

## VIOLENCE OF THE SHEGUE CHILDREN, A SUBCULTURE IN THE CITY OF KISANGANI, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

**BOELE LOSUNA JUSTIN**

Assistant at the University of Kisangani/DRC

**BOLINDA WA BOLINDA**

Professor at the University of Kisangani

**MAPANO MANDI CHARLY**

Assistant at the Institute of Building and Public Works of Kisangani/IBTP-Kisangani

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### ABSTRACT

The present study aims to verify the implementation of children's rights and the violence that establishes itself as a subculture among these children, and how these children take care of themselves on the streets of the city of Kisangani. To achieve its objective, the structural-functional methods and functional analysis have been utilized. They are supported by documentary techniques, direct observation, and interviews in the data collection from our sample consisting of services that deal with child protection in general and Shegue children in particular in the city of Kisangani

**Keywords:** violence, children, shegues and subculture.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

By virtue of the principle of the fiction of domicile, every person (child or adult) has the right to a domicile. The family is the centre of the development of the human person, so it is inherent for everyone to live within the family. In the past, in traditional African societies, the child was considered a precious being and occupied a sacred place, a reference made by the Hesoo (Basoko) peoples who consider the child to be a treasure.

On this subject, Erny (1972, p.139) explains, "We welcome the child with joy as a new member who comes to strengthen the family. Also, because we expect beneficial effects, usually the newcomer has just filled the void left by a deceased ancestor who imperatively bears his name for the perpetuation of his existence."

For several decades, the infantile world has been undergoing a progressive disturbance during its evolution in its form as well as its substance.

An overview of the world shows that all societies, regardless of the life they lead on a daily basis, focus their attention on youth, the hope of tomorrow. The eagerness with which the various governments invest themselves in the education and instruction of their young people is sufficient proof that this is the surest way to ensure the succession of tomorrow in all areas of national life.

In this way, no society in the world can wish for an unbalanced youth. The saying that sick and maladjusted youth is a time bomb makes sense here, but in fact, youth has always preoccupied the world at all levels: local, national and international. Non-governmental organizations, religious denominations, non-profit associations "A S B L" throughout the world have most of them targeting young people. Their interests in young people are justified by the fact that their deviation constitutes a danger to society.

To this end, several studies have been carried out, among which we cite: Modeste Mbayo Lukasa, who has worked on street children, states that the United Nations Children's Fund, Unicef in acronym, in his study, Modeste Mbayo arrived at the results according to which, the causes that are at the basis of the descent of children into the street (the shegues) are disharmony, that is to say, separation or divorce of parents, being accused of thieves, sorcerers, exploitation by families, difficult socio-economic conditions, living conditions of parents, deaths of parents, and lack of care, threats, effects of war (2008-2009, p.37)

Hence in 1946, the UN created the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a United Nations agency established in 191 countries whose mission is to ensure that every child receives health, education and equality through its actions in the field and the promotion of children's rights (Larousse 2003-2004, p.27)

African States, for their part, adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in July 1990 to ensure protection and to pay particular attention to the critical situation of many children across all continents. However, the situation of these children remains deplorable and critical because of socio-economic, cultural and traditional factors, natural disasters, demographic burdens, armed conflicts, as well as circumstances of development, exploitation, hunger and disabilities. The child, due to his or her physical and mental immaturity, needs special protection and care.

At the national level, the DRC also has its own mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights in general and of children in particular, which are in force (Loongya 2004, p. 363). Thus, the situation of the child has received sufficient attention from the Congolese legislator, which has expressly recognized the rights of the child and has enacted Act No. 09/001 of 10 January 2009 on the protection of human rights granted by the State (Act No. 09/001 of 10 January 2009 on the protection of the child, Constitution of the DRC, p.2).

The phenomenon of Shegue children is becoming an increasingly worrying phenomenon. There are several reasons for this concern. From a quantitative point of view, the number of children living in this condition has increased considerably to the point that it is difficult, if not impossible, to give the exact number of children who are left on the street, given the itinerant nature of their category.

Faced with the situation in which these Shegue children find themselves, characterized by violence as a way of life, our reflection revolves around the following questions:

- Why does violence among Sheg children become a way of life?
- What is at the root of the violence, as a subculture, among the Shegues in Kisangani?

The main objective assigned to this study is to try to understand why violence among the Shegues becomes a way of life and it even becomes a subculture. The child who should be at school and especially in family roofs finds himself on the street and from there he creates strategies for survival.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

In the framework of this study, the structural-functional method and the systemic approach were put to good use. They were supported by the documentary technique, of disengaged direct observation, free interview, with our sample made up of services that deal with the protection of children, and the Shegue children in Kisangani. (Special Child Protection Police, Kisangani Children's Court).

In order to make the data collected more intelligible, we have used two methods: on the one hand, with regard to data collected by documentary survey or by open-ended questions, and on the other hand, with regard to closed-ended questions.

Thus, we proceeded to the content analysis of the answers to the open-ended or production questions. The analysis of the closed questions was carried out by pointing out the frequencies of distribution. In order to identify the numbers from which we calculated the percentages according to the following formula:  $P=f/N \times 100$ ; of which P = Percentage, f = The frequency of occurrence of the response and N = The total number of frequencies or distribution.

## **3.0 CAUSES AND FACTORS OF VIOLENCE AMONG SHEGUE CHILDREN IN THE CITY OF KISANGANI**

Children exposed to violence and other adverse circumstances are more likely to drop out of school, have difficulty finding and keeping a job, and are at increased risk of being victims or perpetrators of interpersonal or self-directed violence at a later stage.

Considered as sorcerers (D'Haeyer 2004), extraordinary people, shegue children or street children receive no consideration from a society that ostracizes them. In their seclusion, they not only endure the harsh conditions of life on the street, but they also suffer and inflict severe physical and psychological violence on others. In this relationship of abused and violent, these children do not seem to interest the social body, which grants them only violence and contempt.

One may wonder why society adopts such an attitude towards these children? But this study is not only interested in the abuse and violence of which Shegue children are victims, it seeks to better understand the social exclusion that characterizes their lives and the passivity of society in the face of the violence of which they are victims and perpetrators. The purpose of this article is therefore to establish an inventory of the violence of interactions in the street and to highlight the representations related to it.

The problem is to understand how the children got there? What is so unbearable about family life that we prefer the daily violence of interactions in the street? The social phenomenon of "shegue" children clearly testifies to serious dysfunctions of social ties and urbanity in many developing countries. It appears first of all that the number of these children who have fled their families following the deterioration of family living conditions.

The street seems to be open to the refuge of all children. Any child who decides to take up residence in the streets of the city of Kisangani must accept to endure the atrocities that allow his or her integration there. This rite has a double objective: to evaluate the physical endurance of the neophyte and to adapt the initiate to the harsh conditions he will have to face in the street. Thus, a runaway who remains on the street despite the various abuses he has suffered is judged by the elders to be fit to lead his life there.

At this level, the attitude of the runaway child is complex. Having fled the family environment following an accumulation of mistreatment, he finds himself in the street where he is greeted by the violence of the shegues or street children. What to do? Returning home after running away? The child is often very embarrassed and for obscure reasons, he prefers to stay on the street most of the time while having the secret hope that a member of his family will come and take him out.

How do street children interpret their abuse? Andrea Rea notes that the interpretation that victims give of their experience is therefore not uniform and, like other forms of self-presentation, the victimization narrative is an opportunity for a global staging of the social, the interpretation of which requires taking into account the structure of the transformations of the social morphology (Rea 1999, p.28).

For her part, Inès Angelo emphasizes that the child needs to have a protected space in which he feels safe from the gaze of the judgment of others. The absence of such a place is indicative of the difficulties in attributing to the child a psychic space without which he cannot recognize himself and gradually become autonomous (Angelo 2004, p.155).

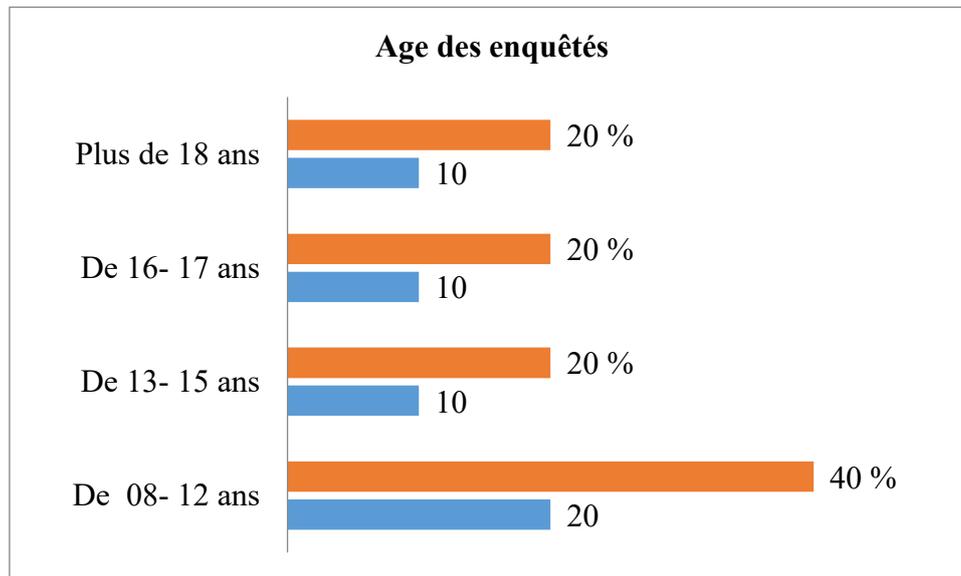
The so-called "shegues" or street children are the sad result of the disorganization of the social structure. Many of these children come from a family space that no longer protected them and threatened them. They were regularly victims of physical or psychological abuse by close relatives. In such a context, children end up opting for the streets, hoping to find better living conditions. They are plunged into another violence. They then learn to immunize themselves against pain, to endure violence but also to commit it.

All these acts of violence are carried out in the total indifference of society. Tortured and tortured, raped and raped, such is their condition as Shegue children. The relationship between Shegue children and society as a whole seems to have settled in relations of reciprocal violence, with society still quick to stigmatize it as "sorcerers", "demons", "possessed", "thieves", etc. Street children react to this exclusion from society with permanent violence and aggression against members of a society that abandons them to their fate.

#### **4.0 RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE SHEGUE PHENOMENON IN THE CITY OF KISANGANI**

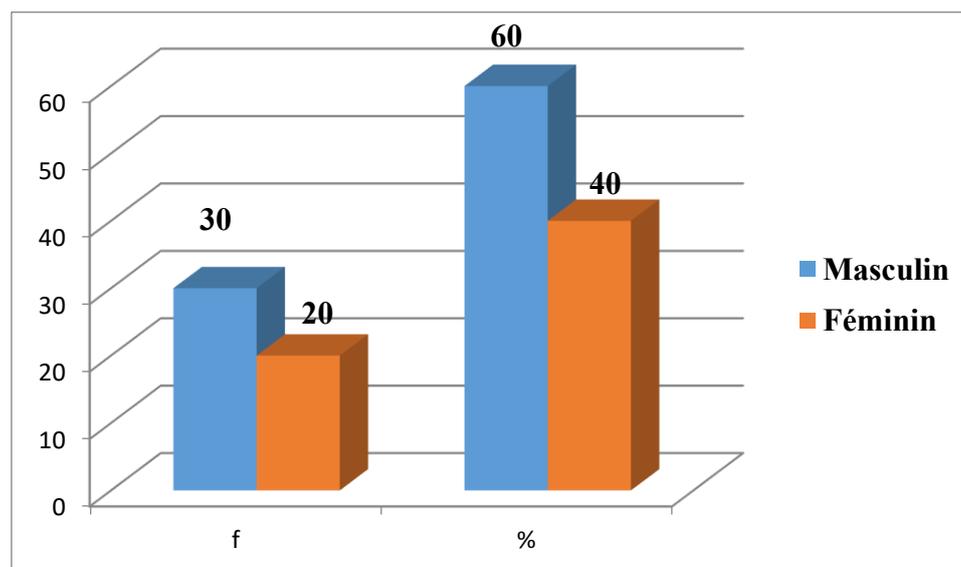
Life on the streets means that these young people are very likely to die before they reach the age of 25. Girls, on the other hand, face violence and the health risks associated with prostitution. Assault and battery, AIDS and STDs are their sad lot. The shegues or street children no longer own anything. No family, no roof, not even a nice change of clothes. They sleep on the ground, on the sidewalks, in old car carcasses or under market stalls, at the risk of being attacked or robbed while they sleep.

In order to make the data collected more intelligible, we have used two methods: on the one hand, with regard to the data collected by documentary survey or by open-ended questions, and on the other hand, with regard to those collected by closed-ended questions.



**Figure 1. Distribution of subjects according to the ages of our respondents**

Considering the content of this figure, we notice that our sample is 50 subjects from four age groups, including 20 subjects for the age group from 08 to 12 years old, 10 subjects from the age group from 13 to 15 years old, 10 subjects for an age group from 16 to 17 years old as well as 10 other subjects from an age group over 18 years old.



**Figure 2. Gender distribution**

Taking into account the population of our study, we have in our sample 30 male subjects and 20 female subjects who were the subject of our research.

The study used the responses given by our subjects as a unit of context, for the unit of recording, we took, for the unit of counting, we considered the frequencies of each response.

As can be seen, content analysis is a quantitative discipline that most often consists of counting the significant elements, calculating their frequency, grouping them into references and then into categories. At the end of this process, percentage techniques were applied, which facilitated the interpretation of the frequencies and percentages contained in the tables. (Likuma Bofaya, 2023 p.125).

The analysis of our survey focused on two key moments in the life of the Shegues in the street in Kisangani, namely: family life and life on the street.

#### **4.1 Family life**

The weakening of the socializing role of the family occurs when individuals no longer learn or no longer integrate into the moral instances of socialization, the fundamental norms, the distinction between good and evil. It is society as a whole that will inculcate them in them through repressive social control. Today, we are witnessing a legalization of society.

The use of the justice system and the police is increasingly frequent to indicate the limits that must not be crossed. It is police officers and judges who inculcate in adolescent offenders the standards to be respected. However, these legal norms that are supposed to represent mores are constantly evolving (relaxation or hardening of laws), regulation can come from above, from the legislator, but also from below, when it is linked to the change in morals observed in society. If the child's socialization has not been achieved in accordance with the norms of society, his integration will be more difficult. Growing individualism, the break-up of families, economic situations such as long-term unemployment and over-indebtedness of households also encourage the breakdown of family ties and the resulting situations of exclusion.

The family unit becomes more fragile, even breaks up; But this does not necessarily imply a lack of solidarity. On the contrary, kinship ties can increase. The family network can remain essential, but with less social pressure. Ties remain close and solidarity is more often chosen.

#### **4.2 Life on the streets**

The street is perceived by society in general as a place of perdition, of outlet, a school of delinquency. It is viewed negatively and beyond the corner, it is the unknown, sometimes the peril.

The culture of a people, whatever its value, may be able to progress and conform to the demands of its century, must integrate the national capital, the past, the present and the positive elements of its cultural heritage and the cultures of its humanity, scientific and technical knowledge, social and political values such as democracy, social justice.

On the other hand, our streets play several roles; socio-economic, legal and educational, this is useful in the daily life of the Boyomese people. Thus, it is perceived by these children in search of a "life", as a living space, a refuge and a space of freedom that they illegally adapt to and that allow them to survive.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This research leads to the assertion that the phenomenon of the shegue child or street child remains and remains a true reality and a time bomb if we are not careful.

As for Barry (1990, p.47), the child in particular appeared as a victim who favoured social transformations because of his malleable character, his lesser capacity to formulate a moral judgment and to control his impulses.

Violence is a force exerted by a person or a group of people to submit, coerce someone or to obtain something. (Volney, Ruins 1791, p.112)

In civil law, violence is considered to be unlawful coercion on someone to obtain something with or without their consent. In the Civil Code, violence is a cause of nullity of the contract (Civil Code, 1804, art 1113, p.202).

In international law, it uses force or threatening coercion against a state to obtain its consent, in breach of the principles of international law. The deterrence maneuver could be played out on a more extensive keyboard of violence, but the technique would be the same radical threat, limited actions intended to prove the determination to make the adversary bend and a constant search for compromise, (Beaufre, Dissuasion and Strat, 1964, p.78)

Edward Tylor, in his work Primitive 1871, culture is considered in its broadest ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which embraces knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, tradition and all other dispositions and habits acquired by man as a member of a society, (Tylor 187, p.108)

According to Taylor Burnett Edward, culture is a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and all other dispositions and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.

The subculture is a set of values, norms and behavior specific to a given social group and manifesting a deviation from the dominant culture. The expression "subculture" is used to designate the culture specific to sub-groups within the society as a whole, which therefore presents with the latter a certain number of cultural traits in common, but also many different specific cultural traits that are not found in the other social groups that make up society.

Different subcultures can be distinguished, according to very different criteria. At the level of the territorial space, regional subcultures are identified, according to social milieu, class subcultures: popular, working-class, bourgeois culture, and possibly, depending on the criteria of sex and age, we will be led to identify a female subculture or a youth subculture.

The notion of subculture is relative. Indeed, each culture can be a subculture, if it is studied in its relationship with a larger culture. Belgian culture or French culture are subcultures in relation to European culture, in particular.

The Child, today the term child is much more widely understood since it is defined by the UN convention. On the rights of the child like any human being under the age of 18, unless the age

of majority is extinguished earlier. It is in this sense that we use this term. While immediately pointing out that age alone is not absolute in some respects, one ceases to be a child, for example, if one is emancipated.

Shegue, the origin of the term shegue, which young people do not use among themselves, is uncertain. Some say that it would be an observation by Che Guevara, in homage to the Cuban revolutionary. Others, more numerous, say that the word comes from Hausa, a language often spoken by traders from West Africa that means Balard. The shegues are above all street children in the Lingala language, used in large cities in the Democratic Republic of Congo such as Kinshasa, Kisangani etc (Justin Boele, 2024).

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, which focuses on violence among Shegue children, a subculture in the city of Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of Congo. After the collection and processing of the data, the research led to the results that the Shegue phenomenon is a time bomb if we are not careful.

The violence that has taken up residence among children is said to be due to the vulnerability of the latter, who are abandoned to their sad fate, without state assistance, in the city of Kisangani. These abandoned people live on their own effort if necessary, they use violence to extort money which sometimes allows them to find something to live on.

The State has the obligation to insure and protect all its children who vegetate in the streets of the city of Kisangani, to ensure the succession of tomorrow, the Congo of tomorrow, the strength and weakness, it is in the hands of the youth, while an unbalanced youth, affects the future of the country. The State has a primary role to ensure and supervise young people, because the future of an entire nation depends on it.

These children live on the margins of society, without family supervision or access to basic rights, education, health, protection. They develop a sense of rejection and permanent survival.

The lack of state care or the ineffectiveness of child protection policies, the lack of reception, reintegration and follow-up structures are the causes of violence in the large city of Kisangani.

Their daily lives are marked by misery, exploitation and sometimes abuse (physical or sexual). Violence becomes a means of expression, defense or survival. The permanent tensions with the police or the inhabitants create violent reactions. Stigmatization accentuates their aggressiveness.

The phenomenon of violence among Shegue children is not a simple individual deviance, but the symptom of a profound disruption of the urban social and cultural fabric. Socio-cultural reintegration based on local values, education and holistic care can bring about change.

The institutional deficit, the absence of effective social protection mechanisms or appropriate juvenile justice, the state appears to be a distant or repressive actor, rarely protective. Society perceives its children as a threat rather than victims. This stigmatization reinforces their isolation and justifies, in their eyes, a violent response; "If society rejects me, I attack it."

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