause feeling of irresponsibility among members of the society saying that "I do not care about that societal problem as far as it does not affect me." This will be because of the feeling hurt by the situation of fellow citizens on the street. For sure, feeling of the public will be hurt when it sees a lot of beggars on the street stretching their hands for alms or searching for food from garbage cans. So, the psychosocial debilitation is not only with the victims, but also with the public.

When help-seeking people are collected from streets and helped by their compatriots, as just the experience of help-seeking people in *Makedonia* helping center, their psychosocial life will be revived. They will be happy and confident that there are other people beside to help them. When they are respected for their contribution by the society and get help whenever they face hardship, they will be happy with their society and will be sensitive to any societal problem; and they will contribute their own part in easing the societal problem.

Similarly, other members of the society will also have good feeling when they see destitute people being helped. Generally, when abandoned people get collected and helped to escape all the crises they have on street, their psychosocial life will be revived; and this revival will also make the public happy which leads to social reconstruction.

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