

Non-discrimination and Protective Rights of Children in Ethiopia: The Case of Gerar Jarso Wereda in Oromia Region

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Abstract

This study investigated the situation of children's non-discrimination and protective rights, the magnitude and manifestations of violations of these rights, the nature of the violations, the causes and consequences of the violations, and possible suggestions to reduce the intensity and diversity of right violations in Gerara Jarso Wereda¹. Six out of the 21 kebeles² in the Wereda were selected using stratified sampling. Study participants were randomly selected children and 47 seriously abused children. In addition to these 60 parents, 21 teachers, 12 kebele authorities, and 24 respected elderly people in the kebeles were also interviewed. A questionnaire, interview guides and a focus group discussion guide were used to collect data. Results were analyzed using percentage, t-test, ANOVA and qualitative methods. Results showed that children faced discrimination because of their identity (family economy, religion, culture, sex and their physical condition). Neglect, physical abuse, child labour, and practicing harmful traditions were reported. Recommendations related to awareness raising, reporting abuses, law enforcement and building capacity of child right committees are forwarded.

Keywords: children, protective and non- discrimination rights, violation of child rights, Ethiopia

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Introduction

Respect for human dignity is the foundation for human rights. The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) begins by stating, "Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." Article One states "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Children are human beings—simply smaller and more fragile than adults. That is why the Universal Declaration also recognizes that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an outgrowth of the human rights declarations (UN, 1989; South East Asia and the Pacific, 2004).

As a member of the UN, Ethiopia has ratified the CRC on December 9, 1991 and interpreted it into the country's legal system through proclamation number No 10/92 which was included under Article 36 of the country's constitution. Prior to this, the Ethiopian government had also enacted laws in the Penal Code of 1957 (in articles 527, 545, 546, 548, 552, 558, 560, 589, and 594) to provide legal support for the protection of children from abuse and neglect (Desalegn, 1998; Lijinet, 2001).

The ratification of the CRC has laid a basis for its implementation. However, the ratification of the document alone does not guarantee the realization of children's rights but is only a step towards that end. The gap between ratification and implementation must be bridged before we can hope for a more promising future of Ethiopian children (Eshetu, 2002; Tibebu, 2002). Article 4 of the CRC states that "State parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the convention." The article indicates that comprehensive measures should be taken to ensure full realization of children's rights in view of the principles enshrined in the convention (UN, 1989). So this paper is meant to explore how rights enshrined in the convention are being respected or violated in the target Wereda (Gerar Jarso). The study specifically focuses on the situation of the two major categories of rights namely non-discrimination and protective rights in the Wereda.

Statement of the Problem

With regard to child right research in Ethiopia, I noticed three key observations in the literature. One of the key observations is the gap between ratifying international or regional conventions and protocols and implementation (Eshetu, 2002; Veerman and Levine 2000). Consequently the ratification of the United Nations Convention, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and passing of other supportive legislations by different states has not resulted in major improvements in the well being of children and thus the provisions have not brought an end to the plight of the world's children (Mulinge, 2002). One major reason for the failure is focusing too much on the UN conventions and giving less attention to the local ones. If the gap becomes too big and if an imbalance occurs between the international, national, and local levels, the effort to protect children will not be as complete as it should be (Veerman and Levine, 2000). Mulinge (2002) argues that though both passing supportive legislation for the protection of the rights of the child and having the political will for their implementation are necessary, considering socio-economic and political dilemmas (poverty, corrupt practices, HIV/AIDS, civil wars and other armed conflicts) is equally important.

The second observation is the dispute on child work and child labour. This is particularly an issue of debate between developed countries who criminalize child work versus developing countries who feel that the child should contribute for the betterment of his/her country. The latter argue that developed countries seem to be concerned of child labour forgetting their past that children were instrumental for building their economy (McKechnie and Hobbs, 2007).

The third observation is that the UN CRC is often taken as a framework to study child rights and researchers are divided in their reaction to it. Some applaud it and recommend it to be strictly observed and used in any research on child rights. Others counter argue that it does not reflect the realities of some states and it misses out some important socio-cultural and economic realities of the experience of developing countries particularly African experience (Abebaw, 2008; Olowu, 2002).

This study considered these three observations as conceptual frameworks guiding this study. As such, it is partly an extension of previous studies; what makes it different is that it specifically focused on two major categories of rights (non-discrimination and protective rights).

As one of the least developed countries in the world, Ethiopia is host to a variety of economic, social, and educational problems. According to MOLSA (1992), nearly 60% of the population lives below the poverty line. In such a country it is likely that millions of children will live under difficult conditions in which their rights will be seriously violated. In this regard, Children, Family and Youth Affairs Organization (1999) indicated that in Ethiopia more than 4,042,357 children (of which more than 150,000 are street children) live in exceptionally difficult situation. Gerar Jarso is one of the *Weredas* in North Shoa Zone of Oromia Regional State which has an estimated population of 109,751 of which children below 15 years comprise 47.7% (52,417) (Welfare Monitoring Survey of 2000).

The present study is intended to carry out an investigation with regard to children who are embodiments of our past, present, and future. Our past successes and failures, our present commitments and opportunities as well as our future aspirations, hopes, and frustrations are all embedded in and revealed through our children (Tilahun, 2002). Investing on children lays the ground for a better future of any nation. Thus, studying the situation of children particularly with regard to the violations of their rights has unparalleled importance in our development efforts.

The following basic questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent are children's non-discrimination and protective rights respected in the *Wereda*?
2. If there are violations, what are the forms of abuse related to non-discrimination and protective rights?

3. Is there any significant difference in terms of the sex, residence, educational status, and intactness of families in the violation of these rights?
4. What are the reasons community members identify for violations of child rights in the *Wereda*?
5. What did the local community suggest to reduce the intensity and diversity of child right violations in the *Wereda*?

Literature Review

Studies and sample surveys in Ethiopia show that numerous children are still suffering from violations of their basic rights. Because of high malnutrition rates, more than 1 in 3 children are stunted. The infant mortality rate is 97 per 1,000 live births and 1 out of 6 die before their 5th birthday. Access to basic services such as education, health, shelter, clean drinking water and sanitation is among the lowest in the world. Children both in rural and urban areas are required to work either to supplement the low income of their families or to be the bread winners for of the whole family. In addition, there are many harmful traditional practices like abduction, early marriage, rape, tattooing, bloodletting, and female genital mutilation (Eshetu, 2002).

UNICEF (2005) in its report on the situation of children in the world estimated that in Ethiopia more than 6 million children live under difficult conditions. A large proportion of Ethiopian children live in conditions which are widely seen as predisposing factors to street life involvement due to poverty, lack of education, displacement due to war, drought, etc. Nearly two-thirds of Ethiopian families live on income below what is required to meet the minimum basic needs (Konjit, 1996). A study by the Children Family and Youth Organization (1999) identified the following factors as related to child abuse and neglect: disease, famine, lack of child care centers, poor education of mothers, and low income of families.

There are four categories of child abuse and neglect reflected in the literature:

I. *Physical Maltreatment*- this includes acts of physical force that could be associated with discipline; more serious acts of physical force beyond the realm of what would normally be associated with discipline; forcing a child to eat or drink illegal, harmful or poisonous substances; victimization by proxy, agent or broker; and closely confining or physically restraining a child (Riddle and Aponte, 1991 as cited in Belay *et al.*, 2001). These actions could be revealed by some corporal punishments like pinching, whipping, hitting with one's hand, beating with sticks, exposure to fumes of burnt pepper, etc.

II. *Neglect*- refers to omission of primary care takers positive attention to the needs of the child. It includes refusal or delay in providing physical or mental health care; supervisory neglect; custody refusal, abandonment or desertion; personal hygiene and physical needs neglect; nutritional neglect or omission; and educational neglect (Desalegn, 1998).

III. *Psychological Neglect and Abuse*- refers to any act that conveys the message that the child is worthless, flawed or unloved (Hetherington and Parke, 1993). According to Hert, Brassand, and Karlson (1998) as cited in Belay *et al.* (2001) there are four types of neglect and abuse:

1. *Spurning* – this is care giver belittling, ridiculing, public humiliation and criticism;
2. *Terrorizing* - this is any one or a combination of care givers' acts as placing a child in unpredictable or chaotic circumstances, setting rigid or unrealistic expectation with threat, harm or danger, failure to protect the child from violence, and exposing the child to physical violence or conflict between parents or others;
3. *Isolating* - refers to confining a child or placing unreasonable limitations on the child's freedom of movement; and
4. *Denying emotional responsiveness* - this is a situation where a caregiver is detached from and uninvolved with the child or failing to express affection, care and love for the child.

IV. *Sexual Abuse*- refers to any sexual activity with a child irrespective of the consent of the child (Finklehor, 1979 as cited in Belay *et al.*, 2001). The

abusive acts include inter alia: sexual intrusion or penetration, genital molestation, genital fondling, leading to touch perpetrator's genitals, vaginal intercourse, oral genital contact, simulated intercourse, anal intercourse. The kind of coercion involved during the abusive acts include verbal pressure, physical force, threat of force, offering presents or bribes, forcing to use alcohol or drugs, threatening family members, and other forms (Belay *et al.*, 2001).

Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect

Early ages are formative and thus crucial for later physical, social, cognitive and emotional development. Thus, children in their early age need to be well fed, well dressed, well attended to and comforted for a healthy mental, social, physical and psychological growth. Maltreatment at an early age has a tremendous impact on the child's development of social skills, cognitive ability, and emotional adjustment (George and Main, 1997; Plotkin and Twentyman, 1984).

Hetherington and Parke (1993) explain the consequences of child abuse and neglect as follows:

The physical and psychological consequence of child abuse is serious. It can result in physical handicaps, neurological problems and disturbances in emotional and social development. Such children are found to be compliant, violent and aggressive toward adults and peers. Some abused children are hyper vigilant; they seemed to have learnt not to trust adults. As they grow through school they not only continue to show problems in relations with peers, teachers and caregivers, but they also have academic problems, low self esteem, and become depressed and withdrawn.(p.297)

The International Save the Children Alliance for South East Asia and the Pacific (South East Asia and the Pacific, 2004) states that physical punishment gives children the message that violence is an appropriate form of conflict resolution; it teaches them that it is acceptable for powerful people (adults) to be violent toward the weak (children). Surely children have to be disciplined and raised to understand and follow social rules, but this has to be done through positive approaches like negotiation, reward,

and explanation of mistakes and offences rather than punishment. When we treat children in a way that takes away their dignity, we teach them how to take away others' dignity (Leo, 2003 as cited in South East Asia and the Pacific, 2004).

Methods

Area Sampling

In the *Wereda* there are 17 rural and 4 urban *kebeles*. Of the 21 *kebeles*, six were selected using stratified random sampling (2 *Kola*³ 2 *Dega*⁴ and 2 Urban).

Selection of Participants

The research participants include children who are attending school, drop-outs and those who have never attended school, parents, teachers, *kebele* administrators, and respected people in the local community (recognized for their distinct contribution or role in the *kebele*). Specifically the participants include the following:

- 453 children (75 from each *kebele*); 246 male and 207 female; 150 from urban and 303 from rural areas). Of these, 328 were attending schools whereas the remaining 125 were dropouts or have never been to school. The age range was from 7 to 18 years. This was done to enable the researcher to get children who can express themselves. The gross educational enrolment rate in the *Wereda* was 68.25% in the 2003/04 academic year.
- Forty seven (26 male, 21 female) who have been subjected to different forms of abuse (e.g., torture, excess labour, corporal punishment,
- inhaling fumes of pepper, scars, rape, damage on spinal cord) were selected using availability sampling. Twenty-eight of the children were from intact families, 11 were from single-parent families, and eight were living with other people (e.g., relatives, caregivers, employers).
- Sixty parents (i.e., 10 parents from each *kebele*; 32 male and 28 female) were selected randomly from the six *kebeles* to be interviewed.

- Twenty one teachers (12 male and 9 female) teachers participated in the study.
- Twenty-four community leaders (only one female in the group) recognized for their contribution in their respective *kebeles* were selected (four from each *kebele*) as identified by *kebele* authorities and teachers.
- Twelve *kebele* administrators (chairperson and secretary, only one of them is female) who were selected from the six *kebeles* (i.e., two from each *kebele*) participated in the study.

Overall, 617 individuals participated in the study. Except the 453 children who were selected at random, the remaining were selected using purposive and/or convenience sampling.

Instruments

Questionnaire

A detailed questionnaire, which has 26 items, was developed based on the CRC. The 453 children completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire which has close and open ended items addressing such themes as the status of non-discrimination and protective rights violations, form of the violations, magnitude of the violations at home, at school, and in the neighbourhood, and in the community at large.

Interview Guides

Four interview guides (for parents, teachers, *kebele* authorities, and known people) were prepared. The guides address issues related to the prevalence of child right violations like child labour, harmful traditional practices, level of discrimination in terms of sex, physical and mental disability, child right protection in schools, measures to be taken to protect child rights, and the magnitude of the violations, major causes of the violations and suggested solutions to the problem.

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Forty-seven children who were subject to abuse participated in the FGDs. The main objective of employing focus group discussion (FGD) in this study was to obtain data on violations from abused children. The guide included items that emphasized the manifestations of child rights violations related to the magnitude of abuse, the consequent pain these children are experiencing as a result of the violations, possible causes of the violations, and the suggestions children forward to alleviate child rights violations. Six FGDs were conducted (one in each *kebele*).

Data Collection Procedure

The 453 children completed the questionnaire with the help of research assistants who read and explained items to clarify the tasks of the children because some of the children have no education. The interview held with the selected informants was recorded. The researcher transcribed the recorded data carefully. Interviews were held in Oromiffa and Amharic (local languages) and translated in to English. During the focus group discussion utmost effort was made to make the victimized children feel at ease in the discussion.

Methods of Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed to analyze the data. Data obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed using chi square, t-test, and ANOVA. Data obtained through the interviews and the focus group discussions and the specific observations were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using qualitative techniques.

Results

The data were analyzed under two categories: non-discrimination, and protective rights.

Non-discrimination

The right not to be discriminated is viewed in three subdivisions: discrimination against one's identity, discrimination against mental and physical condition of the child, and discrimination against gender. In this section discrimination against children relative to other family members, discrimination against girls relative to boys, and discrimination against children with disabilities will be addressed. Table 1 shows the incidence of discrimination against a child's identity or family identity.

Table 1. Discrimination against one's identity (n=453)

Type of Discrimination	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Against economic status of parents (rich versus poor)	117	27	318	73
Against belief of parents and children (religious)	88	25	352	75
Against use of one's culture (language and ethnicity)	295	66	151	34

Source: Author's Own Construction, 2006

* 18, 13 and 7 children have not given response to issues related to economy, religion and culture respectively

As Table 1 shows, children reported that they are discriminated against their own beliefs, their parents' economic status, and use of their language and culture while they are with other people of different background. Independent t-tests revealed that urban children ($x=3.76$, $s=1.46$) are less discriminated against ($t=3.56$, $p<.05$) than rural ones ($x=4.26$ $s=1.07$), and non-student children ($x=3.73$, $s=1.19$) face less discrimination ($t=2.35$, $P < .05$) than students ($x=4.14$, $s=1.28$) in the level of respect of one's right to identity (culture, language, parents economic status, and belief of parents and children).

In relation to intactness of parents ($F_{2,314} =6.36$, $p < .05$), the ANOVA showed that children of intact parents ($x=4.20$) are in better status than those with single parents ($x=3.89$). Children who are not living with their parents ($x=3.48$) faced more discrimination than both intact and single parent families in terms of the child's own (or his/her parents') identity.

In the interviews and focus group discussions, a great majority of the respondents stated that the culture does not equally favour all members of the family and children's views are not equally respected. The dominant view among families in Gerar Jarso *Wereda* seems to disregard children and their views. Most respondents agreed that the highest respect and acceptance in a family is given to the father and his opinions, then the mother, elder son, son, and finally the daughter, in that order. However, respondents from several *kebeles* suggested that there are some desirable changes that are attributed to awareness programs by the government and NGOs.

Table 2. Discrimination against physical and mental disability (n=453)

	Number	%
High	96	21
Moderate	193	43
Low	159	36
Total	448 (5 has not responded)	100

Source: Author's Own Construction, 2006

As Table 2 depicts almost 80% of the children reported that the level society discriminates against disabled children is "moderate" (43%) or "low" (36%). The rest 21% (96) of the children reported that discrimination of disabled children is high. Rural children rated the discrimination to be less serious than urban children. The ANOVA ($F_{2,436}=7.67$, $P < .05$) shows that the level of non-discrimination is better in Kola ($x=3.84$) and Dega ($x=3.26$) than Urban/Fitche/ ($x=3.16$). This may be because children with physical and mental disability seem to go to towns from rural areas to get assistance by begging or other means. Children with disabilities in rural areas are also likely to remain at home which may make their disability less noticeable by others.

The study participants in the interviews were unanimous in stating that the community does not see children with and without disabilities in the same way. Clearly children with disabilities are discriminated against. One informant (a parent) from Fitche town, for example, affirmed that "The difference between children with and without disabilities is analogous to differences among the five fingers. Children with disabilities are like the

smallest finger,” suggesting that children with disabilities are weaker and less productive than those without disabilities.

In some of the *kebeles* (e.g., Torban Ashie), the difference between children with and without disabilities is considered analogous to the difference between healthy and unhealthy individuals. The respondents further indicated that discrimination against children with disabilities occurs in many forms. Opinions expressed by some parents in Sherer Guenet regarding children with disability are: “we do not usually buy clothes for them,” “we do not take care of them,” and “we sometimes even pray for their death as if they were not our own children.”

The respondents gave the following justifications why the community behaves this way towards children with disabilities.

- The community does not consider children with disabilities beneficial because of the erroneous belief that they could accomplish nothing; they are considered weak and unproductive.
- There is a belief that children with disabilities could not have good perception and knowledge.
- There is a belief that disability is a punishment for a sin committed by the family.

In some localities (e.g., Enequal Mutie, Sherer Guenet), some of the study participants indicated that the community sympathizes with and takes care of children with disabilities. They also indicated that they support children with disabilities.

Another source of discrimination is gender. Table 3 demonstrates the rate of discrimination against children because of their gender.

Table 3: Gender Discrimination (n=207, girls' response)

Criteria	Yes		No		χ^2 observed	χ^2 critical	Significance
	F	%	f	%			
Equality of sexes in being cared	69	36	123	64	15.19	3.84	p<0.05
Equality of sexes in labour	36	19	156	81	75	3.84	p<0.05

Source: Author's Own Construction, 2006

*15 children have not given responses to these 2 questions

Children's report indicated that girls are discriminated against in both care and labour. While over half (57.20%) of the children reported that girls' participation in traditional play is acceptable, the rest (42.8%) said that it is not acceptable.

A one sample t-test ($t = -54.20$, $P < .05$) showed that the obtained mean ($x=0.97$) is by far less than the expected and maximum value ($x=3$) of non-discrimination, indicating that discrimination against females is a serious problem. In terms of group differences, rural females ($x=0.85$, $s=0.95$) are more discriminated against (with $t=2.58$, $p < .05$) than urban females ($x=1.17$, $s=0.94$) and non-student females ($x=0.47$, $s=0.78$) are more (with $t=5.38$, $p < .05$) discriminated against than student females ($x=1.17$, $s=0.96$).

The qualitative data also revealed that, in general, the community seems to assign more value to males (father, son) than to females (mother, daughter). It is evident from the above discussion that the community in Gerar Jarso *Wereda* gives little attention to children's opinions and views. However, there is much more discrimination against girls relative to boys. A large number of respondents corroborated this idea. An elderly woman from Fitcha, for example, stated that "... Even if a girl is more intelligent than a

boy, she is considered inferior to any boy simply because of her sex.” According to the participants, the justifications given for discrimination against girls include the following: first, the community believes that naturally girls are not equal to boys. Second, the community perceives boys as more productive. Third, the community strongly believes that girls are born to take care of household chores which are considered less useful for the family’s existence. Fourth, there is also a belief that God blessed boys rather than girls. Fifth, the community believes that boys rather than girls cope better with adversities.

Many respondents have raised several manifestations of the discrimination against girls and these include, among others, the following: boys are not required to assume responsibility for household chores; parents more often buy clothes for boys than for girls; more parents force girls rather than boys to drop out of school; when a mother gives birth to a baby girl, parents as well as relatives and neighbours would not be as happy as when she gives birth to a baby boy; fathers do not give plots of land to girls while they do give to their sons; except in churches where girls are allowed to go, in other recreational and social occasions like in play fields, holidays and festivals, girls are by far smaller in number than boys.

Protective Rights

A protective right is a broad category covering such issues as being safeguarded from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Table 4 shows the extent of neglect and disregard towards children.

Table 4. Disregard and neglect (n=429)

Level of disregard and neglect	Number	%
Always	58	13
Sometimes	192	45
Never	179	42

Source: Author’s Own Construction, 2006

According to Table 4, 58% of the children are abused and neglected either always or sometimes. The rest (42%) have never been abused and neglected. In relation to how parents discipline children, 207(47%) said that parents use advice as a way to discipline them. The rest 243 (53 %) reported that parents use verbal abuse (19 %), beating (19%), denying food (4%), dismissing the child from the house (4%), or threatening (6%).

As to how schools discipline them, children reported that schools use advice and convincing (72%), pinching (8%), slapping (5%), beating with stick (12%), verbal abuse (3%), and others (2 %). In relation to the children's perception of severity of the punishment teachers use, 115 (35%) children reported that the punishment is "highly" severe while the remaining 65% rated the severity from "medium" to "very low."

Sexual abuse is another form of abuse in Ethiopia. On this issue, children were asked if they experienced sexual request and 26% of the children reported that they were requested. From all requests friends take 58%, teachers 8%, relatives 14% and others 20%.

According to most interview respondents, except some parents who have relatively better education, the community employs coercive measures to discipline children. Among others, these measures include emotional abuse (such as belittling, insulting, and cursing), physical punishment or abuse (such as beating with stick and whip), dismissing the child out of home for a long time or for good, forcing the child to carry out works that are beyond his/her physical capacity, and forcing the child to starve by refusing to provide meals. These measures sometimes result in shock, panic, and physical injury. Such incidents occur not only at home but also in schools. One informant, for example, reported about his own close relative who had received a major blow on the neck by his teacher simply because he did not do his homework. This resulted in a serious problem on the child's neck that lasted for some days after the incident. Another informant reported a similar incidence in a rural school where the teacher hit the student using a bamboo that resulted in bleeding of the child's hand.

The data collected from the 47 abused children in the FGD revealed that child rights violators include parents (i.e., fathers, mothers, siblings,

stepmothers, and stepfathers), adoptive parents, employers, relatives (such as aunt and grandparent), and friends. More specifically, the data confirmed that over half (56%) of the children were abused by their biological parents primarily by their fathers (about 36%). Besides, about 22 percent of the children were abused by their stepparents, mainly by their stepmothers (16%). A girl in Sherer Guenet is a case in point. Her stepmother usually assigns her tasks that are generally difficult for her age. Besides, the stepmother wakes the girl up every morning at 4:00 a.m. for work while the stepmother's biological daughter sleeps peacefully until late morning (8:00 a.m.).

The data collected from the 47 abused children evidenced also that the majority of the children 20 (43%) were subjected to corporal punishment, the most prevalent form of abuse. In addition, eight of the children (about 17%) were subjected to forced labour, three other children were forced to inhale fumes of pepper, and the bodies of three other children were burnt. Furthermore, two children were raped, two had leg damage, and two more children had broken legs or hands. The other children were subjected to torture, hunger, eye damage and visual impairment, damage of the spinal cord, body slashes, and skin damage from hot water.

The following case (of a physically abused boy from Elamu Arjo Selale) illustrates how severe physical punishment is, why parents employ physical punishment, how parents especially fathers think about and react to children's questions/opinions.

Fathers around here focus on how to exploit children's labour; they do not care whether children attend school or not. Once I asked my father to send me to school. "Are you the one who decide on your education?" he asked me and severely hit me and one of my ears was injured. Up to now, I have not been to school and the injury on my ear still reminds me of that day."

Kebele authorities in Elamo Arjo Selale reported a similar experience whereby a boy was burnt with hot sickle on his leg for stealing coins and the child left his home without telling where he was going. The boy told his friends that he does not believe he has a family after this shocking experience. Nobody knows where the child is living now. What is surprising here is that no legal action has been taken against the parents.

Use of Children's Labour

Use of children's labour by parents is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Frequency of children's responses on the extent of their labour used by parents

Variables	Level of the variable	Number	%
Non-school workload at home	Very high	115	27
	High	109	24
	Medium	127	29
	Low	86	20
Absence from school due to workload at home	Many days	41	12
	Sometimes	144	44
	A few days	41	13
	Never	100	31

Source: Author's Own Construction, 2006

As one can see from Table 5, more than 50% of the children reported that they have high or very high workload and are not going to school. This violation of children's right is presented in relation to categories of children in Table 6.

Table 6. Difference between groups of sex, residence, and educational status in child labour

Variable	Group	Number	Mean (x)	Stand. Dev. (s)	T	p
Sex	Male	174	3.32	2.61	-0.27	p > .05
	Female	142	3.39	1.83		
Residence	Urban	132	3.85	1.65	3.34	p < .05
	Rural	184	2.99	2.61		

Source: Author's Own Construction, 2006

A lower mean indicates a higher workload

There was a significant difference between urban and rural children in the use of child labour by parents. That is, rural children have heavier workload than urban children. This was particularly true in the Kola area ($x=2.88$) compared to Fitcha ($x=3.85$). The researcher's observation of this problem seems to support this result in that children in Kola area are working from early daybreak to late dusk.

Both in Fitcha town and in the rural *kebeles*, the dominant belief among the community as a whole is that each family has a lot to accomplish everyday and children should assume responsibility for some portion of the workload. Most parents take children's labour as a necessity without which many tasks could not be accomplished. Thus, the community in general and parents in particular consider exploitation of child labour as the right of parents. One parent, for example, said "Because I have exerted much effort to raise the child, I have the right to make the child work." Activities children perform include house cleaning, food preparation, taking care of younger siblings, fetching water from distant places, collecting fire wood, tending herds,

ploughing, gathering agricultural yields, spending the night in the farm keeping their crop from beasts, carrying different things on the back, weaving, shoe shining, small-scale business, and sewing clothes.

Evidence obtained from the FGD further showed that children in some families carry out tiresome and labour-intensive works. In this respect, a mother in Fitch town had the following to say:

I had six children of whom four are alive. The two elder boys had been good-behaving children and they were the ones who raised their younger siblings. They used to distil *areke* [a locally distilled drink with a very high alcoholic content] that requires intensive work.

The women admitted that this is a very difficult and tiresome task, which is done under high temperature. Children in the rural *kebeles* (e.g., Enequal Mutie) are awakened early in the morning (sometimes as early as 4:00a.m.) to go to the farm where they should stay all day long working on the farm. Teacher informants have reported that children in the rural *kebeles* (e.g., Elamu Arjo Selale, Torban Ashie, Sherer Guenet) are usually forced to carry out tasks beyond their physical capacity and that children begin to participate in ploughing as early as the age of nine. Thus, in the rural areas, parents seem to be concerned neither about the age of the child nor his/her physical capability to accomplish the work.

Furthermore, child labor exploitation in Gerar Jarso *Wereda* takes another form whereby parents "sell" the child to work for others. In the words of one elderly/respected member of the community in one of the *kebeles*:

.... Other parents "sell" their children to work for others and receive the payment. Given their ages, these children are too small to participate in any kind of work. Besides, their employers often abuse them; the children do not go to school, nor do they have a good future.

The justifications parents give for child labour exploitation include first, payment for several things (taxes, fertilizers, and contributions) is possible only when a lot of work is done and children should contribute their share- they should support their family because they are poor. Second, it is

believed that child labour is important for the child's future, as a way of teaching morale. This is related to the belief that if children do not work, they would be troublesome. Third, using child labour is considered as the parents' right.

According to some informants, parents sometimes take serious measures (e.g., refuse to buy stationery for children, refuse to send children to school) if children do not take responsibility for some portion of the family's workload. The condition is worse in rural areas, particularly Kola.

Harmful Traditional Practices

Commonly observed harmful traditional practices in the *Wereda* include female circumcision, early marriage, rape, and abduction.

Female Circumcision

Female circumcision seems to be widespread in the *Wereda*. Focus group discussions with abused children evidenced that almost all girls have been circumcised. Besides, female genital mutilation is not carefully carried out. Female circumcision is commonly carried out in villages, not in clinics.

Though there were some programs aimed at sensitizing the public on the consequences of female genital mutilation, resistance to these programs has been observed in different *kebeles*. For example, a father from Elamu Arjo Selale was frank enough to express his objection. He said:

Female circumcision has been commonly practiced for a long time. Some people are now urging the public to give up female circumcision. Some residents are asking why we should give up a cultural heritage. They say that the awareness-raising program is not acceptable. But they further state that although they do not accept it, they however are afraid to circumcise the girl child because of the prohibition.

Early Marriage and Rape

Early marriage is commonly observed in some of the *kebeles*. However, the age at which girls get married does not seem to be uniform across *kebeles*. Girls generally get married at the age of 12 to 15 in some *kebeles* like Torban Ashie, 15 to 18 in Fitcha, or even at the age of 9 or 10 (Enegual Mutie).

Another problem associated with early marriage or marriage in general is arranged marriages. Sometimes, parents force girls to get married to a person about whom they know nothing. A father of nine children in Elamu Arjo Selale, for example, pointed out that the family is responsible for arranging marriages. Regretting what he did in the past, the father continued:

I, for example, had arranged marriages for my two daughters previously. For the sake of the marriage, my daughters dropped out of school from grades six and nine. I have nine children and seven of them are now beyond third grade. I have now understood that I should have waited until my two daughters completed their secondary education.

Because of the sensitive nature of rape, one can see how difficult it could be to approach and interview a girl who was raped to secure original data. Luckily, the researcher was able to approach and interview a girl who was recently victimized by a resident of Fitcha town. The girl was 14 years old from a remote place called *Gondar* and was not only subject of sexual abuse but also of emotional abuse and child labor exploitation as one can easily observe from her recollections.

I was separated from my parents when my uncle came to our home and convinced my parents that he would help me to attend school. Immediately after my arrival at my uncle's house in Gondar, I began attending school. Soon after, things began to go wrong because my uncle's wife was not happy about me and we were not in good terms. For this reason, I left my uncle's house and went to an acquaintance of mine. She was a female teacher who promised to treat me like one of her kids and to send me to school if I live

with her and assume responsibilities for household chores. We reached an agreement and we came all the way to Fitcha from Gondar. I was not aware of the distance. She did not keep her promises (I was not going to school, she never bought cloths for me, and she was not treating me like her kids). I asked her to take me back to Gondar. She refused. I told this to her neighbours and one of them told me that she would help me to find some work and I began to live with her. With the help of the latter I was hired as a maid for birr forty per month. I worked for nine months in the same house but the money was given to the woman; I got nothing. I stopped working there and was hired in another home. Once more, with the help of the same woman, I was hired in a butchery. It was at this point that I was raped. It was the owner of the butchery who raped me but it was with the consent of the woman acting as my benefactor. The woman told me that she would kill me if I talk to anyone about the rape and who did it. I was very much afraid and talked to no one about it. Finally, the case reached the police and the latter collected evidence and filed the case to the court. When things got serious, the man showed up and told me, showing his pistol, that he would kill me if I told the court the truth. I was afraid for my life. Consequently, I asked the court to drop the case. The officials were disappointed and I was arrested for seven days. So far, the man has not left me alone; he always follows me. Because I am from Gondar and I have no relative here in Fitcha, I am still in trouble.

This same case was reported when we interviewed the police officer and the latter corroborated what the girl said in the interview. However, unlike the girl who said that she dropped the case because she was afraid for her life, the police officer attributed the release of the perpetrator to the judges who he thought were not knowledgeable about child rights and who simply favored the perpetrator because he is better-off compared to the victim. The police officer further suggested that the perpetrator should have been arrested even if the victim agreed to drop the case because her age does not entitle her for consensual sex.

Potential Dangers of Harmful Traditional Practices

Each harmful traditional practice could result in severe physical or emotional damage to women and children. In some *kebeles* (e.g., Sherer Guenet), husbands often hate to live with a woman who has undergone some form of operation. In addition, girls who were raped and/or abducted often drop out of school because they could not easily cope with the insult and disregard of peers in the school as well as the community at large.

In spite of the above problems, some respondents have pointed out that there is a promising beginning with regard to the abolition of harmful traditional practices. This is reflected in the readiness of the people to abandon these practices because most of them have understood the consequences of the practices.

Discussion

Most respondents who participated in the focus group discussions and interviews generally agreed that children need care and encouragement. They also agreed that parents usually attempt to take care of their children but whether or not the care is sufficient depends mainly on the family's income. Most participants frequently mentioned low family income as a major obstacle to satisfactory child rearing. According to the participants, because most parents live in poverty, they have to eke out a living and this often leads to neglecting children, which in turn has undesirable effects on childcare and development. The gap between legislation and implementation is observed in this study in that families agree on a number of rights of the child but question their realities. Veerman and Levine (2001) indicated that one challenge to the implementation of the UNCRC is the gap between Geneva (the top place of legislation) and the local realities. In Africa in a similar tone of bringing the UNCRC to local realities, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was developed by considering the socio-cultural and economic realities of African experience (Olowo, 2002). Child maltreatment in the *Wereda* studied is often attributed to the following reasons:

1. Family income: Those who have good income can take good care of their children. Those who have limited income are not able to do so. In relation to this Mulinge (2002) argued that the ratification of the UN CRC by most state parties has not resulted in major improvements in the well being of children due to the prevailing socio-economic conditions like poverty. The writer further stated that ratification of the convention, passing and adoption of supportive legal frameworks and the existence of a political will to implement are necessary but not sufficient for protection of child rights because socioeconomic barriers make things complex, but it is good to be mindful that this is not always the case.
2. Number of children: Most parents and other participants of the study stressed that child rearing is not good enough in their respective *kebeles* because of the large number of children in a family. A family can have many children. For these families it may be difficult to send all these children to school. It is also difficult to take good care of each child.
3. Discipline: Another central issue in child rearing in Gerar Jarso *Wereda* as a whole is children's discipline. Among all other concerns in child rearing, the community attaches prominent value to disciplining children. Rather than teaching children about moral values, parents focus on disciplining children using harsh measures. To modify or change these unwanted behaviours or to prevent them, parents often employ coercive measures ranging from insults to harsh physical punishment.

Respondents stressed that no parent hates his/her child; parents love their children and want them to be responsible citizens. Nevertheless, the community strongly believes that raising a child requires strict parental discipline and control. Parents believe that because a child cannot distinguish what is good from what is bad at least until 15/16 years of age, it is their responsibility to mould the child's behaviour by strict control. Thus, parent-child relationships are not generally based on mutual understanding, they are predominantly parent-centred- parents give orders to which the child should readily comply.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the situation of children in light of child right violations focusing on non-discrimination and protective rights in Gerar Jarso Wereda of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Results revealed that the community attaches utmost value to parent-centred rather than child-centred approach to child rearing. Of prime importance in child rearing, therefore, is the parents' (particularly that of the father's) opinion and decision rather than the child's. Coercive measures are practiced in disciplining children, and extreme child labor exploitation is rampant. Family economic status and physical and mental disability are found to be causes of discrimination. More females are discriminated against compared to males in getting care. Non-student children are more exposed to discrimination, neglect, disrespect, labour exploitation and other abuses. Significant differences were also found in favour of children from intact family.

The data further revealed that violations largely occur at home and/or at school. They also occur when children (particularly girls) travel a long distance from home, for example, to fetch water. The perpetrators include parents, teachers, peers, and employers where the father ranks first. Low family income, lack of training about child rights and proper child rearing, limited number of health centers, widespread harmful traditional practices, large family size, and low infrastructure in general are the major causes of violations of children's rights. In sum, child right violation (particularly non-discrimination and protective rights) is rampant in the Wereda implying the need for a serious intervention.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings the following recommendations are forwarded.

1. Conducting intensive and extensive public awareness programs

One serious problem that aggravates the status of child rights is low public awareness of good child rearing practices and harmful traditional beliefs. There are people who still believe that a child is like one of the beloved goods (possessions) of parents. Further, parents think that it is their right to exploit their child's labour; they believe that a child knows nothing and thus everything related to him/her has to be decided by his/her parents.

2. Reporting child rights violations or child abuse

Effort should be made to convince the public that it is the community's responsibility to fight against violations of child rights and/or child abuse. The first step in this fight is reporting any child abuse case one is aware of to the police or *kebele* officials immediately. By so doing, the perpetrators may be forced to quit violating child rights. Once their case is reported, abused children may get the chance to receive counselling and legal aid services (though these services are still very limited in the country). Apart from individual efforts in reporting child abuse, a committee consisting of personnel from relevant government departments such as Labour and Social Affairs, Education, Health, and Justice can also be formed to review the status of child rights in the *Wereda* and write periodic reports directed to intervention.

3. Enforcing the CRC

Enforcing the CRC is an essential mechanism to discourage perpetrators. This requires a coordinated effort from several stakeholders: the justice, police, labour and social affairs office, women's affairs office, *kebele* and *Wereda* administrations, the schools, etc. These groups should work together to make sure that perpetrators are properly penalized.

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Endnotes

- ¹ A government administrative unit or structure in Ethiopia often consisting 50,000-200,000 people.
- ² The smallest government administrative unit in Ethiopia consisting 2,000-3,000 people
- ³ Classification of places in Ethiopia based on temperature which signifies a mostly hot area.
- ⁴ Similar classification as above which signifies mostly cold areas.

The main aim of assessing the relationship between water supply and sanitation and food security. The methods used to obtain the data included household surveys and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) sessions. The data included socio-economic characteristics, water supply households, and the relationship between the water supply and health, education, income and other socio-economic. The results of the study revealed that the villagers of Goga in the Balele Kebele, who have got water schemes, have brought on the agricultural productivity of the water. The inhabitants of Erba village in the Kebele, who have also water schemes, feel that the water supply is inadequate to meet household requirements. The other two Kebeles that have no access to water schemes, i.e. Shek Abul in Balele Kebele and Bura in the Goga Kebele, use water from natural sources that are nearby them as the main source at their households. Lack of access to safe water has affected agriculture and brought about health problems for humans and livestock, shortage of time and labor power, and inability to intensify agriculture through irrigation. The people in all study villages are faced with acute shortage of the households being unable to sustain themselves all year round. Factors that adversely affect crop production, livestock raising, earnings from agriculture activities, and food utilization explain households' food insecurity. The villagers in both watersheds have put forward the following measures to improve their food insecurity situations: expansion of irrigation agriculture, construction of big water storage schemes and development of water points for livestock.

Keywords: water supply, food security/insecurity, East Hararghe Zone, water schemes, irrigation, livestock watering

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