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Customary Parenting Practices of Arsi Oromo

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Abstract

The major purpose of the present study is to assess the customary parenting practices/behaviors of Arsi Oromo as well as to examine how parents' socialization values and beliefs shape these practices. The current study used an ethnographic research design as a guide to this research. It also employed purposive sampling technique to select both the study site (Digelu na Tijo District of East Arsi zone) and the study participants as well as simple random sampling technique (lottery method) to select the Kebeles (the smallest administrative unit) in which the study informants resided. FGD and spot observation were the tools used to collect data from a sample of 70 participants (60 discussants of six FGDs & 10 households). In-depth qualitative data were collected on customary parenting practices/behaviors of Arsi Oromo from well-experienced and active childrearing parents, community elders, religious leaders, abba gadaas (gadaa leaders) and gadaa elders of the study site. Moreover, data were analyzed using thematic technique so as to answer the basic research questions. Generally, the study identified the following major findings. First, traditional authoritarian parenting is a customary practice in child socialization in the context of Arsi Oromo. Second, differential sex-role socialization; harsh disciplinary measures (verbal assault & corporal punishment); firm control and training from early age; physical contact/communication; prolonged breast-feeding and co-sleeping/bed-sharing are found to be the customary parenting practices of Arsi Oromo. Thirdly, traditional socialization values and beliefs that are embedded in the grand gadaa values, patriarchal kinship structure and safuu world view are found to be the major determinant forces that shape the customary parenting practices/behaviors of Arsi Oromo. The current finding that Arsi Oromo still endorses authoritarian (traditional, parent-centered) as opposed to modern/positive (child-centered) parenting practice/behavior generally implies that parenting practice is culture specific (varies across contexts), is determined by the socialization values and beliefs unique to a given society, and thus should be viewed and interpreted from the real contexts and perspectives (socialization values, social norms, normative values-what is valued as desirable by other members of the society & personal values) of that particular society.

Key terms: *Customary parenting practices, cultural values, socialization values, gadaa values, and safuu world view*

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Introduction

Context and Justification of the Study

Understanding today's nature of childhood requires an understanding of parenting in the 21st century. For decades, parenting has been characterized in terms of broad global styles, with authoritative parenting style seen as most beneficial for children's development (Smetana, 2017). However, concerns with greater sensitivity to cultural and contextual variations have led to greater specificity in defining parenting in terms of constructs such as parenting values, beliefs and practices. As a micro-level or specific task, *parenting practice* refers to the behaviors, experiences, skills, qualities, and responsibilities demonstrated by a parent in teaching and caring for a child (Triandis & Suh, 2002). Thus, parenting practice designates the family's function of nurturing and protecting children from harm as well as providing them with basic physical and emotional support (Lam, Kwong & To, 2019). This is presumably because families are the basic unit of society that have the responsibility to provide care and protection as well as the best environment for meeting a child's developmental needs such as learning to socialize with others, learning about their culture and customs as well as developing their spirituality (Grusec, Goodnow & Kuczynski, 2000), and in which children gradually internalize the social standards, culture and tradition of their wider society (Hirut, 2012). Generally, all the specific behaviors that parents demonstrate in socializing their children such as doing homework with children, scheduling time for children to study, read and play; attending children's school activities; and spanking children for wrong doing are examples of parenting behaviors/practices (Spera, 2005). Clearly, such specific parenting behaviors have major impacts in the lives and everyday experiences of children particularly in areas of cognitive, academic and socio-emotional development (Lam, Kwong & To, 2019).

It also holds true that parenting practices/behaviors in the past and today are most effective when grounded in the values and principles of *positive parenting* (Milovidov, 2020). Positive parenting refers to parental behaviour based on the best interests of the child and that fosters open communication and trust, and provides recognition and guidance to enable the full development of the child such as nurturing, empowering, non-violent (Power et al., 2013). In the context of positive parenting, the task of parenting is to foster positive family relationships, ensure the rights of children in the family setting, and optimise the development of their full potential and welfare by nurturing and empowering them in a non-violent way (Lam, Kwong & To, 2019).

In fact, the model of positive parenting needs to be extended into the online world in order to establish the connection between *traditional values* and the *online world* as well as to adjust parenting to the demands of the digital age (Power et al., 2013). Of course, with the introduction of internet, new digital technologies and social media to families around the world, the fundamental role of parents and the goals of parenting remain unchanged: parents and caregivers are still required to nurture, to protect, to provide for, to love, to connect with and to guide their children (Milovidov, 2020). But, unlike the traditional parents, digital parents need to establish communication and trust so that children will discuss their autonomous online activities openly (Power et al., 2013). This means the 21st century digital parents should understand what aspect of parenting works best for children so that their children can actually participate and thrive in the digital age (Milovidov, 2020).

Generally, the existing literature (e.g., Gonzalez-Mena, 2002; Joyner et al., 2010l McKenna & McDade, 2005; Sareen et al., 2004; Seema & Begum, 2008; Tudge et al., 2000) identified and well-documented five dimensions of parenting practices/behaviors. These dimensions of parenting practices/behaviors include sleeping practices, disciplinary practices, feeding practices, parent-child interaction practices and toilet training practices, where these specific dimensions of parenting behaviors vary across different contextual factors such as culture (Bornstein & Lansford, 2010; Suizzo, 2007).

As indicated above, one dimension of parenting behavior/practice is infant-mother sleeping arrangement. This is an important milestone in the infants' life, but its practice differs across cultures based on one's cultural orientations (e.g., McKenna & McDade, 2005; Sareen et al., 2004). For instance, in Euro-American cultures, the practice of sleeping with new-born infants is an uncommon parental strategy for night-time care-giving (Balla, Hookera, & Kelly, 2000). Liu, Liu and Wang (2003) also reported that most people in the western culture believe a child should sleep separately from his/her parents to foster the development of autonomy and independence. In the contrary, mother–infant co-sleeping or bed-sharing is a common or a preferred parenting strategy for night-time infant care in the majority of non-western cultures (Balla, Hookera, & Kelly, 2000). In fact, the custom of mother–infant co-sleeping as cultural convention is firmly grounded in human evolutionary biology, and the physiological, psychological and developmental needs of human new-borns (McKenna & McDade (2005). Most people in non-western cultures also believe that infant-mother co-sleeping or bed-sharing fosters the development of interdependence and relatedness values (Joyner et al., 2010); is more linked to infant protection and breast feeding advantages (Sareen et al., 2004); is viewed as strategies to keep infant safe and make feeding and checking on the infant more convenient (Gonzalez-Mena, 2002); and increases night-time mother–infant bodily contact or proximity (McKenna & McDade, 2005). Relatedly, according to Joyner et al. (2010), breast feeding in the context of a sleeping arrangement of bed-sharing is associated with less infant crying, more maternal and infant sleep, and increased milk supply due to increased frequency of night-time breast feeding that close contact facilitates. Hence, the necessary cautions must be taken in traditionally or habitually labeling one's sleeping arrangement as being superior or inferior to another without an awareness of familial, social and cultural contexts.

The second dimension of parenting practice/behavior is toilet-training. Basically, the toilet or potty training stage is a significant developmental milestone in early childhood (Baird, Bybel, & Kowalski, 2019), where it involves a complex integration of neurological, muscular, and behavioural mechanisms (Solarin &

Madise-Wobo, 2017). Toilet training is mainly influenced by physiological, psychological, sociocultural, and genetic factors (Joyner et al., 2010), and its practices vary widely across different cultures (Rouse et al., 2017). According to Rogers (2007), the potty training practice of Western and non-Western culture differs significantly, because it is an area where values of independence and interdependence can crash. Gonzalez-Mena (2002) also asserted that the approach and timing of toileting practice are different depending on whether one believes in *toilet training* (interdependence perspective) or *toilet learning* (independence perspective). For example, in Asian and African cultures, there is a history of an *assisted* toilet training process (Solarin & Madise-Wobo, 2017), beginning very early, often between 1-3 months of age (Rogers, 2007). In such an assisted context, toilet training takes place in accordance with the interests of the mother and not to the interest of the infant (Miheret, 2007), where the care-giver observes the infant closely and learns how and when to help the child eliminate appropriately (Rouse et al., 2017). In the contrary, the majority of children in the west do not begin independent toilet learning until 21-36 months of age (Solarin & Madise-Wobo, 2017). This is probably because the western cultures emphasis on the child to freely learn appropriate toileting habits (Rogers, 2007). It also associated with the belief that most western children achieve the physiologic, cognitive, and emotional development necessary for toilet training by 18 to 30 months of age (Baird, Bybel, & Kowalski, 2019). Generally, what these points makes clear is that western cultures do not force children to formal potty training before the child is ready (Rouse et al., 2017). In regards to this, Gonzalez-Mena (2002) suggested that the markers of readiness for toilet training include *physical readiness* (being able to walk, the ability to handle their own clothing, pulling down pants), *intellectual readiness* (awareness of a full bladder or rectum, telling the adult after eliminating), and *emotional readiness* (demonstrating dissatisfaction with a soiled diaper, showing a willingness to use a potty instead of diaper). In conclusion, the age at initiation and completion of toilet training differs for western and non-western countries (Solarin & Madise-Wobo, 2017). Hence, in interpreting the toilet training practices of various cultural groups, the cultural and

socioeconomic contexts need to be taken into account so as to avoid prejudice and stereotyping.

The third dimension of parenting behavior/practice is infant feeding practice. Evidence indicated that there is variation in infant feeding practices across cultures based on one's cultural orientation. For instance, parents from independent culture tend to train children from early age to develop *self-helping skills* so that they can be able to independently feed themselves while parents from interdependent culture are too busy modeling self-helping skills through spoon-feeding (Gonzalez-Mena, 2002). In line with this, Bornstein and Esposito (2020) suggested that parents raised in a culture that values interdependence may choose to feed their child for a longer period of time rather than encouraging self-feeding. Globally, there is heightened interest to increase rates of *optimal infant feeding practices* in order to improve child survival (Kogade et al., 2019). According to UNICEF (2016), optimum infant feeding practices include *initiation of breastfeeding* within one hour of birth; protecting and promoting exclusive breastfeeding for infants up to 6 months; and continued provision of breastfeeding together with appropriate complementary foods preferably until two years of age. Though breast-feeding is believed to improve child survival by providing protection against infectious disease and malnutrition (Negi & Kandpal, 2004), ensuring adequate growth (Kruger & Guericke, 2001), and decreasing childhood morbidity and mortality (Kogade et al., 2019; Kruger & Guericke, 2001; Morisky et al., 2002), there is a clear variation in breast-feeding practices across socio-economic conditions (Al-Shoshan, 2007; Sokol, Aguayo & Clark, 2007). For instance, Negi & Kandpal (2004) indicated that the rates of *breast-feeding* are higher in rural areas than in urban areas. In the contrary, a study by McKenna and McDade (2005) revealed that the rates of *bottle-feeding* are higher in urban settings than in rural areas. What this undoubtedly shows is that, despite its obvious advantages, breast feeding in many developing countries is on the decline (Kruger & Gericke, 2001). In fact, the declining trend of breast-feeding has been attributed to increased availability of commercial milk substitutes (Morisky et al., 2002); urbanization (Al-Shoshan, 2007), and the age and educational attainment of mothers (Debela &

Mesfin, 2022), where younger and well-educated mothers were found to have low rates of breastfeeding (McKenna & McDade, 2005). Similarly, local studies conducted on infant feeding practices in the Ethiopian context also confirmed that infant breastfeeding is on the decline. For instance, a study by Geda et al. (2021) reported that nearly half of all infants less than six months of age were not exclusively breastfed. Likewise, a study by Debela and Mesfin (2022) also reported that the proportion of infants who are exclusively breastfed declined, where the non-exclusively breastfeeding mothers supplemented their breast milk with some addition of foods like cow milk, Axmiet (cereal-based fluids), water, formula milk, and tea/sugar solution.

The fourth dimension of parenting behavior/practice is the pattern of parent-child interaction. Parent-child interaction is a set of observable behaviors, that can act as an indicator of the growth of a secure attachment or an emotional bond, in which a sense of security is associated with the relationship between the caregiver and the child (Bornstein, & Esposito, 2020). Awde (2009) also described parent-child interaction patterns as a caretaker's communicative behaviors that include attention regulation, infant manipulation and pragmatic input. According to Trommosdorff (2006), parent–child interaction occurs through communicative processes such as *storytelling*, modeling, creating and enforcing rules, conversing, and providing memorable messages. In fact, many factors influence or dictate how parents interact with their children. One of these factors is cultural value orientation (Awde, 2009; Bornstein, & Esposito, 2020). Clearly, the cultural value dimension that influences the quality of parent-child relationships includes independence and interdependence (Trommosdorff, 2006). So, while the cultural value of independence allows for more flexible parent-child relations (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003), the cultural value of harmony and interdependence, that underlies the parent-child relationships of non-western culture (Awde, 2009), fosters family orientations and obligations since the individual is embedded in a tightly knit social network of duties including the mutual support between parents and children (Bornstein, & Esposito, 2020). Similarly, being informed or dictated by their cultural values of autonomous and individual identity,

western mothers use a highly elaborative child-centered conversation style; while non-western mothers, who have the interdependence value orientation, tend to use a more *didactic*, mother-centered approach, focusing on appropriate behaviors, rules, and social obligations (Balla, Hookera, & Kelly, 2000). Moreover, while western parents engage in regular verbal and face-to-face interaction with their children just to promote independence and autonomy, parents in non-western cultures use close body contact and affective tuning to promote more social sensitivity and group oriented tendencies (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). In addition to cultural orientations, socio-economic adaptations are also the major sources of variations in parent-child communication patterns and strategies. For instance, LeVine (1988) indicated that, in the rural-agrarian societies, maternal attention exclusively focuses on *physical nurturance* and child protection through prolonged breast-feeding and co-sleeping in order to maximize the child's survival chances while in urban-industrial societies maternal attention is more devoted to *verbal communication* such as talking and playing with the baby (attend to their infants verbally & visually). The other factor that influences parent-child interaction is the infants' age. According to Bornstein and Esposito (2020), attempting to soothe the infant when she is upset and expecting her to look content at birth; talking and smiling to the infant and expecting her to turn her head to a parent's voice at one month; and reading a book and playing jointly with age appropriate toys at one year are typical examples of the parent-child interaction patterns associated with age.

The fifth dimension of parenting behavior/practice is disciplinary practice. Clearly, like the other dimensions of parenting behaviors, disciplinary practice also varies depending on one's cultural orientation. In connection to this, research and theory show that parents with collectivist cultural orientation use authoritarian patterns of punishment while those with individualistic cultural orientation use more democratic disciplining techniques (Sareen et al., 2004). For instance, in a study that compared the Americans and Koreans disciplining practices, DeMattio et al. (2003) found out that the Koreans often rely on physical punishment such as swatting a child's hand, pulling their ear and beating them with a rod while the Americans rely

too much on time-out techniques. Similarly, some local studies conducted in the context of Ethiopia (having collectivist cultural orientation) confirmed the use of harsh physical punishment in child socialization. For instance, the result of a study by Nuredin (2019) on Dessie samples indicated that parents frequently use corporal punishment such as knocking on the head; pinching between the thighs; slapping on the face and beating the arm, buttock, or leg with an open hand; and beating with an object in child socialization. Likewise, in her study of parental beliefs, values and practices of child rearing among the kechene parents in Addis Ababa, Bruktawit (2018) reported that 80% of the parents in her study employed physical punishment as a means of disciplining children. Moreover, in her study on violent child disciplining practices at home in Mekelle, Shewit (2015) also found out that physical (violent) punishment is a widespread practice in Ethiopia as it is in many other low-income countries. At the same time, the report of a study by Menelik et al. (2022) in the pre-school setting revealed that children experience harsh physical punishment endorsed by primary caregivers in their lifetimes in Ethiopia. What all these points shows is that harsh physical punishment is a common practice not only in the home context, but also in the pre-school and primary school settings in Ethiopia. In fact, as suggested by Shewit (2015) the Ethiopian traditional cultural norms consider physical punishment as an effective means of child discipline and as something good and essential for instilling ethical behavior and preparing children for their future. In spite of the traditional cultural norms, even the local laws and policies that have been adopted and that have prohibited violent physical punishment against children in the school, childcare institution, and penal institution settings (UNICEF, 2023) failed to ban the use of physical punishment in child socialization in the home and non-institutional child care settings (Shewit, 2015). For instance, article 576 of the Criminal Code 2005 recognises the power of parents and others with parental responsibilities to take a disciplinary measure that does not contravene the law, for the purpose of proper upbringing (Nuredin, 2019). Similarly, though the provisions in the Civil Code 1960 allowing for light bodily punishment as an educative measure within the family were repealed, article 258 of the Revised Family Code 2000 states that the

guardian may take the necessary disciplinary measures for the purpose of ensuring the upbringing of the minor (UNICEF, 2023). Generally, provisions against violence and abuse in the Constitution 1995, the Criminal Code 2005 and the Revised Family Code 2000 are not interpreted as prohibiting corporal punishment in childrearing at home (Bruktawit, 2018).

Moreover, studies have shown that parenting practice/behavior is shaped by parents' *socialization values* and beliefs (Barni et al., 2017; Daly, 2004; Huy, 2018; Keller et al., 2010; Kikas, Tulviste, & Peets, 2014; Tam & Lee, 2010). Parents' socialization values are the characteristics that parents value most or ideas about what qualities need to be encouraged in children, as well as goals and aspirations that guide parents in upbringing or raising their children (Kikas, Tulviste, & Peets, 2014). According to Barni et al. (2017), parents' socialization values can be conceptualized as *traditional (*that emphasizes such values as respect for others, good manners, obedience & being trustworthy) as well as *modern* (that emphasizes values related to self-direction such as independence, imagination, self-confidence & healthy lifestyle). As a result, when parents give priority to *social values* such as politeness, obedience, trustworthiness, and respect for others, they are socializing their children toward interdependence, but when they give priority to self-direction values such as creativity, self-confidence, and autonomy, they are socializing their children toward independence (Huy, 2018). Understood in this sense, parents' socialization values occupy a central place in the family for they are known to play a role in shaping the ways in which parents raise their children and how parents organize their children's home environment (Kikas, Tulviste, & Peets, 2014). In addition to socialization values, parents may sometimes want their children to possess their *personal values* (the values they have acquired as desirable qualities for themselves), which parents may have internalized from their culture values or what they perceive as normative and important in their society (Huy, 2018). Hence, in determining what values are essential qualities to be fostered into their children, parents refer not only to a direct copy of their personal values, but also to the socialization values (what parents want their children to adopt) and to the *normative values*-social norms that are perceived as

appropriate, desirable and normative by the wider society (Tam & Lee, 2010). What all the above points makes clear is that parents draw their parenting behaviors/practices from their cultural model of independence or interdependence (Bornstein & Lansford, 2010) and that they develop shared ideas about the nature of children, their developmental process and the meaning of their behavior from their personal and socialization as well as normative values of the wider society (Keller et al., 2010). This means that parenting behaviors should be judged by the standards of one's cultural model; that there is no one best way to raise a child; and that a difference in cultural orientation leads to differences in parenting behaviors/practices (Daly, 2004). Consistent with this, the local studies conducted thus far in Ethiopia have also shown that parenting behaviors are shaped by parent's socialization values and beliefs. For instance, Bruktawit (2018) reported that parental values such as religious, obedience, relatedness, and collective patriotic shape childrearing practices/behaviors. Similarly, in her study of childrearing in Sidama community of Ethiopia, Miheret (2007) found out that the economic and social values as well as parental demand for total obedience and respect influence the parenting behaviors of Sidama family. The result of a study by Berhan (2016) on values and experiences of parents raising adolescent children in Addis Ababa showed that parents aspire to raise obedient children. Moreover, a study by Nigus (2020) on Awra Amba community revealed that child rearing practice in Awra Amba community involves active participation of children in family discussion.

Relatedly, almost all activities of the Oromo society, including its parenting behaviors/practices, are believed to be shaped by its traditional cultural values and beliefs that, in turn, are determined and deep-rooted within the grand *gadaa values* (Asmarom, 2000) and *safuu world view* (Workineh, 2005). There is a widely held view that the basic values in the gadaa system (rule of law, cooperation, tolerance, egalitarianism & democracy) are the major sources of all the traditional Oromo cultural values (Dame, 2014), as well as the socialization values and parenting behaviors-what parents do with their children (Gemechu, 2005). Similarly, the safuu worldview, which refers to an overall ethical and moral basis for regulating Oromo

people's way of life and activities, helps individuals avoid morally wrong actions such as embarrassment, bad conversations, lying and stealing (Jeylan, 2005); helps respect one another and maintain culture in the context of the Oromo world (Workineh, 2005), and determines which values to stress and which norms to follow in raising children (Alemayehu, 2009). Thus, in light of the Oromo concept of safuu, respect for authority, conformity, obedience, relatedness and consulting elders for advice are the basic values and norms expected to be internalized by children during the normative developmental period (Jeylan, 2005). Generally, the safuu worldview guides relations within the family life, parenting behaviors and gender based division of roles (Tadesse, 2014). More specifically, the finding of a study by Wario (2020) on the socialization of children in the gadaa system of Borena Oromo revealed that the socialization values used by parents to teach their children are respectfulness, patience, honesty, independence, cooperativeness and love, and that the strategies employed in socializing children include advising, punishing, storytelling, posing riddles and practicing life situations. This clearly shows that the *traditional authoritarian parenting* is the dominant practice in child socialization among the Oromo society. Relatedly, in his ethnographic study of storytelling for the socialization of children in Ethiopia, Tadesse (2014) found out that storytelling is a customary child-friendly process of socialization among the Guji-Oromo, that it provides occasions for positive communication between parents and children, and that it helps parents seek to achieve three socialization outcomes: cautioning children, motivating children to learn to fit their actions to accepted norms and values, and heightening children's respect for the value of adult supervision. Likewise, in their study on the traditional childrearing practices at Dire Enchini woreda, Dinke and Gurmessa (2019) identified the use of play, game and song (learned & developed in natural setting) as the traditional child rearing practices in the area.

Generally, as indicated above, numerous literature sources (e.g., Gonzalez-Mena, 2002; Joyner et al., 2010; McKenna & McDade, 2005; Sareen et al., 2004; Seema & Begum, 2008; Tudge et al., 2000) pointed out that people across different cultures have unique parenting practices/behaviors. However, parenting behaviors

unique to the Oromo society in general and Arsi Oromo in particular were not well studied, documented, and supported by adequate and up to date empirical data. In fact, many sources (e.g., Asmarom, 2000; Dame, 2014; Gemechu & Assefa, 2006; Levine, 2007; Tadesse, 2014; Wario, 2020) stated that the Oromo people have rich cultural values, which are deep-rooted in gadaa values and safuu world view, which form the basis of Oromo way of life, tradition and identity. However, the extent to which these rich and unique cultural values inform the parenting practices/behaviors of the Arsi people was not adequately examined so far.

In addition, up to date and comprehensive research data are not available regarding the ways in which Arsi Oromo deal with the various dimensions (feeding, toilet training, interaction, disciplining, sleeping arrangements) of parenting behaviors. However, lack of accurate, timely and adequate research data on these aspects of parenting practices may result in a lack of understanding the appropriate parenting behaviors that goes along with the time and the child's developmental stage; the type of interventions and services that should be planned for parents and children; and how parents should treat their children. Similarly, due to lack of adequate awareness and information about good and positive parenting, parents may fail to adjust their customary practices of childcare in light of the demands of the 21st century digital age, the existing theories of parenting, theories of child development as well as age-appropriate developmental needs of their children. Not only this, parents may also fail to be informed consumers of up-to-date research data on positive and effective parenting. At the same time, little is known about whether or not the customary practices of child care entrenched within the cultural values of Arsi Oromo are in line with the current knowledge, principles and theories of child development as well as empirical research outcomes.

In spite of this, the existing literature clearly shows that parenting is adaptive to socioeconomic, cultural and demographic conditions. Of course, few studies were conducted so far in different cultural groups and contexts of Ethiopia, including the Oromo society, focusing mainly on infant feeding practices (Debela & Mesfin, 2022; Geda et al., 2021); harsh disciplinary measures (Menelik et al., 2022; Nuredin, 2019;

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Shewit, 2015; UNICEF, 2023), the socialization of children (Wario, 2020); childrearing practices (Bruktawit, 2018; Dinke & Gurmessa, 2019; Miheret, 2007; Nigus, 2020); and storytelling (Tadesse, 2014). However, none of these studies have examined how parenting is adaptive to cultural and socioeconomic conditions as well as all the five dimensions of parenting practices (parent-child interaction patterns, infant feeding practices, sleeping practices, toilet training practices, and disciplining practices) in the context of Ethiopian society in general and Arsi Oromo in particular. At the same time, the studies under taken so far in the area were not reflective of the agrarian and urban contexts of the Ethiopian society and Oromo society, respectively.

Furthermore, research and theory suggest that policy-makers, psychology professionals, health care providers and social workers who tend to provide services for parents seek adequate data on the current parenting practices so that they can decide whether the existing parenting practice is normative or detrimental in a given culture as well as develop appropriate parenting interventions (Ribas & Bornstein, 2005). But, empirical data are not available on such very crucial matters in the context of Arsi Oromo. Moreover, evidences show that parenting is a dynamic and adaptive process which develops and changes in accordance with the dynamic, ever- increasing and multi-dimensional needs of the child as well as with advanced digital technology (Lam, Kwong & To, 2019; Milovidov, 2020; Power et al., 2013). According to Kikas, Tulviste, and Peets (2014), parental behavior has changed considerably in today's society in response to different child behaviors, child's age-appropriate developmental needs, different contexts (such as the large variety of family structures, the diversity of cultures that currently co-exist in the society, & a shift in *mindset* that touches the very heart of the parenting task), and across time. This can be expressed as the need to replace the concept of *parental authority*, which focuses solely on meeting aims related to the child's obedience and discipline, with the much more complex and demanding concept of *parental responsibility* (Power et al., 2013). But, nothing is known concerning the extent to which Arsi Oromo parents understand how crucial it is to regularly adjust their parenting behaviors to these dynamic, ever changing and adaptive process as well as the child's basic needs.

In conclusion, the facts and gaps indicated above clearly suggest that there is a dire need to investigate customary parenting behaviors/practices in the context of Arsi Oromo. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to address such a felt gap.

Research Questions

This research attempted to answer the following basic questions.

*RQ1***.** What parenting practices are perceived as customary to Arsi Oromo culture?

RQ2: How do parents' socialization values and beliefs shape the customary parenting practices of Arsi Oromo?

Operational Definition of Terms

In this study:

- Customary parenting refers to the parenting practice accustomed by and typical of Arsi Oromo
- Parenting practice refers to the specific behaviors that parents perform in treating or dealing with their children
- Parental socialization values refer to characteristics that parents value most in children
- Gadaa values refer to basic values in the Oromo gadaa system such as rule of law, cooperation, justice, tolerance, egalitarianism and democracy
- Safuu world view refers to an overall ethical and moral basis for regulating Oromo's way of life

Methodology

Research Design

Ethnographic design of the qualitative research approach was employed in the current study. This is primarily because ethnography research is one of the qualitative research approaches in which the researcher can be able to observe and interact with the target population in the real-life environment or natural setting to obtain useful cultural information (Sharma & Sarkar, 2019). Unlike many other scientific research strategies, ethnographic design allows the researcher to collect data and gain insights through firsthand involvement

with the research informants (Wilson & Chaddha, 2010). Similarly, ethnographic design allows rendering a truly faithful understanding of the cultural and habitual practices of a given society from an insider's perspective (Sharma & Sarkar, 2019). Therefore, the researcher strongly believes that data about the parenting behaviors unique to Arsi Oromo can be gathered through a field work involving such an ethnographic study, the researcher being an insider to the culture being studied.

Data Sources/participants

Well-experienced and active childrearing parents, community elders, religious leaders, abba gadaas (gadaa leaders) and gadaa elders were the major sources of data for the present study. In this study, a total of 70 participants (60 discussants of FGD & 10 households) who have adequate knowledge and rich experiences as well as who are indigenous to the language (Afan Oromo), traditions, way of life, and culture of Arsi Oromo were involved. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select both the study site (Digelu na Tijo district of East Arsi Zone) and the FGD participants while availability sampling was used to select active childrearing households for spot observation. The existing literature (e.g., Bazeley, 2004; Duggleby, 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Webb & Kevern, 2001) shows that because of the complexities of data it generates, samples for qualitative investigations tend to be smaller and drawn purposively. The use of purposive sampling technique for the selection of the study site was primarily based on the researcher's familiarity with the site (as he grew-up there & is an insider to the Arsi Oromo culture); the assumption that the insider to a given culture can bring rich contexts and experiences to the generation of data and interpretation of the findings; and the researcher's belief that he has easy access to the study participants. Similarly, the use of purposive sampling technique for the selection of the study participants was based on the assumption that the participants are part and parcel of the typical culture of Arsi Oromo, have rich experiences in the cultural values of the society, have firsthand information about parenting behaviors or practices in the site, and are actively or practically engaged in the typical childrearing activities over the years. Relatedly, the

researcher contacted the study participants through the respective Kebele administration, in which the participants resided.

Relatedly, the participants of the current study have several demographic characteristics. For instance, with respect to gender, 30 of the participants were females and 40 of them were males. In terms of educational level, 20 of the participants completed elementary education, 15 of them completed high school education, eight of them have diploma, seven of them have 1st degree and 20 of them can read and write. At the same time, eight of the participants were religious leaders, seven of them were gadaa leaders, 15 of them were gadaa elders, 13 of them were community elders, and 27 of them were active childrearing parents. In terms of occupational career, 35 of the informants were farmers, 25 of them were government workers and 10 of them were business men. Finally, in terms of age category, the participants ranged from 25 to 75 years old.

Description of the Study Site

Arsi Oromo live in the south eastern part of Oromia regional state. Currently, Arsi is divided into two administrative zones, namely East Arsi zone with 24 administrative districts and West Arsi zone with 12 administrative districts. Arsi in general shares boundaries with East Shoa Zone in the North, Sidama Region and West Bale Zone in the South, Alaba Zone in the West, and Western Hararge Zone in the East. The agrarian Arsi society practices a mixed economy of animal husbandry and subsistence farming. As other Oromo do, the Arsi Oromo maintain high regard for livelihood and their economy is based on cattle and farming (Jeylan, 2005). On top of this, readers are referred to the map indicated below for the specific location of the study site (Digelu na Tijo district of East Arsi Zone).

Figure-1: *A map showing location of the study site extracted from the map of Oromia, 2013*

Data Collection Instruments

In the current study, the researcher employed both spot observation and focus group discussion guides to collect rich and in-depth qualitative data. Five subject matter experts (SMEs) and practitioners from the field of psychology were invited to judge the appropriateness, relevance and adequacy of the tools in assessing the specified constructs as well as to establish the content validity of the data collection tools. Audio/tape records and field notes were taken both in the case of spot observations and focus group discussions. The use of FGD as a method of data collection was based on the assumption that it creates an opportunity for interactive conversations and in-depth debates among the discussants as well as it allows using the group as a unit of analysis (Duggleby, 2005). As a result, a focus-group discussion guide consisting of seven unstructured items (such as how do Arsi Oromo parents practice sex-role socialization, child disciplining, infant feeding, toilet training, and sleeping arrangements with children; how do Arsi Oromo parents invest time playing and making adequate verbal conversations with their children; what socialization values and beliefs inform childrearing parents in their everyday actions with their children etc.) was developed by the researcher to capture information about the customary childrearing practices, and the socialization values and beliefs that inform, shape or determine parenting practices from the participants of the study. Generally, six FGDs (two FGD in Tijo village, two FGD in Sagure town, one FGD in Digelu

village & one FGD in Lole village) were conducted. In each of the FGD sessions, 8-12 discussants (including representatives from each of the childrearing parents, community elders, religious leaders, gadaa leaders & gadaa elders) were involved.

Similarly, household observation was used as a method for watching and recording what childrearing parents actually do when disciplining, feeding, toilet training, arranging sleep patterns, and interacting with their children. For the purpose of this study, active childrearing parents who have children from the age of *0-5 years* were observed in their respective home settings while performing their regular daily routines or interacting with their children. The early childhood age or period was selected for the spot observation primarily based on the assumption that it is a critical period where early foundations are laid down and when children need special attention, investment and care from their caregivers to develop secure emotional attachment. Hence, as observation is the main technique for collecting information related to cultural features (Sharma & Sarkar, 2019), the spot-observation technique, originally developed by Best (2001), was adapted for the current study. This spot observation tool was principally developed for watching the behaviors of childrearing parents as they naturally or directly interact with their children in the home setting (Gauvain & Munroe, 2009). Thus, this spot observation technique was employed in the current study for it helps minimize disruption, gives space for recording the activities performed by the child and parent on the spot, and allows the use of a predetermined observation schedule (Best, 2001). This spot observation guide consists of 12 unstructured items (such as where is the child, mother, father located; what is the child, mother, father doing; who directs the child in what she/he is doing; who is more responsive to the child's basic physical & emotional needs; what objects, activities & events are available to stimulate the child etc.).

Procedures

The data collection instruments (FGD & Observation) were prepared in English language, and then, translated into the local language of the participants, Afan Oromo, for ease of understanding. Prior to the actual data collection, the study

participants were contacted to get their oral consent or willingness to participate in the study and to explain the purpose of the study. In this study, six FGDs were conducted. Of these, three were conducted in the rural settings while three were conducted in the urban settings. In the process, the FGD responses were recorded using both on site field-notes and audio/video recordings. In order to help identify the concepts and themes emerged from the data, the FGD responses were transcribed. Similarly, so as to ensure confidentiality, the participants' actual names were not used both in the transcription and analysis of the FGD data, instead such codes as P_1, P_2, P_3 …, and P_{12}, that stands for participant$_1$, participant$_2$…, and participant$_{12}$ were used. On average, the FGDs took a period of one hour. All the FGDs were moderated by the researcher with the help of a trained data recorder so as minimize the over-dominance of few and ensure efficient use of time.

Similarly, a total of 10 household observations (in which 10 childrearing mothers with their infants were selected through availability sampling for the spot observation) were conducted. Of these, five were carried out in urban settings while five of them were conducted in rural settings. At the same time, the observation period was divided into the '*observe*' and '*record*' intervals. During the '*observe*' interval, the observer watched the behaviors and activities performed by the target child and the co-participants, while during the 'record' interval key notes were taken on the behaviors occurred in the previous 'observe' interval. In transcribing and analyzing the observation data, the target participants' real names were not used, instead codes such as the target child, mother, father, sister, brother and aunt were used to describe the situation. On average, each observation lasted for 50 to 60 minutes. Besides, all the household observations were conducted by the researcher in order to minimize the intrusion of others. Likewise, in order to minimize the *social desirability effect* or response biases of the childrearing parents, the researcher explained the purpose of the observation and, ahead of time, informed them of keeping their daily routines unchanged and behaving in the usual way during the entire observation period. Generally, in analyzing both the FGD responses and household observations, thematic analysis technique was employed for it helps

organize data into categories and identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within the data (Bazeley, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Result

In the present study, rich and thick qualitative data were captured using FGD and household observation methods. Data captured through the two techniques were transcribed and then major themes were identified from each of the transcripts and analyzed as per the research questions formulated in the study. The approach used in analyzing the FGD data was that firstly summary of the findings was presented followed by citations of some quotations from the transcripts as supportive evidences and, then interpretation of the findings was given. Generally, the analysis of data is organized as per the two research questions and the corresponding sub-themes emerged from the data.

Analysis of FGD and Household observation data

Customary Parenting Practices of Arsi Oromo

Early sex-segregated role socialization: The FGD participants were asked to describe about how Arsi Oromo teach and socialize their children about gender-roles from early age. Summary of the FGD responses indicated that Arsi Oromo households encourage sex-segregated roles or differential sex-roles in socializing their children from early age. This means that boys and girls are treated differently, have clear division of labor and trained to perform different tasks (females are mostly trained to carry out household chores while boys are trained to carry out field tasks) throughout the growing up years or the normative developmental periods.

For instance, in witness of the presence of gender-segregated role socialization in the custom of Arsi Oromo, one urban FGD informant said:

> *Starting from early years of socialization, both in the rural and urban settings, Arsi Oromo socialize boys and girls differently and assign different roles to boys and girls…as a tradition, girls are generally trained for indoor activities (fetching water,*

helping mothers in the kitchen, collecting firewood and caring for younger siblings) while boys are trained for outdoor activities (herding cattle & helping their fathers with farming activities or tasks)

The main points echoed in the above quotation clearly show that there is an ear-marked division of task for male and female members of the Arsi community, where these tasks and the behaviors expected of children are modeled mostly by the two parents' (mothers & fathers) gendered-role attitudes, perceptions, thoughts, behaviors and enactments.

Similarly, one rural informant of the FGD said:

It is not a norm for baby boys to cook in the kitchen, particularly in the typical rural areas…traditionally, the expectation for the boys is to model and follow their fathers' foot-steps in the field work… contrary to this, when a baby son is seen cooking in a kitchen, the act is considered as breaking safuu (moral codes)…not only this, the society mostly calls boys who are seen cooking in the kitchen '*nadhicha*' (meaning a boy who has *feminine identity & womanish characteristics*).

The points narrated in this quotation generally show that the *safuu* world view has its own standards for what is expected of men and women in Arsi tradition. As to this *safuu* standard, household chores are generally considered as women's territory, where interference in this territory by stranger (boys in this case) is seen as breaking *safuu* (the norm or moral code of the society). Specially, the boys' typical action of cooking in the kitchen is considered as an encroachment into the girls' territory and as an act of breaking safuu. As a result, boys who are seen demonstrating the task culturally assigned for girls are mostly given a nickname like *nadhicha*. The primary intention of using such a nickname is to make the boys feel ashamed, and is to lower the status and value the boys will have in their peer groups.

Furthermore, another rural informant of the FGD said:

> *Starting from the moment of birth there is variation in a way girls and boys are welcomed and treated in the context of Arsi community…for instance, as a tradition, when a baby girl is born women make five ululations, give her milk and bless her saying: let god takes you to an alien full of wealth (have many cattle & goods), while when a baby son is born women make six ululations, give him water and bless him saying: let you overcome all the challenges of life.*

A critical examination of the above quotation generally shows that there is a deep-rooted belief among the Arsi community that boys and girls are valued differently (girls are considered as the property of aliens, not the property of the family of origin since she marries to aliens while boys are considered to remain in the family home, as the pride of the family of origin and as the ones who take responsibility in protecting and caring for the family of origin up on retirement or during old age). This means that when boys are considered as economic, social and psychological assets for the family, girls are considered as liabilities. So, on the basis of this premise, boys and girls are treated differently from early age of socialization. The most surprising thing ever is that such a variation is even welcomed and celebrated by the women themselves by making different numbers of ululations up on the birth of boys and girls. Moreover, the blessing that *'let you overcome all the challenges of life'* clearly indicates or communicates the societal expectation that baby boys should take the responsibility of managing home and serve as a '*bread-winner*' during the later marital life and in caring for their parents during old age. What can be implied from the blessings forwarded by women during the birth of children is that girls should be trained from early age to get ready for efficiently performing indoor tasks (household chores, preparing for marriage, forming family, rearing children) while boys should be trained from early years to get ready for efficiently performing outdoor tasks (economic utility, emotional security, social security like representing the family in various ceremonials or rituals). As a result, boys and girls are treated differently from early age and through the entire normative

developmental periods to fit into such expectations and to be competent in the roles culturally defined for and assigned to them.

Feeding Practice: The FGD participants were asked to elaborate about how Arsi Oromo households practice infant-feeding from early years, while 10 childrearing mothers were observed in the home setting on how they actually feed their infants. In summary, the analysis of FGD and household observation data indicated that prolonged breast-feeding, supplemented with the provision of cow milk, is a customary infant feeding practice among both the urban and rural Arsi households. The data also showed that the use of bottle-feeding (commercial powder milk) is limited to mothers in the urban centers who have better income as well as who are busy working for a long period of time outside of the home context.

For instance, one informant of the FGD from the rural setting said:

> *In the typical rural setting, it is a customary practice to see mothers breast-feeding their infants at least up to the period of one year and six months….in the urban setting, after eight months, mothers prepare powders from a variety of grains* (called mixin) *and feed their children in the form of soup or porridge in addition to breast-feeding…in the typical rural tradition it is also a common practice to provide cow milk as a supplement to breastfeeding to infants, but the use of commercial powder milk is not a common practice in the typical or remote rural settings.*

The content of the above quotation clearly show that while prolonged breast-feeding, the use of grain powder in the form of soup and the use of cow-milk are the typical infant-feeding practices in Arsi culture, the use of commercial powder milk is not a customary practice, particularly in the typical rural settings.

In addition, one urban informant of the FGD said:

> *Among the urban households in which families are high earners and can afford the cost, it becomes a common practice to see infants bottle-fed with the commercial powder milk until the*

> *mother gets back to home from the work place…it is also a common practice for low-income or low-earning employed mothers to bottle-feed their infants either with the content of cow milk or grain powder* (mixin).

The content of this quotation shows that the practice of bottle-feeding infants with commercial powder milk is typically associated with the urban settings as well as with the contexts of mothers' employment and level of earning or wealth. Generally, the use of commercial powder milk seems to be an emerging phenomenon as an alternative to breast feeding for working and wealthy mothers and families in the urban settings. Moreover, it is also indicated that the use of commercial powder milk is not a customary practice among the typical rural Arsi households, probably due to prolonged breast-feeding, prolonged mother-child physical contact, and the availability of alternative cow milk or failure to afford the cost.

Consistent with the FGD data, the household observation data also indicated that breast-feeding and provision of cow milk for infants and small children were evident as common practices among all the households observed. In some of the observed Arsi households it is evident that infant-feeding combines breast feeding with the practice of bottle-feeding that contains a mixture of grain powder *(mixin)*.

Sleeping Practices: The FGD participants were asked to describe about the practice of infant sleeping arrangements in the context of Arsi Oromo. Summary of the FGD reports indicated that infant-mother co-sleeping in the form of bed-sharing or room-sharing is a customary practice among the majority of Arsi households.

In connection to this, one rural informant of the FGD said:

> *Both in rural and urban areas, it is a customary practice to see infants sleeping with their mothers, while older siblings sleep together or with other members of the family (sharing not only rooms, but also bed).*

This implies that the arrangement of a separate bed/crib or a separate room for new born infants, which is the typical culture of the western society, is not common in the context of Arsi community (particularly in the typical rural setting).

At the same time, another urban informant of the FGD said:

> *Nowadays, in the urban setting, the practice of preparing baby cribs close to their mother's bed is becoming a common phenomenon among well to do families…but among the majority of Arsi households, infants and babies commonly sleep with their mothers…the practice of arranging a separate room for the kids to sleep alone at night is not common both in the rural and urban settings.*

Generally, what can be understood from the contents of the above quotation is that though the use of baby crib is on rise particularly among the urban households, still room-sharing with infants and bed-sharing with little children are a customary practice of both the urban and rural Arsi households.

Parent-child Interaction Behaviors: The FGD participants were asked to describe about the extent to which Arsi Oromo parents invest time playing and making adequate physical and verbal interactions with their children, while household observation were conducted to watch the actual parent-child interaction patterns in the real home environment. The analysis of both FGD and household observation data showed that while physical contact (hugging, picking, holding, kissing, carrying on the back & shoulder) is a customary parenting practice, intentionally designed verbal interaction (consciously drawing children into oral conversations as well as planning, scheduling & devoting adequate time playing with children) between parents and their children is not a common parenting practice among the majority of Arsi Oromo. In fact, in the past there was a common practice of *storytelling* among the Arsi people, in which all the family members gather around the fire place (where this helps establish physical proximity) and children will have an opportunity to develop social values, verbal interactions as well as cognitive skills (problem-solving skills & reasoning abilities). But, nowadays, such a practice does not exist particularly in the urban centers (for most of the family members come back home getting tired from work place, & engage in watching TV programs up on arrival) and is on the verge of

declining significantly not only in the urban areas but even in the very remote rural settings due to workload and economic hardship.

In relation to this, one rural informant of the FGD said:

> *Currently, at least in the urban context, parents' verbal interaction with small children is getting improved with increased education, awareness, modernity and media advocacy on the rights of children. However, verbal interaction that purposely aims at enhancing children's verbal skills, reasoning ability or self-confidence is very limited among the majority of Arsi households, especially in rural areas.*

Similarly, one urban informant of the FGD said:

> *In the past, there was a practice of telling fable stories (*oduu durii*) and riddles (*hibboo*) to children as a means of improving children's conversational, thinking, problem-solving and reasoning skills and ability…as a tradition, grandparents usually gather children around a fire place at night and tell stories to them and, after the story telling, ask children to reflect on the contents of the stories told…but, nowadays, such a tradition has gradually declined to a point where it does not exist especially in the urban setting.*

The important implication that can be drawn from the above two quotations is that, though it is on the verge of declining now, oral tradition has been playing significant roles in child-socialization since the remote past. Specifically, *indigenous fable stories* have long been promoting verbal interactions between children and parents. However, at present, the practice of storytelling that was used in the past times to enhance the early socialization as well as the verbal interactions, social skills as well as various cognitive abilities of children declines and the role that Arsi parents play in this regard is getting minimal, not only in urban setting, but also in the typical rural setting. In fact, the declining trend in storytelling that is believed to enhance the pattern of parent-child interaction might be associated with being overwhelmed with

parental highly competitive work overload for ensuring survival, the influence of modernity (urbanization, industrialization, use of TV as an alternative communication channel) or giving more attention to modern education that is not well-connected with indigenous knowledge.

Consistent with the FGD data, the household observation data also indicated that visual attention or interaction (looking) and physical contact (holding, carrying on the back, hugging, picking & kissing) were commonly evident among the households observed. It was also witnessed that the culture of purposely planning and investing time with children as well as deliberately drawing children into conversations with the view of improving children's reasoning and communication skills was minimal among the households observed. This means that the interaction between children and the sampled Arsi households can be characterized as more of visual (physical-body contact, emotional proximity) than verbal conversation.

Disciplinary Practices: The FGD participants were asked to explain about the techniques that Arsi Oromo parents use to maintain order and discipline in the process of up-bringing their children, while the household observations were also conducted to watch the disciplinary techniques employed by parents in child socialization. The analysis of both FGD and household observation data indicated that the use of harsh or authoritarian disciplinary measures (verbal abuse & physical punishment) is a common practice among the sample Arsi households as a method of maintaining discipline or order, and controlling children's misbehaviors.

For instance, in witness of the common use of physical punishment among the Arsi households in the early socialization of children, one rural informant of the FGD said:

> *The use of punishment, both physical (beating by sticks, pinching, punching) and verbal (insulting, yelling at, cursing), is very common among all the urban and rural Arsi households…some of the following traditional Arsi proverbs also dictate or enforce the childrearing parents to use punishment starting from early years of the child's life*: '*uleen qodaa qofa*

> *cabsa*' (stick breaks only household objects); '*rabbiin ijoollee uleedha*' (the god of children is stick);'*ijoollen hin qunxuuxamin gaafa ijaan ilaalan boochi*' (children who have never been pinched before will cry only when one gazes at them or throws eyes on them)

The important message that the traditional Arsi proverb '*uleen qodaa qofa cabsa*' transmits to the childrearing parents is that it is important to employ physical punishment for managing children's misbehavior, and that beating a child with thin stick (*ulee*) does not harm but leads him/her onto the normal path or gives him/her a lesson in future life. Similarly, the vital message that the traditional saying '*rabbiin ijoollee uleedha*' transmits to the childrearing parents is that it is good to use corporal punishment in maintaining order since children fear stick most and that stick makes children keep quiet and respect rules. At the same time, the crux of the traditional saying '*ijoollen hin qunxuuxamin gaafa ijaan ilaalan boochi*' transmits to the childrearing parents is that children who were not subject to strict discipline or punishment throughout the formative developmental years will get easily disappointed only when they are warned or firmly instructed to accomplish a task. Generally, the societal values and beliefs expressed through these proverbs strongly suggest that early training and strict discipline are the most important driving forces in early socialization of children. At the same time, these proverbs also imply that it is necessary to employ physical punishment in child socialization and that the use of physical punishment makes children respect rules and obey parents' instructions.

Similarly, one urban informant of the FGD said:

> *In disciplining children, the use of physical punishment is a common practice among Arsi households…I try to establish rules, I mostly advise and teach my children to respect these rules…when they violate or break the rules I beat them with stick, I blame or even curse them.*

The points raised in the above quotation imply that Arsi parents have been using various techniques or methods such as advising, enforcing rules, physical and verbal

punishments (maladaptive or authoritarian measures) for maintaining discipline or order in their children. In fact, the use of authoritarian measures or harsh punishment does not show parents' hatred or rejection of the child, rather it is a form of communicating parental expectations and social norms to children as well as keeping order.

Consistent with the FGD data, the household observation data also indicated that parents were seen threatening, warning and using both the verbal and physical punishment (beating with stick, pinching, yelling) as a means of maintaining discipline and controlling children's misbehavior. At the same time, frequent *facial-warning-sign*, a 'stop doing this' kind of message was commonly observed among the households. This seems to be a customary practice in the context of Arsi society to train children from early years to conform to the expectation of their parents or obey family rules and instructions. The observation data also show that *harsh physical punishment* is a method that the sampled Arsi parents commonly use to endorse *obedience*, respect for others, and *conformity values* into their children.

Parents' socialization values and beliefs that shape the parenting practices of Arsi Oromo

The FGD participants were asked to describe the socialization values and beliefs that influence or shape the parenting behaviors/practices of Arsi Oromo. Summary of the FGD responses indicated that the traditional beliefs that parents internalized from their traditional cultures (such as children are god given, children are assets, children should be heard, children should not be spoiled, children should be punished) and the conformity values of politeness, obedience, respect for others and relatedness (which are embedded in the traditional Oromo gadaa values, patriarchal kinship structure & safuu world view) guide and inform the childrearing behaviors (what parents actually do in raising their children) of Arsi people.

In regard to this, one FGD informant from the rural setting said:

> *Such qualities as sociability, hard work, complying with rules, obeying commands, mutual respect,* politeness, *good manner,*

> *decency, role modeling as well as cooperation are the socialization values desired by Arsi parents to be instilled into children, and that also inform or dictate the childrearing parents of how to deal with or raise their children*.

The main insight to be drawn from the contents of the above quotation is that the qualities, attributes, characteristics or traits indicated above are the socialization values that Arsi childrearing parent are expected to internalize, and then instill into children throughout the normative developmental years, where such socialization values generally correspond to the *conforming value orientation.* It is also possible to understand from the contents of the above quotation that Arsi community generally wants its offspring to possess the traits or qualities that correspond with the basic values embedded in the traditional Oromo gadaa system (respect for elders, rule of law, cooperation, egalitarianism) and safuu world view (politeness, conformity, obedience, relatedness, and consultation).

Similarly, another FG discussant said:

> In our *locality, the childrearing parents endorse such traditional beliefs in child socialization as Ijoollee icitii itti hin himan* (it is not necessary to tell secrets to children); *daa'imman naamusa horachuu qabu* (children should possess good manner or discipline)*; daa'imman yoo balleessan adabamuu qabu;* (children should be punished when they misbehave)*; daa'imman ajajamoo ta'uu qabu*' (children should be willing to serve & obedient); *daa'imman ija baduu hin qaban* (children should not be spoiled).

The central message that the abovementioned traditional sayings convey to the childrearing parents is that there should be a limit when interacting with children; it is not necessary to give freedom for children to complain and participate in family discussions; children should be raised in a way they are decent, loyal and obedient to parents; children should not be allowed to challenge, question, or argue with their parents or elders; it is also good to use punishment as a method of managing

children's misbehavior or maintaining discipline; and it is necessary to have firm stand in dealing with children. Generally, one can clearly understand from traditional sayings stated in the above quotation that possessing the values of obedience, loyalty or conformity will have adaptive values; while being refusal, challenging, or defiant as well as making confrontation with parents will be considered as breaking safuu and will have severe consequences for children in the growing up years.

In summary, what all the data summarized above tells us is that the way Arsi childrearing parents treat, deal with, interact with, maintain order, and shape their children is based primarily on the standards, expectations and assumptions put in place in the *societal level cultural contexts as well as in the micro level parents' socialization values* and *personal values* that are basically internalized and learned from the safuu world views and gadaa values of the Oromo society.

Discussion

Parenting Practices

Early sex-segregated role socialization: The finding of the current study shows that gender-segregated role socialization of children is a customary practice in raising children from early age in the context of Arsi Oromo. This means that boys and girls are treated, oriented and trained for different roles from early years. As evident in the current study, while boys are trained for outdoor tasks, girls are mostly trained for indoor tasks. This finding clearly implies that the presence of such a deep-rooted sex- segregated role socialization leaves little room or opportunity for parents to promote *egalitarian gender roles* among boys and girls. Not only this, the practice of sex-segregated role socialization stands contrary to the advocacy for gender equality, fundamental human rights and the contemporary views in which more women are joining the wage work force. The prevalence of such a practice also limits girls from exercising their maximum potential and personal growth, implying that there is a dire need to make a balance between paid work and house chore.

The result of the present study is consistent with numerous previous research and theoretical literatures. For instance, Teungfung (2009) suggested that based on

traditional gender role socialization, women were assigned the responsibility of childrearing, in addition to performing other domestic tasks. Similarly, in his study of the Oromo society, Daniel (2005) showed that women are highly represented in feminine activities such as cooking, cleaning and child care-the home making role whereas men are represented in masculine activities such as managing, financing and farming-the *bread-winning role* or the economic provider role. Alemayehu (2009) also pointed out that the traditional values and beliefs embodied in the Oromo world view of *safuu* expect women to be tied to domestic duties and men to work outside homes and to provide income through employment. At the same time, in describing the role of gadaa values in sex-role socialization of Arsi Oromo, Hirut (2012) suggested that gadaa rules dictate deep gender role segregation between the sexes. Moreover, while describing gadaa values as sources of sex role socialization, Asmarom (2000) pointed out that based on age-grade gadaa culture all male members of the Oromo society were required to be trained in military skills and self-defense beginning from early years, whereas female children remain in the home to help their mothers. Moreover, Bruktawit (2018) also suggested that the parental beliefs, values and behaviors (their involvement & interaction with their children) of the Ethiopian people are gender based. Østebø (2009) also suggested that patrilineal family structure is instrumental to the practice of differential sex role socialization among the Oromo society. Mbaya (2002) also reported Arsi Oromo society's tendency to value sons more often than daughters as another source for the differential socialization of boys and girls.

Feeding Practices: The finding of the current study indicated that prolonged breast-feeding and provision of cow milk to infants are the common feeding practices among both urban and rural Arsi Oromo households. In fact, theory and research suggest that the use of breast-feeding has a number of advantages both for the infant and the mother in promoting infant's body strength, protecting infants from diseases, and helping mothers develop close physical and emotional contact with their infants. Similarly, the finding revealed that the practice of bottle-feeding in the form of commercial milk powder is only limited to urban, well to do and dual earning families

while bottle-feeding in the form of cow milk and *mixin* (grain powder) is a common practice both in the rural and urban households. The finding also revealed that spoon-feeding their toddlers instead of encouraging self-help skills from early age is a common practice among all the observed Arsi households. Since the majority of Arsi society is an agrarian (whose livelihood depends on farming & cattle breeding), collectivistic (which promote interdependence), rural and less literate, the prevalence of such customary practices as prolonged breast-feeding, use of cow milk and spoon-feeding should be taken as the typical parental strategies for the survival of their children. However, especially the practice of spoon-feeding children needs to be revisited so as to cope up with the demands of the contemporary world, and in order to help children to be self-reliant and confident as well as develop essential life skills.

Generally, the findings of the present study are consistent with the existing body of literature. For instance, Gonzalez-Mena (2002) pointed out that parents from interdependent culture are too busy modeling self-helping skills through spoon-feeding. Similarly, a study by Al-Shoshan (2007) also revealed that breast-feeding is one of the oldest practices recommended by all religions and it is the universally endorsed solution in the prevention of early malnutrition. Moreover, a study by Sokol, Aguayo and Clark (2007) suggested that breastfeeding is a tradition in every culture of African society regardless of socio-economic status. Moreover, Debela and Mesfin (2022) reported that non-exclusively breastfeeding mothers supplemented their breast milk with some additional foods like cow milk, Axmiet (cereal-based fluids), water, and tea/sugar solution

Sleeping Practices: The present study revealed that infant-mother co-sleeping either in the form of *bed-sharing* or *room-sharing* is a customary practice among the Arsi Oromo households, particularly in the typical rural settings. This infant-mother co-sleeping might be driven by the household's psychology of protecting the infant from harm, maintaining the survival security as well as developing strong emotional attachment bondage with their children. As suggested by *attachment theory*, mothers who are sensitive and responsive to their children's basic emotional and physical needs tend to establish strong attachment bondage with their children. Of course,

among some urban households (who are wealthy & literate), the use of a separate crib for infants (sharing room with mothers) is becoming a common practice. But, still the use of a separate room for a new born infant is not a well-established culture in the context of Arsi Oromo. This might be associated either with lack of adequate resources (economic reason) or keeping the infants close to their mothers as this has the advantage of regularly breast-feeding and maintaining close physical contact and forming emotional attachment (psychological reason) between the infant and the mother.

Generally, the findings of the present study are consistent with numerous researches conducted in the non-western cultures. For instance, a study by Liu, Liu and Wang (2003) showed that in many non-western countries childrearing practices emphasize the development of interdependence and family closeness. Similarly, Joyner et al. (2010) found out that African American mothers viewed both room-sharing and bed-sharing as strategies to keep the infant safe, make feeding and checking on the infant more convenient.

Disciplinary Practices: The finding of the present study showed that the use of punishment (predominantly physical punishment) as a method of managing the misbehaviors of children and maintaining order is a customary practice among Arsi households. As obedience, compliance or conformity is extremely valued in Arsi culture, traditions and customs, obviously such values are believed to be instilled into children through punishment. The use of harsh physical punishment in early life may predispose children to serious short-term and long-term negative developmental outcomes across several areas of functioning (physical, emotional, social, & cognitive). In fact, the use of punishment as a method of keeping order and peace in children might be enforced by traditional beliefs and values that are embedded in safuu world views and gadaa values. In support of this, Shewit (2015) said that the Ethiopian traditional cultural norms consider physical punishment as an effective means of child discipline and as something essential for instilling ethical behavior and preparing children for their future. In addition, though the local laws and policies adopted in the Constitution 1995, the Criminal Code 2005 and the Revised Family

Code 2000 prohibit violent physical punishment against children in schools, childcare institutions, and penal institutions (UNICEF, 2023), they fail to boldly ban the use of corporal punishment in childrearing at home (Bruktawit, 2018). Generally, the present finding is also consistent with many local studies. For instance, in their studies on various cultural groups in Ethiopia, Menelik et al. (2022), Nuredin (2019), Shewit (2015), and UNICEF (2023) concluded that the use of harsh and maladaptive disciplinary measures is very common in Ethiopia.

Child-parent Interaction Behaviors: The finding of the current study generally showed that the practice of intentionally setting or designing a variety of activities aimed at improving the mental, physical, emotional, and social skills of children, and devoting adequate time to play with children is very limited; that there is *inadequate verbal conversation* or interaction between parents and their children; and that *physical contact* (holding, hugging, picking, & kissing) between children and caregivers is a common practice among Arsi households observed. In fact, the existence of close physical contact between the child and caregiver might have the advantage of increasing comfort for breast-feeding infants, protecting infants from harm, keeping infants safe and healthy, and keeping babies calm and more easily managed. On the other hand, absence of or limited verbal conversation between parents and children might have negative repercussions on the development of language skills, reasoning ability, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills as well as psychological well-being of the growing-up children.

Generally, the present findings are consistent with numerous studies of the non-western culture while it is not consistent with researches of the western cultures. For instance, western mothers use a highly elaborative child-centered conversation style, while non-western mothers tend to use a more didactic, *mother-centered approach*, focusing on appropriate behaviors, rules, and social obligations (Balla, Hookera, & Kelly, 2000). Moreover, while western parents engage in regular verbal and face-to-face interaction with their children just to promote independence and autonomy, parents in non-western cultures use close body contact and affective tuning to promote more social sensitivity and group oriented tendencies (Trommsdorff &

Kornadt, 2003). Similarly, LeVine's (1988) model of parental strategies indicated that in the agrarian societies maternal attention exclusively focuses on physical nurturance and child protection through prolonged breast-feeding and co-sleeping in order to maximize the child's survival chances, while in urban-industrial societies maternal attention is more devoted to verbal communication.

Parents' socialization values and beliefs that shape the parenting practices of Arsi Oromo

The findings of the present study showed that authoritarian or controlling types of parenting beliefs and conforming value orientations that are deep-rooted in the basic gadaa values and safuu world views of the Arsi society directly inform childrearing parents of what they should do and how they should deal with their children. Consistent with this, Hirut (2012) in the context of Arsi Oromo, and Wario (2020) in the context of Borena Oromo pointed out that the *traditional authoritarian parenting* is a customary practice in child socialization. Basically, traditional socialization values are defined by Barni et al. (2017) as values that emphasize politeness, respect for others, good manners, obedience and being trustworthy. As a result, when parents give priority to such *social values* as politeness, obedience, trustworthiness, and respect for others, they are socializing their children toward interdependence (Huy, 2018). Alemayehu (009) is also of the opinion that to be consistent or compatible with the basic safuu values (mutual respect, conformity, obedience, relatedness & consultation), children are expected to be obedient, seek parental advice and guidance, be related, and conform to parental norms, while parents are expected to instill exactly the same values into children. This means that the qualities and characteristics parents desire to instill into their children (both personal values & socialization values) and the beliefs that parents hold about how a child should be raised significantly determine how parents should socialize (train, discipline, treat) their children. As parental values and beliefs eventually evolve from the traditional cultural values (*gadaa* & *safuu* values) that the Oromo people established over generations are gradually internalized by the childrearing parents, it

seems likely that parental values and beliefs can exert tangible or powerful influences on parenting practices.

Generally, the present study is consistent with the existing literature. For instance, a study by Penderi and Petrogiannis (2011) revealed that how parents treat their children (parenting behaviors) is determined by what parents believe about childrearing (parenting belief). Lam, Kwong and To (2019) also suggested that parents' values and beliefs about their roles and responsibilities determine their naturally occurring parenting behaviors. Similarly, Kikas, Tulviste, and Peets (2014) indicated that parents' socialization values play a substantive role in shaping the ways in which parents raise their children and how parents organize their children's home environment. Consistent with this, the local studies conducted by Bruktawit (2018), Miheret (2007), and Nigus (2020) on different cultural groups of Ethiopia have clearly shown that parenting behaviors are shaped by parent's socialization values and beliefs.

Implications

The finding of the current study generally showed that the use of physical punishment as a method of disciplining children is the customary parenting practice of Arsi households. The use of impulsive and overly harsh discipline is, in fact, condemned in such written documents as the Ethiopian constitution (at least in the school & child care institutions) and UNCRC for its negative effect on the holistic development of children. Hence, researchers, professionals, policy formulators and service providers should be able to boldly challenge and influence the decision makers to officially ban the use of corporal punishment, not only in the school and child care institutions, but also in the home setting by incorporating a clear statement in the Constitution, the Criminal Codes and the Revised Family Codes. Similarly, practitioners and professionals working with parents are advised to design and provide regular orientation programs for parents on the contents of the theories of child development as well as on the basic rights of children so that parents gain adequate awareness about the detrimental effects of authoritarian disciplinary

measures (verbal assault & physical punishment) and gain adequate insights into a variety of authoritative and psychological disciplinary techniques such as timing out, inductive reasoning, warning, advisement, reinforcement (both negative & positive), restriction of privileges, shaming and verbal reprimand in child socialization.

Secondly, the result of the current study also indicated that sex-segregated or differential role socialization of boys and girls is the customary parenting practices of the Arsi Oromo households. Such a customary parenting practice, in fact, gives less room or opportunity for instilling egalitarian gender roles, attitude and identity in socializing children. Thus, the practitioners and professionals that work with families as well as various agents of socialization need to develop *culture sensitive parenting education program* that helps parents reflect on their actual parenting roles and eventually improve their parenting behaviors; promote egalitarian gender role socialization as well as receive appropriate and adequate orientation, knowledge and insights on the nature of child development and age-appropriate developmental needs of children. Moreover, continuous training program may also help parents gain insights on the detrimental effects of sex-segregated role socialization on the behavior of children and the importance of good role modeling as well as establishing emotional attachment for the healthy and positive development of children.

Thirdly, the finding of the present study showed that infant-mother co-sleeping and breast-feeding are the customary parenting practices of Arsi Oromo. In most of the existing literatures, such practices are recognized as *culture specific* and believed to enhance the positive and healthy development of the growing up child. Consequently, various agents of socialization, family policy makers and practitioners need to strengthen such a customary parenting practice as well as create access for parents to align these indigenous parenting practices with up to date research data on good parenting and with the contents of *contemporary developmental theories*.

In addition, the result showed that though there is adequate physical contact or interaction between children and parents, verbal interaction was found to be inadequate in the context of Arsi Oromo. In fact, the existing literature suggests that absence of adequate verbal interaction during the early socialization years has

detrimental effect on the critical thinking, reasoning and communicative skills of the growing up children. Hence, various agents of socialization, family policy planners and practitioners working with parents need to strengthen the practice of *storytelling* in child socialization; design a training package that supports childrearing parents to invest adequate time and attention with their children during the early years of socialization; and give freedom for their children to interact with objects and people around them.

The current study also concludes that gender-segregated division of labor for child-rearing responsibilities and household chores; traditional socialization values and beliefs that are embedded in traditional *gadaa* values and *safuu* world view typically characterize and determine the customary parenting behaviors of Arsi society. Hence, agents of socialization, family policy planners and practitioners need to link indigenous knowledge of child raising with modern theories of child development; train parents to get access to up-to date research findings on good or positive parenting and good role modeling; and promote the values in the gadaa system and safuu world view that enhance positive child development, while adjusting those which have negative repercussions on the holistic development of children.

Finally, the current study has implications for future research to extend the scope of this study in terms of study sites, study variables, conceptual frameworks and methodological issues so as to ensure greater generalizability and capture better insights on the topic.

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