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**Street Children in Kurzeme District of Riga City,
their Patterns of Sexual Behavior and Substance
Abuse**

Project: Rapid Assessment and Response

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October, 2000

This study was financed by UNICEF

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STUDY DESCRIPTION

Acuteness of the problem

The discussion with regard to children not attending schools, rambling the streets and begging there is going on for several years in Latvia. Children spending the most of their time on streets are often referred to as “street children” even though it is quite possible that the majority of these children spend night at home (it should be noted that only a small number of the children have terminated their relationship with their families completely and live in basements, heating mains and other places).

Due to evidence indicating increase in number of children on the street several institutions like the United Nations Development Program, the Soros Foundation-Latvia, a number of NGOs in Latvia as well as the Rapid Assessment and Response Working Group that was established during a training seminar in Jūrmala (February, 2000) have included the problem of street children in the scope of their activities. Rapid Situation Assessment and Response is a set of approaches for assessing problems of a defined target group in a defined territory in order to find solutions within this defined territory or organization.

Having admitted that the problem of street children is acute in the whole territory of Latvia the established Rapid Assessment and Response Working Group planned to perform an assessment study in Kurzeme district of Riga City (excluding Bolderāja). There were elaboration foreruns for the improvements to the life of street children already – the Council of Kurzeme district had established a day center for children from socially unfavorable families. Thus the results and recommendations from the study of the Rapid Assessment and Response Working Group could be used later to deliver successful and efficient help to street children.

Objectives

- 1) to characterize the overall situation with regard to street children in Riga focusing on Kurzeme district (except Bolderāja);
- 2) to define the most acute problems both from the point of view of children and various institutions;
- 3) to study peculiarities of substance abuse and sexual behavior among street children in Kurzeme district (except Bolderāja);
- 4) to draft recommendations for institutions and organizations dealing with solutions for street children paying special attention to aspects pertaining to activities of the day center in Kurzeme district.

Study activities:

The following activities were performed within the framework of the study in order to define the situation of street children in Kurzeme district of Riga city, the degree of their dependence on various drug and toxic substances as well the key problems in the area:

- 1) two swoops to register the children on streets in Kurzeme district and to estimate – using census calculation methods – the realistic total number of children on the streets at a particular time in Kurzeme district;
- 2) analysis of secondary data on the available statistics and studies pertaining to children and specifically – to street children;
- 3) in-depth interviews with children from the streets in the premises of social assistance service and children's shelter.

Study was performed in August – September, 2000

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ANALYSIS OF STATISTICS AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

Statistic registration of street children is a very difficult task. It was singled out in previous studies that calculations with regard to street children could be only approximate. In accordance with the official data there are **340** street children in Latvia having their main socialization on the street. The number is calculated assuming that 0.013% of the total population are street children¹. As this figure may change along with various definitions and due to the absence of a definite scheme for street children registration various sources refer to various totals of street children – from a couple of hundreds up to 30.000.

Data from Riga Municipal Police highlight certain trends in numbers of run-away children and children-beggars: there were 93 vagrant and begging children detained in the first quarter of 1997 whereas in 1998 – 193 children. In 1999 there were 114 children in the vagrant and begging children follow-up scheme of the Riga Municipal Police, 14 out of these – in Kurzeme district, while in the year **2000 there were 114 and 12** out this total in Kurzeme district.

¹ “Bērnī un Ģimenes Latvijā” (*Children and families in Latvia*), ed. Taņa Lāce, Rīga, 1999

The survey by UNICEF National Committee “A Child in the Street” (carried out in 1997 wherein 62 street children in Riga were surveyed) gives an idea about street children in Riga. Boys on the streets are three times more often than girls, the age group represented the most often is 9-11 year olds. More than a half of the children are from single-parent families, the level of unemployment is very high there, and majority of these children are from families with three and more children. The rate of conflicts in families is very high, 44% of the children name this as a reason for living on the street. Almost a half of the children do not attend school or attend it irregularly and mention that the main reason for this is the lack of money in their families as well as dislike to studies. Majority of the children have never attended a physician for any check-up though they do admit having headaches, coughs, colds and other health problems. Street children form the groups of 8-14 usually with strict hierarchy therein.

Generally speaking, the information on substance abuse among street children is poor. Data on the state of children and associated problems (morbidity and dependence) is available, unfortunately the appropriate differentiation is absent. The following is a statistical review on health and addiction problems of children and adolescents on the whole that indirectly gives an insight into problems of street children in this respect.

Drug abuse among adolescents

Statistical data provided by the State Center for Prevention of Addictions show that the number of under-age people with diagnoses like “alcohol addict” or “excessive alcohol abuse” under ambulatory observation is increasing (table 1). Number of crimes committed by intoxicated under-age people is large (table 2).

There were 823 children and adolescents in the register of addictions patients and drug abusers at the end of 1999 or 32.3% out of the total number of these patients and drug abusers. The number of under-age people with diagnosis “addiction” has increased 1.5 times in contrast with the figures of 1998 (table 3). The number of deceased youth due to causes like abuse of drugs and psychotropic substances has also increased – there were 7 cases in 1998 whereas in 1999 – 11 (table 4).

Analyzing statistical data from the State Center for Prevention of Addictions on the registered use of drug substances among the children and adolescents of Kurzeme district in Riga it can be stated that there are 82 young adults resident in Kurzeme district registered as alcohol addicts. 25.6% of these young adults are Latvian, 63.3% are Russian and 6.1% - representatives of other nationalities. One fourth of the young adults have no definite occupation. Out of the total of 82 people surveyed 61 were

male, 21 female. 59 young adults had incomplete primary education, 23 – primary education. Two of the registered children lived together with drug addicts (table 5).

Table 1. Number of adolescents with diagnosed alcohol addiction, a case of alcohol-induced psychosis and excessive alcohol use.

| Year | Alcohol abuse | Alcohol psychosis | Excessive alcohol abuse |
|------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 1996 | 8 | 3 | 193 |
| 1997 | 14 | 4 | 253 |
| 1998 | 19 | - | 423 |
| 1999 | 22 | 2 | 394 |

Source: State Addictions Prevention Center. Spread and Consequences of Alcohol, Drug and Nicotine Abuse in Latvia. Riga, 2000 (As to the data of Ministry of Interior).

Table 2. Rates for crimes committed under intoxication from alcohol.

| Number of | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Crimes committed by the under-aged | 2171 | 2591 | 3025 | 3634 | 4023 | 3757 |
| Crimes committed under intoxication from alcohol (out of the above) | 593 | 666 | 726 | 835 | 927 | 703 |
| Number of under age people that have committed crime | 1728 | 2626 | 2713 | 2800 | 3030 | 2712 |
| Out of these – under intoxication from alcohol | 600 | 739 | 764 | 660 | 766 | 547 |

Source: State Addictions Prevention Center. Spread and Consequences of Alcohol, Drug and Nicotine Abuse in Latvia. Riga, 2000 (As to the data of Ministry of Interior).

Table 3. Children and adolescents in the register of SCPA with diagnosed addictions, intoxications or substance abuse

| | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
|---|------|------|------|------|
| Dependence on drugs and psychotropic substances | 80 | 154 | 162 | 241 |
| Drug and psychotropic substance abuse | 350 | 455 | 536 | 582 |

| | | | | |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Total | 430 | 609 | 698 | 823 |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Source: State Addictions Prevention Center. Spread and Consequences of Alcohol, Drug and Nicotine Abuse in Latvia. Rīga, 2000 (As to the data of Ministry of Interior).

Table 4. Mortality rates due to drug and psychotropic substance abuse

| Year | Total mortality rate | Age group 0-14 inclusive | Age group 15-19 inclusive |
|------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1994 | 55 | - | 4 |
| 1995 | 42 | - | 6 |
| 1996 | 41 | - | 8 |
| 1997 | 45 | 1 | 2 |
| 1998 | 53 | 2 | 5 |
| 1999 | 115 | - | 11 |

Source: State Addictions Prevention Center. Spread and Consequences of Alcohol, Drug and Nicotine Abuse in Latvia. Riga, 2000 (As to the data of Ministry of Interior).

Table 5. Distribution of children registered at the State Center for Prevention of Addiction for substance abuse. Kurzeme district.

| Abuse substances | Children (0-14) | Adolescents (15-17) | Total |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------|
| <i>Alcohol</i> | 13 | 17 | 30 |
| <i>Opiates</i> | - | 12 | 12 |
| <i>Indian cannabis</i> | - | 13 | 13 |
| <i>Sedatives</i> | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| <i>Amphetamines</i> | - | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Hallucinogenic substances</i> | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| <i>Solvents</i> | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| TOTAL | 25 | 57 | 82 |

Source: the State Center for Prevention of Addictions

HIV spread in Latvia and occurrence of STDs in Riga

Sexually transmitted disease – syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia of urinary-genital system – morbidity rates among teenagers are illustrated by the below figures.

Syphilis

There was a total of 5 syphilis cases registered in the age group of 13-14 year olds in Latvia in 1998 and 199 – in the age group of 15-17. Whereas in the first three months of 1999 2 syphilis cases were registered in the age group of 13-14 and 45 cases in that of 15-17. Syphilis morbidity rates are detailed in table 9 below.

Gonorrhoea

There were 4 gonorrhoea cases registered in the age group of 13-14 year olds in Latvia in 1998 and 81 in the group of 15-17 year olds. In 1998 there were 5 gonorrhoea cases registered in the group of 13-14 and 61 cases in the group of 15-16 year olds. Gonorrhoea morbidity rates are detailed in table 10 below.

Chlamydia of urinary-genital system

There were 3 chlamydia of urinary-genital system cases registered in Latvia in 1998 in the age group of 13-14 year olds and 68 cases in that of 15-17. In the first three months of 1999 there was one girl infected with chlamydia infection of urinary-genital system in the group of 13-14 year olds and 27 young adults in the group of 15-16 year olds. Chlamydia infection morbidity rates are illustrated in table 8 below.

HIV

From 1997 to April 30, 2000 there have been 16 HIV infected children registered. Ten of these children were infected by sharing a needle. This is the most frequent infection spread pattern in the age group of 15-17 year olds. The total number of HIV infected cases in the age group under 20 is 78 (tables 6 and 7).

Table 6. Distribution of HIV infected children and young adults according to the age groups.

| Year | Age group (years of age) | | | | Total |
|------|--------------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 0-2 | 3-14 | 15-17 | 18-20 | |
| 1996 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| 1997 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1998 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 16 | 18 |
| 1999 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 30 | 36 |
| 2000 (as of April 30) | 0 | 0 | 6 | 11 | 17 |
| Total | 1 | 0 | 15 | 62 | 78 |

Source: the State Center for Prevention of Addictions

Table 7. Main HIV spread patterns among children and young adults

| Pattern | Age group | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | 0-17 | 18-20 |
| Homosexual contacts | 2 | 5 |
| Heterosexual contacts | 1 | 5 |
| Vertical transmission (mother-child) | 1 | 0 |
| Intravenous drug users | 10 | 49 |
| Undefined | 2 | 3 |
| Total | 16 | 62 |

Source: the State Center for Prevention of Addictions

Table 8. Chlamydia of urinary-genital system morbidity rates in Riga

| | 13-14 y.o. | | 15- 17 y.o. | | Total |
|----------|------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | |
| 1997 | - | 1 | 10 | 52 | 63 |
| 1998 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 35 | 46 |
| 1999. | - | 1 | 4 | 11 | 16 |
| 3 months | | | | | |

Table 9. Syphilis morbidity rates in Riga

| | 13-14 y.o. | | 15- 17 y.o. | | Total |
|-------|------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | |
| 1997 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 40 | 53 |
| 1998 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 36 | 49 |
| 1999. | - | - | 2 | 15 | 17 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 3 months | | | | | |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|

Table 10. Gonorrhoea morbidity rates in Riga

| | 13-14 y.o. | | 15- 17 y.o. | | Total |
|----------|------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | |
| 1997 | 3 | 2 | 18 | 28 | 51 |
| 1998 | -- | 1 | 10 | 12 | 23 |
| 1999 | -- | - | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| 3 months | | | | | |

Summary

The analysis of statistical data and those of the previous surveys show that a survey on substance abuse and sexual behavior patterns among street children available to public at large is non-existent that accounts for the uniqueness of this survey. The survey of UNICEF National Committee "A Child in the Street" (performed in 1997; covering 62 children) provided a mere insight into social and demographic characteristics of street children. It brought out that there were three times as many boys on the streets than girls, the age group represented the most often is that of 9-11, street children come from single-parent families or families with many children with high conflict occurrence rate.

The objective of the survey on the following pages was to define the situation with regard to substance abuse and sexual behavior patterns among street children. Acuteness of such survey is explained by the increasing ratio of young adults among the HIV infected in Latvia needle sharing being the main pattern of infection spread.

SWOOP IN STREETS OF KURZEME DISTRICT IN ORDER TO DETERMINE THE NUMBER OF STREET CHILDREN

There were two swoops in order to determine the number of street children that spent their time on the street from 5p.m. to 10p.m.

According to the information acquired during the swoops it is to be concluded that in this time period (August 2000) there was an average of 803 children on streets in Kurzeme district, because during the first swoop there were 167 children met (A1) and 187 during the second (A2). There were 38 children met repeatedly (S). The formula used for estimation of the number of population within a defined territory and social group was: $N=A1 \times A2/S$

This calculation is quite general since the fact that children move freely from district to district has to be taken into consideration. At the same time it indicated that the children spend quite a lot of time on the street because they have no other place to go.

Description of the swoop:

Responsible person: Dr. Artūrs Vāvere

Date:

Swoop 1: August 17, 2000 (Thursday)

Swoop 2: August 19, 2000 (Saturday)

Participants:

Swoop 1: Artūrs Vāvere, Dinārs Tokarskis

Swoop 2: Artūrs Vāvere, Andris Vāvere

Means of transport:

Swoop 1: bicycle

Swoop 2: bicycle

Duration:

Swoop 1: 5p.m. – 10p.m. (3 hours)

Swoop 2: 6p.m. – 10p.m. (4 hours)

Route:

3 Dārza Street – Kuldīga Street (through the yard along Vocational School No.19) - Daugavgrīva Street – along Buļļu Street to Dzegužkalns – Dzegužu Street - Daugavgrīvas Street – Motoru Street – Reņģes Street – Dagmāras Street – Slokas Street – Nordeķu Park – Buļļu Street – Saulgožu Street – through the yards to Sloka Street – Secondary School No. 69 – Purva Street – Tapešu Street – Slokas Street – Kleistu Street – yards along Anniņmuiža Boulevard – through the yards to Jūrmala Avenue – Tapešu Street – Kuldīgas Street – through the yards to Elvīra Street – Melnsila Street – Baldones Street – through the yards to Kristapa Street – through the yards to Āgenskalns Street – Slokas Street – Baldones Street – yards of Vīlipa Street – along Secondary School No. 34 to Dārza Street – Morica Street – Jaunsaules Street – Dzirciema Street – Purva Street – Slokas Street – Dārza Street 3.

Materials for distribution

1st swoop:

- a) Booklet “COOL condoms” (in Latvian, Russian) – was distributed to everyone;
- b) information on children’s rights – in Latvian;
- c) Condoms “Life Styles”;
- d) Lolly-pops – 50 pieces.

2nd swoop:

- a) booklet “Safe Love – That Is Love” in Latvian and Russian – was distributed to everyone;
- b) Condoms “Life Styles” and “Durex”;
- c) Chewing gum – 50 pieces.

Quantity of distributed materials:

1st swoop: 167 booklets “COOL condoms” – 95 in Russian and 72 in Latvian;

2nd swoop: 183 booklets “Safe Love – That Is Love” – 102 in Russian and 81 in Latvian.

Quantity of materials distributed repeatedly:

38 young adults received materials repeatedly during the second swoop.

INTERVIEWS WITH STREET CHILDREN: SURVEY DESCRIPTION

Method: 9 in-depth interviews with street children were performed within the framework of the study. Street children were recruited in three places: streets in Kurzeme district (3 interviews), Social assistance service of Kurzeme district in Riga city (3 interviews) and children’s shelter on Marsa Avenue (3 interviews).

The main issues to be clarified during the interview were: description, characteristics of the child’s family, residence, state of health, diet, school attendance, leisure activities, friends, sexual experience, substance abuse, knowledge of drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.

Interviews with children were performed by the members of the working group: Gita Gaņģe, Artūrs Vāvere.

The report was prepared by Inese Šūpule.

Interview Description: Analyzing the results obtained during the interviews the specific characteristics of the subject as well as those of child’s age and experience should be taken into consideration. Interviewers described the respondents’ answers as “More untrue than true”, because the respondents gave answers that seemed to be more what could be desirable than realistic. Children sought for explanatory excuses with regard to their behavior while responding during the interviews. All the respondents had vagrant experience while some of them tried to avoid admitting the fact.

Respondents were offered tea, received informative materials, condoms; children that were found on the street were paid 5 lats for an interview.

To give a general respondent description – children behaved freely during the interviews and seemed to be quite interested. Children interviewed in the shelter seemed to be less interested to answer questions. Other people were present during two of the performed interviews. Names of respondents are changed in the report.

INTERVIEWS WITH STREET CHILDREN: RESPONDENT DESCRIPTION

Evaluation of respondents' honesty:

Victor, 12: Spoke silently, indirectly.

Jānis, 13: Talked a lot, boasted, told stories, though was trying to avoid many subjects that he did not want to talk about, the stories about himself were contradictory, he revealed more facts during the successive days of the interview (interviews were going on for 8 days).

Evita, 13: Answered gladly, seemed to be frank though tried to avoid certain issues like her sexual experience.

Vija, 13: Behaved freely. A social worker from AIDS Prevention Center was present during the interview.

Genādijs, 10: Did not answer the questions often, did not perceive questions often.

Aldis, 12: Seemed to answer quite frankly and sincerely to the questions.

Karīna, 15: Attitude to the interview: positive, interested.

Mārtiņš, 13: Was open and not hiding anything. Jānis (13) was present during the interview.

Serjoža, 17: Was open and was not hiding anything special, talked freely about all the subjects.

INTERVIEWS WITH STREET CHILDREN: SURVEY RESULTS

I Vagrancy experience

Reasons and the duration of vagrancy

Serjoža (17) had the longest experience of being on the street – he’s been there since the age of 9. The main reason of his going away from home is the fact of mother’s drinking (he has no father). The other boy with the longest vagrancy standing was Jānis (13) leaving his home on the cases when he was in conflict with his father (father had hit him several times, a couple of times even beaten him up). As to the rest of the children – vagrancy was somewhat an episodic habit. It is quite characteristic that they run away from homes after cases when a father or step-father has beaten them or their mother has been drinking. The children interviewed often came from single-parent families, the so-called “problematic” families wherein one or both of the parents drink. Two of the children tried to avoid admitting runaway cases (Aldis, 12 and Vija, 13).

Serjoža, 17: Lives on the street since the age of 9². Says that his mother was drinking and beating him so that he was unable to stand it. “Whenever she drinks, I’d run away from home”. Since age of 6 his father resides in Lithuania. He has a younger brother, four years old, who lives with his mother, and Serjoža takes care of him occasionally. The police has detained Serjoža some 20 times.

Evita, 13: This was her second time running away from home. She mentioned her bad relationship with her step-father as the main reason for that, saying, “Step-father drinks and gropes all the time. Often beats us, hits”. When asked what was her mother’s opinion on that, the girl returned, “What can she say? She loves him very much. She does not care”. Evita seems to have quite a serious conflict with her step-father because he is coming home drunk, he is splitting hairs over nothing, and is groping often. Every night whenever she is home Evita is ready to run away (her sports shoes and clothes are always ready). She turns for help to a social worker, earlier she used to call the police. “I used to call the police earlier, when he touched me. He’s got three notices already. Though it is all good for nothing!” She says that her relationship with her mother is very good, however, she avoids meeting stepfather, and her real father lives in Russia since Evita was 6. Evita attends discotheques regularly, goes to “Kardināls” (“The Cardinal”), for example. “Mother knows, that I will not come and expects me only the next evening or one after the next. I’d go away on Friday and she’d expect me only by Sunday”.

² Translator: the grammatical and stylistic peculiarities in children’s answers were sustained in order to reflect the original style of their speech. Same refers to grammatical tense forms, jargonisms and certain “modifications” in language that could (and should) be attributed to the social and educational background of the speakers.

“It’s boring to go to disco with a bunch of people. They always get drunk there. With boys I’d go to sing karaoke in “Zaļā Vārna” (The Green Crow). Boys know how to behave in a more cultural way. Girls do not give a damn what will people think.”

Genādijs, 10: Mentioned his mother’s drinking as the reason for vagrancy. Told us how his mother had been drinking for 2 months and therefore he had run away from home. He told how he has been wandering streets till late until was detained later. Also told us how his neighbor had given him food, that he had two sisters (one – 7, the other does not walk yet), how his mother was unemployed, and father worked in a sawmill. Both his grandfather and grandmother drink.

Mārtiņš, 13, has been wandering the streets for some time only, the reason – his stepfather who is beating him. The longest time he has been wandering around – a week – lived in garden houses then. Runs away and bums around some two times a year.

Jānis, 13 explained that his father would beat him up, once the father had broken his hand, Jānis had been bleeding bleeding, though relationship with his mother was good. “I have normal, charming relationship with my mother. Father does not hit me anymore, because he knows – if he’d do that, I’d be gone in an instant. Does not come close anymore”. “Now I wait until the old one will pass away. So that I have my peace.” One of his sisters is imprisoned now for drug injection.

Viktors, 12. The police has detained him already twice for walking around at night. Came to Marsa Avenue from Alīse Street. Has no father, his mother is a seamstress. Lives only with his mother.

Karīna (15) had run away from home herself too, though told more about the other children as well as how she and her friends had been trying to help people on the streets.

Karīna, 15, does not tell about herself much though tells us about other children on the street that she meets in the yard. “I do not know where street children can get any help. They sit on the street the whole day and do what they want. Where the parents are – I do not know, sit somewhere and drink! Children would not listen to them anymore, they do not care. They grow up full of hatred. Though if the parents change, the children would change instantly,

too”. “Of course, if a child gets into a bad gang, then the child will just go down, will start using alcohol, and who knows what. Let’s say we have a girl. We keep her on her feet, we do not let her fall. She’d do one prank and then we all would come together, so that she wouldn’t get, she is alone anyway, we all try to help out. She’s got problems at home with her parents. It seems to me that in our times there are quite a few of these children. I’d say that this is a big problem. Children bum around. They have nothing to eat at home. They are vagrant, they beg, they pinch things, they are a lot more endangered than we are. Let’s say – to be a bum out there. I have seen it from my own experience. They lay down in a stairway and sleep there. And let’s say there is a drug addict that lives there. Or to sexually abuse a child – I will feed you, you come with me – and then abuses. Again – there are other parents that send their children out on the street to beg, so that they have enough for alcohol”.

Night Shelters

Children that have run away from home spend the night everywhere – in the railway station, in the central market, in trains, trams, trolleybuses, basements, gateways, attics. In order not to be detained they explain the police, that they’ve missed the last train. At the same time the conductors of public means of transport all know these street children by face and let them spend a night in trains, trams and trolleybuses.

Jānis, 13, lives and sleeps in attics, trains and basements. “I could go wherever I’d like. I could go to the railway station and stay there. I could go to some stairway and stay”. When in the railway station – they sleep on chairs “indoors, where it is warmer”. They tell the police that they’ve missed the last train. Sometimes they stay with strangers in their flats.

Vija, 13, has spent a night in the central market.

Serjoža, 17, spends nights in trams, trolleybuses, in stairways. “All the conductors know me. They know I have no money, that I am homeless”.

Attitude towards shelters

Almost all of the children interviewed had had a chance to visit the so-called vagrant children orientated institutions. The shelter on Alīses Street

was mentioned the most often (3a Alīses Street – Under-age Prevention Center) and the shelter next to the railway station as well. The latter received positive references whereas Alīses Street did not receive a single positive reference from the children. They told us how the policemen in Alīses Street were laughing at children, how they hit them and prevented them from using the bathroom. An opinion that the children need a place to stay was expressed repeatedly and a place to spend their time would be highly desired, too.

Jānis, 13, has been in Rēzekne boarding-school, has run away from there, then spent 2-3 months in Daugavpils due to fighting and avoiding classes. “It is like a mental hospital there! Street doors without handles. I was going to run away from there. But...When I was coming in, a girl ran away the very day. But how far will you run away?” After Daugavpils Jānis was in psychiatric-neurological hospital in Jelgava. “My papa sent me there for check-ups. My behavior there was charming. And everything is all right with my head, too. Sent me back to school, I had normal behavior there. Had no fights there”.

He has been in the shelter next to the railway station to what he refers as “normal”. Now – should there be need – he’d go to this shelter. Did not go there earlier since was unaware of it’s existence, “I did not know that shelter. I sat and begged and one lady came up and told me, “Come on, come with me, let’s go to the shelter!” She worked in that shelter”. He is aware that there is a shelter in Jelgava, too, though does not know where exactly.

Alīse Street is bad, home is good.

The shelter next to the railway station is “normal – recent renovation”. They get sent to the one next to the railway station when there is a conflict in family, but to Alīse Street – when run away from home.

Evita, 13, does not like Alīse Street, because the children are allowed to use the bathroom only twice a day and there are no door handles.

Viktors, 12, dislikes Alīse Street where he was brought by the police.

Genādijs, 10, dislikes shelter; he’d prefer being home, because it is better there.

Mārtiņš, 13, has been in the police once for wandering around. Was sent to Alīse Street. Then got spanked at home.

Earning money

The most popular way of earning money among the street children is stealing and begging. Two of the boys earn money providing sexual services. Only one of the boys (the oldest one of all the children interviewed) has ever worked. Children spend the money earned differently – frequently – on sweets and computer games. The children eat usually at their acquaintances' in the market, or ask for a piece of sausage and bread. Shoplifting is common – have stolen bread; have also stolen food from their parents, acquaintances, in gardens. Begging is referred to as easy way of earning at least 2 lats a day. Boys that earn money providing sexual services refer to this as an acceptable way of making money, “If only you get paid, why not?”

Genādijs, 10, has neither stolen anything nor ever begged. Looks for money in shops, on the floor and has found 2 lats.

Stealing

Jānis, 13, when asked about stealing responded, “Not me, not anymore. I do not even put my hand to it. It is not mine, I do not take it,” even though he has been stealing in shops and from his teacher, grandmother, sisters and others. Then during another interview referred to a case when participated in stealing a car and justifies himself saying that “I did not get inside the car. This is a great difference. If you get inside, it is stealing, if you are just a lookout – it’s another thing”. Has also been “imprisoned” for that.

Viktors, 12, Has pinched things in shops.

Mārtiņš 13, Has pinched foodstuffs in shops.

Serjoža, 17, has stolen things and has been caught at the age of 15-16, has been imprisoned for half a year. Prison guards have been scoffing at him and have beaten him up, especially the under-aged have been beaten up. It also happened that some other boys were sexually abused by the guards, “Some 3-4 people were beaten up, raped”. Now he is not willing to steal anything, he’d prefer finding a job. Has also stolen things from friends, that had been drunk (shoes, cigarettes). Has never participated in burglaries, but has stolen things in gardens. Sold everything immediately.

Begging

Serjoža, 17, “Whenever I am hungry, I go the market and ask for bread and sausage. It does happen that I’d ask for money from passers-by. Sometimes it happens that they invite me to their place – to eat and to sleep”. The day before Serjoža had dined with an acquaintance that works in a bakery. Has slept together with this acquaintance (62). Has happened to work in the market, helped out in a stall there. Earned 5 lats a day. Currently works too – carries bags with whiskey.

Jānis, 13 begs whenever he has run away from home, earning 2-3 lats a day that are spent on ice cream and machine-games. Begs at Interpegro shop, McDonald’s, “Centrs” Department store. Begs to get money for sweets and computer games, not for food.

Sex for money

Serjoža, 17, earns money regularly providing sexual services, started this “business” at the age of 9 when first agreed to do something like that. “Want money – work to get it”. Someone came up to me on the street at the railway station, said, “Want to earn 10 lats? Help me to get some pleasure?” Did not pay for that the second time.

Earlier used to earn money like this more often, now – less often. The last time of its kind had been the day before the previous day. “Why not earn something? I did it. I got 10 lats”. He is both looking for clients himself (calls and offers) and also accepting offers from strangers on the street. He’s got permanent clientele, “Familiar people with money come and find me all the time”.

Sometimes earns money for bringing people together – finds some acquaintances that would agree to provide sexual services. There are some 300 (?) young adults that earn money like this on the street. The main reason for that – they have no parents, no chance to earn money, which is typical for street children. One can meet clients everywhere – at the railway station, at circus, in Old Riga, at the Freedom monument.

School attendance

Three of the interviewed children had very poor education for their age and they were not attending school. Serjoža, 17 years old had completed 4 classes, Viktors, 12 years old was not attending school for two years

already, Genādijs, 10 had completed only one class and did not know either how to write or read.

Viktors, 12, has not been at school for two years though admits that he liked it there.

Serjoža, 17, has completed 4 classes.

Genādijs, 10, completed one class only at school, admits that he never liked it there. Now his mother would not let him go to school. Does not know either how to read or write. Does not want to go to school, at the same time does not know what would he like to do.

Aldis, 12, has no problems with school attendance.

Vija, 13, does attend school, but there are quite a few classmates that do not attend it. Vija does not know what do they do, where do they go, but the teachers are unable to do anything about it.

II KNOWLEDGE ABOUT STDs, AIDS AND HIV

Children's answers to questions regarding sexually transmitted diseases especially HIV/AIDS showed that the degree of their competence in this respect was quite low, they had heard of several names though did not know anything else about the diseases. The eldest children like Karīna (15) and Serjoža (17) showed the highest expertise. The only one that had learned about the diseases at school during health education lesson was Aldis (12).

Jānis, 13, does not know what either HIV or AIDS or other STDs are except syphilis. He had heard of this illness though did not know anything else. "You catch "syphel" running around without washing yourself in the evening, sleeping in all kinds of shit. Then you get pimples all over". At school during the health education class he had heard of scabies and fungal infections.

Evita, 13, had heard of diseases like AIDS, syphilis, though did not know anything else. Did not know what HIV was saying, "I have read but nothing stays in brain". With regard to syphilis she knew that the whole body is covered in little pimples when you catch it. She dislikes the health education class and says, "It were better if we did not have the health education classes, they are boring, what do we need them for?"

Vija, 13, does not know anything and has not heard anything about STDs (thinks that rape is a sexually transmitted disease). When the names of these diseases are mentioned, she recognizes the names and admits that STDs spread from drugs. She also has heard that one can prevent STDs using condoms. She had had health education class at school and she said it was “normal”.

Viktors, 12, does not know anything about STDs.

Genādijs, 10, does not know anything about STDs.

Aldis, 12, has heard of AIDS and STDs, after being prompted recognizes a term “syphilis” and is aware that condoms should be used during sexual contacts for prevention purposes. He first heard of terms AIDS and HIV during health education classes at school.

Karīna, 15, admits, “AIDS, of course, is terrible. But we are to blame ourselves only. Why do they need drugs? It is all just because of drugs. So it started. One sleeps with another, another with another. Well, if you are infected, then just do not touch those drugs! Haven’t we heard enough of those horrors on TV, on radio. I consider it to be horrible and we are to blame only ourselves. Had we been more careful, paying more attention to our health, everything would’ve taken quite a different course”.

Mārtiņš, 13, has heard of AIDS and HIV, does not know any other diseases, cannot differentiate between AIDS and HIV, whether these are different things or not.

Serjoža, 17, could mention several STDs – syphilis, gonorrhoea, AIDS, HIV. Was quite informed about these diseases.

III SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

Only Serjoža, 17, the oldest of the respondents had had “normal” sexual relations, he was the one that also had a girlfriend. None of the others had had sexual relations with representatives of the opposite sex. Though it does not mean that they had not had sexual experience. It was stated that two of the respondents – Jānis, 13, and Serjoža, 17, provided sexual services regularly to grown-up men and had been sexually abused repeatedly. Jānis had been filmed and photographed nude. He also had

had more serious sexual abuse experience though he was reluctant to provide details with regard to that, has suffered from violence.

Sexual experience

Jānis, 13, speaks indirectly, says that he is not interested in these kinds of things and things of the kind are not discussed with his friends. Has been once with a girl from the 8th grade in a toilet. Does not masturbate.

Evita, 13, has not had sexual relationship herself. As to her – within the circle of her friends all the boys had had sexual relations, though none of the girls. Thinks, that the most desirable time for the first sexual intercourse is the age of 16-17. “I know a girl. She slept, so and so. Now walks around seven months pregnant and her mother wants to throw her out from the flat to go wherever she wants”. Evita herself knows that to prevent undesired pregnancy one could use condoms and tablets”.

Vija, 13, has had no sexual relations, though she does not know anything about her friends with regard to this area.

Aldis, 12, has had no sexual relations, neither have any of her acquaintances, friends. “They say they’ve been kissing, but I do not believe that”. Has heard about sexual abuse from TV program “Kriminalinform³”.

Mārtiņš, 13, has had no sexual relations.

Karīna, 15, “I think it is too early for me. I do not think it to be good that someone with 12 years will jump in the bed and think “Oh, now I’m a heroine!” but then will regret again. Why do I need that? I will be patient, I can deal without it. And when the time will come – everything will come!”

Serjoža, 17, admits that parallel to his sexual relations for money he has a girlfriend that is already his second girlfriend. He had the first sexual contact with a woman at the age of 14. He uses condoms. Has regular sexual contacts with another guy his age. Does regular STD tests – thanks to an acquaintance in out-patient clinic – free of charge. Has lived with a friend for a month. Explains that they have taken sauna together, have slept. Serjoža

³ Translator: A TV program on TV3 IN Latvia “Kriminalinform” – Criminal Information. Overall criminal situation analysis with pictures of the detained, stories and frames from the place of action.

was 14, his friend – 26 at the time. He's still meeting him. Has lived with the total of 10 people, the longest time together – 11 months.

Sex with older men

Jānis, 13, has an acquaintance at whose place he can stay in Riga. When living with this man, sleeps with him in bed naked. At first was quite reluctant to tell about this and said that he has had no sexual relations though later admits that sleeps every night next to the man nude.

“I had run away from home that day and was riding the tram No.11 that day. It was 12 at night. I was sitting all the time. The tram-man said to me, “You, there, at the back, the little one, come to the front”. Brought me to his place. I went in, and he told me to to make myself home. I ate, played computer games, and went to bed. So I started living with him. Lived for 3 weeks. Then one day I got sick of it. And they called the cobs. Had to go home. And what for am I going to live with him? Brought me to the same Alīse Street. And they came to pick me up”.

When asked to evaluate what he liked about the acquaintance, Jānis admitted, that he liked this “godfather”, because “he buys Everything” he wants and Jānis can behave freely. The only thing he disliked was that what happened during the night, but he could stand it because he buys everything Jānis wants.

Sex for money

Jānis, 13, “When I was begging, said, ““Let’s go to my place!” so and so. But I did not agree. Man. Old. “If you have no place to live, come and live with me!”” During the first day of interviews he said that he did not go with the man, because “who knows what can happen, what do you know, can get raped or what”. On the second day Jānis admitted that at the age of 11 he and another boy that was younger than Jānis had had the following adventure. “I was sitting and begging, and a man came up to me and said, “I will give you 6 lats” and that I should undress nude. And another chap did the same, agreed, too. We took trolleybus, went to his place. Offered us a cup of coffee, I went to the bathroom. Meanwhile he did to him I do not know what or what”. Then they had asked Jānis to do minet. After this Jānis felt really bad, very sad and neither he nor the other boy told anyone about what they had experienced. On the whole – Jānis tried to hide this experience, at first told that they had made only the other boy do

some things. There had been several cases of this kind – also with photographing and filming.

“I was small at that time some 10-11 years old. We were walking with a chap. An old bone approaches. Will give us 6 lats. Come to my place. Said: undress. I undressed. The old one undressed, too. Starts groping, feeling us so and so. We dressed and left”.

Evita, 13, has no experience of the kind. Only once they had had a case when together with a girl they were hitchhiking to her grandmother’s place. “Said, “I’ll pay you very well””.

Karīna, 15. With regard to sexual abuse said, “Yes, I have heard, but I think it is so terrifying to abuse innocent children. To ruin all their life! I simply do not understand the people that are able to do something like that! It is very, very cruel!” Nobody among the acquaintances are of the kind, but even if there were, Karīna thinks that the person would not talk about it, would keep silent.

Photographing and filming

Jānis, 13, has been photographed and filmed nude. Was quite indirect and reluctant to go into details at the beginning of the interview, said that he had not accepted a proposal of its kind. “Asked me to show, where the Freedom Monument was. I showed. He says, “Drop in – in my place”. I say, “What for?” He says, “We will give you 20 lats so that you could be photographed half naked”. I did not agree”.

At the end of the interview it became clear that he had been both filmed and photographed nude together with another boy.

“We were sitting at the same place – in the center. A chap came up, asked where the Freedom Monument was. They gave us 2 lats, so that we’d go to their place upstairs. [They say they had agreed because they had thought that these had been “normal” people and because they had been hungry.] We went upstairs, they offered us coffee and everything. I took a bath, washed myself, went out.

Edgars was with them. There were 3 people. Englians. I came out to dress myself. Eduards was undressed and someone in the room filmed him with a camera. He was naked and that Englian sucked him. I was sitting there, too. Then a chap came up that offered 2 lats and he said me, “Undress”. Sucked me and that’s all.

[“That’s all” is said so hastily and indirectly that it made us think, that there might have been something else, that they do not want to tell about at all.] (They have made the boys to “play” with one

another.) We dressed ourselves. They gave us 10 lats (for two). We went to computer games and played for all the ten. On the second day did not do anything, had breakfast and gave another 5 lats. We went out and spent all”. On the second day the boys had claimed and received another 10 lats after having threatened the others with the police.

There had been more offers of its kind, all the time from the same men.

Jānis’s attitude towards such a way of making money is not negative at all, one can go for that if paid enough. “Depends how much they’d pay. I’d sign for 30 lats” (to be filmed and photographed – to something more – for 40 lats).

Rape

Jānis, 13, told during the first part of the interview that he did not know what rape was, then admitted that he had been told. “Mom said what could happen. He had had the thing of its kind at work. Someone like me even smaller. He was raped. Brought to hospital. Vsjo⁴. Did not pump him back live”.

“I’ve dug it all up – everything I’ve been through”. “I do not want to remember it all”. “What’s good from it if I told you about it? It’s all shit, the worst what I’ll tell you. I do not want to do it, what for?”

There has been a case when he had been promised 50 lats, he had been fed, brought to forest and paid nothing”.

Violence against children

Jānis, 13, “I was nine and a half then. I had left home. I was brought to Tīraine. And they beat me up really well. I owed money for the glue (2 packs). They were beating me for some 50 minutes, with fists and in stomach. Had trauma in head, broken arm, broken ribs. It will stay in my memory forever”. Jānis would like to repay for this wrongdoing.

IV SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Cigarettes

Two boys (10 and 13 years old) and one girl (15) among the nine children interviewed did not smoke. The other six did. They had taken up smoking when they were 8-10 years old. The amount of cigarettes per day varied from 3-4 cigarettes a day up to three packs a day. It is quite characteristic

⁴ Translator: That’s it (from Russian)

that the children were not hiding that they were smoking thus we can infer that smoking is quite a normal and acceptable thing to their opinion. It is quite common to ask for cigarettes from passers-by (“to shoot for cigarettes”).

Jānis, 13, has been smoking since the age of 8. “I used to smoke one pack a day, now – as much as I want. A cigarette is enough for 2-3 hours”. Buys cigarettes in shops, newspaper-stalls, sometimes is given on the street. When asked about the hazard of smoking, responds the following. “I read in a paper that you sooner get older. Bad with lungs and may develop cancer”.

Mom knows that her son is smoking, though she does not smoke herself. Took up smoking because his sister smoked. “Sister smoked and took it up, too. I just looked it on, that’s it”. Started with “the menthols”, has smoked Elita, Bond, Marlboro, Monte Carlo.

Evita, 13, has been smoking since the age of 10. Smokes 3-4 cigarettes a day. Smoked LM, Quattro. Mom knows and gives her money. When asked about the potential health hazards, Evita responded that she felt problems during sports classes, “I feel it already that I do not have that much strength inside!”

Vija, 13, has been smoking since the age of 11-12. Took up smoking because wanted to try out and now it is difficult to give up.

Viktors, 12, smokes since the age of 9. Likes smoking, smoked 2 cigarettes on the day of interview, smokes an average of 6 cigarettes a day.

Genādijs, 10, does not smoke.

Aldis, 12, smoked for 2 weeks at the age of 10, then “they caught me and that’s it – enough. Spanked me and that was the penalty. Did not see either sweets or TV for a month. Neither money”. Said that “Such quite not good friends” of his were smoking.

Karīna, 15, does not smoke herself, but the majority of her friends around do smoke. “I know a class and everyone there is smoking. Good if some three of them do not smoke. It is only from the younger classes. From the fourth.”

Mārtiņš, 13, has been smoking since the age of 9, smokes an average of 1.5 packs a day.

Serjoža, 17, has been smoking d since the age of 14. Smokes and average of 3-4 packs a day. Buys cigarettes “Hollywood”, “Monte Carlo” for 28-30 santims per pack, sometimes asks for cigarettes from passers-by.

Alcohol

All the children interviewed had tried alcohol, the oldest – Serjoža (17) was the “most serious” alcohol consumer – he is used to having drinking sessions for several days. Quite possible that Jānis (13) – who referred to a drinking occasion with a cousin of his mother – is another alcohol addict or ardent consumer.

Jānis, 13, during the first day of the interview told us that he did not use alcohol too often. “ If someone offers me, then just a shot of liqueur. Vodka – no, I fully do not drink it. I’ve been offered many times but I have never accepted. I am afraid that the heart may stop”. Whereas on the second day of the interview he told us that he had had vodka with an 15 year old acquaintance. Got drunk for the first time together with a cousin of his mother at the age of 8-10. “Me cousin of my mother. He bought a liqueur. That strawberry one – cool! Was not strong. And we started drinking. I did not even notice: we drank for my mother, father, and grandmother. Finally we had finished 3 little bottles. Well – never mind! Were drunk. Bought 2 little beers in the morning – one for the cousin, one for myself”.

Evita, 13, consumes alcohol on rare occasions, most frequently – beer. “ With a bunch of friends we take a bottle of beer for four. We’d rather buy an ice-cream each!” Has tried all kinds of alcoholic beverages. “Beer is beer. Vodka is vodka.”

Viktors, 12, has never tried vodka, but has tried beer.

Genādijs, 10 Has never tried vodka, but has tried beer.

Aldis, 12, when asked about alcohol consumption replied that he did not like alcohol and that he had tried it only once – at Christmas his mom had offered him a glass of champagne.

Karīna, 15, explained that her school mates (she mentioned the 6th grade) drink beer the most often. They purchase it in a shop explaining to a shop assistant that beer is food. “Well they watch what adults do. And then they want, too.”

Mārtiņš, 13, does not drink vodka, drinks beer since the age of 12. Took up drinking the last August when his mother and father were drunk.

Serjoža, 17, started consuming alcohol at the age of 11. During the last month started drinking 2 bottles of vodka. If he has money – he buys alcohol in a shop – liqueur, vodka, if he has no money – he buys some “krutka”⁵ in “točka”⁶ that costs 50 santims a liter. Drinks several days in a row.

Drugs

Among the children interviewed four boys out of the six had tried sniffing glue and three of these boys had done it quite systematically over some period of time. Two of the youngest boys only had never tried glue (Genādijs, 12 and Aldis, 10) neither did any of the girls admit it. Two of the boys had used the so-called “fofon”⁷ with tablets that cost 30 santims per tablet. The oldest of respondents had been consuming the tablets for several years. Three boys had experience of smoking pot. Intravenous drugs were not a subject to any of the children interviewed. All the children referred to drug abuse quite indirectly being aware that this was something undesirable. It is quite characteristic that they refer to the bad habits and experience of their friends and everyone admitted being scared of using intravenous drugs, because they were afraid of developing addiction, especially the girls. Several mentioned that they had seen stories and films on “Kriminalinform”.

Jānis, 13, speaks about drug abuse indirectly, the first thing he mentioned about drugs was “The worse for yourself. Will get worse in your head. Won’t remember anything”. It is quite obvious that he is afraid of drugs, “What you know? Once you’ll put it on and won’t be able to take it off”. “Person harms his own health. I have no intention to harm myself”. Though in a while he admits that he has sniffed glue (at first says that he has not, then says that he has and justifies himself saying that he had been ashamed and it

⁵ Translator: [krutka] home brewed liquor; borrowing from Russian.

⁶ Translator: [točka] – distribution point, borrowing from Russian.

⁷ Translator.: in literature referred to as substance with trade name FOV (tharen) a pharmaceutical that was found in the first aid kits from the Soviet army. Tharen is a first aid medicine against organic substances from phosphorus.

had been hard to remember). He has also used tablets that he calls “fofon”⁸. Tried the mentioned tablets at the age of 11. “I was given two little tablets once. I swallowed. Nothing so serious did not happen”. Though comments his feelings the following way, “You walk, everything’s like phantomized. You see a tree and you think it’s a car. And you laugh about everything”.

Describes glue sniffing the following way. “When you sniff that glue, then all of a sudden you get the growling sound in your ears, then you feel dizzy, and you do not know where you are”; “You’ve got to buy glue, fasten both ends of a plastic bag, pour glue inside and sniff. An hour or an hour and a half. Then everything starts shivering, like you were drunk. But you don’t feel sick”. He sniffs “Moment” glue. Buys it in the market, at stalls, it costs 60-80 santims. One tube – if you are alone in the “čufan”⁹ – suffices half a day.

Jānis sniffs only to keep the company – not alone. “I sit with friends, they sniff. What am I – the little white pigeon – I will sniff, too!”

He does not know where one could purchase drugs – used to know where “fofons” was sold.

Evita, 13, does not admit of having used any kind of drugs. Though refers to her friends, acquaintances that have used drugs and their drug abuse experience. “I know some that sniff not only that glue. They buy all kinds of pharmaceuticals like “dimidrols”¹⁰ (that is used 2-3 tablets a time). Smoke all kinds of hashish. I have not tried and I think that I am not even willing to do so. Once we were at a discotheque. One boy had overtaken with smoking or something. Fell on the floor. Laughed and laughed and fainted. An ambulance was called. Everyone was tested against drugs. No, I will never take drugs. Because there has been a case when a person passed away in front of my eyes. Early in the morning after a disco three chaps were on the street. And simply fell on the ground in front of us and was unconscious. Must’ve been from heroin”.

When asked whether her friends take drugs, Evita replied that “occasionally and only the girls – boys never do”. Evita has been offered hashish but she says she always refuses. “I will not try and won’t take. Instead of torturing myself. I will try to give up and so

⁸ Please, refer to footnote 7.

⁹ Translator: [tchuffan] – the plastic bag.

¹⁰ Translator: “Dimedrols” is a trade name for *Diphaenhydramini Hydeachloridum* an anti-histamine medicine with sedative properties, used extensively in the Soviet times.

on. And will have even more problems. What do I need it for? I know that after trying once everything goes only one way. Drugs, violence after that. Suicide. People just do not get what they are doing. When a person has finally got what it was then it is better to die than to live. Same with one friend of mine. Poked her little brother after she had taken heroin”.

If she needed drugs, she could get them from some boys she knew. She also was informed that the first time heroin costs 5 lats but with the second time the price keeps increasing. “One girl that I know took out everything from her home she could carry – a TV set, all kinds of gold, everything that was there” (to purchase heroin).

Vija, 13, has never had anything to do with drugs. None of her friends have taken drugs but she knew some substances (heard the names on “Kriminalinform”) like heroin, pot, and cocaine. Is not interested in trying drugs because she is afraid that she could develop addiction.

Viktors, 12, has glue sniffing experience. Tells us that her friends smoke grass, he has tried it himself, too, says that he always develops cough after, but “the head does not ache like after heroin or cocaine”.

Genādijs, 10, has never sniffed glue and says that “he never will” but is aware that children around sniff glue.

Aldis, 12, “I have no intentions to use drugs”. Heard from “Kriminalinform” that things like drugs “nicotine and heroin” exist. When prompted, recognizes terms like hashish, pot (what hashish was – he did not know), heroin, grass, glue. Knows that you purchase drugs on the street but does not know anyone personally that would sell drugs.

Karīna, 15, said, “I do not understand the people that can sell drugs. He knows that he can get sick with this illness. That he will need more and more. Digs grave for himself. Just wait for your final day!” There are no people in her class that would use drugs though there are some in her school (in the tenth grade). “There have been cases when people have needed an ambulance. The Prevention Center is right there – next to us!”

Karīna herself has never tried any drugs. “They say, “Oh, you have not tried!” and they wonder, I just return, “I am not

interested and just leave me alone!” But they do it. Look like corpses. Like corpses just woken up. Come to school and laugh for hours”.

Grass, tablets of elves and sun¹¹ are abused at school, so is glue. She has heard that drugs (though she did not know what drugs) are for free the first four times. “But when they get used to it – then, dear me, just pay away! That’s how it is! That’s how they “train” the people to use drugs”. She says it is quite typical that pupils use drugs to assert themselves and they try to talk other pupils into drug abuse. “Some say – I will try it once, I will experience what it is like, then – yeah, “experienced”! – go to a hospital!”

Karīna said that she did not know where one buys drugs. “Thank God nobody has offered me and I have no intention to try anything!”

Mārtiņš, 13, knows grass, has smoked it several times but money is a problem – if he had money, he’d do it more often. Has sniffed glue, tells us about the process in detail and what the feelings are. Still sniffs glue with friends occasionally.

Serjoža, 17, the first time sniffed glue at the age of 10 and has in fact been doing it daily for 3-4 years. “I wanted to try it. I saw how one then another did it. Tried it once, then wanted to try again. Sniffed until someone told me that the brain could go insane until you won’t understand anything”. Remembers how glue sniffing affected his senses strongly, how he had to steal things to get money, how the police had been willing to detain him. Remembered a case when he was detained at the very moment of glue sniffing. Initially when he was trying to give up the habit, it had been hard though now he does not feel any need for that. “One little boy I know sniffs, I walked with him and everything inside me just turned upside down with disgust. I couldn’t stand that!”

Has been smoking grass, one joint a week for two years and says, however, that he does not smoke anymore. “Got sick of it, sick of spending money!”

Has tried “fofol” (“fofon”?) tablets, too. One friend of his had had a whole packet of the tablets. Took four tablets, did not remember anything what he did, then felt very, very sick. Kept using the tablets for a year until got bored again and due to financial problems gave up these tablets, too. Three tablets were sold for 1,50 lats back then. Yes, he’d know where to get tablets, there are

¹¹ *Translator:* It is not clear from the interview whether the elves and the sun are on the tablets or this is the effect of these tablets.

numerous “točkas” ([točka] – distribution point) around, though he has no money for that.

Has purchased other tablets, too, like “ecstasy”. Has tried these several times. Felt like a sleepwalker. Has never tried intravenous drugs, once saw other people do it, and tells us that he knows what “cold turkey” means and knows that drugs require money and knowledge. He knows neither how to heat the substance nor how to inject, or when the substance is ready. Another reason for his not using is the following “you could die from it! I’ve seen a person die. Committed suicide”.

V. ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

Two of the boys interviewed on the street that have also the longest vagrancy experience have had several suicide attempts that they were reluctant to tell about. Neither were they willing to explain the reasons for committing suicide.

Jānis, 13, has tried to commit suicide four times (jumped from the fourth floor, cut his veins and swallowed tablets). Explains these attempts by saying, “Was sick of living”. Told us that he did not have any other particular reason.

Serjoža, 17, when used to be younger, had had several suicide attempts. Cut the veins.

VI. WHAT WOULD THE STREET CHILDREN LIKE TO CHANGE ABOUT THEIR LIVES?

A desire the children refer to the most often is “I wish my parents did not drink and we had normal relations in our family”. One kid was willing to revenge for a certain wrongdoing. However, one boy (the oldest – Serjoža, 17) said that he would like to set up a house for young adults and children so that they had a place to go to and to spend their free time.

Jānis, 13, would like to pay back to a man that did him wrong.

Evita, 13, would like to change her behavior, to give up smoking; would like to have a normal family. “I would like to live normal life with my family, not with various crisis institutions. But I know that my step-father will never change. Treats mom like a servant and it is just disgusting to see all that. She does what he tells. She loves him very much”.

Karīna, 15, “I would like everyone to be more careful and to think about what they do!”

Mārtiņš, 13, Would like not to have a father (step-father) he has and would like his mom to have more money.

Sejoža, 17, would like his mother not to drink. “I do not understand why she drinks if she knows that she is going to have problems?” Another thing he’d like to do is to set up a house for under-age children and young adults where they could live and play various games. He would like everyone to have a job.

INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN ON THE STREET: KEY CONCLUSIONS

This survey proved that the main reason for children’s vagrancy is their relationship with parents. The most characteristic problems mentioned were: mother is drinking; father or step-father is beating the child. Reasons like protest against the limits and desire “for freedom” as a motif for vagrancy appear after repeated cases of running away from home only. The majority of the children interviewed represent single-parent families or the so-called problematic families wherein one or two parents are drinking.

Possible future interference (recommendations)

Due to the fact that the main reason for vagrancy is the relationship with parents, the possible improvements are linked to social work aimed at parents – discussions with parents, assistance to find a job, to stop drinking, and at an ultimate case – threats. On the whole it is a strand of the social assistance scheme in Kurzeme district that needs further strengthening.

The children that have ran away from their homes spend the night at the railway station, in the central market, in trains, trams, trolleybuses, gateways, basements and attics. Thus the survey disapproves of the prevailing assumption that the children have no place to stay at night. It should be mentioned though that all the places mentioned above are dangerous for children, because there the opportunities to meet drug addicts or people who sexually abuse children are greater. Therefore it is utterly necessary to spread the information on shelters where children – should there be need in case of a conflict in their family – can find a place to spend a night. Evaluating the shelters the children knew they referred positively to the one next to the railway station, of course, admitting

again that often they have no free room for stay and no room to spend free time.

The majority of the children interviewed lack appropriate education, one child does not even know how to read or write. School attendance is directly linked to building the respective attitude in the parents that brings out again the necessity to work with these parents – they should care whether or not their child attends school.

The information gained shows that the knowledge on STDs, HIV and AIDS among the vagrant children is very poor and again – directly linked to their age: the older ones were better informed. At the same time the study results clearly point out to a need for further education of children.

The study shows that children on the streets are too often subject to various dangerous situations and negative influences like the ones detailed below.

- Sexual abuse (two of the boys interviewed are child prostitution workers, one of them provides sexual services regularly and even recruits others, both of the boys have experienced attempted rape episodes);
- Violence against children (children on the street are a lot more often beaten up than any other children, they also suffer from violence of their parents, mainly their fathers' violence);
- Early smoking (the majority of the children girls inclusive smoke, they have taken up the habit at the age of 8-10);
- Alcohol abuse (two of the boys consumed alcohol in large quantities, in the majority of the cases children had started using alcohol with their relatives and under their influence – when the parents had been drunk);
- Drug abuse (many of the boys had glue sniffing experience of several years, as well as experience of using various tablets and smoking marihuana. None of the children interviewed had used intravenous drugs, but some of them had witnessed situations when someone else did which accounts for larger probability with regard to their eventual intravenous drug abuse since peer influence is essential during teenage years);
- Health problems (several children had psychological disorders: one of the boys had disability of the 2nd degree, psychic deviations, that manifested in increased emotiveness and aggression towards the others, one of the boys went to school for children with development disorders and another boy had been repeatedly at a hospital of psychiatry and neurology due to fighting and absence from studies);
- Attempted suicides (two of the boys had repeatedly attempted to commit suicide and they were reluctant to reveal the reasons);

- Stealing (the majority of children had stolen small things and some of them had been detained for that);
- Begging (one of the most typical and easiest money making sources, but it is dangerous because there had been cases that children were offered to provide sexual services when doing it).

Possible future interference (recommendations)

One of the main recommendations is to continue the activities pertaining to creation and development of friendly support and assistance/service points, children day care centers where children could have a meal, spend their free time and do something. Additional requirement in creating such centers/support points is that they should not be repressive in their nature because the children will not attend places of this kind. Creating these centers/support points the opportunities to control and care for children, their physical and mental state would increase.

Recommendations for further studies

This study proved that it is not possible to perform quantitative surveys among street children, rather an approach of the qualitative sociology should be opted for, i.e., one should try to understand the children, to gain their trust during several meetings. It was also discovered that the children open up during successive meetings, they open more and more aspects of their position that often contradict the previous, because something is being hidden. The study proved that complex approach to the problem could be the most efficient i.e., it should include things like getting acquainted with the child's family, as well as the social workers that have been in touch with them, other people that have been in contact with the family in order to find solutions to vagrancy.

APPENDIX: Plan of the Interview/Interview Guidelines

Getting acquainted. Discussion attempt. Opening up the respondent.
Hey, my name is Gita/Artūrs. In the name of UNICEF and UNDP I am doing this study on young adults. Would you agree to answer several questions? Your answers will be confidential – neither the parents, nor school – nobody will find out. Therefore you can answer easy without worrying that someone may find out.

1. What's your name?
2. How old are you? What's your age?
3. How do you prefer to spend you free time? What do you do when you meet friends?
4. Do you attend school? What grade are you in? Do you have a class at school called "health education"? What do they teach you there?

Knowledge about AIDS; Sexual experience

1. Do you have a girl/boyfriend?
2. What do you think about sexual relations? Do you have any experience?
3. Have you heard about HIV (human immune-deficiency virus) or AIDS?
4. What do you know about it?
5. Do you think it could have anything to do with you?
6. Who told you about that? Where have you heard about this disease?
7. How do you think one can acquire HIV that causes AIDS? How do think the people get infected with HIV that causes AIDS? What do you think, who's under the largest risk to acquire HIV that causes AIDS?
8. Do you know – could you mention any sexually transmitted or venereal disease? Have you heard about diseases like syphilis, gonorrhoea? What do you know about these diseases?
9. Have you had sex with anyone?
10. What do you think – can one get infected or get sick during sex?
11. Have you thought of using protection during sex?
12. When did you last have sex?
13. What means of protection do you know against diseases that could be acquired during sex?
14. Have you had sex with an adult?
15. Have older uncles or aunts invited you to their place?
16. What have they offered you?

17. Have you heard of sexual abuse against children? What do you think of it?

Substance abuse

1. Do you smoke? How many cigarettes a day? Why do you smoke? How long have you been smoking?
2. Have you had beer, wine, vodka or any other alcohol during the last weeks? What did you drink? Why did you drink? Did you celebrate anything? How do you purchase cigarettes/alcohol? Who gives you that? Do you buy them yourself or do anyone else buy them for you?
3. Have you tried any drugs or toxic substances? Which ones? Do you prefer any particular drugs? Which ones? Why these? When did you first try these drugs?
4. Which ones of these drugs have you tried yourself or any of your friends? How many of your friends use these substances?
 - Marihuana, grass, hash;
 - Heroin;
 - *Hanka* (an extract from poppy-heads);
 - LSD (other hallucinogenic substances);
 - *ecstasy*;
 - Other amphetamines;
 - Cocaine;
 - Crack (synthetic cocaine);
 - Tranquilizers or other sedative substances;
 - Morphine (other opiates);
 - “anti-radiation” tablets (FOV);
 - *cyclodolum*;
 - glue, aerosols or other solvents;
 - “magic mushrooms” – hallucinogenic mushrooms;
 - Other substances (what are they called?).

Sociological and demographic questions

1. Are you trying to earn money anyhow? How do you earn/get money for yourself? What do you spend your money for?
2. Has anyone ever beaten you up? Who? Why?
3. Have you ever stolen anything?
4. Have you heard of these centers (shelters) where there is assistance provided for children/young adults?

5. Do you have father, mother, any brothers and sisters? Tell me about them! How old are they, what do they do? Who else do you live with in your family?
6. Does any of your brothers or sisters:
 - Smoke cigarettes;
 - Consume alcohol (beer, wine, vodka);
 - Ever get drunk;
 - Smoke marihuana, hashish;
 - Use tranquilizers or sedative substances;
 - Use *ecstasy*?
7. Do you usually sleep at home? If not – where do you stay then?
8. Do you always feel full? Has it happened that you have eaten nothing several days in a row?

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me.