Childhood Experiences In Parental Care and Later Competency: The Case of *Sinkegna* High School Students*

Darge Wole**

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Background

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In spite of the many hardships they endure, some ***sinkegna*** become so successful academically that they qualify for admission to higher institutions of

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I. Background

The ***sinkegna*** form a special group of students in provincial senior high schools. Impelled by the absence of senior high schools in their vicinity, they grudgingly tear themselves away from their homes at the completion of the junior grades and continue their education elsewhere as distinct, if undistinguished, temporary residents. Characteristically, the ***sinkegna*** depend on modest provisions periodically collected from their homes and they live in groups in bare rented rooms. Observations and a modicum of research[1] suggest that the ***sinkegna,*** confronted as they are with the exacting task of self-management under strained conditions, generally suffer from problems such as inadequate diet, illness, homesickness, and conflict with room-mates and house owners.

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learning. Others wither away at various stages of the high school years. Given such a divergent outcome, it is appealing to investigate why this is so. Following this line of inquiry, the present study explores the relationship between early experiences in the hands of care-givers and the academic progress of the ***sinkegna*** as well as their competency in managing their maintenance and social problems.

II. Literature

Empirical evidence regarding the ***sinkegna*** is almost non-existent, and the factors that contribute to their prospects remain undetected. An exploratory study that involved 206 ***sinkegna*** senior high school students (Darge, 1994) has revealed the many travails of the ***sinkegna*** and their coping strategies. For instance, it was reported that 52 per cent of the ninth grade ***sinkegna*** included in that study failed academically at the end of the academic year. The study also identified a number of problems, including home sickness and conflict with house-owners as major impediments for the ***sinkegna***. Furthermore, some indication was given in the study about the effective coping methods of the ***sinkegna*** which included "substituting" (or, looking for other viable options), "reciprocating" (i.e., assisting each other), and "tolerating" (accommodating others' interest). However, by design, that study did not assess the role of upbringing in determining the progress of the ***sinkegna.***

Appeal to theory suggests that the manner in which the ***sinkegna*** are reared has a considerable impact on their competency (or their ability to assess and solve problems) when circumstances deprive them of the close support and supervision of their parents or guardians.

One home-based factor that determines competency in self-management during childhood and beyond seems to be the amount of affection the individual enjoyed as a child. Many studies (Sears, 1970; Belsky, *et. al.*, 1980; Forehand, *et. al.*, 1986; Dornbusch, *et. al.*, 1987; Phillips, *et. al.*, 1987; Denham, *et. al.*, 1991; Lakew, 1992; Steinberg, *et .al.*, 1994) strongly suggest that responding to children's need readily and adequately, providing explanations about desirable and undesirable actions, rewarding desirable behaviors, and expressing love and concern foster the development of self-management in the children. For instance, Belsky, *et. al.*, (1980) and Denham, *et. al.*, (1991) provided evidence which indicates the importance of maternal stimulation,

affection and supervision in the development of the cognitive and social skills of children. Lakew's (1992) study, which focused on local low-income families, suggested that mothers can promote the development of self-regulatory behavior among children by mediating the experiences of the children in their day-to-day contacts.[2] Overall the above types of parental engagement help to establish psychological security and to promote rational conduct and prosocial behavior.

Another factor in child upbringing that affects the child's ability for self-management appears to be his experience in exercising responsibility. In this regard, research (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Loeb, 1975; Hoffman, 1977; Rheingold, 1982) indicates that asking children to share tasks at home, or to assist in social activities appropriate to their age, giving them a moderate level of direction together with some opportunity for independent decision, and using reasoning (instead of imposition) in disciplinary matters improve competence in assuming responsibility. These kinds of outcomes are apparently discernible even among very young children. For example, Baumrind & Black (1967) found that affection, assignment of some responsibility and monitoring are related to self-confidence and independence among preschoolers, specially girls. Presumably, early experiences of the kind provide the child with the opportunity to practise skills, to appreciate the needs and views of others, and to build self-confidence on the basis of one's own accomplishment.

In academic matters, an additional factor that contributes to achievement and self-management ability appears to be support and general supervision by care-givers. In this respect, assisting children to set clear academic goals, encouraging and discreetly helping them to achieve the goals, and making a follow-up of their progress appear to promote academic progress, specially if they are provided to the child beginning from the early years (Morrow & Wilson, 1961; Elder, 1965; Dornbusch, *et. al*, 1987; Kurdeck & Sinclair, 1988). To mention a specific instance, Dornbusch, *et. al.* (1987) found that consultations with adolescents in making decisions that concern them and being firm about the decisions and expectations promote their academic achievement.

There are of course other socialization agents (besides the family) in child development. These include, for example, the peer group (Grusec & Abramovitch, 1982; Hartup, 1983), teachers (Yando & Kagan, 1968) and textbooks (Saario, *et. al.,* 1973). Yet some evidence (eg. Douvan & Adelson, 1958) suggests that parental influence is likely to prevail over peer influence with regard to basic social values (such as self-control). Moreover, it appears that the quality of early care appears to influence considerably the outcome of subsequent interactions as in the case of school dropouts (Cervantes, 1965) and children that are susceptible to emotional disturbance (Paget, *et. al.*, 1984). So parents or early care-givers remain to be central in the socialization process, although others also contribute to it.

In this study, focus is made on the three dimensions of parental care (i.e., "Affection", "Responsibility", and "Academic support and Supervision") because they are directly related to the kinds of problems (maintenance, academic, and social) that are investigated in the study. The selection of the three dimensions also has substantial theoretical basis in literature pertaining to the importance of early experience in child development, which includes the cognitive - developmental theories advanced, for example, by Piaget (Flavell, 1963), and the social learning theory advocated by Bandura (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Briefly, according to these theories, the child's level of understanding, problem solving behavior and social skills ensues from his own actions, and from interactions with others through such processes as nurturance, mediation, and modelling.

Briefly literature suggests that children who, in the hands of care givers, are nurtured with affection, the opportunity to exercise responsibility, and academic support and supervision are more likely to be competent in handling their problems and duties than those who are relatively deprived of these kinds of care. In relation to the ***sinkegna***, the implication of the theoretical literature is that the more they experience affection and academic support and the more they exercise responsibility and independent decision during childhood, the more competent they will be in managing their maintenance, academic and social problems as ***sinkegna.***

III. **Statement of the Problem**

Based on the theoretical literature, it is anticipated that

1. parental encouragement and support (**PESM**) is positively associated with the academic progress of senior high school ***sinkegna.***
2. PESM contributes importantly to the variation in the academic performance or progress of the high school ***sinkegna.***
3. compared to the ***sinkegna*** who receive low PESM, those who receive high PESM
   - 3.1. are less prone to maintenance, academic and social problems (or **MAS** problems);
   - 3.2. generate a greater amount of effective solutions to their problems; and
   - 3.3. employ a higher proportion of self-referenced solutions.

PESM was assessed by a scale devised by the researcher (See "Measuring Instruments" below). Academic progress is considered in terms of (a) the average marks for grade 9, and (b) overall status of the student after a lapse of four years commensurating with grades 9-12. Overall academic status had three categories: those who failed in grade 9 or dropped out of school with failing marks[3] (Initial Failure or **IF** Group), those who similarly failed in grades 10 and 11 (Moderate Success or **MS** Group), and those who normally progressed to grade 12 in the same school (Regular Success, or **RS** Group).

"Self-referenced" solutions related to coping methods that capitalize on the ***sinkegna's*** own resources (eg. discrete use of materials, planning of activities, and diligence) instead of on the help or sympathy of others.

The study contributes to a better appreciation of the possibilities and the attendant snags in the application of theoretical formulations about child rearing practices to the personal competence of students in a uniquely challenging situation. Practically, the study is also useful in identifying specific coping methods that are associated with the academic success and social competence of the ***sinkegna***, and similar student groups.

IV. **Method of Study**

The study method is described in terms of respondents, measuring instruments, and procedure.

1. **Respondents**

107 ninth grade ***sinkegna*** in Arbegnotch School (Arsi Zone - Oromia Region), which was the total ninth grade ***sinkegna*** population in the school at the time, supplied initial information. The study was conducted in that school because, according to previous observations by the researcher who is familiar with the school, about half of the ninth grade students in the school were traditionally ***sinkegna***. Moreover, limiting oneself to one ***sinkegna***-loaded school instead of considering a number of schools provided a better opportunity for an efficient and reasonably intensive consideration of the situation of the ***sinkegna*** in a form approximating a longitudinal study.

The strong professional contacts the researcher already had with the school personnel were also deemed to be advantageous to conduct the study which required interviews and wide access to student records over a four-year period. In addition, the hot climate and the attendant malaria at the site form a specially challenging context that would likely serve as an acid test of the adjustment competencies of the ***sinkegna,*** the majority of whom descend upon it from the highlands, almost green.

2. **Measuring Instruments**

Two types of instruments were used to collect data: The PESM scale and a questionnaire. The PESM scale included items that dealt with parental **affection,** responsibilities given at home, and encouragement for making decisions independently (the latter two henceforth labeled simply as **Responsibility**), and academic support and supervision (or, **Academic SS**).

The 77 - item PESM scale (17 on Affection, 40 on Responsibility and 20 on Academic SS) evolved out of a pretesting and subsequent adjustment based on a trial with 67 ***sinkegna*** ninth graders in Debrezeit Comprehensive High School[4]. The internal consistency reliability indices (KR-20) for the total

scale, and for the Affection, Responsibility and Academic SS sub-scales were 0.79, 0.85, 0.65 and 0.71 respectively. (See Note 5 for sample items). Couched in Amharic, the PESM scale consisted of statements to be answered as "True" or "False", indicating positive or negative experiences with regard to PESM. Responses indicating a positive PESM were awarded one point each. Those corresponding to a negative PESM received a zero score.

The questionnaire, again written in Amharic, included 38 maintenance, academic and social (**MAS**) problems that ninth grade ***sinkegnas*** in the study site probably faced. Thirteen of the problems related to maintenance, 13 others focused on academic matters and the remaining 12 dealt with social relations. The respondents were asked (a) if they faced the problems, (b) what methods they used to solve the problems they faced, and (c) the effectiveness of their methods. (See examples in Note 6).

3. Procedure for Data Collection and for Analysis

Following the pilot testing of the PESM scale in October 1992, the Scale and the questionnaire were administered in classrooms without any time limit. All the 107 ***sinkegna*** ninth graders (42 females and 65 males) in Arbegnotch School completed the Scale and the questionnaire. The grades of the respondents on the Eighth Grade National Examination were also collected from school records at the time.

In November 1995, other follow-up data were gathered from the school, and the IF, MS and RS groups were determined. The marks and rate of absenteeism of the respondents in the ninth grade were also secured. In addition, interviews were held with ten of the IF and RS ***sinkegna***.

In the analysis, the Pearson Product - moment correlation coefficient (PPM) was used to make an initial assessment of the association between PESM and academic progress. In the case of overall academic status, a score of 1, 2, or 3 was assigned to the IF, MS and RS status, respectively. The weight of PESM in determining academic progress was further explored using the backward regression method (Pedhazur, 1982). The potential predictors of the ninth grade academic achievement included PESM, sex, Grade 8 results and

absenteeism. These same variables plus ninth grade results were used in predicting overall academic status.

Comparisons of High and Low PESM groups were also made with regard to the average number of problems faced, and the proportions of effective and self-referenced solutions. A colleague served as an independent co-judge in determining self-referenced and non-self-referenced solutions. T - test (one tailed, $p < 0.05$) was used to determine statistical significance.

V. **Findings**

Out of 107 ***sinkegna*** who were initially involved in the study in 1992, four disappeared before even completing semester 1 in the ninth grade, thereby leaving only 103 subjects (43 females and 60 males) for consideration. In some of the analysis, it was not possible to include all 103 cases because of missing data.

General findings shall be presented first. Result of tests of hypotheses follow.

1. **General Findings**

Forty-three (41.7%) of the 103 ***sinkegna*** either failed or withdrew with failing marks at the ninth grade level. Seventeen others (16.5%) dropped out at the tenth and eleventh grade levels on the same account. Twenty-nine ***sinkegna*** also left school for no apparent reason after registering in grades 10 and 11, and only 14 (13.6%) were available in the twelfth grade in 1995/96.

The means and standard deviations on different measures for the 103 respondents were as follows.

Table I. Means & Standard Deviations on Different Measures

Measure/Variable	Mean & S D by Sex			
	Males (n=60)		Females (n=43)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Affection	12.9	3.3	12.1	3.0
Responsibility	24.9	3.8	25.5	3.5
Academic SS	15.1	2.9	13.2	2.8
PESM	52.9	8.0	50.8	7.3
Grade 8 Results	69.9	13.1	67.4	13.5
Absenteeism	8.2	6.9	7.5	7.1
Grade 9 Results	59.1	10.3	52.1	5.2

* Maximum possible scores: Affection = 17; Responsibility = 40; Academic SS = 20.

** In days

As Table I indicates, initially, the male and female respondents were very similar in most of the characteristics considered in the study, including the results on the Eighth Grade National Examination. However, the males excelled the females in the amount of academic support and supervision reportedly received from care-givers ($t = 3.29$, $p<.05$). Males also showed marginal superiority over females in PESM as a whole. A major difference in favor of males was also detected between the two groups in relation to their ninth grade average score ($t= 4.16$, $p < .05$).

A comparison of the scores for the Affection, Responsibility, and Academic SS dimensions indicated that the nurturance provided by the concerned care-givers was more limited in the case of giving opportunity for assuming responsibility than in the case of providing affection or academic support and supervision.

2. Specific Considerations

The findings regarding the hypotheses that were advanced earlier were as follows.

2.1 PESM and Academic Competency

The Person Product - Moment Correlation (PPM) between PESM and Grade 9 result was 0.17 (n= 97, p<.05). It, therefore, appeared that PESM is positively and reliably related to the academic progress of the academic progress of the ***sinkegna.***

2.2. Contribution of PESM to Variation in Academic Progress

Simple regression of the ninth grade average scores on PESM, sex, grade 8 result, and absenteeism produced the following results.

Table II. Simple Regression Analysis Results for Predicting Ninth Grade Achievement from PESM and Other Selected Variables

Variable	B	t	
Constant	54.9		
PESM	0.135	1.16	$R^2 = .159$
Grade 8 results	0.060	0.88	St. error =8.8
Absenteeism	-0.050	-0.39	F= 4.47, P<.05
Sex	-6.859	-0.80*	n=99

*P< .05 only in this case.

Backward regression analysis of the same data revealed that only "sex" accounted importantly and reliably to the prediction. (F= 15.8, P < .05). By itself "sex" explained 12.9% of the total variance while PESM was responsible for only 1.3% of the variance.

Regressing overall academic status over PESM, grade 8 results, absenteeism and sex produced a similar result.

Table III. Simple Regression Analysis for Predicting Overall Academic Status from PESM and other Selected Variables

Variable	B	t	
Constant	1.09		
PESM	0.019	1.717	$R^2 = 0.13$
Grade 8 results	0.001	0.264	St. error = 0.756
Absenteeism	0.003	0.220	F = 2.43; P < .05
Sex	-0.448	-2.427*	n= 76

P < .05 only in this case.

Backward analysis for predicting overall academic status again recognized "sex" as useful variable in the prediction (t=2.56, p=0.01). PESM did not feature as convincingly important. (t =1.71, p = 0.09).

2.3. PESM and Competency in Handling MAS Problems

In relation to maintenance, academic and social (MAS) problems, the questions set forth initially focused on the number of problems reported, and the proportions of effective and self-referenced solutions. (Classification of self referenced and non-self-referenced solutions was deemed adequate because there was 85% inter-judge agreement.) The correlations between PESM and the number of problems reported, and between PESM and the proportion of effective solutions were both significant (r= -0.21, n= 103, p<.05 in the case of the former, and r= 0.20, n=102, p<.05 in the case of the latter). However, no evidence was obtained to show a relationship between PESM and self-referenced solutions (r=-0.02, n=99, p>.05).

Apparently, PESM relates reliably but negatively to the proneness of the ***sinkegna*** to face difficulties, as measured by the number of problems they reported. Evidently also PESM promotes the ability to generate solutions. Unexpectedly and discordantly, however, no evidence was obtained to show that PESM is associated with the use of self-referenced solutions.

Other analyses involving High and Low PESM groups are given Table IV

Table IV. Means & Standard Deviations for High & Low PESM Groups

	Mean & S.D. by Group					
	High* PESM Group			Low* PESM Group		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
No. of Problems	20	5.74	36	22.6	6.0	34
			(t=1.82, P < .05)			
Proportion of effective ** solutions (%	56	35	34	39	35	32
			(t= 2.13, P < .05)			
Proportion of self referenced solutions (%)	67	27	36	66	27	34

* High PESM = Top 1/3 on PESM, or PESM score of 56 & above
Low PESM = Bottom 1/3 on PESM, or PESM score of 46 & below.
** Solutions indicated to be "moderately" or "highly" effective.

Pertaining to the magnitude of problems, it appeared that the High PESM group is less amenable to academic and social difficulties than the Low PESM group. Reference to the questionnaires completed by the respondents indicated that in academic matters, the High PESM group had relatively less problems in asking questions in class, in locating or arranging suitable places for studying, and in understanding their textbooks written in English. Thirty-seven to sixty-three percent of the High PESM group, (as contrasted with 64-82% of the Low PESM group) reported these problems. Regarding social concerns, 3-30% of the High PESM group as compared with 29-46% of the Low PESM group complained about problems of adjusting with room-mates and class-mates, and about lack of friends.

VI. Discussion

The overall results provided a dramatic scaffolding to the specific considerations, and they prompted some observations.

1. General Observations

As students, the ***sinkegna*** appear to be a specially disadvantaged group indeed. Out of the 107 ***sinkegna*** admitted to the ninth grade in 1992/93, only 14 (or

13.6 %) progressed regularly up to the twelfth grade in the school, and a much less proportion of female ***sinkegna*** than male ***sinkegna*** did so. For the period 1992/93-1995/96, the progression rate in grades 9-12 for the school as a whole was 50.6% (Edosa, 1995). This figure is by far greater than the rate of progression for the ***sinkegna*** only[8].

The follow-up of the original ***sinkegna*** respondents further revealed that 43 of them (i.e., 40%) had either failed in the ninth grade or withdrawn with failing marks at that level – which indicates that the transition stage from junior to senior secondary grades is specially difficult for the ***sinkegna***.

Some explanation for the carnage of the ***sinkegna*** at the point of initiation is evident in the general conditions the ***sinkegna*** (and the non-***sinkegna*** in some cases) pursue their education. For one thing the ***sinkegna*** as a whole suffer from shortage of essentials, specially shortage of provisions. Skipping two meals in succession was a routine practice[9]. Many ***sinkegna*** renounced their breakfast if they attended the afternoon shift and their lunch if they attended the morning shift. Some of the ***sinkegna*** battled hard to supplement their provisions with their own earning through petty trade, often in the form of brewing and selling *araki* ,or local hard liquor (in the case of females), and through trading in grains, poultry and vegetables (in the case of males). But that occasionally cost the ***sinkegna*** irredeemable class hours.

The poor track record of the school on the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESLCE)[10] has further dampened the academic motivation of the ***sinkegna*** who feel that their tortuous high school days are not likely to be rewarding after all.

In some cases, the school regulations also proved to be too exacting to the ***sinkegna.*** To wit, the school required students, including the ***sinkegna,*** to present two guarantees (one working adult and one classmate) in order to be supplied with textbooks. As strangers to the locality, the ***sinkegna*** found this practice to be specially difficult. The near - unbearable hot climate imposed an additional constraint on the ***sinkegna.*** Malaria attack, with frequent relapses, forced many of the ***sinkegna*** to miss school for a week or more at a stretch. Quite simply, the ***sinkegna*** are in a hot spot.

The overall results regarding PESM scores suggest that the psychological nurturance children in the study area obtain from care-givers is not impressively high. The average scores of both males and females on the Affection, Responsibility, and Academic SS subscales ranged from 63-76 per cent. Perhaps the preoccupations with the drudgeries of rural life, and the predominantly subsistence economy limit the care and attention parents can give to their children. The pattern of scores on the PESM subscale further suggests that care-givers in the study site have greater limitations in responsibility training than in the provision of affection or academic support.

2. **Specific Issues**

Does PESM contribute to the resolution of the kinds of difficulties the ***sinkegna*** face? Using the findings as a basis, this issue shall be appraised from two points of view: academic progress, and competency in handling MAS problems.

2.1. *PESM and Academic Progress*

A positive relationship was detected between PESM and the academic progress of the ***sinkegna,*** and the relationship appeared to be more marked in the long run (i.e., after 4 years rather than one). Also, the **RS** group scored significantly higher than **IF** group on PESM. These results are in line with the theoretical formulation that early affection, opportunity to exercise responsibility and independence, and guidance and support promote academic achievement.

However, further analysis cast shadow on the importance of PESM in determining academic progress. In one regression analysis which considered PESM, sex, grade 8 results and absenteeism, PESM was not identified as a statistically significant predictor of ninth grade achievement. Instead "sex" evolved as the only reliable prognosticator in the set.[11] An alternative backward regression analysis using overall academic status (instead of just the ninth grade result) as the dependent variable also showed that PESM had little or no weight in the prediction ($t = 1.7$, $P = 0.09$).

Unexpected as they were, the preceding results prompted further probing. In another backward analysis involving the data concerning PESM, grade 8 result,

grade 9 result, and absenteeism for **male *sinkegna*** only, PESM was summarily discarded as unviable predictor of overall academic status ($t = 1.4$, $p = 0.16$). In a similar analysis using the data for **females** only, the result was less definitive ($t = 1.9$, $p = 0.07$). These findings are essentially the same as the previous ones (which identified PESM as ineffectual in the prediction of academic progress with one potentially meaningful qualification, namely, a possible differential effect of PESM on the academic progress of males and females. This latter point has to await a separate consideration in another investigation.

The fact that "sex" surfaced as a specially important factor in predicting academic progress, surpassing any contribution that PESM makes to the prediction, also offered inducement to identify more precisely on what relevant characteristics the two sexes differed, and whether or not they differed in any aspect of PESM. Along this line of inquiry, no significant differences were detected between males and females in their scores for overall PESM, Affection, Responsibility, the Eighth Grade National Examination, and in absenteeism. However, a difference between males and females favoring the males was evident in the score for Academic SS ($t = 3.29$, $p < .05$).

The analysis was carried one step further to check if Academic SS (by itself) had a differential effect on the overall academic status of males and females. In a backward regression analysis involving Academic SS, grade 8 result, grade 9 result and absenteeism, it was determined that Academic SS had a minimal contribution towards explaining academic progress, although, like PESM, it appeared to be marginally more helpful for the prediction in the case of females than in the case of males. (Reduction in R^2 due to removal of Academic SS = 1% for males and 3% for females)

The slight evidence suggesting that Academic SS may be more important in the academic pursuit of females than that of males is titillating given the cultural matrix of the study which generally de-emphasizes female education. The study site is predominantly rural, suffused with the traditional conception of the female as less capable than the male in academic matters (CYAO & IC, 1995). Hence academic support is likely to boost the morale of female students more markedly than that of males.

2.2. *PESM and Competence in Managing MAS problems*

Three aspects of the issue prompt contemplation.

(a) PESM and Proneness to Problems

The negative relationship between PESM and the number of problems reported by the ***sinkegna*** suggests that the more the ***sinkegna*** enjoy parental affection and the opportunity to exercise responsibility and academic support, the less likely it is going to be for them to define or interpret their conditions as threatening. A comparison of the average number of problems indicated by the top and bottom one third of the respondents on PESM confirms this conclusion.

One may suppose that a disparity in the economic and academic background of the two groups may supersede PESM in explaining the difference in the amenability of the high and low PESM groups to the tribulations of ***sinkegna*** life. However, supplementary analysis failed to support this conjecture. The average scores of the two groups on the 8th Grade National Examination were 71.4 and 69.2 respectively. In terms of economic background, 83% of the High PESM group had defined their parental status as low, while 76% of the low PESM group did so. Also, according to the responses of both groups, the majority of their parents were farmers, daily laborers and pensioners.

One other more plausible explanation suggested by literature (Gottman, *et. al.*, 1975) is that the High PESM group were able to win acceptance by peer groups in the new setting more easily than the Low PESM group, and that in turn contributed to the strengthening of their feeling of security. An alternative and even more meaningful explanation is that the High PESM, with their markedly favorable parental handling, were more adept in resolving, as a matter of routine, things that are often recognized as problems by the rest of the ***sinkegna.*** For instance, compared to the Low PESM group, the High PESM group would be expected to have less inhibition in asking questions in class. In addition, they are likely to be better prepared for adjusting with room - and class mates, and to be more effective in winning friends.

(b) Effectiveness of Solutions

No evidence was found to indicate that the difference between the High and Low PESM groups in using effective solutions was due to the *quality* of solutions used by the two groups, since both groups mentioned the same kinds of solutions to a similar degree. Rather the difference between the two groups with regard to the effectiveness of their solutions seems to be due to the difference in the way the groups *match* a solution to a problem. For example, borrowing references from a friend was identified as an effective solution to shortage of textbooks more frequently by the High rather than by the Low PESM group.

A number of other revealing ideas emerged from further scrutiny of the solutions that the ***sinkegna*** considered to be effective. For instance, the solutions identified by both the High and Low PESM groups showed plasticity and some degree of imagination. Examples of these kinds of solutions include: arranging a sleeping place in the evening by clearing utensils, using left-over blank sheets from previous years (for taking notes), wearing *barabaso* (sandal made of automobile tyre), or *kongo* (sandal made of plastic), using "decent" clothes only during school hours, and avoiding too much walking (to save shoes;)

The stamp of tradition and the intuition of adoption are also evident in the "effective" solutions of both the High and Low PESM groups concerning their diet. *Beso* (a ready-made type of sublimely ground flour of toasted barley), and *kita* (a kind of pancake approximating fast food that is usually baked from barley flour) were mentioned frequently as staple food[12].
The two modes of solutions commonly used by the High and Low PESM groups and by the other ***sinkegna*** as well, namely "frugality" and "borrowing" further demonstrate the impact of environmental constraints on coping methods. Given a subsistence allowance of 20 to 30 Birr (about 4 US) or alternatively a provision of grain amounting to 1½ k*una* (estimated to be 7 kilograms) for a month[13], a readily available option is to save. When saving proves to be difficult, borrowing suggests itself as a solution. The more spend-thrifty are normally predisposed to lending because they realize that they themselves may be forced to borrow before long.

Also some solutions point to the inescapable range of subjectivity in determining the effectiveness of solutions. In this regard, some solutions were recognized as effective more widely than others, and no solution was identified as universally effective. For instance, "going barefoot" was mentioned as an adequate solution (to the lack of shoes) only by some of the High PESM group while "mending old cloths" was accepted as salvaging by almost all of the respondents in both the High and Low PESM groups. Licking pepper to appease one's appetite during hunger, though imaginative and somewhat stoical, was judged to be minimally effective.

(c) Self- referenced Solutions

The apparent absence of a relationship between self-referenced solutions and PESM introduced a noticeably raucous element into the findings, and no single explanation seems adequate for the discrepant finding.

Perhaps the fact that there was only 85% interjudge agreement in the classification of self referenced and non-self-referenced solutions has contributed to some minor degree to the result. The less-than-optimum reliability of the PESM scale (KR-20=0.79) also offers an additional, though ancillary, explanation.

In line with the evidence about the role of peer groups in weakening some attitudes (Hartup, 1983), another interpretation of the finding is that the peer group in the new setting have eroded the inclination for independent problem solving among the High PESM group. However, this consideration is not sufficiently convincing because it appears that peer groups have limited influence on firmly established outlooks and tendencies (Douvan & Adelson, 1958).

From another angle, strange as it may seem, it could be that the degree of self-referenced solutions employed by the ***sinkegna*** is determined not just by PESM but also by the predominant customs and constraints in which the ***sinkegna*** function. In the present case where there is scarcity of material resources, the prevailing social custom is mutual help, including sharing and borrowing. Given the context, the ***sinkegna*** promotes his privilege to share with others if his conduct suggests give-and-take and tolerance. That means

even those ***sinkegna*** who enjoyed substantial stimulation for self-management may evince unexpected tendency to rely on others (eg. through borrowing) due to the dampening effect of the overall social traditions.

3. Implications

To schools catering to the ***sinkegna*** and to the educational system as a whole, the study is a stinging reminder about the many trials of its special attendants and about the limitless wastage resulting therefrom. Possibilities for redemption include: instituting school feeding programmes for the ***sinkegna***, specially at the ninth grade level, and providing more accommodating preventive health services. In the long run, however, a more careful determination of the location of senior high schools and the associated catchment areas is probably essential.

But the study has practical implications that go beyond the needs of the ***sinkegna.*** Actually the ***sinkegna*** may be taken as epitome of students persevering under severe stress. From that vantage point, the coping methods reported to be generally effective by the ***sinkegna*** offer clues to the non-***sinkegna*** in similar predicaments, particularly to those coming from economically deprived homes.

The theoretical implications of the study are no less important. Two issues are specially important in this regard. One of them concerns the relationship between parental encouragement for self-management and the degree of self reliance students manifest. In the context of the present study, no relationship was found between the two variables. This finding conflicts with general expectations and deserves further scrutiny. In this regard, one vantage point would be to consider communities upholding varying degrees of self reliance and to explore if the impact of parental encouragement for self management changes among the communities. The second issue borne out of the study concerns the differential effect of parental academic support and guidance on male and female students. In this study, there is some indication that female students may benefit more than male students in that regard. But, the available data are only suggestive and they need to be cross-validated using additional evidence.

Despite some limitations, the PESM scale developed for the purpose of the study also provides ground work for devising an instrument that assesses the impact of child upbringing on the characteristics or competencies of children and youth.

VII. Summary

The high school ***sinkegna*** in provincial towns provide a unique case for assessing the impact of early experience in parental care on subsequent competence of children in handling challenges with regard to self-support, and academic and social problems. From the study, it appears that PESM enhances the ability of the ***sinkegna*** to generate effective solutions to their problems, including their social problems. Some evidence also suggested that PESM, particularly academic support and supervision, may have a greater influence on the academic progress of females than males. However, one shortcoming of the study that should be considered in the interpretation of the findings is that the ***sinkegna*** were required to provide information retrospectively, and the information so obtained may suffer to some degree from lapse of memory or distortion.

The expectations set forth in the study initially have been confirmed only partially because, although some evidence was obtained to confirm the positive influence of PESM on the ***sinkegna's*** ability to solve every day problems, overall, no such evidence was secured to support the facilitative effect of PESM with respect to academic achievement, specially among males. In the midst of weighty psychological literature buttressing the expectations on the one hand, and the possibility of divergent findings on account of cultural variations on the other, there is greater incentive now than before for pursuing the inquiry.

Notes

1. See Darge Wole (1994) in the References.

2. Lakew's research report is only one of the initial accounts of an early intervention project the lessons of which have yet to be derived in full.

3. The minimum requirements for "Pass" slightly varied according to the grade level and the number of subjects in which the students scored below 50%. Following the regulation of the period which

required 50-55% average for promotion, those ***sinkegna*** who dropped out of school at the end of semester 1 in grades 9-11 with an average of less than 53% were considered "failures".

4. The Pilot study was done in the Debrezeit comprehensive high school because the school had a good number of ***sinkegna,*** and served to reduce cost because it was much closer to the researcher's base than Arbegnotch School.

5. Sample Items:

Affection:	. When I was a child my parents loved to hug me. (Positive for PESM)
	. My parents were not used to giving me food unless I asked for it. (Negative for PESM)
	. When I was very young, my parents used to hug me a lot.
	. My parents used to respond to me invariably whenever I talked to them even when they were doing do some work.
Responsibility:	. The tasks I was expected to perform for the family on week-ends were clear to me (Positive for PESM).
	. I was not allowed to buy anything without first consulting my parents even if I had the money. (Negative for PESM)
	. I have never seen my parents fighting with each other.
	. When my parents quarrel with somebody they become sulky.
Academic SS:	. My parents never wanted me to be absent from school (positive for PESM)
	. My parents did not encourage me to study unless examinations were approaching (Negative for PESM)

6. Sample items:

M (Maintenance):	shortage of provisions, problem of preparing food, lack of room for rent, illness, shortage of money to buy clothes.
A (Academic) :	shortage of exercise books, problem of finding a proper study place, difficulty of teacher's English, fear of asking questions in class.
S (Social) :	Work overload in the house, lack of friends close-by, discord with room-mates, homesickness

7. For the 1992/93 academic year, the percentage of non-***sinkegna*** ninth grade students promoted to the tenth grade was 18% as contrasted with 42% of the ***sinkegna*** . Data regarding the progression rates in grades 9-12 as a whole also indicated a similar trend

8. The figure is probably a little inflated because of the number of students who re-join the school after interrupting their studies for a year or more. Unfortunately, data concerning such type of re-entrants are extremely difficult to trace from school records.

9. The details, about the problems, coping methods and general conditions of the ***sinkegna*** used in the discussion are based on interviews (undertaken on December 26-27; 1995) with ***sinkegnas***: Girma Goshime, Selamawit Tadesse, Meskerem Mersha, Fekadu Bogale, Workinesh Sime, Mulualem Zerihun, Yohannes Molla, Tiringo Tesfaye, Marye Kokebe, and Awol Adem. The first five ***sinkegna*** belong to the RS group while the rest represent the IF group.

10. According to the Director of the School, for the period 1992-93/1994-95, the percentage of male and female students who obtained a GPA of 2.8 or above in the ESLCE was only 8.7 and 0.9, respectively.

11. It was intriguing to find that neither the 8th Grade National Examination results nor absenteeism had a statistically or practically significant contribution towards the prediction of academic progress. This raises an issue about the relationship between the curricula for elementary and junior secondary schools and those for senior secondary schools. A question may also be raised about the adequacy of the 8th Grade Examination results as a measure of achievement. Concerning absenteeism, a re-view of some rosters has also suggested that roll call may not always be taken seriously.

12. *Beso* can stay for a long time without being spoiled, and it is almost a ready- made food because one only needs to moisten it with a sprinkling of water before eating. *Kita* is also a fast food in a way – it becomes ready for consumption a few minutes after the dough is thinly spread on a heated sheet of metal.

13. This provision is supplemented by five *gurd* of bean flour (estimated to be about 3 kilograms) to be used in the preparation of sauce.

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