

Full Length Research Paper

Socio-economic conditions of street children: The case of Shashemene Town, Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia

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This research examines the socio-economic conditions of street children in Shashemene Town of Oromia National Regional State. The purpose was to assess the socio-economic conditions of street children in Shashemene Town. In order to realize this aim, both qualitative and quantitative types of data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The quantitative data were collected from 234 street children through interview schedule while qualitative data were gathered using key informants interview, focus group discussions and observation. Sample street children were selected by using stratified sampling techniques. Then, the collected data from different sources were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. All the data obtained from different sources were triangulated to arrive at sound conclusions regarding the socio-economic conditions of street children in Shashemene. The underlying and basic factors pushing the larger number of street children unto the streets lie in the increasing number of families surviving under extreme poverty and family breakdown. They engaged in unskilled jobs like vending, carrying goods, shoe shining and lottery selling. The street children who work and live on the streets of Shashemene were found to be vulnerable to wide and extreme violations of their rights. They were verbally, physically and sexually abused by different perpetrators. There is a need to consider variables such as factors accounting for streetism, the current socio-economic conditions of street children and difficulties children face in the streets to tackle severe socio-economic conditions of street children. Therefore, it is recommended that the national and regional policy makers must be sensitive to the issue of children in street situations and the economical and societal hazards to which they are exposed. Shashemene Town office of small and micro-enterprise and local NGOs should create job opportunities for street children and enhance children's creativity by providing training and reunite street children with their families.

Key words: Shashemene, socio-economic conditions, street children.

INTRODUCTION

Although the issue of street children is a worldwide phenomenon, it is even more serious in developing nations where lack of adequate social infrastructure and socio-economic program threatens the developmental needs of these unfortunate children. The current study

focused on the socio-economic conditions of street children in Shashemene Town. Similar to many least developed countries, the rapidly growing number of street children is becoming the most critical socio-economic problem urban Ethiopia is facing today. In Ethiopia,

children form a sizeable segment of the population. According to Central Statistics Agency (CSA), there were more than 40 million children in Ethiopia in 2007. Thousands of children live under especially difficult circumstances (Meseret, 1998).

According to Kibrom (2008), children in Oromia constituted 46% of the total population where 11.6% of them are homeless children. Of the total homeless children in the region, about 66% lived in urban Oromia while the remaining 34% lived in rural Oromia. Atakilte and Gunilla (2011) stated that Shashemene Town as a commercial center has recently attracted many migrants, particularly from the densely populated Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) in search of work and for a better life. With the continued growth of the town, there has been a growth in the number of children on the streets. Many of whom are attracted to the town for the same reason as the adults, with the hope for good income generating possibilities. There are no recent and accurate statistics to ascertain the exact number of street children although UNICEF puts this at 1,107 (UNICEF, 2000).

Even though an immediate attribution to the phenomenon can be laid squarely on the economic disparity between the rural and the urban areas, there are also inadequate programs to discourage the influx of disgruntled children from seeking greener pastures in the urban capitals. As Beauchemin (1999) posits, while the consequences of the growing numbers of street children are a problem, these children are not responsible for their predicament.

The dilemma of these children should be the concern of all stakeholders. Apart from humanitarian reasons, the potential contribution of these children towards the development of the nation will be lost. These children occupy the lowest strata of the social ladder. They are everywhere, yet, they remain extremely invisible.

The focus should shift from the perceived inadequacies of these children to the social injustices and the structural imbalances that have contributed to their existence and continues to further hinder any innovative remedial strategies. Although the magnitude of the street children phenomenon in Ethiopia may not be in the proportions of some other countries in Latin America and other African countries, the problem is progressing with little attention (Aptekar, 1994).

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, reviews of local research on the area of street children were conducted by Kidist (2007) entitled "Survival Strategies of Street Children and High Risk Behaviors towards HIV/AIDS in Adama Town", Kibrom (2008) "Life in The Streets of Adama: The Situation of Street Children in a

Fast Growing Ethiopian Town", and Mekonnen (2011) "Street Children in Addis Ababa: Exploring Policy Framework for Interventions". All studies, however, did not consider the socio-economic conditions of street children which threaten the life situations of children and highly curtails the social and economic development of the country. That is why this study is important to make a visible and glaring situation that many, including societal institutions and the general public have consciously tried to ignore. If we wait for the problem to explode, then, we would have missed our chances to reason through lasting pragmatic solutions. Problems are better cut in their infancy than at a matured stage. Thus, the objective of this study was to assess the socio economic conditions of street children in Shashemene Town.

METHODOLOGY

Description of the study area

Shashemene town is one of the five first grade towns in Oromia National Regional State. It has its own administrative council and administrated by Mayor. The town lies between 7° 11' 09" to 7° 13' 19" North and 38° 35' 02" to 38° 37' 05" East (CSA, 2007). The town is located about 250 km South of Addis Ababa and 25 km north of Awassa, the capital town of SNNPR. Most parts of the town have an elevation that ranges from 1500 to 2300 m, except the eastern section with altitude over 2300 m (Figure 1). It is the main commercial and administrative center in Oromia which is positioned on the trucking route that connects Addis Ababa to Nairobi (BoFED, 2008).

The total population of Shashemene is 102,062 and 39.7% of them are children below the age of 15 (CSA, 2007). The population is distributed over an area of about 18.57 km² of the town. This gives an average density of about 5,496 persons/km². Among the total population of the town, about 49.7% is female while 50.3% is male (BoFED, 2008). With the continued growth of the town, there has been a growth in the number of children on the streets (Atakilte and Gunilla, 2011), many of whom are attracted to the town with the hope for good income generating possibilities.

Approach

Based on the problem under investigation, usually a study tends to be quantitative or qualitative in their nature. Mixed methods research resides in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Frequently, researchers that use mixed methods employ a research design that uses both quantitative and qualitative data to answer a particular question or set of questions. This combination of methods involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data in a single or multiphase study. In this study, a mixed approach had been utilized to achieve its objectives. As a result both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered to obtain meaningful findings.

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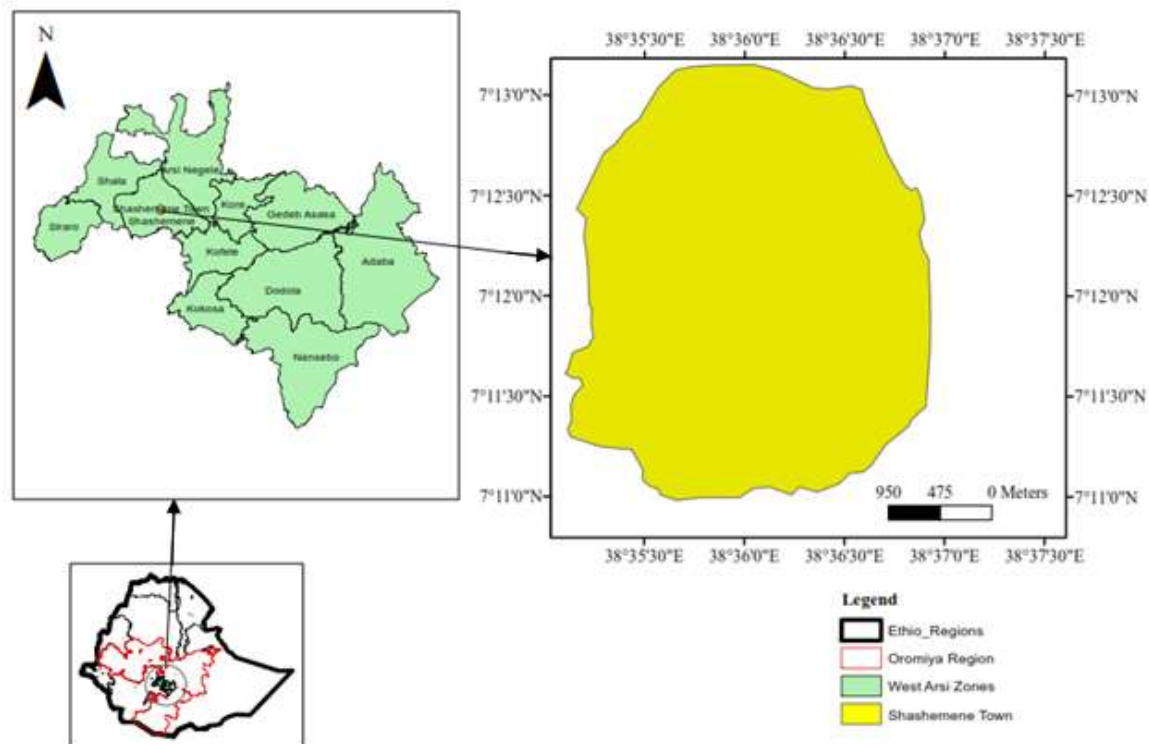


Figure 1. Map of the Study Area.
Source: Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia (2010).

Table 1. Distribution of sample interviewees by sub-towns and sex.

S/N	Name of Sub-towns	Total of registered population			Number of the interviewees		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total
1	Alelu	84	13	97	33	5	38
2	Arada	130	31	161	51	12	63
3	Aposto	121	26	147	47	10	57
4	Awasho	158	36	194	62	14	76
Total		493	106	599	193	41	234

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Sample, sampling technique and sample size

In Shashemene, there are eight sub-towns. Out of eight sub-towns, four were selected purposively as there is a higher concentration of street children in these areas; and these are Alelu, Aposto, Arada and Awasho (Table 1). This was done through observation and consultation of key informants working in the area of street children. Since street children list was not available in Shashemene town, Social Affairs' Office, the researcher has prepared comprehensive, reliable and appropriate list through registration of all street children living or working in the streets. The street children registration activity was done five days prior to data collection date. Accordingly, 599 street children were registered in the four selected sub-towns. The numbers of participants of street children were determined based on Lynch et al. (1972) formula and drawn using stratified sampling techniques to ensure adequate representations

for each of the population subgroups or strata in the sample as follows.

The quantitative data for this research was collected from 234 street children in four mentioned sub-towns. The 8 key informants and 16 focus group discussants comprised of experts from Women and Children Affairs' Office, Police Office, Social Affairs' Office, local NGOs, street children families and street children. These key informants and focus group discussants were selected purposively since they are concerned and more informed bodies in the area.

Data sources and data types

Primary sources

Basically, the study hugely relies on the primary data collected

through projected fieldwork. The primary data sources include: street children, street children families, experts from local NGOs, and concerned governmental authorities and experts. These data were gathered by using interview schedule, key informants interview, focus group discussions and observation.

Secondary sources

To complement the primary data, secondary data were collected from published and unpublished documents, including books, journals, international conventions, conference papers and annual reports. The document analysis covers all related issues concerning the socio-economic conditions of the street children and the efforts that have been made to solve the problems of the street children.

Methods of data collection

The major methods of data collection that the researcher used were: interview schedule, key informants interview, focus group discussion and non-participant observation.

Ethical considerations

As this study utilizes human participants, certain ethical considerations were addressed. The consideration of these issues is necessary for ensuring the privacy as well as the security of the participants. To accomplish this aim, legal authorization for the study was received from Haramaya University School of Graduate Studies and showed to the participants and concerned officials. Local authorities were informed. The ethical considerations were identified in advance so as to prevent future problems that could be raised during the research process. Among the significant issues that were considered are consent and confidentiality.

Securing permission and gaining the consent of the participants for this study was an important ethical consideration. In order to do so, the researcher expressed the aims of the research clearly for all participants. Developing rapport and gaining the trust of the participants has been considered essential throughout the research process. The researcher practiced candor and honesty throughout the study to assure the research respondents that their security and safety is of greatest priority. Besides, the participants of FGDs and key interviewees were paid to compensate for their lost times.

The privacy of the respondents as well as the confidentiality of their responses were prioritized by the researchers. In order to do so, the names and responses of the participants were kept confidentially. The researchers also ensured that all data gathered for the study were protected from unauthorized access.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal information of street children

Distribution of street children by sex

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the street children who participated in the study in terms of sex. Looking at the sex of street children, most studies show a predominance of the male sex within the population. Save the Children (2009), in a study of 300 children in the Republic of Georgia found that more than 70% of the sample was males. Project Concern

International Zambia (2002) revealed that 80% of the children interviewed were boys. The sample of this study constitutes two hundred and thirty-four street children. As to the sex equilibrium of street children in Shashemene, 193 (82.5%) of the population are male while females share is less than eighteen percent 41(17.5%).

According to Save the Children (2009), one possible explanation for this disproportion lies in traditional gender differences in child rearing practices and cultural differentiation between male and female roles in Georgia, where girls are expected to engage in household duties more than boys. For boys, spending time outside the home with their peers is not necessarily perceived as negative. Another reason is that in cases of the death or absence of parents, girls are more likely to be taken care of by relatives than boys. Another reason for keeping girls at home is related to the strict gender division of labor at home. Domestic work is performed primarily by women. Therefore, girls may be needed for their labor. At home, they help their mother with domestic chores and look after younger siblings (Zuberi, 2005). As to the situation in Shashemene, a key informant from Social Affairs' Office of Shashemene Town said that as in most Ethiopian societies, the people in and around Shashemene also culturally had special place for their female children. They do not allow their girls to engage in street life. Due to this cultural influence, female children also prefer working in domestic settings as maids, child minders and general house helps takes root from customary servitude.

Age group of street children

One important variable examined in this study is the age group of the interviewed street children fall. The age group is a very important factor in the analysis of the socio-economic conditions of the street children.

Table 3 shows the distribution and percentage of the age of street children. It shows that most of the children who had been interviewed are 15-17 years old comprising 106 or 45.3% of the total respondents. Almost thirty-six percent (35.9%) out of 234 belongs to 12-14 years of age and only nearly 19% belongs to the age group of 9-11 years. This indicates that most of the street children in the towns of Shashemene are teenagers.

On the contrary, with the findings of the researcher in the study which was carried out with support from UNICEF in 2006, more than 58% of Palestinian street children were 10-14 years old. Similarly, Save the Children (2009) stated that around 66% of street children in Georgia were 5 to 14 years of age. As the researcher realized from focus group discussion, the difference in age group distribution of findings' in the literatures and researcher's result is due to the lack of government and non-government institutions which are working on resilience of street children in Ethiopia, particularly in Shashemene.

Table 2. Sex of street children.

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	193	82.5
Female	41	17.5
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013)

Table 3. Age of street children.

Age range in years	Frequency	Percent
9-11	44	18.8
12-14	84	35.9
15-17	106	45.3
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 4. Ethnicity of street children.

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Oromo	82	35.0
Amhara	14	6.0
Wolayta	124	53.0
Sidama	3	1.3
Others	11	4.7
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Ethnicity of street children

The street children were asked which ethnic group they belong in order to find out about their origin. Even though Shashemene is found in Oromia region, majority of the interviewed street children claimed to be of Wolayta origin.

The statistical information discloses the following ethnic composition of street children in Shashemene. More than half of the street children (53%) were ethnically from Wolayta background. The next dominant group was Oromo (35%). Children from other ethnic groups and Sidama background share nearly five percent (4.7%) and slightly above one percent (1.3%) of the study population, respectively (Table 4).

In the literature, it was stated that Shashemene has recently attracted many migrants, particularly from the densely populated Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) in search of work and for a better life (Atakilte and Gunilla, 2011). Similarly, in this study, the origin of most interviewed street children came

from Wolayta, one of highly populated ethnic group in SNNPR.

Educational level of street children

In Ethiopia, a strong suite of laws, policies and programmes lays the foundation for getting all school-aged children into schools and ensuring learner-friendly school environments. Even though all of the street children in researcher's sample were of basic compulsory schooling age, more than 10% were not enrolled in formal school.

As Table 5 indicates, from sampled street children, 88.1% attended primary school or had a lower than high school education while only nearly 2% attended secondary school. While the educational statuses of 4.3% interviewees were illiterate, nearly 3 and 2.1% attended Church and Quran School, respectively.

Consortium for Street Children (2011) stated that despite the introduction of free primary education, school

Table 5. Educational level of street children.

Educational Level	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	10	4.3
Church School	9	3.8
Quran School	5	2.1
Primary School	206	88.1
Secondary School	4	1.7
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 6. Current school attending situation of street children.

Are you currently attending school?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	57	24.4
No	177	75.6
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

attendance in Ethiopia is still characterized by extremely low rates of primary and secondary school enrolment, high class repetitions and extremely high dropout rates, at lower primary level. Similarly, majority of the respondents in this study attended schooling in the past but dropped out before completing primary education.

Current school attending situation of street children

Table 6 gives an explanation on the percentage and frequency of street children who are currently attending school and those street children who are not attending school.

The table shows that from 234 respondents interviewed, only 24.4% of the street children are currently attending school. Nevertheless, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia five years (2010/2011 to 2014/2015) Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP, 2010) declared that, in order to build on the progressive achievements in this regard, the government will increase its efforts in human resource development through improving access and quality of education in the next five years. The findings show that 75.6% did not go to school or eventually became dropouts at primary school.

This tendency is also confirmed by the rapid appraisal assessment of street children in Cairo and Alexandria conducted by UNODCCP, UNICEF and WFP (2001) and which revealed that 70% of those children who are attending school dropped out while the remaining had never been to school. This result, however, is inconsistent with the findings of Prince (2006) who has done a study on factors related to the street children

phenomenon in the major towns of Sierra Leone which declared that 78% of street children were attending school.

Familial information of street children

Bereavement of biological parent of street children

The researcher asked street children about the bereavement of their parents with the intention of assessing the effect of death of parent(s) on children's decision to move to the street of Shashemene.

The result of the study in general indicated that slightly more than forty-eight percent (48.3%) of the street children came from a 'complete' family setting: both parents are alive. About twenty percent (20%) had lost their fathers whereas slightly more than seventeen percent (17.1%) had lost their mothers. The remaining nine percent (9%) had lost both parents while nearly six percent (5.6%) did not know whether their parents were dead or alive (Table 7). Similarly, the study conducted in Kenya by Mercer (2009) revealed that most street children are not orphans and many still maintain contact with their families. It has been shown in Brazil and Nairobi, Kenya that majority of the street children come from homes headed by single mothers (Abdelgalil et al., 2004).

From the findings, some explanations could be given. When one parent is deceased, there would be two alternatives. In case the living parent chooses to stay single, the social and economic stress on children is predominantly severe. As to the other option where the

Table 6. Bereavement of biological parent of street children.

Death of parents	Frequency	Percent
Father dead	47	20
Mother dead	40	17.1
Both dead	21	9
Both alive	113	48.3
Do not know	13	5.6
Total	234	100

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 7. Current residence of street children's parents.

Current residence of parents	Frequency	Percent
In Shashemene town	89	38
Outside of Shashemene town	111	47.4
No Parents/they are dead	21	9
Do not know	13	5.6
Total	234	100

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

living parent institutes another marriage, the substitution of the biological parent by the unknown person creates great detestation to children which also leads to serious conflict within the newly established family unit. Hence, in both cases, children become sufferers of these situations. This being so, children tend to break away from the inhospitable home atmosphere by picking any promising alternatives for survival.

Generally, death of one or both parents has a great effect on many aspects of children's lives. It makes the children more likely to spend nights (or live full-time) on the streets; it reduces the probability of school enrollment and also increases the risk of dropping out of school. These children see a loss or absence of parent(s) as a problem equal to or greater than economic difficulties. Most of them need to make money to sustain their livelihoods

Family's residential areas

The street children were asked about their families' current place of residence to find out the migrational status of street children in Shashemene.

From the children's responses, it was discovered that slightly above forty-seven percent (47.4%) of the families of street children currently reside outside Shashemene. On the other hand, thirty-eight percent (38%) of the street children reported that their families' presently dwell in Shashemene. While about 9% of the total street children

replied that their parents or guardians were dead. Nearly six percent (5.6%) answered that they do not have any information about their families current place of residence.

Table 8 has shown that the children have migrated either together with their parents from distant areas or came by themselves from the nearby rural or urban setting. In the literature, it was stated that in Awassa Town, about 61.1% of street children were migrants from other rural or urban areas in Ethiopia (Solomon et al., 2002). This result was also supported by key informant interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders. They said that a significant number of street vendors, lottery ticket sellers and shoeshine boys migrated to Shashemene unaccompanied.

Educational level of street children's parents

The researcher asked the street children about their parents' educational level to find out the effects of families' education on the children streetism.

As Table 9 indicates, in general, the educational status of parents of street children was very low. From sampled street children, slightly above thirty-seven percent (37.2%) of fathers and fifty-six percent (56%) mothers were reported to be illiterate. From the street children's response, nearly forty-nine percent (48.7%) of the fathers and 37.6% mothers of street children had attended only primary school. Slightly over eleven percent (11.1%) and 6.4% of street children reported that their fathers and mothers respectively attended secondary level education while only three percent of street children's fathers had attended college education. Consistent with this result, the study conducted by Yemane (1995) in Adama Town claimed that 55.1% of fathers and 59% of mothers of street children were illiterates. As Ali (2004) stated, in spite of attempts to eliminate illiteracy, there remain high levels of illiteracy among the families of street children.

As reviewed in the literature, due to their lack of formal educational experience, parents may be unaware of the importance and value of education and may not provide appropriate educational care for their children. This situation encourages children to drop out of school and remain in the streets. Often, the family does not resist this action. In some cases, the family is the main factor that drives children from school.

The lower educational level of parents is a significant factor to the lower job opportunities available to them. From this, one can conclude that, in such less educated society, both parents may be obliged to work to respond to their family's demands. In this case, loneliness or lack of adequate supervision was hypothesized to push a child to the street in search of friendship and support. Generally, although each child has his/her own experience that drove him/her to the streets, lack of educational sustainability of street children's parents are also one of the factors that leads to streetism.

Table 8. Street children parents' educational level.

Educational level	Mother		Father	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	131	56	87	37.2
Primary	88	37.6	114	48.7
Secondary	15	6.4	26	11.1
College	-	-	7	3
Total	234	100	234	100

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 9. Street children's number of siblings.

Number of siblings	Frequency	Percent
0-3	55	23.5
4-7	99	42.3
More than 7	80	34.2
Total	234	100

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Street children's number of siblings

The researcher asked the street children number of their siblings just to know if having large siblings had pushed out children to streetism.

As Table 10 shows, slightly above forty-two percent (42%) had four to seven (4-7) siblings and slightly above thirty four percent (34.2%) street children come from the family who had more than seven (more than 7) children. Only nearly twenty four percent (23.5%) interviewed street children reported that they had three and less siblings.

A comparative study conducted in Awassa in 2002 by Solomon et al. (2002) revealed that higher number of street children than non-street children have more than six siblings. On the contrary, 42.8% of the non-street children have less than three siblings. Generally, from findings one can conclude that having large number of siblings is one of the factors that accounted for children in the streets than having small number of siblings.

Factors that accounted for streetism

Reasons why street children come to Shashemene

Only thirty eight percent out of two hundred thirty-four interviewed street children reported that the present places of their parents are in the Shashemene town (Table 8).

From this, the researcher is concerned on the reasons behind migration of children to the town. Accordingly, as

Table 11 indicates, almost thirty-six percent (35.9%) of them declared that they came to Shashemene due to absolute poverty of their families and slightly above twenty two percent (22.2%) come to Shashemene for the sake of finding a work. A little above twenty one percent (21.4%) confirmed that Shashemene is their family's origin place; while nearly seventy percent (16.7%) come with their parents. Others about 3.8% of them reported that they come to the town due to peer pressure.

In the statement of the problem of this study, Atakilte and Gunilla (2011) claimed that Shashemene Town as a commercial center has recently attracted many migrants, particularly from the densely populated Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region in search of work and for a better life. This idea clearly concurred with the results indicated in Tables 4 and 8.

Most of the research conducted globally regarding the street child phenomenon indicates that poverty is the single most important factor influencing children to leave their homes (WHO, 2000). In a study of 108 street children in the Pakistani cities, 75% of interviewed children cited poverty as the primary reason for being on the streets; inadequate family incomes forced them to seek employment in the informal economy (Ali et al., 2004).

According to focus group discussions, the majority of street children in Shashemene migrated from SNNPR, particularly from Wolayta Zone and rural area of West Arsi Zone which surrounded the town. Wolayta Zone is predominantly densely populated in Ethiopia while both areas are frequently hit by drought; this is followed by very severe famine.

Table 10. Reasons why street children come to Shashemene.

Why did you come to Shashemene?	Frequency	Percent
Poverty/Famine	84	35.9
To find work	52	22.2
With parents	39	16.7
Peer pressure	9	3.8
Shashemene is my family's origin place	50	21.4
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 11. Street children's parental separation/ staying together.

Are your parents staying together?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	100	42.7
No	103	44
No parents/ they are dead	21	9
Do not know	10	4.3
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

An official from Social Affairs' Office also claimed that; *many of the children on the street in Shashemene are here because of abject poverty from mainly the rural areas they come from. There are very limited opportunities for these children in their areas of origin, and unfortunately the urban environment does not offer them any real alternatives.*

Street children's parental separation/staying together

Street children were asked about whether their mother and father stay together. The result of their responses showed that slightly above fifty seven percent (57.3%) of street children did not come from an utterly staying together family.

The street children parents' separation/staying together (Table 12) makes it obvious that nearly forty three percent (42.7%) of their parents were staying together. While forty four percent (44%) of interviewed street children mothers and fathers were totally separated, nine percent and slightly above four percent (4.3%) respectively have no parents and do not know about their parents' family circumstances. As Table 12 indicates, majority of the parents of street children were divorced or separated. Most of them come from homes headed by single mothers/fathers. In many instances, the children could only speculate the whereabouts of their parents.

During the focus group discussion, the participants reported that family disintegration is a very powerful stressor for street children. Divorce of parents is often accompanied by additional problems, such as a severe decrease of a family's economic conditions and a loss of

the bond to the only caregiver present in the child's life. The stakeholders agreed that the case of divorce contributed to further problems including frequent family conflicts preceding the separation and an introduction of a step-parent who may not accept the children. According to key informant from Shashemene Town Women and Children Affairs Office, in traditional Ethiopian societies, there was no destitution. Every child had a caretaker, but this gradual disintegration of family system has contributed to too many of its younger children looking elsewhere for survival, and unfortunately many end up in the streets.

Generally, from response of street children, focus group discussion and key informant interview, one can conclude that single motherhood/fatherhood contributes to the lack of oversight and guidance that parents can give to their children. Single-parent caregivers who became sick resulted in the loss of income and food, and contributed to children leaving school and going to the streets. So, the separation of family no doubt has effects tremendously in leading children to the street.

Parents' employment conditions

The street children were asked about their parents' employment conditions to gauge the impact of this factor to streetism. Accordingly, only less than one-quarter (21.8%) reported that their parents employed or have regular income. Whereas, slightly above three-quarter (78.2%) of interviewed street children parents were unemployed or have no regular income (Table 13).

During the focus group discussion, the participants

Table 12. Employment conditions of street children's parents.

Are your parents employed?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	51	21.8
No	183	78.2
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 13. Street children's economic activities.

Current economic activities	Frequency	Percent
Street vending	63	26.9
Carrying (porter)	52	22.3
Begging	16	6.8
Lottery selling	36	15.4
Shoe shining	56	23.9
Gathering and selling coffee that overspill in market places	11	4.7
Total	234	100

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

reported that majority of the parents of street children had no permanent jobs and it is difficult to generate income to support their children. This situation further depicts that unemployment of parents may be considered as one of the factors for street children phenomenon. Further, findings from FGD also revealed that those who were employed are self-employed and engaged in activities such as petty trading, hairdressing, selling firewood and vegetables. These activities generate very low income, hardly adequate to sustain the family.

Similarly, the key informant from street child mother claimed that; *I am unemployed. However, I have five children with two different men in my life, who are now both deceased. The only primary caregiver to all these children is me, unemployed mother; I cannot provide all the basic needs of my children. I would have loved to provide for all the needs of my children, but it was practically impossible. My trade does not provide enough financial resources to fulfill my parental obligations. Thus, my children are put to work on the street to augment what I can provide.*

This result is consistent with the findings of Lemba (2002) who has done a rapid appraisal assessment of street children in Lusaka. Lemba's study showed that more than 90% of the fathers of street children were unemployed.

The current socio-economic conditions of street child

The street children's economic activities

The sample interviewees were asked on their current economic activities whether it has effects on their socio-

economic conditions. In general, the work of street children falls into that of informal economy. It is irregular, low paid and the market is highly competitive.

As Table 14 shows, almost twenty seven percent (26.9%) of the interviewed street children were street vendors who sell cooked potato, home-made biscuits, 'kollo' (roasted cereal), tissue paper and chewing gum. Slightly above twenty two percent (22.3%) currently lead their life by carrying goods at bus station and market places. Nearly about seven percent (6.8%) were engaged in begging as a means of survival. The research confirms that slightly above fifteen percent (15.4%) of street children lead their livelihood by lottery selling while nearly twenty four percent (23.9%) and nearly five percent (4.7%) are engaged in shoe shining and gathering and selling coffee and different vegetables that overspill in market places, respectively.

During the course of observation, the researcher observed that all shoe shiners and most of lottery tickets sellers were male street children; whereas, the majority of street vendors were female street children. Similarly, all street children porters in Shashemene Town bus stations and market places were male while the beggars were predominantly from female street children. Street children are probably the most visible face of child labor.

Focus group discussion results with stakeholders confirmed that there was a connection between hours worked and income earned. In order to earn a bit more than the minimum income, street children had to spend long hours working. Most street children seem to engage in two or more activities in order to ensure high income as possible.

A focus group discussant street child who survived by carrying goods at Awasho Bus Station claimed that;

Table 14. Street children source of food.

What is your source of food?	Frequency	Percent
Buy	117	50
Get from institutions	4	1.7
Beg	5	2.1
Collect leftover	64	27.4
Get from family	30	12.8
Relatives and friends houses	14	6.0
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

sometimes we have to fight to get some loads to carry. The bigger boys will be pushing us off the buses that bring the goods, and sometimes the market women refuse to let us carry their loads because they claim we are too small to carry the load. On a bad day, I will make no money, and that means no food. I sometimes go to bed with no food and I cry.

From both focus group discussions, the researcher realized the bad working situations of street children. The findings showed that they were deprived of their right to protection from any sort of economic exploitation. The effect of child labor on the psychological and physical development of the child is obvious. Not in contradiction to this findings, NPA (2010) posts that the street children lack occupational safety, work long hours, are paid no or a low wage, and work in dangerous environments. Most of them are involved in petty trade or carrying goods, shoe shining, begging, or collecting garbage.

Street children's source of food

The researcher asked the sampled street children whether source of food is directly related with their socio-economic conditions or not. Accordingly, as Table 15 indicates, a half of interviewed street children (50%) declared that they have bought their food. Surprisingly, in an unfamiliar way in Ethiopian tradition, in Shashemene Town leftover/remaining food is not gotten freely, the street children should give different services to hotel owners and relatively affluent families to get leftover. Most of the street children of Shashemene who bought their food confirmed that they are either unfresh food from hotels or leftover. During the course of observation, the researcher observed that many male street children were buying leftover in Aposto, Arada and Awasho sub-towns of Shashemene. Slightly above twenty seven percent (27.4%) collect leftover freely from hotels and affluent family houses in return for their services. Only nearly two percent (1.7%) of street children got their food from non-government institutions, while slightly above two percent (2.1%) street children source of food come from begging. Nearly thirteen percent (12.8%) and six

percent (6%) of interviewed street children got their food from family, relatives and friends houses, respectively.

During the focus group discussion with stakeholders, the members reported that many of the street children have families, but their families do not care for their welfare which includes the provision of food. Sometimes for survival, they walk for kilometers upon kilometers just to get money to buy food for themselves and even for their families from the very little money they make. Furthermore, the result indicates that majority of the children living on the streets survive and eat through several improper means that is not healthy for the development of children. According to the findings, these are consequences of the low socio-economic conditions of street children. In literature, similar to this finding, Prince (2006) claimed that most street children had to depend highly on begging and buying for their daily survival source of food.

Number of times street children eat everyday

The street children were asked as to how often they eat per day. The result showed that more than half of the interviewed street children (53%) reported that they eat twice per day. This in fact means street children may go hungry to sleep or search for work. Slightly above twenty four percent (24.4%) of the children confirmed that they eat three times per day. Whereas, nearly twenty three percent (22.6%) responded that the frequency of their meal depended on the availability of food on each day (Table 16).

This result is in line with a comparative study conducted in Sierra Leone major town in 2006 by Prince (2006) which revealed that more than three quarter of the street children had eaten less than three times per day. Contrary to this finding, Kibrom (2008) stated that more than sixty percent of the street children in Adama ate three times per day.

Focus group discussant street child commented that; *I had no money so I had to go to bed with an empty stomach. In the middle of the night, I had hunger pains and I had to go to a hotel to beg for some. They had*

Table 15. Number of times street children eat per day.

Food per day	Frequency	Percent
Two meals	124	53
Three meals	57	24.4
As available	53	22.6
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 16. Distribution of where street children sleep at night.

Where do you sleep at night?	Frequency	Percent
Family house	88	37.6
Relative house	25	10.7
In the street	34	14.5
Rent house	39	16.7
Dilapidated house	31	13.2
Other places	17	7.3
Total	234	100

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

mercy on me and gave me a little to eat. I then went back to sleep. These findings indicate that most street children in Shashemene do not have the recommended three meals per day. The findings showed the consequence of the low incomes of street children and their parents.

Distribution of where street children sleep at night

The researcher asked street children about the place they sleep at night with the intention of assessing their socio-economic conditions and classifying them to children "of the street" and "on the street".

Table 17 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of places where street children slept at night. The table illustrates that nearly thirty eight percent (37.6%) of interviewed street children in Shashemene Town slept in family houses while nearly eleven percent (10.7%) and seventeen percent (16.7%) slept at relatives or rent houses, respectively. According to definition given in the literature, these street children who comprised more than 65% were children on the streets. Children on the street earn their living or beg for money on the street and return to their home at night (UNICEF, 2006).

Correspondingly, nearly fifteen percent (14.5%) and slightly above thirteen percent (12.2%) slept on the street and in dilapidated houses. These children are categorized under children of the streets. In the literature, UNICEF (2001) posts that children of the street are homeless children who live and sleep on the streets in urban areas. For these children, family ties may exist, but they are

tenuous and maintained occasionally. A little more than seven percent (7.3%) were sleeping at other places such as in public buildings, market places and in garages.

During five observation times, the researcher observed the street children slept on the sides of the street and in dilapidated/abandoned buildings in Arada, Aposto and Awasho sub-towns. Generally, these findings indicate that majority of the street children do not have proper places or houses to sleep. The study reveals that street children slept in all types of odd places based on the above table. This implies that the street children in Shashemene Town neglected their basic needs.

Street children's money management conditions

The sampled street children were asked about their management of money earned whether they save or give to others. The result showed that more than ninety percent (90.6%) sampled interviewees do not save money. Only slightly above nine percent (9.4%) street children save their money. Surprisingly, out of two hundred thirty four interviewed street children, nearly sixty nine percent (68.8%) gave their money to others. Less than one quarter (31.2%) do not give money to others. The findings showed that the street children work not only for their own, but for their families' monetary needs (Table 18).

Both focus group discussion results with stakeholders confirmed that almost all the money street children gave to others goes to their parents. So, majority of the

Table 17. Conditions of street children's money management.

Money management conditions	Yes		No		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Do you save money?	22	9.4	212	90.6	234	100
Do you give money to others?	161	68.8	73	31.2	234	100

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 18. Street children's health problems.

Do you have any health problem?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	115	49.1
No	119	50.9
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

children on the street spend their money on meeting family expenses and covering the cost of their personal expenses. On the contrary, children "of the street" mainly spend their earnings on themselves, purchasing their food and buying their own clothes.

In the literature, it was stated that the street children are likely to handover all or part of their earnings to the family. Thus, they are contributors to the economic survival of the family unit (UNICEF, 2001). It was also reported that in the streets of Vietnam, street children can often earn extra money for their families, as much as ten times their parents' monthly income, by vending or scavenging in the summer (Hong and Ohno, 2005).

Difficulties children face in the streets

Street children's health problems

The investigation also looked at the health issues encountered by the street children on whether or not they have any health problems and provided with any treatment. In view of that, almost half (49.1%) of the respondents have mentioned they have some form of health problems during the time of data collection. However, barely half (50.9%) of the interviewed street children confirmed that they did not have any health problems (Table 19).

The researcher is interested to know the major health problems of the street children through focus group discussions and key informants. From the focus group discussants, it was clear that intestinal parasites are the leading cause of illness. Participants have also listed food poisoning, abdominal pain, gastritis, malaria, headache, anemia cough, and relapsing fever, stab injury when attempting to rob a house, and car accident by a drunken driver when they are sleeping on street as health

problems they face frequently. They have also reported rape, unwanted pregnancy, and physical abuse by police as health problems. As to the actions they take when they get sick, majority of them go to health institutions, while the others do nothing with health institutions, but look for traditional healing.

In literature, Densley (2000) posts that street children suffer from poor health outcomes because of their lifestyle, living environment, and lack of access to medical and social services. Therefore, the findings showed that the combination of malnutrition, exposure to unsanitary living conditions, consumption of unclean water and food, lack of toilets, exposure to cold, left children to become vulnerable to diseases.

Street children's use of psychoactive substances

The researcher asked the street children about their habits regarding the use of psychoactive substances with the intention of assessing its impact on their socio-economic conditions. As Table 20 indicates, in Shashemene Town nearly forty-five percent (44.8%) of street children reported that they did not take any psychoactive substances while 55.2% did. Among the psychoactive substances users, slightly above fifteen percent (15.4%) were chewing chat while 6.4% are smoking cigarette and nearly six percent (5.6%) of the street children used *ganja*. The others, about six percent and twenty-two percent (21.8%) of interviewed street children take all psychoactive substances which are listed in Table 20, whereas 6% were drinking alcohol.

According to 2007 UNICEF report, street children seem to have a propensity to abuse psychoactive drugs, with many using such drugs to counteract the effects of pain and hunger. Muchini (2001) observes that the drugs, as well, reduce feelings of shame that the street children can

Table 19. Street children's use of psychoactive substances.

Psychoactive substances	Frequency	Percent
Alcohol drinking	14	6
Chewing chat	36	15.4
Smoking	15	6.4
Using ganja/cannabis	13	5.6
All of the above	51	21.8
Not at all	105	44.8
Total	234	100.0

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

Table 20. Abuse of street children.

Types of abuse	Abusers									
	Kebele workers		Other street children		Police		Businessmen and drivers		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Verbal abuse	25	23.8	45	42.9	21	20	14	13.3	105	44.9
Physical abuse	7	7.1	51	51.5	35	35.4	6	6	99	42.3
Sexual abuse	-	-	5	71.4	-	-	2	28.6	7	3
Robbed	-	-	19	82.6	-	-	4	17.4	23	9.8
Total	32		120		56		26		234	100

Freq, Frequency.

Source: Researchers' survey result (2013).

do any job without any worry when their survival hangs in balance. Makope (2006) suggested that drugs help these street children get away from stresses and unhappiness. When sober, street children always think and worry about how they can change their situations.

During the focus group discussion, the participants reported that many street children are involved in harmful use of psychoactive substances like chewing chat and taking ganja/cannabis. This habit can lead to excessive intake, increase the chance of misbehaving, violence and unprotected sex. Over time, the continued use of substances can lead to complications such as brain and liver damage. Therefore, the use of intoxicants by street children can be viewed as a risk factor in a number of areas including sexual abuse and infection with HIV.

Abuse of street children

The street children are highly vulnerable section of the society by living an unprotected life. For this "an underclass of the underclass", the risk to be abused is also very high. Accordingly, all interviewed street children declared that they were subjected to different abuses in the street of Shashemene town. The most frequent amongst the type of abuses were verbal and physical. As Table 21 indicates, the majority of street children, nearly

forty five percent (44.9%) reported that they were verbally abused; slightly above forty two percent (42.3%) were physically abused. While three percent (3%) of interviewed street children were subject to sexual abuse, about 9.8% were robbed on their properties.

When the street children were asked who the most likely perpetrators of that abuse are, they identified the following: other street children, police officers, *kebele* workers and others such as drivers, businessmen and passengers. Among the verbally abused street children, nearly forty three percent (42.9) were abused by other street children/gang leaders, 23.8% by *kebele* workers while 20% and 13.3% were done by police officers and others, respectively.

Out of ninety nine street children who were subjected to physical abuse, more than half (51.5%) were abused by gang leaders. About 7.1% were abused by *kebele* workers, 35.4% by police officers and 6% by others. Whereas, nearly three quarter (71.4%) perpetrators of sexual abuse were other street children; 28.6% were taxi drivers and businessmen. On the other hand, in robbing the street children, all perpetrators (100%) were gang leaders.

A key informant police officer reported that abuse is a daily part of life for street children. It is like a reality of everyday life of these children. It was reported that the street children are physically abused and harassed mainly by street gangs and businessmen all the time. The

police officer explained that in addition to physical abuse, street children are also frequently abused sexually or misused by gang leaders and street adults' predators who believe they are easy prey for their sexual gratification. As the police officer commented, the most common forms of sexual abuse were beating, rape, oral sex, and anal sex including homosexuality. The researcher observed three documents, which was a case related to street children's homosexual abuse that was investigated and the culprit was sent to a juvenile court.

During the focus group discussion, the members reported that many times street children were insulted, scared and terrorized by people who are afraid of them or who do not recognize that they are still children despite their way of life. The stakeholders commented that victims of physical and sexual abuse suffer from long-term psychological damage.

In the literature, Makope (2006) stated that 98% of street girls lose virginity once they enter into the street as they lack advice from parents, and imitate experienced female street children. Fresh and younger children in the streets are at the mercy of bullying by older boys and girls who demand anything inclusive of money, food, sex and clothes. Those children who cannot stand to live a sad life, especially when counting money or eating as crew leaders can snatch the money or food by force (UNICEF, 2006).

Conclusions

Based on the above summary, the researcher concludes that the street children in Shashemene were faced with difficult living situation and lack of basic facilities due to their poor socio-economic conditions. Children are driven onto the streets by multiple factors, key among which were poverty, death and separation of parents, lack of families' regular income, peer pressures and lack of basic social amenities. These factors have robbed street children of a good part of their childhood. They have been forced to worry about the things that most children take for granted: food, safety, and a roof over their heads. Thus, street children become "little adults" in their efforts to help themselves and their families to survive.

Indeed, as the study has further revealed, majority of the street children's parents were not educated. Whereas, most of the street children have one time or the other been to school and later become school dropouts. They had to drop out because of the inability of their parents or guardians economic conditions in raising money to pay for school materials. Many of the street children did not have any interactions or emotional attachment with their families.

It is evident from the findings of this research that a large number of street children were engaged in menial jobs like vending, carrying goods, shoe shining and lottery selling. Street children are unprotected working

children who are highly vulnerable to exploitation by the work itself and by others. Their lives on the streets leave them with few opportunities to access basic needs like food, shelter, education and basic health services.

These children who are left in the precarious conditions are exposed to a series of hazards, which go from psycho-physical and sexual abuses, to outright aggressions in the streets, and drug use. Some of the perpetrators of the children come from very close members of the communities, prominent among which were, their peers on the street, polices, *kebele* workers and businessmen.

With their numbers increasing and their health and safety situation deteriorating, street children in Shashemene are in great need of appropriate policies and interventions. Government policies on poverty-reduction, education, and protection are well-intentioned. However, their practical implementation has been limited due to lack of political commitment and enforcement. A limited number of local NGOs which hardly any of them had affiliation with international NGOs have attempted to assist the street children mainly by counseling and training. However, there was no significant impact they brought on the living standards of the beneficiaries. So, the preventions and interventions in place to deal with street children in Shashemene were both qualitatively and quantitatively inadequate. They were incapable of measuring, let alone managing, the street children phenomenon.

Generally, this study implies that due to the abject poverty of their families the influx of disgruntled children to seeking greener pastures in the town highly increased. But, there are no expected alternatives in the town. These children in the town are exposed to most critical socio-economic problems. They occupy the lowest strata of the social ladder. So, the street children in Shashemene are greatly in need of assistance from local government and NGOs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions and the entire study, the following major recommendations have been forwarded:

- 1) National and regional policy makers must be sensitive to the issue of children in street situations and the economical and societal hazards to which they are exposed. The children on the streets of Shashemene need to be given particular attention by Oromia Region State and Shashemene Town Administration, because they are at risk of exposure to various economical and societal hazards, especially given the relatively more discrete nature of the phenomenon.
- 2) The Oromia and SNNPRS states' policies to combat extreme poverty in street children families should particularly focus on tackling long term unemployment for

those who are able to work.

3) There should be more aggressive town administration involvement in addressing the problems of street children, through adequate funding, and more partnership programs with local non-government agencies already engaged in activities for street children.

4) Special initiatives from multiple sectors of the Shashemene Town administration machinery should allocate manpower and financial resources to devise innovative programs for children already on the streets. The offices of women and children affairs', social affairs', education, police and youth and sports should have a special working table, where the needs of the children can be addressed holistically from their respective sectarian capacities.

5) Shashemene Town office of small and micro-enterprise and local NGOs should create job opportunities for street children and enhance children's creativity by providing training, reunite street children with their families where they still exist; improve the economic status of the families of street children, and establish care institutions for young street children. They should also allocate sufficient resources for awareness-raising campaigns against domestic violence and support for child victims.

6) International and local NGOs working with street children in Shashemene should collaborate and form working committees to share vital information and resources. They should enhance their collaboration with regional government agencies in formulating action plans for street children. This will reduce duplication of services.

7) Both the SNNPR and Oromia regional States' should have a program of action to stem the flow of children from their areas of origin, which has been identified mostly as the rural poor areas. At the same time, there should be a program to reintegrate children already on the streets into proper functioning citizens of the society.

8) The researcher's follow-up research endeavors must be considered and the effects of rural poverty alleviation programs on children in the rural parts of Ethiopia should be monitored and evaluated.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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