

Chapter 2

Research and Overview

The data presented in this monograph are the result of several successive anthropological and sociological fieldwork periods with a child-centred approach in Lima and Cusco. Being a street-living child is a phenomenon at a given moment in time. Some children only know the street as their habitat, but most children indeed experience a constant flux in their lives between street and home. The common trait is poverty, mobility and disturbed family structures.

Children growing up in Peru are among Latin America's most deprived population. According to UNICEF, one out of every four young children live in circumstances that can be labelled as extreme poverty (UNICEF 2008: 2). The country has witnessed a rapid growth of its urban areas due to massive migration from the rural areas. Three fourth of the population is urban; slums and the informal sector have grown excessively (Valenzuela et al. 2007: 35; Velazco 2004; Espinoza and Rios 2006: 9–11). People flock to the cities in search of a better life. Lima, presently with close to 10 million inhabitants, embodies this trend. So does the Andean mountain town of Cusco, with rapidly expanding outskirts with migrants from the countryside in search of work. This 'archaeological capital of America', close to Machhu Pichu, and thus a tourist hub, annually receives more tourists than there are residents but still an estimated 75 % of the inhabitants live below the poverty line (Steel 2008: 47).

The data presented in this monograph are the result of several successive anthropological and sociological fieldwork periods in these two cities in Peru: Lima and Cusco. It is based on altogether 5 months on the streets and in street child shelters and it documents the views and opinions of the children, their families/caretakers and extension workers. It was important to first establish trust with a number of these children on the street and the places they hang out, such as the beach, illegal hostels, pinball halls and internet cafés. These 'gatekeepers' introduced us to their friends on the street. Once initial contacts had been established, we started with a quantitative study.

In Lima, 12 enquirers collected questionnaires from among 827 street-working and street-living children, aged between 5 and 17, in different parts of the city. In Cusco, 6 enquirers collected questionnaires from among a total of 341 street-working and street-living children. Around one third of the questionnaires were recorded late in the evening or at night.

The field workers responsible for approaching and interviewing the children were all Peruvians living in Lima and Cusco. Most of them had experience in working with street children or working children. Consecutively, after initial analysis of the data had been conducted, anthropological field work started. Participant observation of the streets was remarkably easier in Cusco than in Lima, due to the dangerous character of specific areas in the latter city and the more extreme marginalisation of street children. Individual and group interviews were conducted with many children; sometimes these were spontaneous and sometimes planned. While some of the children preferred to be interviewed alone, others were more talkative when their friends were around. In total, 42 semi-formal interviews were conducted, with 30 boys and 12 girls. A lot of relevant data, however, was gathered during the dozens of informal talks.

We have to keep in mind, as said earlier, that ‘children move fluidly on and off the streets and that the street does not represent the sum total of their social networks and experiences’ (Panter-Brick 2002: 148). Being a street-living child is a phenomenon at a given moment in time. Some children only know the street as their habitat, but most children indeed experience a constant flux in their lives between street and home. They, for instance, have regular contact with their parents or occasionally return home. Actually, it was a challenge to find children who entirely and at all times fits the category of street-living children, because regular changes in lifestyles and activities is what characterises them specifically. The street-living children in this research shared the specific characteristic of not living in their home, and living on the street at that given moment.

The survey resulted in data on around 200 children in Lima and 50 children in Cusco who answered to the definition of street-living children. At the time of the research, they lived in a shelter, rented room, outside, in parks, on the streets or in dilapidated buildings. Most of the other children (the street-working children) spent the night at the family home. If they stay with one parent, it usually is a mother-headed family. Among the children sleeping in the open air or in dilapidated buildings, we counted only 5 girls and no child younger than 10 years (Table 2.1).

It is hard to aggregate these numbers, statistically, into the total number of street-living children, since only a selection of neighbourhoods was included in the survey and because children *of* the street are generally harder to contact than children *working on* the street. Comparing this number with a census done in 2008 by street educators in Lima (Voces para Latinoamérica and Sinergia por la Infancia 2009), together with our qualitative observations and information from street workers, we estimate the number of street-living children in Lima to be probably less than 1,000 (Ordóñez 1995: 75; Vara Horna 2002; Tejada Ripalda 2005: 37;

Table 2.1 Usual sleeping place of all street children in both cities

	Total	Percentage (%)
Both parents	436	37.2
One single parent	329	28.1
Other family members	136	11.6
Hostel/dormitory/rented place	169	14.4
Open air	37	3.2
Deserted building	8	0.7
Hogar children's home	13	1.1
Otherwise	8	0.7
No response	35	3.0
	1,171	100

Source IREWOC (2012), Tablas Estadísticas—Niños y Niñas de la calle en Lima y Cusco (Table 4)

Voces 2009). Based on observations in our study, we estimate the number of street-living children in Cusco to be around 100.¹

Most street-working and street-living children come from poor families, usually either first or second generation migrants. Sometimes the children themselves are first generation migrants and still have parents living in the countryside. In Lima, although 57 % of the interviewed children were born in the city, a significant number (29 %) was born in la Sierra, the central highlands of Peru, which includes also the poorest departments of Peru; the rest was born in the coastal area and in the Amazon region. They had migrated fairly recently. At the moment of the survey, one fifth of all children had their mother living outside Lima. In Cusco, 40 % had migrated to Cusco recently, either alone or with their parents. In Cusco, like in Lima, a quarter of the children lived without a mother and even one third lived without a father. There thus appeared to be a strong correlation between dysfunctional and broken families and the need for a child to work on the streets: more than half of all the street-working children in the sociological survey (62 % in Lima and 53 % in Cusco) did not have a complete nuclear family.

In Lima, many more boys than girls are working or living on the streets, respectively 63 and 37 % (see also Table 2.2 for general information on numbers). The gender difference hardly applies to the younger categories: among the youngest children, girls are even in the majority. The gender difference is marked in the age category 14–17. In this cohort, there are twice as many boys as girls. Within the

¹ Other studies, done by NGO's, have higher estimates. A study done in Cusco in 1996 by the NGO ensing Maki estimated a number of 3,130 street-working children between 6 and 17 years old (Baufumé and Astete 1998). In 2009 Cusco's night shelter for street children, Qosqo Maki, received 179 individual children, ranging from 5 to 17 years old. This gives an indication of the number of children living in the street in Cusco. However, most of these children stayed only for a short time, or at intervals. This shows the fluidity of the street child population.

Table 2.2 Gender/age of all street children enumerated in Cusco and Lima

Age	Girls	Boys	Lima	Cusco
5–9	94	87	122	59
10–13	164	172	295	141
14–17	199	352	410	141
Total	457	611	827	341

Source IREWOC (2012), Tablas Estadísticas—Niños y Niñas de la calle en Lima y Cusco (sección 1)

population of street-living children proper the gender difference is bigger: 89 % are boys, while just 11 % are girls. Compared to Lima, the difference between the number of boys and girls working on Cusco's streets is relatively small, but within the population of street-living children this difference was bigger: 82 % were boys and 18 % girls. Girls thus are still a minority, both *on* the street and *in* the street. One of the explanations is that girls are more resilient than boys and may cope with problems at home for a longer time, even when they are abused or maltreated. Besides, girls generally may feel more emotionally connected to family members and feel more responsible to help. Also, even after girls leave home, they generally find family contact more important than boys do and may find distant family members to live with. Girls are expected to stay at home with their parents, in the private space, while the streets are an already accepted domain for boys. Lancy (2010) argues that street kids are more likely to be male, because girls are both more useful and valued at home and, simultaneously more vulnerable and likely to become 'damaged' in the street. The street girl's vulnerability for dangers such as sexual abuse and violence is possibly one of the reasons why more girls than boys are afraid to walk away from the (reasonably safe) home environment. In the case of extreme problems at home more girls opt for a life in a children's or girls' home instead of the street. An additional explanation for the low number of street girls in Cusco could be their 'invisibility' on the streets, for example, because of their employment in more hidden sectors like prostitution in brothels or their living with a 'sugar daddy' (Steel 2008: 72; Woan et al. 2013: 3) (Table 2.2).

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<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-11721-8>

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An Inside View of Hazards and Expectations of Street
Children in Peru

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2015, VII, 59 p., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-11721-8