

THE IMPACT OF NGOs ON STREET CHILDREN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

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The impact of NGOs on street children in developing countries.

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KEYWORDS: Colombia, street children, street-connected children, NGO, Moi pour Toit

Abstract

This study examines the life trajectories of former street children in Pereira, Colombia, and investigates the role of the NGO Moi pour Toit in shaping their futures. Drawing on Life Course Theory (Elder, 1998) and Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the research examines how timing, turning points, and social contexts influence development pathways. A qualitative methodology was used, combining narrative interviews with document analysis. Participants, all adults, reflect on their childhood and how the foundation's interventions impacted their lives as adults.

Findings showed that Moi pour Toit worked as a critical turning point for most participants, interrupting generations of neglect, poverty, and violence by providing education, psychosocial support and stability. Education is presented as a central resource, building self-confidence and opening pathways into employment; however, obstacles such as stigma, limited networks, and structural inequality persist. Family relations were not always rebuilt after abuse and neglect: while some participants reconnected with relatives, others chose to stay no-contact due to abuse and neglect. Across narratives, different situations coexist, reflecting the resilience and agency of participants who are constrained by structural conditions.

The discussion highlights that the work of NGOs can significantly redirect the life trajectories of children, while also emphasising the importance of timing and the interconnectedness of lives. Yet it is still mentioned that the limitation of NGOs' action is in contexts where violence, exclusion, and displacement are omnipresent. The study concludes that while NGOs play a transformative role, sustainable reintegration requires systemic reforms, stronger state involvement, and a reduction in stigma.

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Introduction

Throughout this dissertation, the social problem of street children in Colombia will be analysed through a human ecological perspective, enabling a deeper understanding of the impact of NGOs on children's pathways to adulthood.

Street children in Colombia have been a concern since the late 1970s and early 1980s (Lewis, 1991). To be able to understand the vulnerability of street children, it is important to acknowledge their reality. According to Kwaku (2019), street children are not always children who live on their own and have nowhere to go. Some of them work on the streets and return to their parents or caretakers at night; others even have places they rent or other types of providers that allow them to sleep in a safe or semi-safe place at night (Kwaku, 2019).

The causes of children ending up on the streets can vary widely depending on the region, as well as the country's political and economic context. There are multiple reasons why children end up in vulnerable situations on the streets. For instance, Colombia is known for political instability due to violence and corruption (Fergusson et al., 2022), alongside extreme poverty across the nation (Ucrós, 2024).

Behind so young and with little to no care, those children and adolescents who live and work on the streets are already in a vulnerable situation. These circumstances increase their exposure to violence, marginalisation and health risks (Embleton et al., 2020). It is for the reasons mentioned above that this topic is important and deserves to be further studied. The current academic material available does not provide a full study and understanding of the relation between street children and the effects of a social intervention by an NGO.

When it comes to academic material on street children in Colombia and the long-term outcomes of NGOs, there is very little research on this specific topic. Some useful and interesting resources exist, but they do not cover both aspects together: street children in Colombia and long-term outcomes. When it comes to research done in Colombia, multiple authors have discussed the well-being of children and used critical thinking to understand vulnerability. For example, Apteka (1988) studies the psychological development of street children in Medellin. Pinzón

Rondón, et al. (2020), analysed how different sub-populations of working children evolve in the streets of Colombian cities. Tamayo-Aguelo et al. (2022), on the other hand, provide a broader analysis on adolescent mental health, examining the role of family functioning under displacement and violence. In addition, Mesa et al. (2021) discuss how NGOs in Bogota help street children by giving them a safe space. Even if there are studies covering the impact of NGOs on street children, there is still a major gap in research analysing the long-term effectiveness of social work. Most studies focus either on immediate relief or on children's vulnerabilities, but only a few examine whether NGOs provide support throughout different periods of life. It is therefore why using a theory that analyses and focuses on the pathways of street children after spending time in an NGO can add value to the discussion of street children and how important it is to help foundations and people who help children in vulnerable situations. The interest of this dissertation is specifically focused on the work of the foundation *Moi pour Toit*. This NGO is based in Switzerland and works with street children in Pereira, Colombia. This particular organisation has been around for a few decades and has influenced many people. It is therefore why using *Moi pour Toit* could lead to an interesting research pathway. The research aim of this work is to understand how *Moi pour Toit* has impacted the lives and personal development of former street children in Colombia. But also, how the individuals reflect on their experiences of care, psychosocial support, and education within the foundation, and how they evaluate its influence on their adulthood. And do they believe their current situation can be even slightly helped by *Moi pour Toit*? To be able to study and understand how the foundation helped on the long run the children that have spent time with them the framework will include Life Course Theory and Ecological System Theory. Life Course Theory (LCT) examines individual trajectories, turning points, transitions, and childhood to adulthood. By applying this theory to the life pathways of children, it is possible to understand the long-lasting impact of NGOs on people. On the other hand, Ecological Systems Theory (EST) analyses the multiple-level environments around people. In the case of children who have spent time in an NGO, the ecological layers include the NGO itself, school environment, parents and family, as well as broader networks of society. Using both of these frameworks helps understand both the personal development of children and adolescents and the role of support that the systems provide over time. This dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of how NGOs can influence the

long-term development of vulnerable children. While many researchers have addressed the sudden needs of young people who are on the streets, few have explored the effects and support that children received during childhood. Even fewer studies have concentrated their investigations on the transition into adulthood. By focusing on the foundation *Moi pour Toit*, this dissertation highlights the role played in shaping life trajectories beyond the first emergency care. The findings aim to provide a better understanding of what street children need and to help build an even stronger relationship between the NGOs and the children who are in a vulnerable position. Additionally, the dissertation offers a voice to people who are often overlooked in academic and policy discussions.

Chapter one will present the conceptual and historical context of street children, situating the phenomenon locally and globally, covering the history, the terminology, the social-political context, and child protection policies in Latin America.

Chapter two will present the Life Course Theory. This theory will be the main framework to study and understand street children. This chapter will discuss the core concept of LCT (Life Course Theory), the application to vulnerable populations, critiques and limitations, methodological considerations, and how it is relevant to the present study.

Chapter three will discuss Ecological System Theory. This approach will be used as an extra support to LCT and its framework. The EST has some common aspects with LCT; however, they also have some differences, which will be shown through the origins and evolution, the key systems, the applications, and how it can be complementary with Life Course Theory.

Chapter four will be Analytical Model and Objectives. This chapter is important since it provides the general objectives of this study and the model of how it will be discussed.

Chapter five will present the methodology and how the interviews will be handled to ensure the best experience for both sides. To be able to do so, the paradigm and design, the positionality of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, ethics, and limitations are all aspects that need to be addressed and prepared before entering the discussion with the participants.

Chapter six discusses the results obtained during the interview and analyses the results. Additionally, it reflects on the issue. Lastly, the results are summarised in the discussion, while mentioning potential limitations that this research can face. Recommendations for future development will also be shared.

Chapter 1: Conceptual and Historical Context

The phenomenon of street children is still a major sign of child vulnerability worldwide. While the presence of children on the streets is not new, the categorization of “street children” as a social problem started around the middle of the twentieth century (Aptekar, 1994). Across various regions of the world, this group of children were associated with poverty, marginalisation, exploitation and was often denied basic rights (Aptekar, 1994). This issue is particularly present in Latin America, and in Colombia more than in some other countries. Historical inequalities, displacement, and armed conflicts have increased the presence of children on the streets (Springer, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2022). To understand this problem in Colombia, it is essential to approach the discussion within a global historical perspective and a regional Latin American framework. This section will therefore cover a broad historical overview, followed by the global roots of the problem and the recognition internationally, and finally, it will focus on the situation in Latin America and its very particular context.

1.1 Historical Overview of Street-Connected Children

The presence of children in public urban spaces is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, there has been evidence that in the 18th and 19th centuries, impoverished Europe increased the roaming of children on the streets of cities that have been industrialised, such as London, Berlin and Paris (Wernham, 2001). Those children often worked in menial jobs or survived by begging and theft. In Charles Dickens’ novel, for example, he expressively describes the situation of children exposed to the difficulties of the streets, and he also highlights the social neglect they suffer from (Dickens, 1861). Orphans due to wars, industrial accidents or epidemics had to fend for themselves in the streets without any other choice. During these times, the gaze on those children was either as victims of poverty needing help and charity or a threat to the public (Wernham, 2001).

At the beginning of the 20th century, similar phenomena appeared in multiple countries undergoing rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. In Russia, after the end

of the First World War and the revolution in 1917, thousands of so-called *besprizorniki* (abandoned children) were living on the streets and surviving in difficult conditions (Aptekar, 1994). In the United States, the Great Depression from 1929 to 1939 displaced entire families and increased the number of working children and homeless people. This dynamic also occurred in Asia, where Chinese and Japanese cities saw the number of minors abandoned and child labourers increase in urban cities (Young, 2003). These different examples demonstrate that street children are not unique to South and Central America, but part of a larger problem linked to urban growth, poverty, and socio-political crises.

Despite the presence of children on the streets for a very long time, they only started to frame them as a distinct category of vulnerable people during the second half of the twentieth century. Several factors contributed to this change.

Firstly, the fast urbanisation of developing countries after the end of the Second World War. The increase in rural-to-urban migration created a significant movement of people. Cities in Asia, Africa and Latin America grew at a significant rate, often without the necessary infrastructure to absorb the influx of poor families (Aptekar, 1994; Young, 2003). In this context, children who lived and/or worked on the streets became a visible symptom of urban poverty.

Second, during the post-war period, humanitarian help started to become more popular, as well as human rights discourses. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and later the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 gave children a place and rights. This allowed the situation regarding street children to be rethought, but also provided a normative basis acknowledging the problem as a social justice situation rather than a private family issue (United Nations, 1989).

Thirdly, between 1970 and 1980, street children gained international visibility. In 1979, it was the International Year of the Child, declared by the United Nations, which drew global attention to children's rights. During the same time, the growth of international media emphasises the difficulties of children living on the streets of cities like Manila, Nairobi, and Rio de Janeiro (Wernham, 2001). During this time, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and religious missions started to play an

important role reporting the dragging attention on their work and pressuring governments to take actions and respond to the situation (UNICEF, 2005).

By 1980, street children had become a recognised group within international policies. UNICEF started to produce reports and statistics on the issue, discussing what children living on the streets were missing, for instance, lack of access to healthcare, education, and higher exposure to exploitation and violence (UNICEF, 2005, 2024). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was put into place in 1989, marked a significant turning point. This convention established the obligation on governments/countries to protect all children, including those without any formal family or school structures (United Nations, 1989). The broader vision of CRC covers different aspects such as development, protection, survival, and participation, which was especially relevant for the situation of street children.

While street children exist across the globe, the situation is overly noticeable in Latin America from the 1970s onwards. Multiple dynamics that are interconnected can explain this.

Structural inequalities are one of them, and it has long characterised Latin American societies. The concentration of land ownership, exclusionary economic growth and a weak welfare system created a significant percentage of the population living in poverty (Springer, 2016). The acceleration of urbanisation is also one of the causes of a growing poverty percentage. For example, in 1950, only 41% of Latin Americans lived in cities; however, by 1980, the number had reached 67%. This caused a lack of integration of rural migrants, which led to the proliferation of informal settlements where poverty and overcrowding were severe (Aptekar, 1994).

Political and military violence with authoritarian regimes disrupted families and communities structures. In Brazil, Chile, Argentina and some other places where military dictatorships were highly present between the 1960s and the 1980s, the poor were targeted, creating insecurity and more marginalisation. In Central America, multiple countries were going through civil wars, such as El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. This created a large displacement of families whose children ended up on the streets of larger cities (Wernham, 2001).

Media and cultural narratives had a major impact on the visibility of street children. In Brazil, the *meninos de rua* became an emblematic sign of urban poverty. Their presence in major cities such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo drew international media attention, especially after police violence against them in the 1980s and 1990s (Benitez, 2011). In Mexico City, children working on the streets were also highlighted as a symbol of inequality. Bolivia and Peru also witnessed the increase of indigenous children in street situations, accentuating the marginalisation of minorities and pointing out economic hardship (Springer et al., 2016).

By the 1980s, NGOs in Latin America had developed multiple strategies to approach and address the issue. Shelters and programmes to outreach and educate were put into place, as well as vocational training. During the same period of time, the Latin American Council for the Children and Adolescents (DNI) was founded, which allowed a regional platform to advocate for children's rights and protection (Wernham, 2001). Nevertheless, most cases and questions remained underfunded and undersupported by governments.

While Colombia's experiences regarding street children cannot be separated from the wider global and regional dynamics, it also has its personal and specific historical roots. Multiple structures and political factors together make the problem of street children persistent in its cities.

Inequalities are a crucial characteristic of Colombia's development. According to Meisel-Roca et al. (2020), disparities between central and peripheral regions have been present for almost a century, from 1926 to 2018. Despite some economic growth, rural and isolated regions continue to be left behind due to geographic inequalities and policies privileging industrial localities. The economic model Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI), adopted in Colombia in the middle of the 20th century, highly impacted rural and urban areas in Colombia. While it helped major cities to grow, it also contributed to the neglect of rural parts of the country, reinforcing inequalities (Kalmanovitz and López, 2006). Small farmers saw the value of their goods decrease, and the decline in prices slowly reduced state investment, which pushed many families into precarious conditions. This approach, pursued between 1950 and 1990, favoured urban manufacturers, leaving rural populations with fewer opportunities. These structural inequalities lead rural families to migrate to

cities without a stable livelihood, which increases the risk of children being pushed into the streets for survival.

Another major factor in Colombia is the long-standing armed conflict. From the civil war, *La Violencia* (1948 to 1958), through the rise of guerrilla movements and the escalation of narco-trafficking in the 1980s and after, armed conflicts have displaced rural populations multiple times. According to Shultz (2014), millions of Colombians have been displaced over the last decades, often ending up in precarious urban peripheries. This type of displacement is called forced migration within national borders, which is due to violence, human rights abuses, or disasters. This has been particularly severe in Colombia. For children, frequent displacement can cause family breakdown, loss of community ties and exposure to life on the streets.

Between 1970 and 1980, a fast influx of rural migrants into cities such as Bogota, Medellin, and Cali was observed. The rise of drug cartels and paramilitary groups coincided with the influx of people coming into cities. Urban infrastructure started to be strained with the number of people coming in and needing shelter, which created difficult conditions and a higher level of poverty. Springer (2016) argues that children in precarious environments often feel the need to separate from their families as a survival strategy or to find social connections with peers on the streets.

Before the 1970s, children in the streets of Colombia, especially in cities, were often seen as a normal sign of poverty, rather than a distinct category of vulnerability. The local term *gamin* (e) portrays street children as delinquents rather than victims (Aptekar, 1994). However, academic and media intervention during the 70s and 80s started to shift the approach of people. Granados (1976) was the first scholar to formally study Colombian street children as a specific group, focusing on the causes of their lifestyle and what could have led them to the streets, for instance, family dysfunction and lack of institutional support. Goode (1986) was also a pioneer when it came to documenting the interventions of NGOs in Colombia. She analysed and studied what NGOs were doing to help children who were living on the streets, such as outreach programmes and shelters, but also highlighted the absence of state action. In 1977, the documentary *Gamin*, filmed in Bogota by Ciro Duran, shocked Colombian society by providing raw footage of children's daily struggles

(Saldarriaga, 2011). Together, these contributions created a shift in the perceptions, from delinquents to vulnerable.

From the beginning of 1980, Colombia started to witness an increase in the visibility of street children and the surge of responses from local and international organisations. NGOs started to provide services such as food, healthcare and temporary shelter. However, these efforts were limited by a lack of financial support, and institutions struggled to keep up (Goode, 1986).

After the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and later, in 1991, the Constitution, which incorporated children's rights into national law, a stronger framework was provided to help children. In theory, protection, education and health were guaranteed to all children. In practice, the implementation was old, marred by corruption, conflict and limited budgets (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

By the early 2000s, tens of thousands of Colombian children were estimated to be living or working on the street. Foundation Plan (2021) estimated that around 13 '000 children are currently living and working in Colombian cities' streets, facing high risks of exploitation, violence, substance abuse, but also excluding access to education and healthcare. Despite decades of advocacy, street children are still a visible reality.

Comparing Colombian street children to other regions highlights both similarities and differences. In other regions of Latin America, such as Brazil and Mexico, the correlation between children's situations is identical for the most part (Benitez, 2011; Springer, 2016). However, Colombia's situation regarding drug trafficking is unique and has been one of the major reasons for internal displacement, which has continuously fed the presence of children in street situations (Shultz, 2014). Another significant difference is the first reason why Colombian children were acknowledged by the international public. Whereas Brazil's *meninos de rua* drew attention largely because of police brutality in the 80s and 90s, Colombia's *gamins* drew attention due to conflicts and inequalities.

Furthermore, my countries in Latin America have developed stronger social protection systems after the democratic transitions of the 1980s and 1990s; Colombia's efforts have been less successful due to insecurities and institutional fragility (Meisel-Roca et al. 2020). NGOs steal the central point when it comes to

helping children, but without consistency and support from the state, their limits are quickly reached (Goode, 1986).

The history of street children is both global and local. Across centuries and continents, the phenomenon has been directly connected to urbanisation, industrialisation, poverty and political violence and instability. From Dickens in London to post-war in Russia, from the *meninos de rua* of Brazil to the *gamins* of Colombia, children's presence on the streets has been a common sign of social inequalities.

The historical and global overview, for that reason, provides a necessary context for the next section of this work. It demonstrates that while the category of “street children” is a recent global discourse, the history behind it is much longer. It highlights the interconnection between global and local frameworks and specificities. A theme that will carry on the analysis of Colombia's situation in the following chapters.

1.2 Definition and Terminology

There are two types of children who spend time on the streets. There are children *on* the streets and children *of* the streets. Children on the streets commonly refers to minors who live and work on the streets but go back to their families or caretakers at night (Julien, 2023). Both, street boys and girls are vulnerable and face similar forms of violence; however, the significance and likelihood of exploitation do vary: boys tend to be more exposed to gangs, forced labour, and police violence, while girls, face higher risks of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and early pregnancy (Scanlon et al., 1998; UNICEF, 2012). Children on the streets are slightly less likely to be involved in human and sex trafficking, drug exposure, and gang violence

This distinction has become the biggest typology in the literature on street children (Aptekar, 1994; UNICEF, 2005). This difference in phrasing makes the difference between street-connected children easier to understand, but also shows that the level of risk can vary. For many, the streets are a workplace and social playground, while for others, it is their residence and identity. The categories are fluid and

children can shift from one situation to another depending on their family circumstances, the violence they face, but also peer pressure and networks.

Children of the streets, on the other hand, are kids who consider the streets their homes, they patrol through “their territory”, and beg for basic necessities (Julien, 2023). Some research also highlights the behaviour gap between the types of street children. For instance, children who live on the streets permanently can be more violent, have more resentment for their families and face harder situations, such as prostitution, drug exposure and trafficking (Aptekar, 1994). Another aspect that makes a difference between those two types of children is their school attendance and likelihood of becoming delinquents. According to Aptekar (1994), children who still have family presence and connections are more likely to go to school and have fewer chances to face delinquency, even if they spend time on the streets working. On the contrary, children of the streets who are left to fend for themselves have more chances to drop out of school and are at higher risk of becoming delinquents (Aptekar, 1994).

This behaviour regarding the evolution of children's situations from on the streets to off the streets resonates with findings in multiple countries. In India, for example, multiple studies have shown that children who return home have an economic motivation and a necessity, whereas those who fully cut ties with their families are more likely to form their own community and create street-based groups that substitute their families (Aptekar, 1994; Wernham, 2001). In sub-Saharan Africa, the same pattern has been observed: children with family ties use the streets as a space of income to support their household, while those without a support system depend on the street as a survival environment (Young, 2003). This pattern of behaviour highlights the dichotomy of “on” and “of” the street, which is not unique to Colombia but is part of a wider framework.

Even if academics have different terms depending on a child's situation, locals use the term “*gamines*” to describe children living on the streets of Colombia. According to Greider (1989), the term *gamines* includes children from the age of six up to seventeen years old who live on the streets. The term *gamines* only applies to children of the streets. Those children may have family, but they do not receive help of any kind and are left to care for themselves (Greider, 1989).

The way the term *gamin* is used in Colombia is important because it reflects how the language shapes the narratives and the perceptions. As Greider (1989) describes, this term was used to describe children who were considered dirty, abandoned, and delinquent. While the term was first used to describe children of the streets, with time it became popular to use as an insult for poor urban youth. By doing so, exclusion was reinforced through linguistic stigma, which marked children as outsiders and unworthy of compassion. Aptekar (1994) argues that terminology has a significant connection with how people perceive each other, depending on how they are described. For instance, with time *gamin* became a pejorative term which created a normative consequence on children. And once a child is assigned the name, society accepts harsher punishment and is less willing to give compassion and help.

As discussed in the previous section, throughout Latin America, different countries have developed their own terms to describe children in street situations. As mentioned, terminology has a considerable impact on the perception of children. In Brazil, *meninos de rua* (street kids) and in Mexico *niño trabajadores de la calle* (street working child) have a different connotation, which leads to broader cultural perceptions and policies implementation. While the details and situation are different across countries, this example shows how language is never neutral and shapes how vulnerability is understood and addressed.

Between the 1980s and 1990s, the global term “street children” was widely adopted by NGOs, international organisations, and the media. However, the use of this term was criticised and it was argued that it was misleading, since it suggested that children in street situations were a homogeneous group when in reality situations varied widely (Wernharm, 2001). Moreover, the popularisation and common use of the term implied that the street was becoming their identity, when many children continued to feel attached to their families and communities. To address these concerns, UNICEF and other agencies around the world have started using the term “children in street situations”, which allows a wider perception of every situation (UNICEF, 2024). The shift in language is important to avoid labelling children as “street children” since their identities are not only reduced to the time spent on the streets but also not to frame the street as a circumstance.

Another major issue is age boundaries. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) defines a child as any person under 18 years old (United Nations, 1989). However, local contexts could make the definitions vary. As noted, Greider (1989) considered *gamines* can go from 6 years old up to 17, while some Colombian NGOs have set their limit to welcome children at 16, they argue that older teenagers are considered part of another problem; adult homelessness (Fundacion Plan 2021). This decision could have crucial consequences because once a child is classified as “too old”, they come out of the system that helps and protects them while still in a very vulnerable stage of life.

Terminology also has an impact on gender. The majority of the literature and the popular imagery, such as the Brazilian *meninos de rua*, focuses on boys. By doing so, it gives less visibility to girls. However, studies have shown that girls living and working on the streets have a higher risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation (Wernham, 2001). In Colombia, while the word *gamin* is masculine, the feminine form *gamina* is used in some cases even if it is less frequent. This lack of the presence regarding girls in terminology may reinforce their marginalisation as interventions are often more focused and designed with boys in mind.

The conflict between how the term street children is used can project an image of children that does not correspond to reality. Street children often carry a victimising tone, even though throughout literature, skills like resilience, creativity, and survival strategies have been used to talk about them. Aptekar (1994) has discussed that street children are not passive when it comes to their situation but active agents who navigate complex environments. However, there is a risk in using terms that celebrate independence and resourcefulness because it can minimise what those children have been through.

Finally, terminology is important because it shapes how policies are made and implemented. If children are seen and defined as delinquents, the response from authorities will be reactive rather than responsive, which involves incarceration and violent police intervention. If they are seen as laborers responses from authorities may vary and be more protective of the child. And lastly, if children are protracted as vulnerable rights-holders, policies are more likely to focus on protection, education, and integration in the society (UNICEF 2005; Fundacion Plan, 2021). Consequently,

the language used to discuss such a significant and sensitive topic matters because it is not neutral; it carries huge implications for how society treats and approaches the most vulnerable members of the country.

In summary, the definitions and perception of street-connected children are highly influenced by their terminology. The context and the cultural perception can also have an impact on how children perceive and talk about. In the past decades, the stigmas and negative labels have been shifted away to be more inclusive of street children. However, in Colombia, the fact that the term *gamin* is still commonly used and has not evolved, the negative labels and stigma are still present and reductive to children. Recognising the power of terms and words is essential to have a more accurate perspective of children, but also to approach them in a gentle and caring way. By doing so, it allows the interventions to help children to be more respectful of children and their rights, but also address their vulnerabilities. It is therefore why it is important to use the term children in street situations, following UNICEF (2024), while also acknowledging the heaviness and importance of the local term *gamines*. This dual awareness ensures the inclusion of local context while keeping the clarity and sensitivity of my study.

1.3 Colombian Socio-Political Context

According to the Fundación Plan (2021) and multiple national reports, 13'000 children are estimated to live and work on the streets of Colombian cities. This number includes children who face physical and sexual violence, substance abuse, exploitation, lack of access to education and healthcare and weak protection from institutions. Many of those children come from backgrounds of disrupted families marked by abuse and neglect, abandonment, or even displacement by armed conflicts or economic hardship. This number also contains children who have little to no family contact and often sleep where they can, but also children who engage in work or survival activities but maintain some family ties (Aptekar, 1994). While the categories are useful to understand the different levels of vulnerability, they can overlap (Benitez, 2011).

Inequalities in Colombia remain deeply present. Meisel-Roca et al. 2020) found that between 1926 and 2018, regional inequalities, especially between urban and rural zones, have barely changed. This inequality comes from geographical isolation, economic policies like ISI (Import Substitution Industrialisation), which benefit regions that are already industrialised, and underdeveloped infrastructure (Meisel-Roca et al. 2020). Those situations create disparities between regions, and besides work inequalities, they also bring restrictions on access to education, healthcare, and legal protection, which increases the risk of children ending up on the streets in marginalised communities.

The dynamics between different regions create a disparity beyond economic activities, education, healthcare, and legal protection are the main structures that are severely affected.

Another key driver is internal displacement, which implies people are forced to flee their house/town but stay in the country (Shultz, 2014). When people are forced to leave their hometown due to armed conflicts involving guerrilla and criminal networks, they often move to urban peripheries where housing conditions are poor and economic opportunities are rare. Youth unaccompanied or those separated from their family during displacement are especially vulnerable to exploitation in informal labour and to armed groups (Shultz, 20214).

Over 8 million people have been affected by internal displacement, making Colombia the country with the largest internally displaced population in the world (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2023). Many were displaced after decades of violence, including narcotrafficking organisations, paramilitary forces, and armed conflict involving guerrilla groups such as FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army (González and Bolívar, 2006). The transition to urban life caused by either forced displacement or economic difficulties exposes children to overlapping risks: criminal economies, breakdown of traditional community support systems, and weak institutional presence (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019).

Institutions that help street children are often at capacity or even limited. Despite national mandates, institutions are often underfunded, understaffed and overwhelmed by the number of children and young people that need help. This major

gap has created space for NGOs to assume a frontline role for providing food and shelter, education and psychosocial support. However, their participation is often dependent on donor funders, which can lead to not meeting the scale of needs, particularly in remote and conflict areas. Although the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) is the predominant agency responsible for child protection, it has struggled for years with a lack of staff, underfunding and difficulties in reaching isolated and conflict-affected regions (ICBF, 2020). Despite a solid legal framework to protect children and their rights, Colombia endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, the gap between the two is significant (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Another major issue is participation in the informal economy and exposure to violence. Springer (2016) mentioned that many street-connected children enter the informal economy to be able to survive. This informal economy, such as street vending, car washing and recycling, starts at an early age, and it becomes a primary earning for them and their families. However, this informal labour often exposes children on the streets to exploitation, criminal elements, and irregular hours that can limit their access to schooling or safe shelter.

Children are drawn into illicit economies, especially in urban contexts. Micro-trafficking on the streets relies on minors because they are seen as less likely to face harsh penalties, but also because they are economically vulnerable (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Barón, 2005). However, by being exposed to trafficking, even if it is locally, the consumption of bazuco, a cheap, highly addictive cocaine derivative, traps many children and adolescents in a cycle of dependency (Rueda-Garcia et al., 2020).

Education is a constitutional guarantee for all children; however, it remains inaccessible for many street-connected children. The main obstacles are stigma from peers and teachers, lack of identification documents, overcrowded classrooms, and economic pressure from the household (Bonilla, 2011). Dropout rates are high among marginalised and displaced children, while re-entry into the education system is difficult due to bureaucratic barriers (Save the Children, 2019). Exclusion from education is both a cause and a consequence of street-connected children. Without access and a stable schooling rhythm, children are more likely to reinforce the cycle

of poverty and marginalisation, which often leads to illicit economies (Pinzón-Rondón et al., 2008).

Armed conflicts and displacement have created a larger stage whose impact is felt most acutely in urban centres. Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Pereira have absorbed a significant number of families, creating informal settlements (Dureau, 2002). These environments are made out of precarious housing, weak state presence, and high criminality. For many children, the streets are both a social environment and a space of survival. As mentioned earlier, street-connected children in Colombia are often a link in the chain of informal economy. Their activities range from selling small goods to recycling, performing street music, or cleaning windshields. This form of work, while allowing them subsistence they also expose them to exploitation and insecurity. In some cases, children are drawn into illicit economies, especially micro-trafficking or sexual exploitation. Both rely on minors for their perceived impunity, which leads to fewer chances of consequences. The widespread use of bazuco reinforces dependency on jobs that exploit them, which creates more marginalisation.

The vulnerability of children connected to the streets in Colombia is not an isolated issue. It is rooted in inequalities, violence, displacement, limited support from institutions and a precarious economy. Colombia is one of the most unequal countries in Latin America, with a Gini coefficient consistently above 0.50 (World Bank, 2002). The concentration of wealth and resources is held by a few people, which contrasts sharply with the precarious living conditions of millions. The inequalities feed the cycle of exclusion; families in poverty often lack access to housing, healthcare, and social protection, which leads children into survival strategies to help their families, which often means school dropout and fewer chances to access a better life. These dynamics were reinforced in the 1990s with a neoliberal reform that weakened the investments for the state in social aspects and increased dependence on informal economies (Ocampo, 2015). In the case of street-connected children, this meant reduced state help and institutional safety nets and a more important exposure to urban poverty.

The Colombian government has taken steps to address child vulnerability, incorporating laws to protect children, expansion of social programs, and peace

agreements with armed groups. However, the implementation of said laws and agreements have been fragmented and insufficient (Defensoria del Pueblo, 2018). The limitation on spending on social projects has historically been overshadowed by security and counter-insurgency, which has led to the limitation of welfare programs (Pécaut, 2008). NGOs, therefore, play an independent and indispensable role. Initiatives such as Fundación Niños de los Andes, Fundación Tiempo de Juego, and Moi pour Toit have a major impact on street-connected children; their support ranges from food and shelter to education and psychosocial care (De Benitez, 2011). So far, their reach is limited, considering the scale of need, highlighting the ongoing gap between reality and legal commitments.

The vulnerability of street-connected children is not an isolated situation in Colombia, but the result of a structural weakness. Decades of armed conflict and displacement, deep inequalities sociologically and economically, weak state institutions, corruption, and illicit activities have weakened the country and its population. These dynamics are stronger in urban contexts, where children face daily risks of violence and exploitation, which often lead to exclusion and marginalisation from education and services. Despite important efforts by NGOs and institutions, the protection remains fragmented, leaving children reliant on illicit networks to be able to survive. This socio-political context not only provides evidence about the persistent problem but also contributes to the importance of studying life trajectories and institutional interventions, as this thesis seeks to do.

1.4 Child Protection Policies in Latin America

Since the mid-20th century, Latin America has been marked by major debates and policies concerning children's rights, welfare, and protection. Historically, most regions around Colombia have been approaching street-connected children as primarily criminals and delinquents. This idea and approach are highly influenced by colonial legacy and authoritarian routines, which leads to seeing children in the street as *menores infractores* (minor offenders), which leads the authorities to approach the problem with a drastic response prioritising punishment, institutionalisation, and social control (Rizzini, 2002). However, during the 1980s, after years of military

dictatorship, the dynamics began to change. New opportunities, including NGOs and social movements that advocate for human rights, started to be democratised. The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) went in this direction, which made every Latin American country sign and join it by the early 1990s. By doing so, it made the first region to collectively adopt the treaty (Méndez, 1998). The United Nations policy challenged the Colombian doctrine of *situación irregular* (irregular situations). Since the 1920s, Latin American child policy has deemed that children who were abandoned, delinquent, or in danger were perceived as outside the norm and could be subject to state guardianship, judicial measures, and forced institutionalisation (Rizzini and Polotti, 2011). However, once the UNCRC convention was adopted, the doctrine changed to integral protection, which switched the narrative from children are objects of charity in control to children are right-holders.

This created a significant shift across Latin America. Many countries starting with Brazil perform their Constitution on child protection to align with the new framework. ETA, which stands for *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*, made a groundbreaking entrance in 1919 because it:

- Recognise children as legal subjects with civil, social, and political rights.
- Emphasised family and community-based care over institutionalisation.
- Created mechanisms for children's participation in decision-making (Rizzini, 2002).

In other Latino countries, similar reforms were adopted, for example, in Argentina (Ley 26.061, 2005), México (Ley General de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes, 2014), and in some other countries. These legal frameworks were influenced and tightly controlled by the work of NGOs that focus on advocating for children across the world and who linked local struggles to global human rights agendas (Liebel, 2004).

Nevertheless, major delays have been holding back the implementation of legislation. While the legal approach shifted to a more gentle framework regarding the help provided to street-connected children, the public policies and approach are still very paternalistic and punitive, which leads to institutionalisation being all over

the place and social programs being chronically underfunded. Even though reforms and frameworks have been put into place and structured, the main reason why children still end up on the street is that structural inequalities, such as poverty, violence, and displacement, are still very present and taking away children's rights.

When comparing and analysing American countries, several regional veterans merge:

Brazil has been one of the forefront Actors when it comes to child rights reform. The ECA created counselling advice and help for the rights of children and adolescents, reducing the implication of authorities and incorporating civil society participation. However, the implementation of those council structures remains and even. While Brazil has innovative programs such as Bolsa Familia, violence against children in favelas remains important, and police brutality on street children is still very high (Hecht, 1998; Rizzini et al., 20013).

Mexico passed the *General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents* in 2014, which created a national protection system. Yet, it does not mean that children are less likely to get into gangs, forced into informal labour, and trafficked because the chronic poverty and violence make them more vulnerable, as with Colombia (Panter-Brick, 2002). Despite legal protections, the stigma around street-connected children causes them to be targeted by law enforcement and presents them with barriers to healthcare and education.

Peru's *Código de los Niños y Adolescentes* was introduced in 1992, and they use the *protección integral* approach. In Lima, the NGO Generación has been working in direct connection with street children. However, the state expects them to fully deliver services with little to no help from them (Invernizzi, 2003).

Chile and Argentina have experienced tension with questionable practices and legal reforms. In Argentina, legislation to side with children and help them has been ignored despite the fact that judicial and police actors continue to criminalise children in vulnerable contexts (Beloff, 2007). Chile has been maintaining children's policies in the hands of charities and institutionalisation, with notorious abuses toward residents (UNICEF Chile, 2018).

Across the region, we see some common patterns: lack of financial support, abuse from authorities, stigma and difficulties in accessing social support. Street-connected children are still very excluded because they are often associated with poverty, family breakdown, migration, and violence issues that go beyond child protection.

Colombia shows multiple of the same regional problems, but with additional layers of complexity due to its displacement crisis as well as its armed conflict situation. Following the adoption of the UNCRC in 1991, Colombia adopted the Código de la Infancia y la Adolescencia (Law 1098, 2006), which heavily supports the principle of *protección integral*. This code guarantees children's rights to access to education, health, and protection from violence, while holding responsible family members, society, and the state (ICBF, 2008). The Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF) is the major agency for child protection and welfare. Their responsibilities range from early childhood institutions to protection services. Still, as mentioned in section 1.3, ICBF is severely underfunded and overworked (Human Rights Watch, 2020). While Colombia has developed generous and ambitious policies and frameworks, the gap is still severe.

In Bogota and Medellin, police sweeps often target children sleeping and working on the street; they treat them as delinquents rather than rights holders (Springer, 2016). In contrast, NGOs have played a major role in protecting and helping children. Moi pour Toit, Fundación Niños de los Andrés, and Tiempo de Juego give shelter, psychosocial support, and education. The foundations have a significant role and often substituted the state that fails to support children. However, as Ballet and Bhukuth (2015) discuss, NGOs' presence must remain settled to avoid imposing or overwhelming children and their autonomy.

There are three persistent challenges across Latin America, including Colombia, and they are predominantly around child protection landscape:

The first one is criminalisation and Stigma around street-connected children. Despite legal reforms to help protect children, they are still treated as criminals and delinquents. This approach reinforces exclusion and goes against the rights-based discourse of protection supporters (Aptekar, 1994; Panter-Brick, 2002).

The second is institutionalisation versus community-based care. UNCRC promoted family-based care; however, many countries have focused on residential institutions, which some have been criticised for abusing children and neglecting them (Rizzini and Pilotti, 2011).

Lastly, resource constraints. Public help for children's welfare is still severely underfunded by the government. Governments often choose to allocate larger budgets to security and protection, particularly in countries where armed conflicts are common, such as Colombia and Mexico (Pécaut, 2008).

Recent years have shown promising progress:

1. Conditional cash transfers, which are paid to households for school attendance or medical checkups. This has been improving school attendance and reducing extreme poverty.
2. Children's participation rights have also been increasing. This action increased attention with the help of NGOs and local governments to involve youth councils and street-connected children to get help from programs (Liebel, 2004).

Academic research growth is also creating a bigger recognition and awareness for street-connected children. By supporting the idea that they have their own trajectories, a purely protective approach is being used (Thomas de Benítez, 2011).

In Latin America, child protection policies have gone through a major transformation since the 1980s. They have moved from punitive and paternalistic to rights-based frameworks inspired by the UNCRC. Nevertheless, the consistent structural inequalities, violence, and weak institutions from the state signify that the reality promise is often different from what the law promises. This paradox is particularly illustrated in Colombia. While many positive legislations, actions, and international commitments are promised, the lives of street-connected children are still marked by difficulties, exclusion, and exploitation. It is in these particular situations that NGOs become central actors, filling the gaps where the state cannot provide help and

support. It is nevertheless very important to keep raising awareness and critical thinking regarding the autonomy, dignity, and protection of children.

For the purposes of this social problem, studying to understand the policies that are implemented to protect children is essential. Laws and frameworks that are used to help and support children shape the child and the environment of street-connected children, who later will have an influence on how their lives unfold. NGOs like Moi pour Toit are also highly affected by any regulation adopted by a government to help children.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework: Life Course Theory

This study's analysis and approach are grounded in Life Course Theory (LCT). Life course theory explains how historical, social, and personal events shape individuals' lives over time, specifically for people who are exposed to inequality and instability. This theoretical framework highlights the connection between agency and structure, but also the importance of social relationships, historical context and timing and its impact on individuals' life trajectories. These tools make it especially relevant for studying street children and former street-connected children, whose lives are often marked by difficulties, social ruptures, resilience, and encounters with institutions. LCT was first introduced in 1974 by Glen Elder. His innovative study of children growing up during the United States' Great Depression marked the first presentation of LCT. His work showed that the development of a population/generation could not be dissociated from external shocks. For example, the economic crisis and political instability. Since then, Life Course Theory has been applied on multiple occasions and in multiple disciplines: sociology, psychology, history, and demographic analyses. It has also been widely used in studies of family dynamics, migration, childhood, and social policy, allowing a conceptual and methodological orientation which aligned with qualitative and longitudinal research.

This chapter will trace the development of Life Course Theory, lay out the core concepts, discuss applications to minorities and vulnerable populations, dispute limitations, and explain its methodological role and justify its use in this study.

2.1 Origins and Development

The first mention of the life course theory was in 1974 when Glenn Elder used it to describe the evolution and growth of children during the Great Depression (Elder, 1974). Throughout his work, Elder studies the evolution and the trajectory of children who grew up during the United States' Great Depression, which started in the late 1920s and lasted up to the late 1930s. In his book, Glenn Elder shows how the journey of kids who grew up during the great depression is influenced by their position in historical time, their family experiences and how personal choices are

made within a specific social and political context (Elder, 1974). By doing so, he laid the foundation of what is now known as the Life Course Theory. By discussing the historical time, the family experiences, and the personal choices children made once becoming adults, depending on the social and political context, he laid out different key concepts that are now applied when Life Course Theory is used.

Elder's findings were particularly noticeable on the long-lasting impact of the Depression, depending on the timing of life events. People who were adolescents during the economic crisis often faced difficulties at a young age, such as interrupted schooling, reduced prospects for higher education, and premature entry into low-paying jobs. On the other hand, people who were younger during the Great Depression were more likely to benefit from post-crisis recovery programs. In some cases, it has facilitated people's career growth and educational access. These patterns have shown the impact of historical timing and its profound influence on the outcome, laying the groundwork for later Life Course concepts such as turning points and life trajectories.

Building on these observations, Elder established several core principles that have since become central to Life Course Theory. This includes timing of life transitions, historical time and place, agency, life-span development and linked lives (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Glen Elder uses his theory to understand human development over time. He studied different people over many years to gain insight into their life courses and to identify the types of events that shaped them after being observed for months or even years. According to Giele and Elder (1998), Life Course Theory is rooted in psychology, history, sociology, and demography, emphasizing how social, historical, and personal events shape a person's life trajectory. They also describe it as a multidisciplinary framework used to study individuals across their entire lifespan through various research methods.

The emergence of Life Course Theory as a framework is significant because it could have fragmented, and the approach to human development could have been different. Demography provides the tools for mapping the population levels and patterns across generations. Psychology focuses on how people develop throughout their lifespan. Sociology focuses on external institutions and their roles, such as school and family. And lastly, history traces how economic and political crises or

stability impacts people's life as well as wars. By using those different points and aspects Elder and his peers positioned LCT as a full and complete analytical framework which studies both broader social change and individual biographies change.

Ongoing research has allowed me to expand the framework of study and analysis in new directions. Researchers introduced the principle of cumulative disadvantage, arguing that inequalities are a time component. For instance, disadvantages in an early life stage such as education, health, or family instability increase the likelihood of difficulties in work, relationships, and housing later in life. Other's scholars have applied LCT to contexts such as migration, demonstrating how life changes disrupted life trajectories across borders creating opportunities and vulnerabilities. Longitudinal surveys and life history research have enriched the approach, allowing academics to align the narrative of people's lives to the social transformation. The adaptability that Life Course Theory gives allows this framework to study human development across multiple populations and contexts.

After Elder's pioneering work, multiple scholars continued to develop his framework to understand and study issues like social policy impacts, family dynamics, and disadvantages transmitted by previous generations. His theory became versatile and scholars started to apply it to different disciplines such as migration, childhood studies, and social work. By combining structure and agency, Elder's theory offered a meeting point for deterministic models of development and overly individualistic accounts of human lives.

2.2 Core Concept of Life Course Theory

Life Course Theory lays on the concepts that explain how lives unfold through time within external factors such as social, historical, and institutional. These concepts include the timing of life transitions, historical time and place, agency, life-span development, and linked lives (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe, 2003). These concepts create a framework that provides an analytical plan to understand how people respond to key events, but also how these responses are shaped by broader relationships and structures. For the present study, which focuses on understanding

the impact of NGOs on the life trajectories of former street-connected children in Colombia, these concepts are crucial to understand how early vulnerabilities, opportunities, and social disruptions shape adult outcomes.

The first key concept is the timing of life transitions. This concept refers to the idea that the impact of an event on a person's life depends on when it occurs in their developmental timeline. Every event has impacts on a person's trajectory, for example, the loss of a parent, dropping out of school, or even the loss of a job (Silvén Hagström & Hammarström, 2024). While these experiences can affect anyone, their consequences vary greatly depending on the age at which they occur. Losing a parent at 13 years old, will have a different affect emotionally then losing a parent at 35 years old. In both cases it will have a significant effect on emotions but it will also affect people's lives in different ways. When it comes to street children, the timing of life transitions can be seen in various ways. For instance, a child becoming homeless at 7 years old is likely to be more vulnerable to external exploitation than a young adult that is 25 years old (Parpouchi, Moniruzzaman, and Somers, 2020). This concept helps understand how the timing of early life experiences influences the vulnerability of participants in this study. This applies specifically to people who got help from the foundation that is the main subject of this work.

Another key concept is historical time and place. This concept explains that individuals' life courses are shaped by the era and place in which they are evolving. The impact of life events such as migration, education, and unemployment will have different consequences depending on the political, cultural and economic environment of the place individuals live. For example, growing up during a civil war or in poverty will have a different impact than growing up in a politically stable country with food security. Another good example is when an analysis is conducted between immigrant parents and how they adjust and face the system of a country that is not theirs. Le Goff et al. (2023) discussed how children from immigrant parents evolve in a system that is different for them. Even though the situation between the children discussed in Le Goff's study is different from that of the street children in Colombia, it is still very interesting to see how different backgrounds interact depending on multiple factors.

Children in Colombia who grew up in difficult times, such as during armed conflicts, unstable social policies or displacement, are more vulnerable and may have more

difficulties throughout their lives (Ramirez and Haas, 2021). It is therefore why their life trajectory is shaped by their historical and geographical place.

Another concept is agency. Agency stands for a person's capacity to make decisions, take actions and make choices that impact their life path (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). People are not passive when it comes to their life trajectory; they make decisions that influence their trajectory, even small ones that can shape their development, future, and direction, such as a woman who is in a relationship with a violent partner. She can choose to seek help, leave or stray. Any of these decisions is an active choice in their life that can lead to many different scenarios. Despite facing adversity, numerous children choose to leave harmful situations. This active choice puts them in a situation where they can engage with support services like an NGO (Nobre, 2024). This concept helps to highlight people's resilience and decision-making power, which can be very difficult considering that children could come from backgrounds that have taken advantage of them for several years.

Agency has been developed further in LCT research to express the tensions between individual choice and structural constraint. Hitlin and Elder (2007) argue that agency is not only free will, but the social context and available resources limit possible choices, which have an impact on the freedom of people's decisions. Heinz (2009) highlights a similar idea that agency is often restrained by the opportunities and structures of the location and context. For example, labour markets, unequal education, and different systems play a major role. For street-connected children, agency is often a bad or difficult situation, often manifested in decisions to leave harmful environments, engage in illegal activities or informal work, or seek help from NGOs, even if all options involve risk. This demonstrates how agency must be understood for each case and person rather than in individualistic terms.

The idea of life-span development discusses the idea that an individual's life involves during their entire life (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Early life experiences have a very important impact on people's lives; however, it does not determine the whole trajectory of somebody's life, decision-making, and personality. Throughout the teenage years as well as adulthood, someone can evolve and change if they are confronted with another trauma, if they decide to seek help for a healing process or just because they're learning new skills and how to regulate their emotions. For instance, a person who was neglected during their younger years might be able to build a fulfilling, loving, and supportive relationship with people later in life. This

concept supports that even street children who have been neglected, abandoned, or even abused can become people who are part of society and have a life that allows them to be functioning members of the community.

The last key concept is linked lives. This concept discusses how people's lives are connected to each other. It means that an individual's life is interconnected to the people they have relationships with or people who are missing in their lives. For example, the trajectory of an individual will be highly influenced by the absence of support from a family member, a friend, a social network and the caregiver (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Social connections can either protect or increase vulnerability, and this is supported by this key concept. A good and healthy relationship with parents, family, teacher and friends can create stability. On the other hand, abusive or absent parents or broken relationships can lead to emotional distress and marginalisation. Life course theory points out that humans do not evolve in isolation but do in social networks.

The idea of linked lives has been highly supported, and research has been presenting how social bonds influence trajectories across the life course. Umberson et al. (2010) have shown that relationships have both protective and risk factors for well-being, health, and social participation. For vulnerable young people, the support or lack of it can have a massive influence and can provide stability. Good ties to mentors, peers, or NGO workers can lower the risk of exploitation, violence and precarity. For street-connected children, linked lives are beyond family units; they include peers in street communities, institutional caregivers and local authorities. All of whom shape their vulnerabilities and opportunities.

Put together, these five concepts form the backbone of Life Course Theory and directly influence this study. Timing explains why early adversity can have long-term consequences; historical time and place situates the experiences of Colombian children in the social and political context; agency highlights their capacity to make decisions and act even in difficult environments; life-span development emphasises the possibility of evolution and recovery over time; and linked lives remind us that life develops in isolation. By combining these dimensions, Life Course Theory is a nuanced framework which allows the analysis of a complex situation with life trajectories that can be difficult, as well as the role of institutions and NGOs and the role they hold in their lives.

2.3 Application to Vulnerable Populations

In the past decade, there has been a growing desire to understand the long-term impact of adversity on individuals, particularly on vulnerable populations and children. Life Course frameworks have increasingly been applied to study how early-life risks influence development and resilience in vulnerable people. Research on vulnerability has been enriched by interdisciplinary contributions from psychology, public health, education, sociology and childhood studies (Shanahan, et al., 2016).

A significant area of research has focused on children and youth who experienced homelessness, violence, family disruption or institutional care. For example, Ballet and Bhukuth (2015), examine how children end up on the streets and argue that not all children's trajectories follow the same path. They caution that interventions by NGOs can, in some contexts, unintentionally cause harm, particularly if they fail to recognise children's own strategies for survival. Similarly, Thomas de Benítez (2011) emphasises that street-connected children are not simply passive victims of social exclusion but active agents who navigate difficult environments and often participate in the informal economy. These perspectives challenge dominant narratives from Western cultures that portray street children solely as vulnerable dependents, instead recognising their capacity for agency and resilience. For instance, in 2016, a study focusing on street children in Nairobi was done, analysing how long an NGO can run while being effective (Muthoni Wanjiru, 2016).

In South America, multiple studies have been done to understand and analyse how children and adolescents interact with their situation as vulnerable members of society, but also how certain factors can result in their living on the streets and providing for themselves. Morais et al. (2012), for instance, compare adolescents living on the streets of Brazil to those who live a stable and normal life with their families. Their study demonstrates how stressful or emotionally demanding life events can shape trajectories differently depending on the presence or absence of supportive relatives. This resonates strongly with Life Course Theory's principle of linked lives, as the qualities of relationships play a significant role in resilience or marginalisation. Another relevant contribution to the discussion on children's vulnerability and life trajectories is the paper by Pinzón-Rondón, et al. (2008). In their research, they classify Colombian street-connected children into three categories: homeless children, displaced children and working children. While these categories share

common risks, they also differ in significant ways. While these categories share common risk, they also have major differences. For instance, homeless children are more vulnerable, as they lack a form of adult support; displaced children or working children may have social or family ties or minimal supervision. Yet, throughout all categories, exposure to street environments increases vulnerability, especially to violence, exploitation, and health risks. These findings identify the various risks where both individual circumstances and structural forces cross to shape the trajectories of life.

Recent research has discovered the cumulative nature of disadvantage, a major idea in LCT. For example, Ben-David et al. (2021) shows how having multiple disadvantages can increase vulnerabilities over time. Early educational disruption or exposure to violence can lead to limited future opportunities. It is therefore why longitudinal and life history studies have become increasingly important, as they allow scholars to follow how early experience reverberates across adulthood (Elder et al. 2003, Shanahan et al., 2016).

Taken together, these few studies have solidified the idea that longitudinal research is missing. The researches that are currently available are extremely useful and important and they help create a baseline for further studies. It is for this reason that focusing on street children who are now adults could potentially make a significant step forward in understanding the evolution of children in difficult environments. As well as comprehending the role of NGOs and how important their place is. However, it is still very important to take seriously the essence of the children who join them.

2.4 Critiques & Limitations

The framework used to study individuals' overtime is very important. Life Course Theory provides this specific framework; however, like any theory model, it comes with limitations. Being able to critically analyse, understand, and use this theory is crucial, especially when it comes to applying it to the life trajectories of vulnerable populations such as street-connected children in Colombia.

One of the issues that comes with LCT is that it was mainly developed in the United States, in Europe and more specifically on a relatively Western stable population (Elder, 1974; Mayer, 2009). In this society, life stages are often predictable, and

transitions from one stage to another are similar from person to person: schooling, work, marriage, and retirement. For children exposed to difficult conditions such as poverty, violence, and displacement, this “normal” timeline used by Western cultures is disrupted. In the case of Colombia, street children are often exposed to early entry into the workforce, exposure to violence, and a lack of family structure. Scholars have analysed that the framework may be imposing a normative expectation that does not match the reality of the children in the Global South (Punch, 2015).

Another point that is difficult to contextualise when LCT is applied to a topic such as street children in Colombia is agency. The theory often highlights how individuals react and respond to major events, transitions, or opportunities. While this aspect of the theory is important, it can give the impression that people always have the choice and the capacity to choose their path. In reality, children living on the street have high limitations due to abuse, poverty, lack of institutional support, and exclusion from school and other institutions (Hutchison, 2010). Ballet and Bhukith (2014) argue that the daily strategy to survive that is put into place by children, such as begging, working informally, or joining street groups, should not be seen as a sign of choice and autonomy. According to them, this is rather a survival response to severe constraints and a need to protect themselves. It is therefore why applying LCT in this study requires constant vigilance to make sure that agency and structural limitations are not mixed up by Western bias.

Life Course Theory also comes with methodology challenges. The framework that is given by LCT works best with longitudinal data, where participants are followed across different stages of their lives (Shanahan et al., 2016). However, this type of study is difficult to conduct in low-resource and conflict contexts. The case of Colombian trucking children's views over decades can be challenging, as many of them move between institutions, regions, or even countries. Retrospective interviews, such as the ones used in this study, help recreate trajectories, but information is dependent on memory. And in this particular case, selective and fragmented information can be common, especially when trauma is involved (Neale, 2021).

Another significant limitation is the risk of pathologising “non-normative” life courses. LCT often highlights the trajectories that are less common than what is considered

“normal”. However, “off-time transitions”, such as early parenthood or dropping out of school, can be seen as something negative, but because of the situation of the country or the person, it also could be the opposite (George, 2003). By reacting in a negative way, it can reinforce a deficit-based view. However, a part of the trajectory is resilience and resourcefulness, and this has been proven in a Latin American study (Rizzini and Bulter, 2003). In this study, Rizzine and Bulter (2003) have documented the difficulties and the highlights of how some children manage to adapt and create a better life for themselves by sometimes not following the “normal” trajectory.

Finally, some critics explain that Life Course Theory does not always take into account bigger structural forces. Even if the idea of “historical time and place” is part of the theory, many times it is used mostly at the micro level, looking at individuals and families (Bengtson & Allen, 2009). In the case of Colombian street children, it is not possible to ignore larger issues such as armed conflict, displacement, drug economies, and weak institutions. These elements directly shape the risks and opportunities children face. If these are not included in the analysis, there is a danger of simplifying their situation. For this reason, it is useful to combine Life Course Theory with Ecological Systems Theory, as it helps to place personal life stories within the bigger social and political context.

In conclusion, Life Course Theory provides important tools such as trajectories, transitions, and linked lives, but its application in Colombia requires caution. The fact that it was first developed in Western countries, its focus on personal agency, and its demanding methodology mean that it cannot be applied without adjustments. In this research, the goal is not to measure if former street children followed a “normal” path. Instead, the goal is to understand how early experiences and the support of foundations and NGOs influenced the directions their lives took.

2.5 Methodological Considerations

The alignment of Life Course Theory with the research goal is challenging but also a strength. LCT encourages scholars to analyse lives over multiple years, linking events that have happened in early childhood or youth to later outcomes (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe, 2003). This fits the goal of this research, which is to understand how the external intervention from NGOs such as *Moi pour Toit* influenced children over multiple years of their contact with the foundation.

At the same time, the longitudinal approach is difficult to achieve. Having to follow participants over years or even decades is nearly impossible in a “normal”, general context, particularly when dealing with vulnerable or mobile populations (Neale, 2021). For this reason, qualitative methods are the most suited approach, especially with interviews discussing life history. This approach gives freedom to individuals to narrate their lives in their own words, offering a turning point in the understanding of their perspective and the opportunities and challenges they face. This path focuses on the meaning participants give to their own experiences, rather than being influenced by external categories.

Memory and trauma can also create issues with methodology. The narrative from individuals can be fragmented or painful when recalling memories from a difficult childhood. However, as Roberts (2002) argues, reconstructing their past can show inconsistencies that are meaningful. In this study, the stories of displacement, violence, or institutionalisation are a major part of the narrative and the fabrication of life trajectories and must be taken with sensitivity.

Finally, using LCT in this research involves combining socio-political analysis and individual stories analysis. The framework provided by LCT allows the connection between personal experiences and historical events, such as armed conflict, social policy reforms, and displacement (Shanahan, et al., 2016). With this methodology, the children’s trajectories are able to be aligned with the Colombian context while keeping their voices in the centre of the conversation.

2.6 Relevance to the Present Study

Choosing the Life Course Theory for this subject is theoretical but also practical. The goal of this study is to explore the long-term impact of NGOs on children who are now adults, and this framework is designed to capture the impact of early experiences and how they shape their lives. By putting the focus on transitions, linked lives, and turning points, LCT helps reveal the way the absence or support of institutions affects long-term outcomes.

Street-connected children in Colombia often face disrupted childhoods emphasised by abuse, displacement, poverty, and institutional neglect. Entering an NGO such as *Moi pour Toit* often represents a turning point that allows them to access education, shelter, and psychological care, creating opportunities that were unavailable to their families, who were on the street. Life Course Theory creates the environment and tools needed to examine these interventions and see if they change their trajectory. For example, it allows us to understand if school attendance within the foundation increases chances of employment or if a relationship with caretakers has a positive impact in the long run.

LCT also highly focuses on timing and sequencing. The age at which a child is left on his own or enters street life, as well as the time of the NGO's help, has a significant impact on how his life is going to be shaped. A child who enters *Moi pour Toit* at seven will have a different outcome from one who enters at fifteen. By focusing on these significant differences, Life Course Theory provides a significant understanding of how interventions interact with a child's development and its different stages in life.

Linked lives make the relevance of LCT highly important for the understanding of street-connected children. Children rarely live in isolation when they are connected to the streets, they often still have families, staff, peers and social networks. This concept is especially important in Colombia, where displacement often breaks family bonds. Linked lives show how alternative bonds can significantly help children, or in some cases, create additional stress.

Finally, LCT creates a significant bridge between personal narratives and broader structures. By locating personal stories within a historical timeline and placing the

framework, the analysis goes beyond individual applications, such as poverty, child protection systems, and armed conflict. This approach is crucial to avoid a perspective that lacks an objective analysis, as well as the importance of NGOs as actors in the intervention of poor street-connected children.

In summary, Life Course Theory is highly relevant for this study as it connects personal trajectories with historical and political context as well as institutional policies. It provides an intentional approach to how NGOs affect children within the current environment, but also how long-term help and presence shape the opportunities, identity, and challenges into adulthood.

Chapter 3: Ecological Systems Theory

In the previous chapter, Life Course Theory was thoroughly presented and introduced as the main framework for this study. However, to fully understand the vulnerability of street-connected children in Colombia, an additional theory is needed. Ecological Systems (EST) Theory allows us to situate children's lives within the different environments that impact them. This chapter will focus on the origins and development of EST as well as its key concepts, such as the connection between families, schools, politics, and cultural structures. How the theory has been applied in studies will also be discussed. And finally, a combination with Life Course Theory will be provided to create a more complete framework for this research.

3.1 Origins & Evolution

Urie Bronfenbrenner is the developer of Ecological System Theory. In this study, it completes the approach of The Life Course Theory by highlighting the multiple layers of the environment system that influence human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding how street children's lives in Colombia are framed by external and internal factors across time.

Bronfenbrenner's introduction of his theory was a reaction against researchers who were narrowing down their focus on the individual traits or the family environment. Therefore, in the 1970s, he started arguing that children's development was not only influenced by a narrow environment and group around them, but within a complex system that enabled or constrained opportunities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rosa and Tudge, 2013). The model was later called the "bioecological model", which focused on the reactions between environment and characteristics (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006).

The strength of his theory relies on the multiple-level perspective. Instead of blaming vulnerability on a factor only, such as poverty on family instability, he shows how different layers of the society affect children over time. This approach is highly valuable, especially in cases like street-connected children in Colombia, where

vulnerability is widely spread among these children. In the situation of children who are highly exposed to difficulties, their choices are shaped by more than just family dynamics. Structural issues in the country, complex migration, and lack of state protection create a high-risk situation in which they evolve.

Many scholars have applied the Bronfenbrenner model in different fields: public health (Neal and Neal, 2013), education (Hong et al., 2015), and child protection (Jack, 2010). The application and use of this theory comes from the realisation that children's outcomes cannot be explained only by their personal characteristics. Situating their environment provides a much more complete and relevant understanding of personal experiences and outcomes. This structural approach is even more relevant in Colombia, where the microsystem level (neglect, abuse, family breakdown) is deeply connected to the exosystem and macrosystem failures (proliferation of violence, drug-growing economy, weak protection services).

3.2 Key Systems

Bronfenbrenner's model outlines five environmental systems: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem (Guy-Evans, 2020). Each of these systems represents a layer of influence surrounding a child, ranging from immediate family relationships to large-scale historical events. The model is best understood visually as a series of nested circles, with the child at the centre. The microsystem is the closest to the child, while each additional layer increases the distance from the individual, but it still influences the environment. The chronosystem overlays all four systems, adding a time dimension.

Microsystem, consist of family, peers, school, and caregivers. This is what children engage with on a daily basis. These relationships are what scholars use to predict a child's development. For Colombia, the systems are often disrupted by abusive family members or relationships, school dropout or exclusion, or street peers that become substitutes for family (Pinzón-Rondón et al., 2008). When the microsystem breaks down, NGOs could be an alternative for care and stability.

The mesosystem is made up of the interactions between different actors of the microsystem. For example, if the relationships between family and school, or peers in the community are difficult, it can lead to an increase in vulnerability (Morais et al. 2012). However, if the connections are positive and coherent, they can reinforce resilience, communication, and balance.

The exosystem is made up of actors that do not interact with the child directly. Parents' workplace, neighbourhood safety, local governmental services, or media or things that do impact a child's life or whether they do not have direct relationships with it. In Colombia, street children are directly affected by this system failure, parents may be absent due to displacement or violent conflict, and local protection services may be inefficient (Thomas de Benitez, 2011).

Macrosystem is a broader system that includes political, societal forces, and culture; this system frames the previous one. In Colombia, these regroup the cultural acceptance of corporal punishment, child labour, and the normalisation of decades-long armed conflict that has created a lack of stability in communities and families (Ramírez & Haas, 2021). Such structural conditions create an environment where children's vulnerability is not accidental but deeply embedded in cultural and political contexts.

The chronosystem is a temporal dimension that links every other system together. Bronfenbrenner's model includes life transitions such as entering an NGO, losing a parent, or becoming homeless. These are events that are directly related to a person; however, he also includes historical occurrences such as the escalation of conflict in the 1990s or the peace process in 2016. For street-connected children, the timing of events is critical, considering that displacement at seven years old or at 15 years old does not have the same consequences and exposure to vulnerability (Parpouchi, Moniruzzaman, & Somers, 2020). It is therefore why this system aligns with Life Course Theory very closely, SINCE both emphasise temporality.

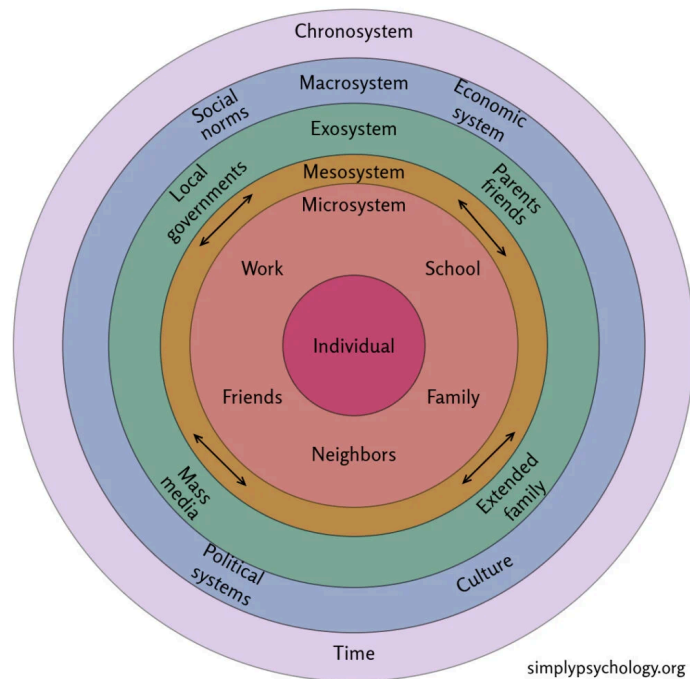


Figure 1:Bronfenbrenner's visual figure of his theory

3.3 Applications

In the context of this dissertation, both of these systems help to analyse how street children in Colombia are influenced by different aspects of their lives, such as family dynamics, school access, neighbourhood safety, healthcare, national policies, and cultural beliefs. When it comes to Bronfenbrenner's theory, a good example is that the failure of the exosystem may lead to a breakdown in the microsystem (Guy-Evans, 2020). If child protection policies are ineffective or if there is an absence of parental presence, it could push children toward the streets. The chronosystem is very close to The Life Course Theory; both are tightly tied into how crucial life transitions and historical events impact growth.

When EST is applied to studies regarding vulnerable populations, it demonstrates how a breakage in one layer can impact the others. Jack (2010) demonstrated that children who are part of a project in the system in the UK are highly affected by the social dynamics and the policies implemented in town and country. In Ungar (2011), he explains the resilience of children using the ecological model, showing that children can adapt in a positive way if the system is stable. For instance, community,

networks, and NGOs can provide a good framework for children in need and can have a significant positive impact on them.

For Colombian street children, the relevance and applicability of each system is particularly important. The breakdown of the microsystem is often due to the exosystem weaknesses, which are led by the macrosystem failure. For example, domestic violence, abuse and neglect are often caused by inefficient child protection, underfunded schools and parental struggles, which are caused by decades of armed conflict and cultural acceptance of child labour and abuse. The chronosystem has a significant role as a time positioner; children displaced in the peak of violence during the 90s have a different life trajectory in comparison to those growing up when peace negotiations were being put into place (Ramirez and Haas, 2021).

3.4 Complementarity with Life Course Theory

Together, both frameworks allow a more holistic understanding of children's vulnerability. Life Course Theory follows personal life trajectories over time, while Ecological Systems Theory draws a plan of the environments and systems influenced by each individual's trajectories.

The complementarity between the two frameworks lies in how they approach vulnerability:

- Life Course Theory (LCT) emphasises temporality — *when* things happen. It highlights transitions, turning points, and trajectories.
- Ecological Systems Theory (EST) emphasises spatiality and structure — *where* influences come from, and how multiple systems interact.

By using both of the theories together, this study can not only analyse *when* Colombian street children are faced with displacement, institutional support, and abuse, but also what shaped these experiences. Scholars have argued that an approach and framework combining time-based and system-based perspectives allows a wider, nuanced approach to the vulnerability of a child (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008; Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003).

Life Course Theory:

Concept	Operational Definition	Example Interview Topics
Historical time and place	Social, political and economic context during childhood and adolescence.	Poverty, armed conflicts, displacement and access to education.
Timing of life events	When a significant event happens, its impact depends on the age or developmental stage of the person.	Becoming homeless Loss of a parent School dropout
Agency	Decision-making capacity to influence their own path.	Leaving home or a harmful situation. Seeking help or avoiding harmful influences.
Linked Lives	Influence and relationships during life trajectory.	Support from various people: family, friends, and social workers.
Life-span development	Personal growth and long-term evolution. Resilience and adaptability.	Healing, new relationships and integrating into society.

Ecological System Theory:

System	Focus Area	Example interview themes
Microsystem	Family, school, colleagues, classmates.	Routines and school environment.
Mesosystem	Interaction between the microsystems.	Relationships between school and family. Or family and friends.
Exosystem	Indirect institutions, for example, policy, NGOs, media and government.	Exposure to violence and media. Access to social services.
Macrosystem	Society norms and cultural habits.	Stigma and community support.
Chronosystem	Historical context and changes over time.	Policy changes and transition from conflict and instability to peace.

Chapter 4: Analytical Model and Objectives

4.1 General Objectives

The general objective of this research is to study the life trajectories of individuals who spent a part of their life on the streets as children or adolescents and who later came into contact with the foundation *Moi pour Toit* in Pereira, Colombia. The goal is to understand the reasons children and adolescents enter the streets, but also their survival mechanisms in such difficult situations, so that we can later understand how the foundation provides help and support. By focusing on life trajectories, the study aims to focus on the complexity of these experiences, emphasising the structural vulnerabilities and the individual agency and its role in shaping children and adolescence.

Focusing on life trajectories provides a larger understanding of the situation and allows it to go beyond the limitations of the descriptive aspect. Instead, it provides a link between multiple stages of life, family background, entry into the streets, experiences of risk and resilience, institutional support, and reintegration into society. The longitudinal approach highlights the interconnectedness of experiences across time. For instance, what happens at a young age can contribute to the shaping of adulthood, while interventions can redirect an individual's entire path. The general objective is therefore to reconnect and interpret the life trajectories while capturing the continuity and changes across a person's path.

The temporal dimension and individual development are the main aspects of this research, and this is why it is grounded in Life Course Theory. According to this perspective, the path and trajectory of a person's life are not random but structured by events, transitions, and turning points that occur in specific social contexts and historical moments. For former street children, life on the streets was a transition that represented a major turning point, often influenced by poverty and abuse. Similarly, *Moi pour Toit* also helped represent a decisive transition, redirecting the life trajectory from a risky path to a protective journey with better opportunities. The life course approach situates the study on a broader narrative, analysing what and when happened and under what conditions.

As a complementary observation, Ecological Systems Theory highlights the interactions and relations between individuals and their environments. The development of children is not an isolated experience but a nesting system composed of microsystem (the family), mesosystem (community and institutions), and macrosystem (broader social structures). Applying this theory to the objective of the study acknowledges how street life emerges and how vulnerability occurs from not only direct and personal factors but from disrupted family systems, weak institutional protections, and societal inequalities. The foundation *Moi pour Toit* positioned itself as part of the mesosystem, providing an institutional environment which compensates for the failures of a child's environment.

Choosing to include the foundation *Moi pour Toit* is a deliberate decision, allowing the research on street children to be broader. In the past years, research on street-connected children has focused on the risk, neglect, and social exclusion, which has led to less attention on the positive impact that institutions can have on children. Organisations have provided shelter, psychological support, and education, as is the case with *Moi pour Toit*; this is why it will serve as a case study of how institutions can modify or influence the trajectory of a child's life. Stability, restoring trust, and access to education and later employment are the main objectives of the foundation, which has a tremendous impact on the development. However, the general objective goes beyond documenting hardships; it will include analysing the mechanisms through which institutional support can change the course of life and how the participants themselves see the help provided.

In this sense, the objective can be considered dual. First, there is the understanding and reconstruction of the participants' life paths and histories, paying attention to the chain of events and transitions that influenced their paths. Second, it aims to analyse the narrative with a broader theoretical framework, identifying the structural pattern, for example, poverty, aggression, and abuse, but also individual agencies such as coping strategies, resilience, and decisions. The study, by that means, produces knowledge empirically and conceptually grounded while being informative on the reasons behind the problem.

Finally, the general objective holds a social and ethical dimension. By allowing the voice of former street children, the research empowered participants while

challenging the dominant stereotypes that picture them only as victims or delinquents. Alternatively, it demonstrates their resilience, their aspirations for the future, and their capacity to reflect on their past. By having this approach, the study contributes to the discussion and debate on child protection and social justice in Colombia. The approach taken by this study creates a vast analytical framework for life trajectory and academic exercises, which illuminate failures in the structures and possibilities for changes.

In conclusion, the general objective of the study is to analyse the life trajectories of former street children who, at some point in their lives, were in direct contact with the foundation *Moi pour Toit*. Rebuilding the timeline and sequence of events, turning points, and transitions that have shaped their lives in a way to reach the objective. By using a dual framework such as life course theory and ecological system theory, the study seeks to capture the interplay between personal experiences, social context, and institutional interventions. These general objectives contribute to the foundation of a more specific analytical model presented in the following section.

4.2 Specific Objectives and Analytical Model

Following up with the general objective outlined in the previous section, this research is built with objectives that guide the analysis and ensure that the life trajectories of former street children are analysed in a systematic and understandable way. These objectives have two roles, which are a guideline for the research and a framework to interpret the empirical data collected through interviews.

4.2.1 Specific Objectives

The study has the following specific objectives:

1. To reconstruct the life trajectories of former street children. To be able to do so, multiple aspects of life need to be discussed, such as family background, reasons for entering street life, and daily survival mechanisms.
2. To analyse the turning points and transitions that shaped their lives. This includes entry into the streets, risks encountered and resilience. But also the reintegration process.
3. To evaluate the role of *Moi pour Toit* in influencing or redirecting the lives of children. Paying particular attention to educational, social, and emotional support.
4. To identify structural and individual factors: poverty, abuse, coping strategies, institutional interventions, and personal agency, which determine the paths of participants.
5. To document participants' own perspectives on their experiences, but also what the society's perception was, and what they recommend for the future and what their hopes are.

These five objectives are all linked and connected. They allow the study to reconstruct their path and personal histories with a deeper interpretative analysis of social and institutional dynamics.

4.2.2 Analytical Model

To put these objectives to work, an analytical grid has been developed, based on both Life Course Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. The organisation of the grid is based on the interview material and into thematic dimensions that align with key moments in the participants' life history. This includes:

- Personal and Family Background: Which places participants as children in their initial environment. This explores parental education, family dynamics, economic conditions, and early vulnerabilities.

- Entry into street life: Causes of leaving home and entering the streets, such as abuse, poverty, and neglect. These are identified as crucial transitions.
- Survival and daily life on the streets: Focus on coping strategies, informal networks, and exposure to risks. Networks can be supportive or exploitative, which shapes daily existence.
- Contact with *Moi pour Toit*: Beginning of a significant transition. Mediated by state intervention such as *Bienestar Familiar*.
- Life at the foundation: What experiences they have had, care, education, and emotional support. These are analysed throughout previous and present environments.
- Transitions and turning points: Representing the turning point and events that impacted and changed the course of life, such as leaving the streets, accessing education, or building new relationships.
- Reintegration and adulthood: This allows the analyses of long-term outcomes, such as family formation, employment, and social belonging.
- Perception of society and institutions: Allowing a reflection on how they were treated by wider society, organisation, and institutions.
- Hopes, Perspectives, and Recommendations: What gives hope to participants? What's their vision for their own future, as well as their advice for children who are currently on the streets?

Every one of those categories cannot be treated in isolation. The life trajectory framework is an interconnected principle that provides a wide and inclusive understanding of people's lives. Life Course Theory creates a large analytical perspective by creating a longitudinal approach, which enables the investigation of how early disadvantages reverberate across time, while also underlining moments of resilience and agency. Ecological Systems Theory, in turn, places personal trajectories in a broader context: the breakdown of family systems (microsystem), external intervention like *Moi pour Toit* (mesosystem), and the tensions of the environment, such as poverty and inequality (macrosystem).

By choosing to use both theoretical insights, the analytical model avoids creating a narrow scope that would only capture a few aspects of the participants' lives. Instead, it places them within a crossing system of vulnerability and protection. This

approach is significant considering that some life events can be caused by different circumstances belonging to different theoretical approaches. Abandonment by parents, for example, can be understood as both a result of poverty or a migration crisis, but also as a trauma. Furthermore, the presence of *Moi pour Toit* is not to be interpreted as individual assistance but as a primary actor when the absence of a dysfunctional family or state is causing difficulties.

The grid, therefore, serves as a bridge between empirical narrative and conceptual analysis. This structure helps organise the interviews in a way that remains respectful of the participants' voices and histories, while at the same time providing a structure that makes patterns, similarities, and divergences easier to identify across cases. Through this function, the analytical model ensures that the study stays grounded in real-life experiences while contributing to theoretical discussions about child vulnerability, resilience, and institutional care.

Finally, this particular analytical model has a practical dimension; it facilitates comparing cases while highlighting the commonalities and specificities of life stories. This approach is academically rigorous while being relevant for this study, as it underscores the importance of long-term support for children in street situations. By analysing and focusing on the relevance of external intervention, and how it shapes the trajectory of participants' lives, the model provides insights that can inform both academic debate and policy discussions on child protection in Colombia, but also beyond that.

4.3 From Theory to Analytical Model

As discussed previously, the social and political context, coupled with the evolution of how children are protected in Colombia, shows how vulnerable street-connected children are. The vulnerable situations for children are not only the result of inequalities but are also secondary to institutions, family dynamics, and individual agency. Comprehending the difference dynamics requires a theoretical approach that can capture the many facets of how life unfolds, which is the life trajectory and layered environment (Hecht, 1998; Thomas de Benitez, 2011).

To address such a complex approach, this study will use a complementary framework. Life Course Theory (LCT) and Ecological Systems Theory (EST). LCT has tools to examine how transitions, turning points, and linked life shape individuals across time (Elder 1998; Shanahan, et al., 2016). EST, on the other hand, was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and it has a broader approach for cultural, social, and institutional. Together, these perspectives provide a multidimensional lens that allows the analysis of former street-connected children's history in Colombia and their relationship with the foundation *Moi pour Toit*.

The decision to use these two approaches is not only methodological but also important to understand the reality of strictly connected children. Their pathways are not only shaped by poverty and violence, but also by other factors that have influenced their life trajectory. For example, personal choices, institutional support or neglect, social networks, and structural forces like inequality and displacement are major factors in their lives. LCT researchers follow individual trajectories across time, paying attention to major events in people's lives, such as entering institutional care, leaving home, or reconnecting with family. EST allows a wider context analysis of individuals' experiences; The family unit, the school system, the community and how it is structured, and the national policies and climate (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Elder and Giele, 2009). For example, the decision to leave home by a child may be explained by abuse, which is the micro-level, but the persistence of the situation is directly linked to a brother's systemic failure. Combining both very theoretical lenses allows us to identify that children are not passive victims of their environment, but they are also not entirely free actors. Instead, they involve and navigate within what's given to them, shaped by structure and the time (Ben-David et al., 2021; Boyden and De Berry, 2004).

Another reason that makes the use of both theories relevant is that they capture the changes across time. In most studies on street children, the focus is on the situation they are currently going through or went through without tracing what happened to them before and what will happen to them when they grow older. LCT addressed the lack of examination on how early disadvantages affect key points during development (Elder, 1998; Shanahan, et al., 2016). This is the central point in comparison to present studies, which followed individuals who were once

street-connected children but are now adults (Aptekar, 1994; Pinzon-Rondon et al., 2008).

EST complements the first approach by showing that the life trajectories of people cannot be understood by themselves. The capability of a young person to leave the street life behind is heavily shaped by their family relationships (microsystem), peer groups and community network (mesosystem), and the larger legal and economic context (macrosystem). Even brother/global interventions can affect the process, such as international funding of NGOs, which can shape the local opportunities (exosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Ungar, 2011). Using the ecological perspective ensures that the study includes a structural dimension, which is EST and an intimate dimension, which is LTC.

Finally, these frameworks align with the research design of a qualitative approach. A qualitative analysis of the life history of a person requires tools that value the experiences of said person, while placing them in a broader social and political position. Life Course Theory emphasises the role of timing, transition in individual narrative, and agency, while Ecological System Theory ensures that children's stories are still contextualised (Elder and Shanahan, 2006; Rutter, 2012). The combination of both theories is not only useful on an analytical level but also for ethical purposes. Using both allows us to respect the complexity of street-connected children while avoiding simplifying their situations. This dual use will also allow us to understand the help provided by external actors such as *Moi pour Toit*.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This chapter will present the methodology and how to collect data regarding the impact of NGOs on street-connected children. The technique used to study a topic is very important, depending on what type of research and results the interviewer is looking for. In this particular dissertation, the goal is to have a qualitative data study. It is therefore why a smaller group of participants is necessary.

5.1 Research Paradigm and Design

Every research project must stand on a clear methodological foundation. In this case, the aim of the study is to understand the lived experiences of people who once lived as street children and later spent time in the foundation *Moi pour Toit*. The central focus is not to measure numbers or test fixed variables, but rather to capture stories, memories, and meaning-making processes. For this reason, the study is placed within a qualitative research paradigm.

Qualitative research is particularly well-suited when the goal is to listen to participants' voices and understand their reality from their own point of view (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Instead of generalising through statistics, this type of research seeks to provide depth, context, and interpretation. It also accepts that reality is not objective and fixed, but constructed through social interactions and life experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is directly aligned with the purpose of my study: to reconstruct and interpret the life paths of people who lived on the streets, entered *Moi pour Toit*, and later became adults.

To achieve this, I use semi-structured interviews. This design is flexible enough to give space to participants' stories, while still following an interview guide shaped by theory. My research was already planned for this by choosing a semi-structured approach because it allows more freedom: questions can be adapted during the conversation, and new themes can emerge naturally. This format is also especially relevant for vulnerable populations, since it allows participants to choose what and how much they want to share (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The design is strongly linked to two theoretical frameworks: Life Course Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. Life Course Theory is useful because it pays attention to key transitions and turning points across life, such as leaving family homes, living on the street, or joining the foundation (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). It also highlights ideas like agency (the capacity to make choices) and trajectories (longer-term patterns). In parallel, Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) makes it possible to situate these individual life events within wider layers of influence: family, community, institutions, society. By bringing these two frameworks together, the research design ensures that both personal histories and structural contexts are taken into account.

The study is also exploratory and narrative-oriented. It is not only about collecting facts, but about understanding how participants make sense of their past and how they build their stories today. This places the research in line with narrative inquiry, which values stories as both the method and the result of research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In line with the structure of this dissertation, an interview guide was developed to structure the conversations with participants. The guide is divided into nine sections to cover the entirety of the participants' experiences. These sections are personal and family background, entry into street life, survival strategies, contact with *Moi pour Toit*, experiences inside the foundation, transitions and turning points, reintegration and adulthood, perceptions of society and institutions, and hopes and perspectives. These multiple sections were planned accordingly to the analytical dimensions presented in Chapter 1 and implemented in Chapter 5. The goal of the guide is to ensure that all relevant stages of life trajectories are addressed, while still allowing room for a free and open discussion. The full guide is provided in Annexe A. Finally, there are ethical and practical considerations behind this design. Instead of interviewing children who are still in *Moi pour Toit*, I interviewed adults who once lived in the foundation. This choice makes the study safer, more ethical, and legally easier to manage. Adults are able to reflect on their own experiences with more perspective, and there is less risk of harming their current well-being. The foundation itself has been running for more than thirty years, which makes it possible to reach adults who have enough distance to share their experiences openly. In addition, strict procedures are followed to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. All participants are assigned numbers, and identifying details such as

relatives' names, neighbourhoods, or workplaces are altered or removed from the transcripts if not considered relevant. Interview recordings and transcripts are stored in safe files with encrypted accessibility that only the researcher can access. Consent is obtained before each interview. An agreement for audio recording is also required. The participants will be informed and reminded that they may withdraw at any moment without any consequences. These steps create a safe environment for the participants while ensuring the safety of their information.

For all these reasons, the study is best described as qualitative, exploratory, and narrative in nature, built around semi-structured interviews and framed by Life Course Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. It is designed to be flexible, ethical, and capable of capturing the complexity of people's life stories.

5.1.1 Relevance of this Study

Moi pour Toit is directly relevant for this study as it provides a real-life example of how child protection organisations can go beyond just basic care. As discussed earlier, Moi pour Toit combines education, psychological care, and holistic development in a context of poverty, where most foundations' main priorities are to provide basic care. The history and programs show the importance of a balanced approach that combines shelter with empowerment, short-term aid with long-term integration.

This particular foundation is also relevant due to its longevity. Because of the longitudinal aspect of this study, it was necessary to focus on an NGO that has been around for many years. Moi pour Toit provides this significant baseline since the first children who have benefited from their programs are now grown adults who are in their forties, thirties, and late twenties.

Moi pour Toit also exemplifies how cross-cultural structures can sustain an organisation over decades and how both lifestyles, beliefs, and approaches can co-exist. It demonstrates how complex partnerships can last and create something positive, with a great impact on people over time. Another particularly relevant point for this work is how the foundation works with trauma and how it can help children to

overcome it in most cases. For instance, delays in communication and expression are very common due to trauma. Many children speak incoherently, lie about irrelevant things, or display obvious signs of mental distress. Younger children often choose silence, even when there is evidence of their heavy trauma. These findings reinforce academic discussions on the long-term effects of abuse and neglect, and the importance of providing adequate support and environment.

Finally, *Moi pour Toit* is openly honest when it comes to the challenges that they face while working with the Colombian government, politically and socially. The country's fragile system for child protection, the high levels of abuse, its lack of mental health support, and unstable political climate make organisations like *Moi pour Toit* indispensable. The work provided by NGOs can fill the gaps, while also being confronted with high risks of instability, tensions, and financial dependency.

For this study, *Moi pour Toit* serves as a model for a longitudinal observation with a holistic approach as well as child-centred care, and also a reminder of how fragile such a system is when it is marked by trauma, poverty, and political instability.

5.2 Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is never neutral. Knowledge is shaped by who asks the questions, how the questions are asked, and how the responses are interpreted. This makes it important to reflect openly on positionality—the social location, background, and perspective of the researcher, as well as the power dynamics that exist between researcher and participants (Berger, 2015).

In this study, the researcher is positioned as both an outsider and an insider. As a foreigner and not Colombian, the researcher does not share the same cultural background or lived reality as the participants. This outsider status brings certain advantages, such as distance, perspective, and the ability to ask questions without taking local assumptions for granted. At the same time, there is a risk of cultural misunderstanding or misinterpretation of subtle meanings.

On the other hand, the researcher has already spent time directly at *Moi pour Toit*, meeting staff and children, observing daily life, and gaining firsthand familiarity with the organisation. This creates an element of insider understanding, which helps in building rapport and interpreting participant narratives more accurately. For example, having seen the facilities and spoken with staff makes it easier to contextualise references participants may make to life in “La Finca” or “La Casa Elisabeth”

This dual status, neither fully outsider nor fully insider, can enrich the research, but it also requires careful reflexivity. Power dynamics are another essential issue. The researcher enters the study with academic authority, while participants may see themselves as marginalised due to their childhood experiences on the street. To address this imbalance, the study emphasises voluntary participation, informed consent, and respect for the voices of participants. Narratives are treated not as data to be extracted but as co-produced accounts built through the interaction between interviewer and participant (England, 1994).

Another layer of positionality involves personal motivation. This project is not purely academic but also connected to a commitment to children’s rights, social justice, and solidarity across cultures. Such motivation strengthens engagement but can also introduce bias if the researcher unconsciously seeks only positive stories about *Moi pour Toit* or avoids difficult accounts. To reduce this risk, strategies such as reflexive journaling, supervision, and triangulation are built into the design (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

By acknowledging these dynamics, the methodology positions the researcher not as a detached observer but as an active participant in knowledge creation. This reflexivity strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

5.3 Data Collection

Participants in this research are adults who, during their childhood or adolescence, spent time at *Moi pour Toit*. They share two common characteristics: first, they experienced situations of vulnerability such as street life, neglect, or abuse; and second, they were taken into the foundation for at least two months. These

criteria ensure that participants have sufficient lived experience both on the street and within the protective environment of *Moi pour Toit*.

Focusing on adults rather than current beneficiaries is an important ethical and methodological decision. Adults can speak about their past with greater perspective and autonomy, without facing risks to their current safety or emotional stability. In addition, working with adults avoids the legal and ethical challenges of interviewing minors.

Sampling will be purposive (Palinkas et al., 2015). Rather than seeking random selection, participants will be chosen based on their relevance to the research questions. With the help of the *Moi pour Toit* staff, the study will identify a diverse group in terms of gender, age, and length of stay at the foundation. The target sample is 9 participants, which is appropriate for thematic and narrative research: small enough to allow for in-depth engagement, but large enough to provide varied perspectives. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) note that saturation in qualitative interviews often occurs with 10–12 participants, so nine participants is a feasible and sufficient goal.

The larger population of *Moi pour Toit* includes children and adolescents who have experienced some force of homelessness, abandonment, violence, or severe poverty, placing them in a situation of social vulnerability. Since its founding in the early 1990s, *Moi pour Toit* has welcomed over 10'000 children, providing them with food, protection, psychosocial support, shelter, education, and a long-term place to live.

The process of recruiting participants was carried out in collaboration with *Moi pour Toit* vice-president and the help of other staff. They contacted a pool of former beneficiaries following a list of criteria: over 18 years old, having lived at the foundation for at least two months, and willing to take part in this research willingly. From this pool, eleven participants were selected; however, only nine were interviewed due to the withdrawal of two of them. The selection process aimed to have a large variation in participants, with different life trajectories and experiences. From the nine participants selected, the variation in age, gender, and length of time at the foundation was important to ensure a coverage of the maximum possible

variation. The final group includes both men and women between the ages of 21 and 36 years old. This age group creates a twenty-year study period that can provide different historical and institutional contexts that can have an impact on the life trajectories of each participant.

The main tool for data collection will be semi-structured interviews. These interviews follow a guide but leave space for flexibility. The guide is informed by Life Course Theory and Ecological Systems Theory, ensuring that questions cover both temporal events and contextual layers. Example areas include:

- Early family life and reasons for leaving home.
- First experiences on the street.
- Strategies of survival, both alone and with peers.
- Entry into *Moi pour Toit* and experiences within the foundation.
- Education, care, and relationships during their stay.
- Transition to adulthood and reflections on life today.

Interviews will be conducted in Spanish, the participants' native language, to capture nuance and authenticity. Later, the researcher will translate the material into English for analysis. Since translation always involves interpretation (Temple & Young, 2004), steps will be taken to ensure accuracy, such as back-translation and review by bilingual colleagues when possible.

Each interview lasted between 1 hour and 2 hours. Every interview was conducted online, using a secure platform to ensure the confidentiality of each participant. All interviews were recorded using a secure app that guaranteed the protection of the information and the identities of each person. Permission for recording was given by the participants, and it was later transcribed.

Prior to the start of each interview, emails and texts were exchanged to ensure that some words were understood and to understand how comfortable the participants were. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide, designed to allow the voices of participants to be free and open, and tailored to participants' comfort. (See Annexe A for a full interview guide.)

In addition to interviews, an observation of Moi pour Toit was conducted in July-August 2023 and July 2024. During this time, visits to the facilities were regularly done, observation of the daily routines was also performed, and informal conversations with children, adolescents, and staff were also carried out. These experiences provided a better understanding of the foundation environment as well as a better contextual idea of its practices, which allows an interpretation of the interview material.

The researcher visited Colombia in 2023 and 2024. Both “La Finca” and “La Casa Elisabeth” facilities were visited for observation purposes. Daily informal conversation and observation allowed a better understanding of the structures and work done at the foundation. The observation of the non-participants offered insight into how the foundation is structured and its functionality.

In addition, the field visits, official publications, and internal reports by Moi pour Toit were consulted. These included annual reports from 2021, 2022, and 2023, program descriptions, and internal planning. These documents provided a significant amount of information concerning different points such as the practices over time, the evolution of the foundation, and their future goals.

The interviews will be organised in collaboration with Moi pour Toit, which will help contact former beneficiaries. Once potential participants are identified, they will be informed about the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw. After providing informed consent, participants will take part in an interview of approximately 60 minutes, conducted online.

Interviews will be recorded with permission and then transcribed. Online interviews were chosen for practical reasons: they make participation easier for adults who may live far from Pereira, they ensure safety for both researcher and participant, and they are logistically flexible. However, online interaction can also make rapport building more difficult, so the researcher will dedicate time to informal conversation at the beginning of each interview to build trust.

5.4 Data Analysis

The analysis will be based primarily on Guerra's (2006) content analysis model. The reason for that is that it uses a dual systemic coding with interpretive depth. This combined approach allows personal analysis of individual life stories while highlighting common trajectories. A model like this is especially valuable for a study that focuses on personal stories with individual voices and life trajectories (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Following Guerra's (2006) model follows interconnected steps:

1. Familiarisation with the material: Repeated reading of the transcripts.
2. Systematic coding: Significant passages are labelled.
3. Grouping of codes into categories: Selecting recurrent experiences, patterns, and ideas.
4. Construction of themes: Organise categories.
5. Review and refinement of themes: Ensure accuracy.
6. Producing the final frameworks: Making sure themes are articulated and connected to the research.

This step-by-step process helps transform raw interview material into structured insights. The goal is not only to summarise what participants said but also to interpret how they make sense of their life trajectories, while drawing attention to resilience and vulnerability.

In addition, the study follows Bryman's (2016) six-step model of thematic analysis, which emphasises linking findings back to theory. The two frameworks, Life Course Theory and Ecological Systems Theory, will be used to interpret the themes. For example, experiences of "leaving home" or "finding support at *Moi pour Toit*" will be seen as transitions or turning points in the life course, while the influence of peers, institutions, or broader Colombian society will be framed within ecological layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Finally, this analytical approach does not aim for statistical generalisation but for analytical generalisation (Yin, 2018). Using individual interviews and discussions illustrates cases better, especially when the goal is to identify resilience, vulnerability, and child protection.

5.5 Ethics

Because this study involves participants with histories of vulnerability and trauma, ethics form a central concern. The research follows the principles of the Belmont Report (1979): respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

- Informed consent: Each participant will be fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw, and the measures taken to protect confidentiality. Because the interviews were recorded, the verbal consent was formally documented at the beginning of each recording (Kaiser, 2009)
- Confidentiality: Pseudonyms will be used, and identifying details will be removed. Data will be stored securely in encrypted files. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings and transcripts.
- Minimising harm: Given the sensitivity of the topics, interviews will follow trauma-informed practices (Campbell et al., 2009). Participants will be told they can skip questions or pause at any time. If distress arises, information about psychosocial support will be provided.
- Researcher responsibility: The researcher will maintain reflexivity throughout, recognising the power imbalance and ensuring participants feel respected as experts of their own lives.

By placing ethics at the centre, the research aims not only to protect participants but also to enhance trust and authenticity.

5.6 Limitations

Like any study that requires individual life stories that are based on memories and experiences, this study has limitations. First, the retrospective of traumatic events that have happened many years ago for most of them. Memories can be affected by many factors, such as time, trauma, or substance abuse. However, in qualitative research, the truth value is how the stories are narrated; for instance, how people interpret their lives is more important than factual accuracy (Riessman, 2008).

Second, the study only focuses on the NGO, *Moi pour Toit*. The transferability of findings to other contexts is limited by the slim field studied. Still, the validity of the case study is held in depth rather than breadth. However, a study based on *Moi pour Toit* can still be highly valuable, considering how long the foundation has been around, but also for illustrating theoretical points about child protection and resilience.

Third, the use of online interviews can have some disadvantages and come with challenges. Unstable internet, time difference, or reduced personal connection can cause the interviews to be less efficient. While these are significant limitations, it can also come with great solutions that can allow participants to share their stories even if they live in a different region.

Finally, the positionality of the researcher can shape the interpretation of the results. Personal values, motivation, and cultural distance may influence how the narrative is interpreted and analysed. To reduce this potential bias, several safeguards are put into place: continuous reflexive journaling, discussion of interpretations with supervisors, and transparent use of coding. In addition, the possibility of bias will be revisited in the results discussion, where the researcher will reflect critically on how personal positions and perspectives may influence the result (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Despite these limitations, this study is still highly academic, solid, and valuable. Its design allows deep exploration of personal stories while offering respect and insights into the complex intersection of resilience, institutional care, and vulnerability.

Chapter 6: Results

This chapter presents the foundation *Moi pour Toit*, a Swiss/Colombian institution dedicated to the education, protection, and empowerment of vulnerable children in Pereira, Colombia. By working with a historical analysis, organisational structure, and firsthand observation, this chapter lays the foundation on a larger scale for child protection, trauma-informed care, and cross-cultural solidarity.

Following Chapter 4 analytical model and objectives, this chapter not only describes *Moi pour Toit* but also integrates the voices, experiences and life trajectories of the nine participants. Their stories are presented following the analytical dimensions identified earlier: personal and family background, entry into street life and survival strategies, and contact with *Moi pour Toit* and the support received. This plan ensures that the participants' stories and life trajectories are narrated and presented in a reconstructed way that ensures that the sequences of events, transitions and turning points follow the theoretical framework.

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first one follows the history and origins of *Moi pour Toit*, highlighting the personal connections that have shaped its creation. Section 4.2 explores the motion and philosophy while focusing on the guiding principles that lead the daily work. Section 4.3 details its programs and activities, while Section 4.4 discusses organisational development and internal dynamics. Section 4.5 examines partnerships, relationships with locals and international, and challenges. Finally, the last section reflects on the relevance of the foundation for the study, focusing on the practicality of the research regarding child protection.

Throughout this structure, the chapter will allow easy comprehension of the foundation *Moi pour Toit* as a humanitarian institution in a case study which crosses international borders and shows resilience, agitation, and cooperation.

6.1 Moi pour Toit and Results

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the foundation Moi pour Toit, which is the central point of this dissertation. Before presenting the participants and their stories, it is essential to contextualise the environment in which their life path was impacted. Founded in response to a challenging problem of neglect and vulnerability faced by children in Pereira, Colombia, Moi pour Toit has grown, evolved, and changed in the almost 40 years of its existence. Its unique binational structure, rooted in Switzerland and Colombia, makes it especially interesting. The following dimensions of the foundation's identity and operation will be explored: its origins and founding, the social and political context, its mission and philosophical approach, the programs and activities, its governance structure, and finally, the challenges and moments of resilience. These different sections are the start of understanding the life stories of the participants and how their lives were influenced.

6.1.1 Origins and Founding

The foundation Moi pour Toit is a Swiss, Valaisan, private charitable NGO known for its help and support to children in Pereira, Colombia. Since 1987, the foundation has operated on its own without any type of help from Switzerland. Its program provides help, protection, education, and integral training for children and adolescents aged from 4 years old up to 18 years old. They are also allowed young adults to stay if they are studying at University or doing an apprenticeship. The foundation structure has stood out for its longevity and consistency, offering an alternative to the protective systems known in the country.

The foundation carries a deeply personal and symbolic history. In the 1970s, Christian Michellod, while travelling on a Colombian train, met a young girl with whom he had a life-changing discussion. This moment eventually led him, twelve years later, to create Moi pour Toit, which was originally "Moi pour lui, pour les autres", an NGO with the goal of helping children. His goal was to provide shelter and education for what he called "orphans of Tenderness", which evoked children who suffered from not only physical abandonment, but also emotional neglect caused by a country shaken by displacement and violence.

6.1.2 Context of Emergence in Colombia

Moi pour Toit emerged during a time when Colombia, specifically Pereira, was suffering from high turbulence. Located in the coffee-growing region, Pereira was not spared from narco trafficking, civil violence, and socioeconomic difficulties. Many children were forced into difficult situations and faced hardships that highly influenced their lives. Moi pour Toit emerged as a response to the crisis of street children, property, abuse, and parental death. The foundation established facilities in Pereira and its surroundings, providing immediate refuge while building a long-term plan for reintegration and rehabilitation.

From the very beginning, Moi pour Toit has been highly focused on education, psychological care, and vocational preparation from early years. This contrasted heavily with the norm in the 1980s. At the time, state institutions lacked resources and only offered custody care. Throughout the history of Moi pour Toit, the foundation has always been a pioneer for children's rights. They insisted on treating children as individuals with rights and potential, rather than just a case number that is anonymous.

Since 2008, the foundation has been leaving a significant impact on its path. In 2008, the Swiss Confederation, through the Development and Cooperation Department (DDC), designated Moi pour Toit the most active private Swiss NGO in Colombia. In 2012, to celebrate its 25th anniversary, the foundation produced a documentary titled *Después de la Tempestad* (After the Storm), evoking its role as a refuge for street children in Pereira. The film also holds a significant place between donors and beneficiaries, and how important the link is.

The foundation journey has not always been easy and without bumps. In July 2023, Moi pour Toit experienced a tragic loss after the death of its founder and president, Christian Michellod. The foundation describes this difficult moment as “the last storm” that shook its very core. Despite these difficult times, Moi pour Toit has remained very committed to its mission and has still been receiving immense support from the *Club des Mille*, numerous donors, and the strong dedication of its committee members. In August 2023, the new leadership structure was put into place with Michèle Michellod-Marquis as president and Françoise Lapaire Nicolini as

vice-president, alongside other members and external auditors who took the lead after Michellod's passing. The continuity and the legacy of Christian would be left to the day-to-day work of the foundation.

The work and relationship of the Swiss-Colombian structure of *Moi pour Toit* is itself significant and impressive. From Switzerland, financial support, governance, and donor engagement are ensured with transparency and accountability. And in Colombia, the work provided by the staff, the educators, the social workers, the psychologists, and the administrators translates to a successful foundation with a concrete program directly impacting children's lives. This dual framework is central to the longevity of the foundation, allowing it to be stable with the support from Switzerland while remaining connected to the Colombian reality.

Moi pour Toit has become more than a shelter for almost forty years. The foundation and its people represent resilience, cross-cultural solidarity, and the belief that a small gesture like a train conversation can lead and grow into a lasting institution that changes lives.

6.1.3 Mission and Philosophy

Moi pour Toit's mission is to *“train and fully form each boy, girl, and adolescent so that they become honest, responsible, respectful, supportive, and tolerant individuals, able to integrate into the family or community”*. The foundation symbol is an image of a child's hand, which symbolises the guidance and teaching to walk through life. This vision reflects a holistic approach focusing on immediate care and empowerment to build long-lasting growth, which reflects the philosophy of building principles of dignity, opportunity, and resilience.

The heart of the foundation lies in the metaphor of *taking a child by the hand and teaching them to walk through life*. The interpretation of said metaphor is literally applied to the foundation approach; accompanying children through their trauma, their personal growth, and their education until they can fend for themselves and be independent. In Colombia, most institutions focus on custodial care and short-term sheltering. *Moi pour Toit*, however, commits itself to long-term care and supports a

full trajectory of development, from childhood through adolescence and in some cases into university studies.

Education is at the centre of its philosophy. Moi pour Toit's schooling access is highly important, as well as vocational training, cultural enrichment, and psychological development. The adoption of Waldorf pedagogy in its facilities reflects the importance that children hold for the foundation, as well as how important holistic education is. Pedagogically, this approach is well-suited for children recovering from trauma or neglect because it emphasises creativity, individualised attention, and emotional balance.

As important as education is, it cannot heal the wounds of abuse and abandonment. Moi pour Toit highly insists on the importance of mental health and social support. When it comes to the support given to children, the UN needs are met on a really high standard. In both La Finca and La Casa Elisabeth, psychologists are provided, as well as pedagogues and social workers. This mix of therapeutic approaches and educational support ensures that children are not only attending school but are given the correct tools to process trauma and regain trust in society.

Inclusivity is also a major part of the foundation philosophy. All children are welcome with no discussion. All children are welcome with no discussion. However, if the child has already been in the foundation, staff may sometimes decide not to accept them back if their first experience was unsuccessful. According to the vice-president's philosophy, however, every effort should be made to help the child, even if it requires extra time, energy, and resources. This philosophy reflects a high belief in second chances and a refusal to abandon a child who has already been rejected in other settings.

A final part of the foundation philosophy is the partnership between Switzerland and Colombia. The Swiss part of the foundation, which is the financial and donor engagement, works hand in hand with Colombian staff who focus on the daily actions and child care. This dual system embodies the foundation belief of community and general support. It shows the efficiency of people who truly care about the well-being of children and demonstrates how local and global can work hand in hand to provide a healthy and safe environment for children. Multiple

participants mentioned that the connection to Switzerland was important for them. Seeing Christian and Françoise come back every year with the same interest to talk to them and see them was heartwarming and important for the trust they built as children.

Moi pour Toit's mission and philosophy is a great representation of the convergence of education, inclusivity, care, and accountability. It does not merely rescue children from immediate harm but strives to build a future where they can thrive as autonomous, empowered individuals.

6.1.4 Programs and Activities

Moi pour Toit has implemented multiple programs and activities to support and provide shelter, education, personal growth, and therapy. These programs are organised across its different facilities, and each activity is tailored to the developmental stage of each child. *“During my first day at the foundation Moi pour Toit, I had the opportunity to visit the structures, talk to the staff members, and talk with the kids as well. The facilities are well done and spacious. Boys under the age of 13 are living in Combia (La Finca) with the girls. However, from 13 above, boys are living in a different facility located in the city centre of Pereira (La Casa Elisabeth). It is important to acknowledge that the moving age for the boys is between 12 and 13. This decision depends on the maturity of each individual.”*

The separation of adolescent and younger kids/girls is facilitated by how the foundation is organised and divided. La Finca, located in Combia, provides a rural environment which is more suitable for young kids who are starting the healing journey and need a calmer place. However, adolescents' journey will be exposed to urban life to start building independence and reintegration into society, as well as accessing secondary schools. For this, they will be moved to Casa Elisabeth in Pereira. In La Finca, there is a school with multiple classrooms for the use of the younger children from the foundation, as well as for children from outside the program. The older kids have access to education in public schools in Pereira. Some of the children still present in both La Finca and La Casa Elisabeth are older and

already attend university. This polyvalent system allows flexibility for continuing education while adapting to the needs and age of each child.

Moi pour Toit also offers vocational, artistic, and cultural activities to encourage creativity and practical skills. For example, a music teacher visits once per week to provide lessons, complementing the academic curriculum. Daily activities are also implemented to foster healthy routines, including sports, household chores, and therapeutic sessions. This management encourages discipline and responsibility. Psychological and medical support are integrated into the programs. The Bienestar and the Ministry of Health require the foundation to maintain two nurses, a nutritionist who visits every two weeks, two psychologists, two pedagogues, and two social workers. Medical appointments are organised by the nurses, who accompany the children along with Swiss volunteers or health authorities. This frame around children and their well-being is a part of the state requirements, and it also reinforces the philosophy of the foundation.

The programs Moi pour Toit implement and support go beyond the basic needs that children require. Prevention is one of them. The foundation works with families and local communities in a proactive way to prevent abuse and neglect. Staff members build programs and relationships to engage with locals to create awareness and reintegration, but also to ensure children leaving Moi pour Toit do not return to cycles of neglect or abuse.

Overall, the Moi pour Toit approach and programs are comprehensive: they provide shelter, education, psychological healing, cultural enrichment, and vocational training. They give immediate help and care for children in vulnerable situations while equipping children with knowledge and skills to build sustainable futures.

6.1.5 Binational Governance Structure

For almost forty years, Moi pour Toit has evolved and grown into a stable and respected organisation, but this evolution has been marked with hardships and challenges as well as successes. The collaboration between Switzerland and Colombia has been a major factor in the structural growth of the foundation. The Swiss board takes on the responsibilities for governance, transparency, and donor engagement. In Colombia, the day-to-day operations are managed on site by professional teams of psychologists, educators, and administrators. The international structure has allowed Moi pour Toit to create a school and expand its facilities, as well as maintain a reputation for excellence.

During its first years, Moi pour Toit was primarily driven by the passion and vision of its founder, supported by a few people in Switzerland who collaborated with him in its early days. However, over time, the foundation became more organised and structured with formal roles, responsibilities, and operational structures. Today, it functions as a Swiss-Colombian entity with strong coordination between both countries. In Switzerland, the foundation plays a crucial role in fundraising, donor engagement, and financial stability. This ensures that the resources are enough, provided, and well-managed with transparency and efficiency. In Colombia, the organisation is responsible for the practical aspects of projects. Implementation of programs throughout professional teams that are well composed with educators, psychologists, social workers, support staff, and administrators is crucial to maintain the foundation running and healthy. The binational structure has proven to be resourceful and strong, while making the foundation stay close to the Colombian reality, while benefiting from Swiss stability.

Moi pour Toit stands out for its transparency and honesty as well as its professionalism and accountability throughout the development. From early on, the foundation has recognised that credibility among donors requires transparent governance and solid reporting practices. External evaluations, systematic communication, and financial audits have become the norm in its operations. The Swiss branch provides and ensures transparency and honesty on a regular basis, as well as compliance with the regulatory requirements of charitable foundations under Swiss law, while the Colombian team implements projects with evaluation and

monitoring. This approach, based on transparency and honesty, has allowed us to maintain and build long-term relationships with donors, associations, and institutional partners.

The growth of the foundation has created a significant program that requires not only physical infrastructure but also internal procedures, mechanisms for coordination between different units and training systems for staff. This development required significant work, considering that the foundation began with a modest home for children in Pereira. The results of the growth are a coherent institutional model that goes beyond emergency care to provide long-term opportunities for children and adolescents.

The adaptability of the foundation is an important dimension, considering the organisation needed for such a big NGO. Colombia has experienced significant political and social changes over the past decades, from urbanisation, shifts in state child-protection policies, and armed conflicts. *Moi pour Toit* has continuously been adjusting to the changes due to the evolution in the political context of the country. From integrating new educational approaches, aligning with national frameworks for child protection, and strengthening psychological care. This adaptability ensured that the foundation remained efficient and up-to-date with what was needed at the moment regarding vulnerable youth.

Moi pour Toit has built a significant institution that can rely on strong skills from its staff. This was achievable due to the stringing skills, the continuous training, partnerships with the university and local institutions, and exchanges. The organisations recognise that working with you is very different and requires more than goodwill. Qualified professionals are a must when it comes to traumatised children who are in difficult situations; experienced psychologists, social workers, and pedagogues are required. By making sure their staff is professional, the foundation has been able to maintain high standards and care for children's well-being, cultivating a team that embodies the foundation's values.

For its future, the foundation has been focusing on a more sustainable way to proceed with its staff and children. By combining stable governance, a steady professional staff, financial transparency, and adaptability to the social changes, *Moi*

pour Toit's goal is to keep developing and making a sustainable impact. Its binational framework continues to provide a unique advantage in terms of stability from the Swiss oversight while keeping the direct engagement and contextual knowledge of Colombian implementations.

Summary, Moi pour Toit organisational development characterised with three main trajectories: consolidating of binational governance, adaptation to changing social context, and professionalisation of structures and staff. These elements have allowed the foundation to remain faithful to its original mission while ensuring that its evolution is up-to-date with the current social and political context, as well as its alignment with the current donors.

6.1.6 Challenges and Resilience

Partnerships are essential in the foundation work. Maintaining an NGO with such a large number of children relying on it costs a lot of money yearly. Financially, it relies on donors, especially from Switzerland, including the *Club des Mille*, in a significant network of individual supporters. The Bienestar Familiar, Colombia's state welfare authority, also collaborates by placing children within the foundation and monitoring standards. Partnerships with universities and health services provide educational and medical resources. At the same time, challenges can be significant depending on the period. In 2023, there was a period where the number of children escaping the foundation was significantly higher than usual. This behaviour could be related to multiple factors, for example, one of them is a direction that implements new rules. This observation underscores how new or different management can shift in educational philosophy and affect the sense of security of children or the sense of freedom. Another persistent challenge is trauma. When it comes to the children, the obvious abuse is extremely visible. Both mental and physical abuse are obvious even to non-local observers. Scars are visible on many children's bodies: cigarette burns, cuts, wounds from objects, and signs of beatings with bare hands. Among girls, scars often stem from suicide attempts. Many children report having suffered sexual abuse from relatives, including uncles, stepfathers, and other family

members. This harsh reality can place staff members under high stress and difficulties.

Financially, *Moi pour Toit* has a pretty structure and operational budget. One million is required annually to provide for children in La Finca, La Casa Elisabeth and the school. A third of the budget is provided by El Bienestar. Donor engagement has been steady for the past few years, but depending on external funding, the situation can vary and be unstable. La Casa Elisabeth is a property that was donated to the foundation, which serves as a financial safeguard according to Colombian laws. This means that in case of a crisis, it could be sold to support the rest of the operations at La Finca.

Partnerships are important and provide both resources and legitimacy. However, it comes with its list of challenges, from trauma to leadership disputes and escapes that threaten the stability of the foundation. *Moi pour Toit* must navigate these difficulties while maintaining the trust and relationship with its partners and its mission towards children.

6.2 Participants

This section presents the life trajectories of the nine participants who accepted to participate in this study. All participants experienced street life in different ways and were later supported by the foundation *Moi pour Toit*. The narratives are structured following the analytical dimensions defined in Chapter 5, including personal and family background, entry into street life and daily survival, and contact with *Moi pour Toit*, life at the foundation, key transitions, reintegration into adulthood, perception of society and institutions, and future perspectives.

The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences before, during, and after their time on the streets, highlighting common patterns as well as individual differences. Direct quotes from the interviews are used to give participants a voice and illustrate key experiences, challenges, and turning points.

Each participant is first introduced briefly, including age, gender, family context, and the approximate age at which they left the street. Following the introductions of participants, the narratives are organised according to the dimension listed above. This will allow a clear and systemic presentation of the life trajectories of participants.

6.2.1 Participants

Participant 1 is a 31-year-old man who was born and raised in Pereira, Colombia, by a single mother with three kids. He joined a gang before entering *Moi pour Toit* at the age of 12. Participant 2 is a 33-year-old woman from Medellin, she joined the foundation at 14, following Bienestar intervention, after leaving school to work on the streets to support her family. Participant 3 is a 31-year-old woman from Pereira, she grew up with her mother and five siblings in extreme poverty. She was removed by Bienestar at age 11 after repeated injuries caused by her stepfather. Participant 4 is a 21-year-old man from Venezuela. He was abandoned by his mother after migrating to Colombia, and subsequently joined street groups until police intervention brought him to the foundation. Participant 5 is a 25-year-old woman from Pereira, she fled abuse with her younger brother and directly joined *Moi pour Toit* at age 14. Participant 6 is a 29-year-old man from Pereira, who experienced sexual abuse and voluntarily joined a gang for protection before entering Bienestar and subsequently the foundation at age 13. Participant 7 is a 28-year-old man from Armenia, Colombia. He lost his mother to suicide and was removed from a violent household by Bienestar at age 10. Participant 8 is a 36-year-old man from Medellin, he became involved in street work and substance abuse after his family fled cartel violence. He joined *Moi pour Toit* at age 9. Finally, Participant 9 is a 22-year-old woman from Pereira, engaged in survival sex after her mother's death, before entering the foundation at age 13 through state intervention.

Repertory Grid

Participant	Age/Gender	Family Background	Entry into Street Life	Contact with Moi pour Toit	Current Situation
P1	31, Male	From Pereira, Absent father, 3 older brothers	Joined gang to get protection	Arrested and placed by Bienestar at age 12	Married with 2 children, mechanic
P2	33, Female	From Medellin, Both parents were present, 4 siblings	School dropout, sex work on the streets	Bienestar placement, at age 14	Single mother of 1 child, working as a secretary
P3	31, Female	From Pereira, Abused by step-father, 6 siblings	Avoided the streets due to intervention of Bienestar	Beinestar placement at age 11	Married with 1 child working with Bienestar
P4	21, Male	From Venezuela, abandoned by his mother, 3 siblings	Joined groups of street children to survive	Arrested and placed by Bienestar at age 12	Studying at University
P5	25, Female	From Pereira, fled household due to step-father abused, 3 siblings	Avoided the streets due to help request	Turn herself up at the foundation at age 14	Married with no children, working as an educator for street children
P6	29, Male	From Pereira, absent mother, abusive father and relatives, no siblings	Joined a gang for 3 years to flee abuse	Arrested, Bienestar placed him at 13	Working in a bakery in Bogota
P7	28, Male	From Armenia, abusive father, mother suicide, 2 siblings	Spend time on the streets to avoid abuse	Bienestar placed him at 10	Single dad of 2 children, works as a security agent

P8	36, Male	From Medellin, present parents, 4 siblings	Worked on the streets selling coffee, addiction	Bienestar placed him at 9 years old	Relationship and has 1 kid, in the military
P9	22, Female	From Pereira, mother passes way in childbirth, father present, 3 siblings	Sell sexual services to support her family	Father requested Bienestar helped, join M.p.T at 13	Works at a nail salon

After introducing the nine participants, it is now possible to organise the results from the interview following what has been mentioned previously. The following structure will be used, as mentioned: personal and family background, entry into street life and survival, and contact with *Moi pour Toit*. The summer of answers will be put together, as well as important differences, alongside direct quotations of key experiences, challenges, and turning points.

6.2.2 Personal and Family Background

Participants' early family environments were often characterised by economic vulnerability, parental absence, and exposure to abuse or neglect. Most grew up in single-parent households, frequently with mothers who had new partners, sometimes leading to abuse by stepfathers. Generational trauma and poverty shaped these experiences, with multiple participants witnessing cycles of hardship and neglect. For example, Participant 2 recounted: *"I was born after a rape. My mother was sent over to her aunt's house when she was 13 years old because her mum could not afford to feed her nine children. Her uncle, her aunt's husband, abused her and got her pregnant. She ended up having me and struggled her whole life until her passing due to an overdose."* Economic hardship was pervasive, compelling children to contribute to household survival. Participant 8 described early street work and subsequent substance use as responses to family poverty, while Participant 9 sought to support her siblings following her mother's death. Sexual abuse within

households, as experienced by Participant 6, further illustrates how family environments shaped vulnerability to street life. Across participants, low parental education, limited support, and difficult family dynamics were central factors influencing trajectories into street life.

The participants' early family environments were marked by significant economic vulnerability and social instability. Most grew up in households where the nuclear family was absent or incomplete, with single mothers or absent fathers being common. For instance, Participant 1 was raised by a single mother in Pereira, while Participant 4 described being abandoned by his mother in a park after the family migrated from Venezuela due to extreme poverty. Mothers' new relationships often introduced additional risks, such as abuse by stepfathers, which was reported by several participants, including Participant 3 and Participant 5. Poverty was a pervasive feature across the narratives, shaping children's daily lives from an early age. Many participants recalled having to work from a young age to help support their families. Participant 3, for example, reported that all children in her household above the age of six were working, while Participant 8 described selling coffee on the street after his family fled cartel-related violence in Medellin. In some cases, mothers also engaged in survival strategies such as prostitution, as in the case of Participant 4, whose mother left her children to provide for the household.

Abuse and neglect emerge as a common threat across participants' childhoods. Several participants experience physical violence, sexual abuse, or neglect. Participant 6, for instance, faced sexual abuse by male relatives and subsequently chose to join a gang to protect himself.

Participant 2's narrative highlighted intergenerational trauma: *"I was born after a rape. My mother was sent over to her aunt's house when she was 13 years old because her mum could not afford to feed her nine children. Her uncle, her aunt's husband, abused her and got her pregnant. She ended up having me and struggled her whole life until her passing due to an overdose."* For others, the absence of parental care led to premature independence, as in the case of Participant 9, who lost her mother during childbirth, when her youngest sister was born, and was forced into survival strategies such as sex work.

These early experiences revealed the interaction of multiple vulnerabilities, including poverty, family breakdown, and exposure to abuse. They also demonstrate the patterns of intergenerational trauma and social neglect, which often constrained the participants' choices and exposed them to the risks of street life. At the same time, this narrative shows children actively navigating adversity, whether by contributing to family survival, singing protection outside the home, or developing coping strategies to manage and create safe environments.

In sum, the personal and family backgrounds of the participants underscore the structural and relational factors that shaped their pathways into street life. Economic hardship, absent or unstable caregiving, and abuse intersected to create conditions of heightened vulnerability, while individual agency and resilience began to emerge even in these early stages.

6.2.3 Entry into Street Life

Participants' entry into street life was driven by abuse, neglect, poverty, and family breakdown. Specific triggering events, such as abandonment or injury, often precipitated this transition. The transition from home to the streets was often precipitated by a combination of abuse, neglect, poverty, and family breakdown.

Participant 1 joined a gang at age 12, while Participant 2 left school to support her family financially. Abandonment played a key role: Participant 4's mother left him in a park, forcing him to rely on the street network for survival, but also on sex work: *"After leaving me, I had to find a solution to be able to survive. So I started joining groups of other street children and working as a sex worker."* Gendered patterns emerged, with girls more frequently exposed to sexual exploitation and caregiving responsibilities, and boys more likely to experience physical violence or gang recruitment. Entry into street life was thus a cumulative process shaped by structural, familial, and personal vulnerabilities

The transition from home to the streets was often precipitated by a combination of abuse, neglect, poverty, and family breakdown. For many participants, specific triggering events pushed them out of their homes. Participant 1, for example, joined

a gang at the age of 12 after growing up in a single-parent household and experiencing social exclusion from peers. Participant 2 left school to work on the streets and provide for her family, highlighting the economic pressure that forced children into survival strategies. Similarly, Participant 3 was removed by Bienestar following repeated injuries caused by her stepfather, underscoring the role of formal interventions in mediating entry into street life.

Some participants experienced abandonment, which created immediate exposure to the street environment. Participant 4, left by his mother in the park after migrating from Venezuela, had no option but to try in a small group of straight children. Participant 9 also illustrates the intersection of family loss and economic necessity: *“After the passing of my mother, my father was having a lot of difficulties raising us and providing for us. So I decided to help him with the only thing I had, which was my body.”* She worked until social services intervened. For male participants such as Participant 6, joining a gang represented a protective strategy against abuse and a means of finding community in an otherwise unsafe environment.

Across the participants' narratives, two patterns emerge. First, entering the street life is not due to a single event but rather a series of events that shape their vulnerability over time. Second, the exposure is highly influenced by gender; girls are more prone to sexual exploitation and responsibilities for family care, while boys tend to be more exposed to physical violence or gang recruitment. These experiences highlight the reciprocity of structures, personal factors, and familial shaping of the participant's trajectory.

6.2.4 Survival and Daily Life on the Streets

Survival on the streets demands resourcefulness, reliance on and from all networks, and resilience. Participants described how they ensured access to essential goods, such as food, shelter, and safety. Participant 8 started selling *café*s *en carritos* as a way to help his family and due to peer pressure, he became involved in substance use, while Participants 1 and 6 relied on gangs for protection and basic necessities despite exposure to violence. Participant 6 narrated that the negative connotations were better and safer than its previous situation: *“Being in a gang and*

risking police brutality, getting shot, or stigma was better than living in a house with two men who were sexually abusing me.” Exploitation was a recurring challenge. Participants faced substance addiction, sexual exploitation, and physical abuse. Especially for girls who were selling their sexual services, as experienced by Participant 9. Even with severe difficulties, especially as children, the demonstration of agency, problem-solving skills, and resourcefulness showed how independent children were. Participant 4, for instance, sought refuge and help from peers before being introduced to the social services program. Despite abandonment, he managed to find a temporary solution with other street children. These specific situations demonstrate the complexity of children's experiences, from being a child on the street by itself, to being a child that can fend for itself without any extra help. This highlights the negotiation and survival skills while being in a situation with high adversity. Street life in children reflects a complex situation and parcours, from the youth and vulnerability of a child, to the resilience and resourcefulness of an adult. Participant 7 narrated what resources he used to survive by himself on the street: “*A couple of months before my brother left to enrol in the military, I started to beg and steal on the streets to get something to eat.*”

6.2.5 Contact with Moi pour Toit

For all participants, contact with Moi pour Toit represented a critical turning point. The circumstances of the contract with the foundation varied depending on the case or the person: every single participant was put into contact with Moi pour Toit through Bienestar. For instance, children were arrested by the police, then the police contacted Bienestar, and then Bienestar placed them in an NGO that could take them at the moment. However, Participant 5 went directly to the foundation to escape abuse by her mother and stepfather. Even though she requested direct help from Moi pour Toit, Bienestar got involved as a mediator for the situation. Participant 5 said the following: “*My three older brothers left the house a few months before my younger brother and me. The abuse and violence against us increased so much more after that. So I decided to leave before it was too late, and that is why I went to Moi pour Toit. I knew them before because friends of mine were already in the foundation.*”

Every participant recalled the same feeling of rejection when they had to enter the foundation. As mentioned earlier, the calling of the blood is often very strong, and even if children are abused and mistreated, they tend to always seek life with their families over an institution. Participant 3 said the following: *“I did not want to live in the foundation. I hated it for a few months. When Bienestar announced to me that I was going to an institution, I tried to run away and go back to my house.”* Participants 8 and 9 recalled the difficulties they had accepted the fact that they would have to go to the foundation. Both mentioned that, besides the financial difficulties and hard life they were having, they loved living at home with their relatives. Participant 9 especially insisted on how difficult it was, considering her own father requested help from Bienestar.

6.2.6 Life at the Foundation

Life at Moi pour Toit was overall described as stable, secure, and pleasant. As most participants are now older and have some perspective on the situation, they are very grateful and appreciative of their time spent at the foundation.

Some participants have mentioned the drastic contrast between the foundation sense of security and the unpredictable street life. Participant 7 described how he felt after spending years feeling unsafe: *“It took me a very long time to understand that the foundation's help was what I needed. However, the feeling of safety and care came very quickly. I never had a bed of my own and food three times a day. I still tried to run away a couple of times; however, I always came back after a day or two.”* Some participants even expressed how anxious they were and how stressed the situation was for them for different reasons. Participant 1 recalled the following: *“When I first arrived at Moi pour Toit, I felt very anxious and scared. I never really experience any structure in my life. But the educators were very nice and never rushed me.”* Participant 9 also mentioned the support and safety she felt: *“It was the first time I felt safe and supported after spending over a year working on the streets by myself... my father was a very nice person, however, he could not provide for us and it created a feeling of insecurity which the foundation erased.”*

Education, music lessons, art workshops, cultural activities, and vocational training were central to personal growth. Participant 2 described how reintegrating school allowed her to picture a better future without having to choose a poor life path: *"Being able to explore different activities and allowing me to take my time made me realise I could do nice things and that I could be more than just a street kid."* Participant 8, on the other hand, highlighted how practical skills alongside academic education were crucial; *"I am very happy that the foundation allowed us to explore many options. I very quickly realised I was not an intellectual but more of a physical person. And it was only possible due to the fact that we had so many options available to us."* This diversity in the options allows the knowledge and purpose to be wider while helping participants rebuild self-confidence and agency.

The emotional support received within the foundation was very important to rebuilding trust in adults and others. To achieve such an important part of healing, psychological help was provided once a week for each child present in the foundation. Participant 9 provides a good example of the help that psychological support gave her: *"Psychological help made a massive difference in my healing journey. During the years I spent at Moi pour Toit, I had therapy once a week, and it made me realise what happened to me was not my fault and that I did not have to carry the baggage with me if I did not want to. It also allows me to trust people again after."* Participant 5 also describes a feeling of relief after years of violence and abuse. Staff, educators, teachers, and peers played a major role in building respect, a sense of belonging, dignity, personal responsibility and reinforcing social norms. Participant 4 mentioned that the community inside the foundation is very valuable; they stick together when another child or adolescent is having a violent episode.

Therapeutic support gives Moi pour Toit a distinguished place, contrary to other institutions. The counselling and art therapy allows participants to process their traumas and emotions and develop coping mechanisms. Participant 6 described the manual work at the foundation as really useful to calm his stress and anxiety. He also mentioned all the help he got made him transition from survival and defensive mode to a more relaxed and willing to learn person.

Even if life at the foundation was mostly positive, there were still some negative aspects to it. Participant 2 mentioned the lack of privacy due to the sharing of a room

with multiple people: *“When I first arrived, I was put in a room with four other girls. It was a bit overwhelming and stressful because I did not know them at all.”* Participant 8 recalled not liking the director of the foundation when he first arrived: *“I spent 8 years at Moi pour Toit, and during this time I saw two directors in charge of the foundation. The first one was not very patient with me. I was a rebellious child who did not listen, and she was trying to force her authority upon me. After a few months, she left, and the new one was much better.”*

Overall, life at the foundation provided a good structure that helps children with their trauma and guides them into a better life. The immediate protection, but also the long-term educational plan to help them grow into adulthood, allows children to be in a safe space. These experiences increase resilience, the capacity to imagine a future beyond survival, and the development of essential life skills. However, 2 participants mentioned that some of their friends from Moi pour Toit went back to the streets as drug dealers and gang members. And sometimes there are also some regrets and guilds left behind due to different circumstances. Participant 4 is one of them: *“I am thankful for the bed, food, and clean clothes the foundation gave me. But I left on the streets people who helped and cared for me when my mother abandoned me because she could not afford to feed me anymore.”*

6.2.7 Transitions and Turning Points

Important events and turning points in the life path of participants were often linked to Moi pour Toit and the opportunities and interventions it created. One of the milestones is leaving the street and entering the foundation, followed by formal school enrolment, which provides a sense of achievement and a pathway forward to independence. Participant 3, for example, describes her entry in school as a door opening for her future, and for her freedom and independence. Similarly, Participant 7 emphasised how his relationship with the staff helped him overcome invisible borders and obstacles as well as the feeling of abandonment, which helped him envision his future: *“I stayed until I was 22 years old. I started university and stayed until my graduation. I felt so supported, loved and cared about. There are not a lot of places that offer that”.*

Building relationships after an important trauma and abuse is difficult, but when achieved, it becomes a turning point. Resilience when it comes to street children is one of the most important things. It allows them to rebuild themselves and their relationships in a healthy way that still protects them. Friendships formed within the foundation, reconnection with the family members, and guidance from educators are all contributors to resilience. Participant 5, who has fled abuse with her younger brother, describes how the bond with educators and peers is so strong and important, especially coming from someone who had a direct relative in the institution. *“I was so fearful and doubting of everyone when we arrived at Moi pour Toit. After spending some time in the foundation, I realised these people were here to help, and other children went through similar things. After that, my relationship with them became stronger.”*

These turning points demonstrate how structural support, opportunities, and consistent care can interrupt years of doubting and vulnerability, which facilitates positive life trajectories. Turning point combines a couple of structures, such as relational support and opportunities. These two points redirect trajectories and interrupt cycles of vulnerability.

6.2.8 Reintegration and Adulthood

The long-term impact of the foundation on the participants is evident. Every participant mentioned a positive adulthood in comms, including family formation, employment, and social belonging. Most participants were able to access stable work, pursue education, and establish a good family unit. Participant 2, for example, is a single mum but has a great relationship with the father of her child and is able to have a great life with her job. *“After leaving the foundation, I worked at the supermarket to be able to finance my evening classes to become a secretary at a hotel.”* Participant 6 entered employment in Bogota after learning how to bake at the foundation. This allowed him to support himself independently.

Social belonging also emerged as a key outcome. Participants highlighted how Moi pour Toit instilled values of respect, community engagement, and responsibility, which made their inclusion in larger social networks easier. The foundation has also

taught them that they are the future of Colombia and that being a valuable part of society is crucial for the well-being of future generations. Participant 7 mentioned the need to leave the country and come to Europe, but after years of teaching and understanding, she finally agreed with the fact that people need to stay in Colombia and make it a better place. Participant 8 reflected on how early support from the foundation has shaped his life and how much trust he had to rebuild his life after trauma, street life, and family loss.

Even if the foundation provides the participants with as much help as they can, reintegration can come with certain difficulties. Participants 3,4, and 9 mentioned severe anxiety once they started thinking and planning their departure from *Moi pour Toit*. Participant 4 shared how much stress leaving the foundation was causing him: *“I did not have anyone in Pereira to help me if something went wrong. My mom was up north, my father was absent, and my siblings were in Bogota.”* Other participants also mentioned how unsafe they felt leaving the protected area of the foundation. Participant 1 described the fear he felt of leaving *Moi pour Toit*: *“I was scared to be on my own with protection from the foundation. When I decided not to run away from Moi pour Toit, the gang I was in got very mad and wanted revenge. For them, I owed them my life, so leaving was not an option for them.”*

However, challenges persisted, especially for those who have children of their own. Lingering effects of early abuse and economic hardship created a high level of anxiety and stress, and sometimes the easy path to substance abuse calls for them. Nevertheless, Participant 7 makes it his main goal to never go back to old demons.

6.2.9 Perceptions of Society and Institutions

Participants recorded a complex and often ambivalent perspective of society on street children. Many describe the experience as something that was uncomfortable and with a lot of stigma and discrimination. Participant 1, for instance, recounted violence and judgment thrown at him when he was leaving on the street with the gang: *“I remember being pushed around when I first joined the gang. It started when I got the gang tattoo on my neck. However, after a couple of weeks, when I started to carry a gun and begin with older members, people started to look at*

me with fear, even if I was only 10 years old.” Participant 9, on the other hand, experienced social marginalisation: *“Some of my friends were told not to spend time with me due to what I was doing to get money.”* These experiences demonstrate the severe exclusion that children face when they are in vulnerable conditions.

Interactions with institutions were not always positive. Some participants, such as Participant 3 and Participant 7, who both suffer from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, had a positive interaction with Bienestar Familiar. This facilitated the entry into the foundation and provided a good start: Participant 7 recalls the relief when Bienestar came to his house to take him away from his abusers. Yet, there was also children who even if they were in difficult situations, they prefer to stay with their families or with their peers, Participant 6 mentioned it: *“It took me a couple of years to understand that the best for me at the time was to be taken care of by the foundation and that the so called independence that I had was arming me more than anything else”*. A part of the issue is also the punitive way of police interventions on minors. When they get arrested, most of the time, depending on their age, Bienestar will be the default solution; however, even that does not stop the brutality from officers.

Overall, participants agreed on the importance of NGOs' role, like *Moi pour Toit*. The presence of foundations helps fill the gap left by state structures, as well as providing long-term development support instead of only immediate protection.

Awareness of justice and rights is another point that was highly present during the interviews. Participants expressed their bet

6.2.10 Hopes, Perspectives, and Recommendations

Despite a national history marked by violence and adversity, participants have demonstrated a strong will to reorient their lives toward a brighter future. Hopes and ambitions were closely connected to the stability and education that the foundation provided, breaking generational trauma and cycles of vulnerability. Participant 3 aspires to help as many children as she can while making the system more welcoming and caring for vulnerable children: *“I choose to work for Bienestar*

because even if my experience with them was not always positive, due to lack of employees, time limitation and children overloading the system, I believe we can fix the issues.” Participant 5 also expressed the desire to directly impact children's lives in a positive way, like other educators have done to her: *“I remember my educators at the foundation very clearly. They were the most amazing people I have met in my entire life. If I could help children even only a fraction of what they did, I would be happy.”*

Finally, participants have offered recommendations for children currently living on the streets, as well as in the foundation. Most of them have focused on not being ashamed to seek support, prioritising education, and cultivating resilience. Multiple participants have mentioned *Moi pour Toit* and how they should be trusted and given a chance, even if their first instinct is to flee.

Across the 9 participants' narratives, recovery and desire to help others are the main points. Billions is also something that all of them have and the will to do better for themselves and their families, as present in every single one of them.

6.3 Discussion of Results

The results of this dissertation highlight a complex and layered situation of former street-connected children in Colombia, as well as the transformative yet limited role played by *Moi pour Toit*. In this section, the results and findings are interpreted through the lens of a dual theoretical framework of Life Course Theory (LCT) and Ecological Systems Theory (EST), while also integrating other academic debates and children's vulnerability, resilience, and social intervention. By choosing this approach and allowing the discussion to underscore the individual impact of *Moi pour Toit*, but also how structural challenges continue to shape the participants into adulthood. After understanding their right to safety, education, and care, often linking this right to the foundation and making a comparison to their lives before *Moi pour Toit*. Participant 5, for example, describes how the foundation taught her about dignity and respect, which fed her internalised sense of right.

One of the key insights revealed by the study is the importance of turning points, a central concept in Life Course Theory. Participants' description of the entrance at Moi pour Toi is often described as a moment of significant change that interrupted a cycle of poverty, violence, and neglect. For many children, the foundation provided a safe setting with guaranteed access to education, nutrition, and psychosocial support . The contrast between early childhood and what participants have become shows that intervention at the right moment can significantly redirect life trajectories (Elder, 1998).

Timing was crucial. Participants who have entered Moi pour Toit at an early age, have a more positive outcome in life, such as finishing school, having a profession with important skills, and even better relationships with people around them. However, adolescents often carry heavier trauma and emotional luggage due to a longer exposure to street life. Substance use or gang involvement are the two main struggles children face, often making them heavily dependent on this community. This study revealed that even if the foundation provides the best care and surrounds them with all the help possible, its ability to undo years of accumulated adversity and trauma can be limited. This observation echoes Elder's (2003) argument about the timing of an event in a person's life; the direction of developmental pathways is significantly impacted by the life transition.

Agency was another relevant concept. Despite the disruption of daily life, which for some was very problematic, several participants described making a deliberate choice to seek support and to stay at the foundation, The narrative clearly shows the tension between agency and constraint: while they were making decision on the streets to join a gang or not this was shaping their trajectories, however, their range of options were severely narrowed down by poverty, family breakdown, and social exclusion. This confirms the critiques that overemphasising agency can lead to a misunderstanding of the situation, because agency is often limited by contexts due to inequalities (Punch, 2015). The testimonies from the participants suggest that Moi pour Toit extended the scope of agency by creating a pool of choices, such as schooling, apprenticeship, and social networks.

The concept of linked lives also resonates heavily with the results. Participants have mentioned multiple times the importance of personal relationships within Moi pour Toit, with caregivers, peers, and educators. These bonds create emotional safety and stability and act as a protection from returning to street life. For some participants, these connections go beyond the facilities, with them becoming educators.

However, the results also pointed to a difficulty in maintaining links and connections with former peers and staff members. Once participants return to an independent life, difficulties can surface in keeping the relationships. This can be caused by relocation, financial insecurities, or stigma. In many cases, estrangement from biological families can persist. Some face rejection because they did not leave the foundation to return home, and others find it difficult to reconnect with a family they only saw every couple of weeks. Umberson et al. (2010), argued that social connections have a positive or negative impact on the vulnerability of a person. In this situation, the foundation creates a community that offers stability and a sense of community and belonging, but social exclusion from outside the foundation still shapes participants' adulthood.

Applying the Ecological System allows one to create a deeper understanding of the impact that *Moi pour Toit* has as a protective mesosystem. The foundation system was created to be protective, caring and nourishing, while on the mesosystem level, it provides an idyllic environment. This creates a connection between children, schools, healthcare, and vocational programs, bridging fragmented institutions. This was particularly evident when interviewing participants about returning to school or accessing healthcare, opportunities that were not given to them before *Moi pour Toit*.

The study also revealed the intervention limitation NGOs can face; even with a good system in place, the impact of the exosystem and macrosystem creates a hostile environment. Stigma, poverty and a difficult labour market continue to shape participants' path, often fragilising the progress made at the foundation. Several participants reported facing discrimination when seeking employment. They mentioned that their former street children's lives can cause people to be suspicious. Others described ongoing insecurity in neighbourhoods affected by violence and informal economies. These accounts underline Bronfenbrenner's (1979) argument that development cannot be fully understood without accounting for the broader social and political structures in which children are embedded.

Education was one of the most valued resources for participants. *Moi pour Toit* enabled children to go back to school, receive tutoring, and in some cases, attend vocational training. Many participants explained that this set them apart from peers who never entered the foundation. Completing secondary education or gaining a

technical certificate was seen as a source of confidence and a pathway into employment. Still, the transition from education to work was often difficult.

Several participants spoke about the lack of professional networks, the limited chances to access higher education, and the stigma attached to their past. This reflects findings from Pinzón-Rondón et al. (2008), who showed that children who work in Colombia face persistent barriers to upward mobility even when they attend school. Education therefore, acted as a turning point, but its long-term effects were weakened by wider structural inequalities.

The results also highlight the complex and sometimes painful role of families. For some, the foundation made it possible to reconnect with parents or siblings, creating a sense of belonging. For others, contact remained broken because of abuse, neglect, or displacement. These different experiences show how family ties can be both a resource and a source of harm.

Identity was another important issue. Many participants felt proud of having survived the streets and of building new futures, yet at the same time, they carried the weight of stigma and exclusion. This tension reflects Aptekar's (1994) observation that street children are often seen both as resourceful agents and as vulnerable victims. *Moi pour Toit* helped redefine their identities by affirming them as students, workers, and community members rather than as "gamines." But beyond the walls of the foundation, wider society often continued to mark them by their past.

Perhaps the most striking finding is the way resilience and vulnerability appeared side by side in participants' stories. They spoke of being strong, adaptable, and determined, but they also described discrimination, unstable jobs, and continued poverty. This mix shows the danger of romanticizing resilience, as Ballet and Bhukuth (2015) have warned. *Moi pour Toit* clearly built resilience by offering education, care, and opportunities. Yet once young people left the foundation, vulnerability often returned in environments shaped by inequality and exclusion.

These results confirm and extend what earlier research has found. Aptekar's (1988) studies in Medellín showed how resilient street children could be despite harsh conditions, but this study demonstrates how resilience alone is not enough in adulthood without continued support. Pinzón-Rondón et al. (2020) described different sub-populations of working children, while this research follows them further

into adulthood and shows the longer-term role of an NGO. Comparisons with other Latin American countries also reveal similarities: as in Brazil, where *meninos de rua* became symbols of inequality (Benítez, 2011), Colombian children face stigma and neglect. But Colombia's situation is distinct because of armed conflict and internal displacement (Shultz, 2014), which add further layers of vulnerability.

Several implications follow from these findings. First, interventions should begin as early as possible, since timing strongly influences outcomes. Second, education is essential but not enough without real pathways into stable work. Third, NGOs such as *Moi pour Toit* provide safe environments and new opportunities, but they cannot substitute for stronger state institutions. Sustainable reintegration requires systemic reforms: better access to education and healthcare, more economic opportunities, and a reduction of stigma.

Finally, more attention should be given to the experiences of girls, who remain underrepresented both in research and in interventions.

Conclusion

The current research aimed to examine the life trajectories of former street-connected children in Colombia by analysing the impact the NGO *Moi pour Toit* had on their developmental pathways. Led by Life Course Theory (LCT) and Ecological Systems Theory (EST), the study focuses on understanding how timing, turning points, and linked lives are connected to larger societal structures that influence the lifespan. Through qualitative interviews with former participants, complemented by document analysis from *Moi pour Toit*, the research has highlighted the transformative potential of early interventions, as well as the challenges posed by structural inequalities.

The results demonstrate that *Moi pour Toit* created a significant turning point in the lives of participants. For most, entering the foundation marked the break with previous experiences of abuse, neglect, and survival strategies. The immediate protection, stability, and care provided by the NGO allowed children to reconnect with education, rebuild a sense of identity, and form new relationships. The most valuable resource for these children is education, which provides skills, self-confidence, and credentials. At the same time, creating social ties with new people who demonstrate respect, love, and care is another very important point. Educators, peers, and mentors demonstrate the principle of linked lives central to LCT. *Moi pour Toit*'s first role is to provide services, but it is not the only objective. Creating a community in which children are safe and can imagine an alternative future is also a significant part of its work.

Yet, the study also revealed limitations. Participants frequently faced obstacles when leaving the foundation. Employment is difficult, stigma against “former street children” persists, and poverty in their neighbourhoods remains high. These challenges highlight the insights of EST: while the microsystem within *Moi pour Toit* nurtures development, the exosystem and macrosystem, labour markets, cultural narratives, and state policies, impose constraints that NGOs cannot overcome on their own.

The combination of LCT and EST demonstrates the value of a dual analysis using life course and ecological perspectives. LCT provides an analytical framework to understand turning points, timing, and cumulative disadvantage, while EST places

the process within a nesting system of family, school, community, and society. The dual framework made it possible to capture both the agency of participants and their resilience, strategies, and choices. In this way, the study contributes to scholarship by providing individual voices with systemic analysis, avoiding the pitfalls of either over-romanticising resilience or reducing children to passive victims.

The results carry several implications. First, timing matters: early interventions are more effective, as habits, trauma, and beliefs become harder to reverse in later adolescence or adulthood. Second, education is very important, but it is not enough without a viable pathway into dignified employment. Third, while NGOs like *Moi pour Toit* are crucial, they can not replace the state institutions. Sustainable reintegration needs structural reforms: better access to education, stronger child protection systems, and stigma and exclusion reforms. Fourth, better gender attention in studies should be addressed. Girls' trajectories are still less studied in research and in practice.

These implications direct attention to the need for multi-level approaches. At the micro level, psychosocial support and mentoring encourage individual resilience. At the meso level, connections between NGOs, schools, and families ensure a gentle support. At the macro level, political commitment is needed to address poverty, displacement, and violence. Conditions that continually reproduce vulnerability and maintain poverty.

Like any research, this research has limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and participants were only selected from one NGO, which narrows down the generalisation. Retrospective interviews carry a better risk of selective memory, as participants rebuild their experiences through the lens of adulthood. Furthermore, the study did not address gender differences, a gap that future research should explore. These limitations, however, also showed future opportunities for further research.

Building on these findings, future studies could choose to do a longitudinal research project to follow children across different stages of life. This would allow the researcher to follow the trajectories and observe the changes over time. Comparing studies about NGOs across different regions would allow broader insights into different practices and contextual challenges. Additionally, centring girls' experiences or examining intersections with displacement and armed conflict would fill a major

gap. Integrating statistical data to approach the topic with mixed methods could also deepen the understanding of the outcome.

Most importantly, this research accentuates both the promises and the limits of NGOs' interventions. *Moi pour Toit* offered protection, education, and hope. Changing the lives of many children who might have had a very different path and could have stayed in a cycle of violence and poverty. It showed that early and well-timed interventions can redirect life trajectories and influence the future of a person while giving the chance to pursue new futures. Yet, the persistence of poverty, stigma, and insecurity in participants once they are adults is a reminder that even with the best interventions, they can not be stronger than the structure of a country.

This conclusion echoes a bigger truth: the lives of street-connected children are affected by more than just the immediate environment. The political, economic, and cultural systems in which they evolve also have a significant impact. The changes will need to come from the state, the community and the society as a whole. By listening to the voices of those who once lived and worked on the streets, this research advocates for every child who has the right not only to survive but to thrive.

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Table of figures

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's visual figure of his theory. (Guy-Evans, 2025)

Annex A: Interview Guide

Section A - Personal and Family Background

1. Could you introduce yourself?
¿Podrías presentarte?
2. How was your childhood and what's your family background?
¿Cómo fue tu infancia y cuál es tu historia familiar?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your parents or caregivers?
¿Cómo describirías tu relación con tus padres o cuidadores?
4. Did your parents go to school, and how was their education?
¿Tus padres fueron a la escuela y cómo fue su educación?
5. How was the economic situation of your household when you were a child?
¿Cómo era la situación económica de tu hogar cuando eras niño/a?
6. How many siblings did you have, and what was your position among them (oldest, middle, youngest)?
¿Cuántos hermanos tenías y cuál era tu posición entre ellos (mayor, del medio, menor)?
7. How old were you when you first ended up on the streets?
¿Cuántos años tenías cuando terminaste en la calle por primera vez?
8. What was the cause of your street situation (family problems, poverty, abuse, displacement)?
¿Cuál fue la causa de tu situación en la calle (problemas familiares, pobreza, abuso, desplazamiento)?
9. What is your parents' job? What are the financial resources? Did your parents attend school? Did they finish school?
¿En qué trabajan tus padres? ¿Cuáles eran los recursos económicos de tu

familia? ¿Tus papás asistieron a la escuela? ¿Cuáles eran los recursos económicos de tu familia? ¿Terminaron la escuela?

10. Did violence and conflict in your family happen? Do you want to talk about your childhood?

¿Hubo violencia y conflictos en tu familia? ¿Quieres hablar sobre tu infancia?

Section B - Entry into Street Life

11. What made you start spending time on the streets?

¿Qué te llevó a empezar a pasar tiempo en la calle?

12. How old were you when you first went to the streets?

¿Cuántos años tenías cuando fuiste por primera vez a la calle?

13. Did you decide to go, or were there situations that forced you to? For example, poverty and family.

¿Fuiste por decisión propia o hubo situaciones que te obligaron? Por ejemplo, la pobreza o tu familia.

Section C - Survival and Daily Life on the Streets

14. What did your day to day look like on the streets?

¿Cómo era tu día a día en la calle?

15. What was the biggest risk you faced when you were on the streets (hunger, violence, police, gangs)?

¿Cuál fue el mayor riesgo al que te enfrentaste cuando estabas en la calle (hambre, violencia, policía, pandillas)?

16. Did you have any support and help when you were on the streets (people, groups, or places)?

¿Recibías algún tipo de apoyo o ayuda cuando estabas en la calle (personas, grupos o lugares)?

17. How did you get food, clothes, or a place to sleep?

¿Cómo conseguías comida, ropa o un lugar para dormir?

18. Who were the most important people for you on the street?

¿Quiénes fueron las personas más importantes para ti en la calle?

Section D - Contact with Moi pour Toit

19. How did you come into contact with Moi pour Toit?
¿Cómo llegaste a conocer a Moi pour Toit?
20. How old were you when you entered Moi pour Toit?
¿Cuántos años tenías cuando entraste a Moi pour Toit?
21. When did you leave Moi pour Toit, and under what circumstances?
¿Cuándo saliste de Moi pour Toit y en qué circunstancias?
22. What made you stay or accept the help of the foundation?
¿Qué te hizo quedarte o aceptar la ayuda de la fundación?
23. What were your first impressions of the foundation?
¿Cuáles fueron tus primeras impresiones de la fundación?
24. How did you feel the first time you interacted with them? Which type of support did you receive?
¿Cómo te sentiste la primera vez que interactuaste con ellos?
25. Which person was important to you?
¿Qué persona fue importante para ti?

Section E - Life at the Foundation

26. Can you describe important moments or experiences during your time at the foundation?
¿Podrías contarme momentos o experiencias importantes durante tu tiempo en la fundación?
27. How did the foundation help you (e.g., education, housing, emotional support)?
¿De qué manera te ayudó la fundación (por ejemplo, con educación, vivienda o apoyo emocional)?
28. How was your relationship with the caregivers and other children at the foundation?
¿Cómo era tu relación con los cuidadores y otros niños en la fundación?
29. Did you feel safe and supported there?
¿Te sentiste seguro/a y apoyado/a allí?
30. What were the positive and negative aspects in the foundation?
¿Cuáles fueron los aspectos positivos y negativos en la fundación?

Section F - Transitions and Turning Points

31. Looking back, what were the most important turning points in your life?
¿Cuáles fueron los momentos más importantes o decisivos en tu vida?
32. How do you think Moi pour Toit influenced your life situation?
¿Cómo crees que Moi pour Toit influyó en tu situación de vida?
33. Was there a specific moment when you decided to change your life direction?
¿Hubo un momento específico en que decidiste cambiar la dirección de tu vida?
34. Which aspects do you think need to be improved? What did you like less?
¿Qué aspectos crees que se deben mejorar? ¿Qué fue lo que menos te gustó?

Section G - Reintegration and Adulthood

35. What challenges did you face after leaving the foundation?
¿Qué dificultades tuviste después de salir de la fundación?
36. What did the foundation teach you that helped you build your life?
¿Qué aprendiste en la fundación que te sirvió para construir tu vida?
37. How is your current housing and work situation?
¿Cómo es tu situación actual de vivienda y trabajo?
38. Do you have a family now (partner, children), and how do you live with them?
¿Tienes familia ahora (pareja, hijos) y cómo convives con ellos?

Section H - Perception of Society and Institutions

39. How do you see society's view of street children?
¿Cómo crees que la sociedad ve a los niños de la calle?
40. How do you feel treated by institutions like schools, police, or the state?
¿Cómo te sientes tratado por instituciones como escuelas, policía o el Estado?
41. Do you feel that NGOs or the government really help street children?
¿Sientes que las ONG o el gobierno realmente ayudan a los niños de la calle?

Section I - Hopes, Perspectives, Recommendations

42. How do you see your future now?

¿Cómo ves tu futuro ahora?

43. If you could give advice to children currently living on the street, what would it be?

Si pudieras dar un consejo a los niños que actualmente viven en la calle,

¿Cuál sería?

44. What message would you like to give to organizations like Moi pour Toit?

¿Qué mensaje te gustaría dar a organizaciones como Moi pour Toit?

45. What dreams do you still want to achieve?

¿Qué sueños aún quieres lograr?