



REPPER

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Françoise Bompard,

moving spirit and responsible for the Repper Bulletin, passed away on 2 November 1998 at her home, after having fought her illness to the bitter end with her habitual courage and humour. She leaves an immense emptiness in the hearts of all her friends who knew they would find in her at all times a warm welcome and an exceptionally attentive ear. She gave Repper her experience as a psychologist and her unstinting generosity.

Mindful of the future of Repper, she asked me to take up the reins. Extremely touched by this token of trust, I promised her to do my utmost, with the help of Christine Fourty. It is above all with you, however, that we shall be able to maintain and develop this communication tool, the sole aim of which is: to serve you.

Martine Berge.

**François Lefort - Priest and doctor
49 rue de Lyon - 71000 MACON.**

About 10% of the world's street children are girls, except in Bangkok where they probably make up 70%, the reasons for which we are well aware.

Their living conditions are extremely difficult. Common parlance is not mistaken; "a street girl" is a prostitute. This is, unfortunately, true, for almost all the girls on the street are victims of prostitution. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons, although not the only one, why it is difficult to look after the little girls who live on the streets of big cities.

The first question we may ask ourselves is "why are there less girls than boys on the streets"? In the first place, it is likely that, in the poor societies the street children come from, girls begin working in the home at a very young age; they are needed, they are kept longer in the family. It is also likely that little girls know that, if they leave home, their life will be hell, even worse than that of their brothers, precisely because they are girls. This explains why little girls living on the street dress as boys to avoid notice.

Likewise, worldwide, there are very few organizations dealing specifically with girls on the street. Personally, I am aware only of the work of Father Franck in Kinshasa, "Solo para mujeres" in Guatemala City, "La porte ouverte" in Djibouti and "Virlianie Foundation" in Manila. Activities in Dakar and Nouakchott have had to close down as a result of numerous problems.

It is extremely difficult to deal with little girls on the street.

In the first place, it is extremely difficult to find them. They hide and unfortunately do not often sleep on the street. They are more likely to spend their nights with customers or "protectors" who are usually themselves street children. Often, when we arrive in a town, we are told that "there are no little girls on the street". We are then told that "they are shop assistants or thieves". Finally, it is admitted that there are a few but that nothing is done for them, because, as in Lithuania, it is too dangerous to confront the Russian-Lithuanian mafia, or because, in other countries, it is frowned upon by the Catholic or Muslim authorities. "Why are you concerning yourself with this problem? It's suspicious!"

You need the patience of a Father Franck in Kinshasa, the faith of a Dominique Lemay, the perseverance of support organizations to do it. Father Franck is trying to set up hostels for little street girls. Rehabilitation is progressive. First of all there are refuges, then hostels where they learn to sew and finally reinsertion in a family, except for those, of whom there are many, who are HIV-positive.

"Solo para mujeres" in Guatemala looks after the health of little prostitutes to get their attention. Once they are pregnant, the pimp will try to get them to abort, but, strangely enough, these children who have always been abandoned, refuse to get rid of their child. It is at this point that the association suggests they enter a hostel which provides them with the

means of getting off the streets. They are saved thanks to their baby. As far as I know, Dominique Lemay is alone in putting girls and boys in the same hostels, and it works!

Action on behalf of these little girls on the street gives rise to many a problem. If we want to do something about these street children, we must start with the girls. We risk, however, being accused of every kind of depravity, and rumour will put an end to action.

SOLO PARA MUJERES

Les Trois quarts du monde, GUATEMALA,

Anne Pascal, 45 rue de Richelieu - 75001 PARIS.

The aim of Sola Para Mujeres (SPM) is to protect and reinsert girls from 8 to 18 who live on the streets of Guatemala City. It helps them to get off the streets for good by proposing training and work in place of drugs and theft. To this end, SPM proceeds in four stages: contact on the street, the offer of temporary shelter in a day hostel, the drug-withdrawal hostel, the permanent hostel providing educational and professional training. At present, only the first two stages are being maintained due to lack of funds. The children are entrusted to other organizations.

The life of the street girl

The means of survival on the street are theft for boys and prostitution for girls. Street children take drugs to forget their hunger, the cold, their fear of the police and the private militias who pursue them. The girls drug themselves systematically before meeting their customers who they would otherwise be unable to stand. The most widely used and cheapest drug is industrial solvent (thinner) which destroys the brain cells, the respiratory canals and the lungs.

The girls live in little groups of friends who more or less support each other. They usually sleep on the sidewalk, principally during the dry season, or in slums in sordid hotels where drugs circulate freely in spite of the law. They leave only in the evening, on the look out for customers who will pay the wherewithal to survive until the next day.

The women educators and the doctor regularly patrol the public gardens frequented by the girls. They spot them from a distance, approach them to establish or renew contact. The fame of SPM is such that girls unknown to it approach the educator without the need for explanations. Support on the street consists principally in talking with the girls to ascertain their problems and keeping a check on the state of their health. The doctor provides first aid or takes them to hospital in the event of serious injuries or overdoses suffered during the night.

The aim of this approach is to encourage the girls to come to the hostel with their baby. The idea underpinning SPM is to get the girls off the street, not to simplify their life on it.

The hostel has very simple rules: no arms, drugs or stolen objects. This house is their house and they must respect it. Those already resident take under their wing the new arrivals. The availability and the ear of the educators are the hostel's cornerstones: calm reigns, there is no damage to the premises, violence is overcome.

The day hostel is a place where each girl starts to make something of herself by recovering her self respect. It provides new possibilities for girls to encourage them to change their life style.

The educators help them to cope with their daily and basic needs: food, health, cleanliness, but also constant tenderness, psychological support and legal back up. They share daily the household tasks. The girls prepare their own meals and take upon themselves the maintenance of the hostel, thereby providing a break with their street life (for a prostitute buys what she needs). They thus learn again gently the domestic practices drummed into them in childhood by verbal and physical abuse.

The girls' activities in the hostel are sleeping, washing themselves and their clothes (extremely important for their personal dignity), taking their meals together, having their health attended to (most of them suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, herpes, syphilis), looking after their babies, discussing among themselves their decision to get away from the street, prostitution, drugs (maternity may encourage them to change their way of life), and taking part in recreational, sporting or artistic activities.

The educators try to make the girls aware of their children's needs, the goal being to avoid having the babies endure what the girls have gone through. They are given ongoing education, particularly in pregnancy and breastfeeding, which, given their financial situation, is the only means of nourishment. Stress is laid on the overall psychological development of their child. Whenever possible, the boy friends with whom they live are involved in the educational activities, which include videos, discussions, group therapy. This initiation is given by health professionals and, at all times, by the educators while caring for the babies. SPM seeks to ensure that the mothers shoulder their responsibilities and do not entrust their child to the State or have it adopted.

Alexander Ogorodnikov, 107014 Popov way, dom. 2, MOSCOW, Russia.

(Tel: (7-095) 269-03392)

In Repper Bulletin No. 5 we introduced Alexander Ogorodnikov and gave a lightning sketch of his action in Moscow. He has a welcome post to restore which has electricity but no water. In spite of enormous difficulties, 64 young girls have been through it in one year and have been placed in foster families. Alexander needs support, at the very least moral, from all Repper associations to continue his fight against the mafia and the police. As an example of the attacks to which he is subject: the hostel "Island of Hope" has been the victim of a raid (the twelfth). The bandits smashed everything, confiscated important

documents, attacked a woman educator who is still suffering from concussion ... He has provided us with the following testimony.

"It is of course possible to help young girls who wish to continue living on the streets by feeding them, giving them clothes and medicine, but that help is infinitesimal compared with that which enables them to tear themselves away from the destructive environment they live in. This is why we try to provide shelter, even if only for a short time. They take off again when it becomes obvious that street life has transformed their personality irreversibly. Moreover, we are working in "high" risk conditions. For instance: one of our pupils was about to give birth and we were preparing to visit her, take her flowers. That very day our hostel was raided and our entire group was taken to the police station.

It must be hard for you to imagine the limited extent of our means, even to meet the most basic needs of our pupils. The state schools refuse to accept young girls who have not been registered at a police station, which is incredibly complicated. We have nevertheless been able to set up a school on the same principles as those of the state education system. Our collaborators provide free education, but this, of course, is insufficient for social adaptation.

As to our help in establishing a mother-baby link, we are extremely limited by lack of means: suffice it to say that among our collaborators we do not have even one educator!

At present, all that we can do is communicate with the girls, offer them our warmth, teach them the most basic customs of life. Let us hope that the day will come when we can truly carry out even a part of our project.

We work mainly with girls because we consider it indispensable, given their specific psychological needs, to give them priority.

Our personal experience has convinced us that girls are particularly vulnerable and that six months on the streets is enough to change their personalities profoundly. In certain cases, however, we shelter boys too.

Here is a quite typical case: a pregnant teenager, about 16 years old, came to us from a children's home. The state of affairs in these establishments is catastrophic. Pregnant girls are obviously obliged to abort so as not to have to give them lodgings. This young girl stayed with us for some time, and then, one day, she went back to the home to get her belongings. She was immediately put in solitary confinement. It was impossible for us to get her out and we hope she was able to give birth to her child, for it was too late to abort ... You see what dramatic situations we sometimes find ourselves in and how difficult it is for us to give these girls the most elementary help.

Prostitution is obviously widespread but sometimes we are successful in helping some young girls get out of this environment and get professional training.

It is very difficult to establish contact with prostitutes and extremely complicated to communicate with them, for they are controlled: if anyone

sees you talking to them, you are immediately interrupted. Moreover, if you talk to them about the possibility of getting out of this environment, the police themselves may intervene and cause you problems.

Life on the street, with its sometimes dramatic occurrences, awakens in young girls a great love of freedom and suspicion of any structure likely to attempt their social insertion. We have tried various techniques: to mislead their "protectors", one of our collaborators "bought" a prostitute and took her home. Instead of sleeping with her, he started to talk to her about the help she could receive to free herself ... she was terrified and threatened to throw herself out of the window ...

Fear is everywhere. Another typical case: Natasha came to Moscow to take her university entrance exams and found herself without money to pay for a hotel. She sought to sleep in railway stations. The police checked her papers and took her to the police station. She came from afar, was 17 years old, and a virgin. She was gang-raped, beaten senseless, then handed over to the mafia. When I wanted to take the matter to law, she was panic stricken at the idea that they would take revenge on her. I then understood why she and others like her were savagely beaten as well as raped: it is done to terrorize them and completely enslave them. Their willpower is smothered, their personality smashed, their dignity lost, they lose any notion of rebelling. One of the young girls in the hostel brought Natasha to us. Her torturers had finished by losing interest in her, for she was so completely "broken up" that she must have been almost useless as a prostitute."

After these bulletins devoted to the specific problems of girls, might you be interested in knowing what is being done for handicapped or mutilated children or for street children in prison? Send us details of your experiences, and suggest, you who are in the thick of it, topics for thought that might be shared.

Françoise Bompard, clinical psychologist.

Deeply concerned by the problems stemming from accusations of child abuse from certain children, Françoise tried to throw some light on this behaviour in writing the following article this summer.

The educators' role becomes untenable. The children they care for need tenderness, the tenderness missing in their childhood and teens. When this tenderness is offered, the children confuse it with the only experiences they have lived through, those of sexual perversion: the latter is for them the only means of exchange with another, the only vocabulary available to them to communicate with the adult world, the perverted world they have frequented.

The educational, parental environment we try to build around them in the welcoming hostels is confused, by them, with their previous experiences. Everything becomes seduction, every relationship construed as sexual. For example: girls subjected to prostitution at an early age do not know how to exchange a kiss on the cheek ... as a token of sympathy, they offer their mouth, their body, they live as instruments of pleasure and not as sentient beings. They do not have the words to say, to exchange.

It is normal for a child, a teenager, why not an adult indeed, to sit on the knee of someone who "means" something to them. It is normal that the person providing the knee uses reassuring gestures: caressing the hair, a cheek, putting a hand on a shoulder or a thigh, offering a shoulder, consoling with words and gestures which seem to each of us part of our means of expression, our "work" tools. There are situations of extreme distress which call for silence, presence, compassionate gestures. To outlaw all signs of tenderness is to deny the child his or her needs.

Yes, there are adult child molesters and they must be combatted, but every adult who permits him or herself to express emotions should not be seen as a dangerous seductor. The only solution will soon be to entrust children's education to programmed robots, and nothing else!

What is a child seeking when he or she denounces an adult innocent of these accusations? Revenge? To be the centre of attention? Hundreds of reasons could be found, but if it is true to say that the child's word has a sense, it cannot be affirmed that that word is true. There is nothing more dangerous than feeding the child's fantasy of total power: certainly, the child has rights, but so has the adult, in addition to his or her duties.

NEXT REPPER MEETING - SATURDAY, 27 MARCH 1999

from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.,

AT MEDECINS DU MONDE - 62 rue MARCADET,

75018 PARIS.

ATTENTION

The 2nd meeting of the year will be in October on a date yet to be decided. The floor will be given in priority to those working in the field so that they may speak of their activities. We should like to ask those of you involved in this way, who plan to be in Paris at that time to let us know which Saturday would suit you best.

PLEASE SEND ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:

"CONSTRUIRE", 16 rue de la GLACIERE, 75013 PARIS, FRANCE.

Telephone & Fax: 1 47 07 87 14

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The only condition for receiving REPPER, is to apprise us, at least once a year, of the activities and projects of the association and to reply to requests for information on the topics proposed by REPPER.

Some associations have given us no sign of life, or have ceased doing so. Perhaps they are not interested? To avoid unnecessary cost, we should be grateful if you would return to us, before 30 June 1999, the questionnaire below. If we do not hear from you, we shall stop sending you the Bulletin.

To be returned, before 30 June 1999, to:

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