

# The Emerging Risks and Developmental Challenges to Children and the Youth in Ethiopia: the Case of Arba Minch Town

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## **Abstract**

*This study is about the developmental challenges and adversities to children and the youth in Arba Minch which is one of the emerging towns of Ethiopia. Primary data for the study was collected through case stories, in-depth interview with key informants from families, experts in concerned organizations, FGD and observation methods. The purpose of the research was to explore how the emerging risk situations in the family, community and school environments are threatening the socio-economic and intellectual developments of children and the youth in the town. It is identified that there are adverse situations for thousands of children and the youth in the family, school and community environments. Risk factors in the community include high rate of substance abuse, crime and violence, unemployment, idleness and absence of children and youth recreational centers. The presence of shops that show pornographic and action video, drug centers around schools, shortage of educational inputs or teaching-learning facilities, absence of variety of learning styles, students' misbehaviors, and low academic achievements have made schools ineffective. The family environment is also not comfortable for positive child development due to the prevalence of child abuse, child neglect, poverty and family disorganization.*

**Key words:** risks to child development, child abuse, drug abuse, unemployment, youth delinquency

## **Introduction**

It has been widely recognized that poverty, loss of family, divorce, lack of access to basic services such as education, family problems such as

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conflicts and substance abuse are the major risk factors that intensify or aggravate child abuse and exploitation mainly in the urban areas of Ethiopia (Kebrom 2008, Nardos 2007, Getenet 2007, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs [MoLSA] 2002). This in turn threatens children's emotional, moral, cognitive and intellectual or social development which plays a very important role in their adult lives (Kebrom 2008). Abuse, neglect and violence against children exact extraordinary costs to society and linked to lifelong social and health problems: post traumatic stress disorder, depression, antisocial and aggressive behavior, substance abuse, physical damage, impaired academic and work performance, problematic peer relations, and greater involvement with criminal activities (Lomi 2002, Hairu 2006).

According to the 2003 National Policy Document of the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, the Ethiopian Youth (age 15-29) are facing many problems and challenges. The major ones include: unemployment (67%), shortage of vocational and technical schools as well as recreational centers for talent development, and weakness of child related institutions for positive experiences of moral and life skill development. Consequently, many youngsters in urban areas are forced to involve in anti-social activities such as substance abuse (*chat*, *shisha*, and alcohol), commercial sex work, begging, street life and criminal activities.

Arba Minch town is one of the urban areas characterized by a high rate of substance abuse, streetism, rural-urban migration of children, deep poverty, unemployment, idleness, child abuse, crime and violence, and a feeling of insecurity (GTZ-Is 2003). For instance, the unemployment rate of the town is 14% and 62% of the total population is migrant (ROSA 2007). Education and health coverage of the town are 60% and 41% respectively (CSA 2005, ROSA 2007, Hairu 2006). From the above reports it is apparent that growing up in Arba Minch involves risks to positive child and youth development.

The risk situations against children and youth developments are found in the community, schools and family environments. These risk factors are so complex and linked to the ineffectiveness of social institutions responsible for child development in the study area. But how the risk factors in one aspect of their life are contributing to other types of risks is not addressed in the existing literature in Ethiopia. Even though the problem is so deep and complex, no sufficient research is done on the topic

in Arba Minch town. Studies in other parts of the world (West 1982, Werner 1993, Germazy 1991, Winfield 1994) show the interrelated challenges of youth and child development in the urban areas. The few studies on the issue in Ethiopia (Bisrat 2005, Kassa 2006, Kebrom 2008, Nardos 2007, Getnet 2007, Lomi 2002, Hairu 2006) focus on the impacts of family problems, poverty, unemployment and others on the development of the child and youth and how it exposes them to various types of child abuse. However, they never scrutinized the challenges to the three areas of child development: family, school and community as well as how they are interconnected. Moreover, the emerging challenges such as new drugs, expansion of shops engaged in showing pornographic and action videos and their impacts are also not addressed at all.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore and analyze causes and characteristics of emerging risks and adversities in children and youth life and its implications for local and national development in the study area. It is also intended to show how the challenges to youth and child development are interrelated to each other and threaten the physical, emotional, social and economic development of children and youth in the area.

Primary data for the study is collected using in-depth interview, observations and focus group discussions. A total of 55 key informants in the family, schools and experts in the organizations that are related with child development were interviewed in detail. Three focus group discussions were held with 8 children, 11 teachers, and 9 parents. The key informants were selected based on their level of influence and recognized knowledge of the needs, problems and opportunities of children and the youth. Informants were selected mainly purposively based on the local contexts and realities. Snowball sampling and community chain methods were used to find the informants. The collected data was analyzed qualitatively. Field notes and recordings were carefully translated and transcribed. The qualitative data was sorted out and organized thematically. The descriptive analysis was carried out by verbatim narrations, critical comments and comparisons based on the existing literatures. The organized data was interpreted by attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, relationships and linkages among the discussions. Finally the report and conclusion was written up based on the research focus.

## Risks in the Community

### Substance Abuse

Many youngsters and children use the following substances in the town: *chat*, *shisha*<sup>2</sup>, cigarette and alcoholic drinks. Chewing *chat*, smoking *shisha* and taking alcohol afterwards (*chepsi*) become a normal practice and in fact a fashion among the youth in general and the unemployed groups in particular. Many of the unemployed youth, school boys and girls and street children usually resort to *shisha* and illegal video centers in the afternoons to chew *chat*. This in turn is a threat their physical, social, intellectual and economic development. It is also aggravating crime and the feeling of insecurity in the town (GTZ-IS 2003, ROSA 2007). This is because many of the drug addicted youngsters are usually involved in theft and robbery to satisfy their needs for these substances.

The inventory of *chat* distribution centers and shops in the town indicates that there is a high consumption rate of *chat* in the town. In Arba Minch town, there are totally 103 *chat* shops in four sub-towns (Shecha 37, Sikella 34, Nechsar 11, and Abaya and Limat areas 21).

Approximately 5444 Aqáaras (bundles) or about 1815 kgs of *chat* arrive daily from Gidole, the nearby town. According to observations and FGDs, the majority of *chat* consumers were youngsters. For example, in Siklela sub town alone there are 11 illegal movie and 8 *Shisha* centers and 24 local coffee houses.<sup>3</sup> In each center many children and youngsters used to chew *chat* in the afternoons. They were wasting their time daily that could be used for either productive activity or education. Street boys and idle daily laborers used to chew *chat* on the verandas, corridors and on the streets. These groups are the most visible ones. There are much more youth and children who chew *chat* in their own homes. For instance, Ato Admasu G/Mariam, Children and Family Expert in Gamo Goffa Zone Social and Labor Affairs Office, reported the prevalence of *chat* consumption in the

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<sup>2</sup> 'Shisha' is a name of a drug which is reported as stimulant and brings an excessive confidence to an individual when it is smoked while chewing *chat*.

<sup>3</sup> Local coffee houses are a kind of local cafeteria made of woven bamboos and serve coffee in traditional way on the side of streets

town as follows: "... *chat* and *Shisha* are becoming an epidemic. Almost everyone chews *chat* and smokes *Shisha*. You can see joy and smile on everyone's face daily when *chat* arrives. The majority of youngsters and adults chew *chat* in the afternoons. And then at night many of them are involved in robbery and theft to satisfy their needs of addiction. So the night is unsafe in the town..."

In addition, school teachers indicated that, it is also one factor for students' misbehaviors. It is evident that when school doors are closed for late comers and opened for a break, many school children both males and females resort to the above movies and *chat* centers and chew *chat* with delinquent youth. The researcher observed that, in kebele 03 in Sikella sub town in 4 video centers 4 to 6 school girls were chewing *chat* in the afternoons with idle youth.

Chewing *chat* in the afternoons is becoming a usual practice for many adults. Some civil servants usually miss working hours and spend their afternoon chewing *chat*. It is true that some individuals may engage in some productive work while chewing *chat*. However, children in this kind of family are likely to adapt and consider chewing *chat* as a useful and normal practice. In supporting this case, one youth expert expressed families' *chat* consumptions as follows: "...how can you avoid drug addiction among the youth since many children are growing up serving their fathers *chat* and cigarettes ..."

The visible impact of the high rate of *chat* consumption on children and the youth is that it is taking the largest portion of their productive time and in some instances it is killing their industrious spirits. The youth hide and cheat themselves rather than searching their talents for creativity and development. Children are also wrongly socialized by considering consuming *chat* as a normal activity. This is because everybody chews *chat* openly as well as happily. Moreover it is pushing some youth to criminal activities in order to satisfy their addiction needs related to *chat*.



Fig. 1 chewing chat on the street

Fig 2. Chat, arriving on a truck



Fig 3. Chewing and selling chat on the street

Similarly, *Shisha* is an emerging drug which is invading children and the youth in the town. The majority of the informants (50 out of 55) agreed that many of those children and youngsters who chew *chat* also smoke *Shisha*. The Arba Minch town police department identified 41 *Shisha* centers in the town in the year 2008. The researcher, however, counted 49 *Shisha* centers. Each center provides three round service (in the morning, afternoon and at night) and different customers visit the centers at different times. Observation in 5 *Shisha* centers in Sikella sub town indicates that an estimated 15-25 children and youngsters smoke *shisha* daily in each center. He also observed more than 45 individuals who were smoking *Shisha* in a single center.

Smoking *shisha* is a recent phenomenon in the study area. It was introduced five years ago from Moyale via Konso and Gidole towns to Arba Minch. The first users were bar ladies and then urban gangs and drivers of trucks followed. The first *Shisha* center was opened by an ex-bar lady in Shecha sub town. Gradually the number of consumers and its centers increased at an alarming rate and now many *chat* chewers smoke *Shisha* and it is considered as a normal activity. For instance, according to Commander Altaye Charko, the police department head in Shecha sub town, one day a police man caught a lawyer with his girlfriend smoking *Shisha* in the a *Shisha* center. Police was taking measures by capturing and destroying *shisha* instruments. But, the majority of users privately owned

the instrument and in most cases it was used in hidden and shanty areas in the town. The researcher personally observed 10 individuals who owned and use the instrument privately.

Thus, what would be the possible impacts of smoking *Shisha* on children and youth in the study area? It is widely reported that *shisha* and *chat* may cause health problems for the consumers and push some unemployed youth for crime mainly theft and robbery. It is true that the health impact of the abuse of the above substances on the consumers need further medical (laboratory and psychiatric) analysis. But the fact is that a high prevalence of substance abuse is producing wrong role model individuals for descent children in the community. This is because children usually consider their elders' activities, both in the family and in the community, as an "acceptable practice".

In this case Dorothy's famous poem (Assefa 1995) which is entitled as "Children Learn What they Live" supports the above argument. It explains that children consider and adapt the recurrent actions and events in their families and communities as normal acts. Thus, the high rate of substance abuse in the community magnifies children's exposure for negative socialization.

The Police also associate some crimes and youth delinquencies with the above substance abuse. Commander Aynishet Borke, head of Arba Minch Town Police Department, reported the impact of *chat* and *Shisha* on children and the youth in the town. He narrated:

...Many of the school boys and unemployed youth smoke Shisha and chew chat. Urban gangs, criminals, and idle groups spend their day times in Shisha centers. I personally caught five gangs in these drug centers. They design a plan for theft or robbery at night. Stolen mobile phones and other ornaments are negotiated for sale in these drug centers. You can usually see 15-25 idle youth or criminals in each center in the afternoons. Sometimes dangerous drugs such as heroine are smoked together with Shisha. After taking those drugs some youth fear nothing; ignore police and run very fast. We realized that Shisha provides over confidence for consumers. Drug intoxicated gangs usually rape children. For instance, within the first three months in 2008, three children aged less than 14 years were raped by these groups in Shecha sub town alone...



*Fig. 4 Many people share this single pipe line of shisha at a time*



*Fig. 5 Some Shisha instruments confiscated by the police*

Thus, the above witness and other sources also prove that one of the major causes of youth delinquency and their involvement in criminal activities in the town is the high consumption rate of the above substances (GTZ-Is 2003, ROSA 2007, AMM 2007).

#### **Crime and Youth Delinquency**

There is also a high rate of crime, violence and youth delinquency and consequently a feeling of insecurity in the town. The majority of offenses and violence are committed by children and youth between 15 and 29 years of age. The following table proves this fact relying on data obtained in three years (2005-2007) of time.

Table 1 reveals that in almost all of the three years, the majority of offenders (more than 70%) were children and youngsters between 15 and 29 years of age. In addition, more than 65% of crimes and offenses were committed by the unemployed youth and daily laborers. Moreover, group crimes are increasing in the town. For instance, in 2006 the number of crimes was 819 but the number of offenders was 1159 and in 2007, 1492 offenders were involved in 922 crimes. The crime rate is also increasing. Similarly, according to the police department and other sources about 86% of crimes and offenses were committed by school dropouts and people in

the lower strata of economic activities (ROSA 2007, AMM 2007, Gtz-Is 2003).

**Table 1: Crime, offenders' employment status and age category**

Years	N <sup>o</sup> l of crime	N <sup>o</sup> . of offenders	Offenders' age category		Offenders' work and employment status			
			15-29	30 and above	Unemploy ed youth , daily laborers	Petty trader	Drivers, brokers, students	Others
2005	805	969	671	298	700	120	110	39
2006	819	1159	1024	132	925	110	111	20
2007	922	1492	1100	392	980	200	202	110

*Source: Gamo Goffa Zone, Arba Minch Town First Instance Court (2008).*

Besides, the data shown above, informants also reported that the major causes of the youth's involvement in the criminal and violent activities are high rate of unemployment , high consumption rate of substances such as *chat, shisha*, alcoholic drinks and their consequent addictions (GTZ-IS 2003). In addition, the expansion of video centers without license, where children and the youth frequently watch violent movies and pornographies are reported as encouraging the youth delinquencies. Moreover, failure in school and children's less educational attainments are other factors that limit the capacity of the youth to involve in gainful activities and compete in the labor market and the consequent involvement in criminal activists. Negative peer pressure was also reported as another cause of the youth delinquencies. The following narration of the experiences of my informant, Tamiru Demissie, a 29 years old man who used to be a criminal, also shows how the situation of the family and unfavorable conditions in the

community push children and the youth to participate in anti-social activities.

Tamiru was a member of an urban gang. Before he came to Arba Minch, he was trafficked by a weaver from Dorze (Gamo Highlands) to Sidama by his own uncle. There he became child weaver or servant for his uncle for three years without salary and education. Then he went out to streets in Yirgalem town. He practiced gambling and addicted with *chat* and cigarettes. Later on he came back to Dorze. However, since his poor mother had nothing to support him he again migrated back to Arba Minch. Since there were no sufficient formal and informal employment opportunities in the town at the time he became a member of an urban gang for three years while practicing gambling and renting table tennis playing facilities and bicycle on the streets. In one occasion he also fought with his own teacher when he was in grade 10. After that he was fired from the school. Chewing chat, watching violent movies and Group fight was a fashion of many youths in the town. He believes that his life began to change only after he became a protestant Christian by the support of his teachers and friends.

It was reported that delinquent youth initiate violence and conflicts in hotels and usually abuse poor and disadvantaged children on the streets and slums. They sexually and physically harass school girls. After committing crimes, they usually escape to the two lakes: Abaya and Chamo nearby the town. My informant, Ato Gersu Zada, Gamo Goffa Zone Labor and Social Affairs Office Team Leader, reported that such criminals and gangs also physically exploit children around Abaya and Chamo lakes.<sup>4</sup> Street children are forced by those criminals, for instance, to pick girls from schools, pick pocket, to spy on someone's compound to find whether someone is in the compound or not for theft and to attack innocent people. These gangs use street children believing that children would not be accused because of their age. Hence, the name given to those children who were involved in such types of crimes is "*Astekwash*", which means a child who provides information for a criminal. Urban gangs and idle groups usually cheat, harass and rape teenage girls in the schools.

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<sup>4</sup> As to the office there are more than 300 children around Abaya and Chamo lakes who serve gangs by cooking food and carrying heavy loads of fish to the town daily for nothing since there is no law enforcement agents around the lakes.

For instance, according to Arba Minch Town First Instance Court Report of the year 2007, twenty two cases of child abuse (rape, physical injury and sexual harassment) by urban gangs were brought to the court. The prevalence of crime among youngsters and the presence of a large number of idle gangs in the community are threatening positive child development in two ways. Firstly, these groups are abusing the above disadvantaged children on the streets and slums. Secondly, they are becoming negative role models by teaching children crimes and violence.

### **Unemployment and Absence of Youth/Children Recreational Centers**

The unemployment rate in Arba Minch town is 14% and the majority of the unemployed groups (more than 70%) is the youth under the ages between 15 and 29 years (GTZ-Is 2003, ROSA 2007). Similarly, according to the Arba Minch Town Youth, Sport and Environment Development Office survey result of 2008, there are 11,334 youth in the town out of which 3,086 (28%) are unemployed. There are also 4220 (37%) school dropouts who are partially employed. However, the survey never included street children and youth. It also did not include criminals /gangs who settle or live around the two lakes. Thus, it is estimated that there are about 20,000 youth in the town out of which about 7000 (35%) are unemployed.

Similarly, hundreds of children and youngsters are idle. They are always gathered in local coffee houses (totally there are 57 local coffee houses in the town) and on verandas. The researcher observed 6 local coffee centers in Sikella sub town and in each center about 12-17 youngsters spending their afternoons chewing *chat*, chatting as well as harassing passers by mainly school girls.

On the other hand, the town has no children and youth recreational and sports centers for spending their spare time and gaining mental and physical development. There are also no cinema and theater centers that could serve for moral education as well as experiences of life skills. On top of this, there is no well equipped and rich public library that could be of use to the youth. The town also lacks technical and vocational schools for talented and interested students in vocations to enhance work and employment creativity. In the past there was Arba Minch Mecane Yesus Vocational School, from which many successful youth obtained vocational/technical skills mainly in wood and metal works. But now it has

been upgraded to a college with the change of the educational policy only those students who achieved well in the grade 10 national examinations can join it and other vocational colleges. But, many of the school boys who have interest and talents in construction and mechanics resort to private garages and workshops.

To reduce unemployment and gradually develop and expand medium and large scale enterprises, the town's Trade, Industry and Transport Office in collaboration with Enterprise Development and Youth Affairs Office organized many unemployed youth in various kinds of Micro and Small Scale Enterprises (MSEs). In four years (2005-2008), 1976 unemployed youth were organized under 254 associations in MSEs activities of trade, industry and service. However, only 146 associations have survived or are still active. But 108 (43%) associations failed to continue. In addition, no association managed to join medium and large scale enterprises with a capital of more than Birr 500,000 as per the plan of the project. Informants identified many causes of failures for the above associations: lack of effective technical, material and financial support from the stakeholders and concerned government officials, lack of coordination and attention among some government institutions to solve problems of the youth, and lack of business and technical skills as well as experiences among the members of associations were mentioned as the major challenges. Absence of coordination, cooperation, determination and entrepreneur skills among members of some associations were also reported as other obstacles.

The other threat to positive child and youth development related to the above problems is the expansion of violent and pornographic films. In Arba Minch town there are 23 video centers without license to show the films in four sub towns (3 in Abaya, 4 in Nech Sar, 11 in Sikella and 5 in Shecha). These centers are entertaining quite a large number of children and youth daily. Since there are three rounds of show (at 10 am, 4 pm and 7 pm) many children and youngsters watch daily those movies in the town. The researcher observed 11 such movie centers which entertained about 45-50 children and youngsters in each center and more than half of the customers were kids under the age of 10. The most preferred movies are suspense, actions, war and violent films from India and America. Moreover, pornographic films are preferred by many of the customers. In these video centers sex films are openly shown two times in a week. The researcher observed in 5 video centers in Sikella sub town an estimated 8-

15 school children in each video center, both males and females, with their uniforms, spending much of their time in the afternoons in such video centers. In addition, they were chewing *chat*, smoking cigarette and practicing gambling in these video centers.

Therefore, one can easily estimate the negative consequences or risks to children and youth related to these movies. In the first place all movies shown were not checked and never take into account children's age levels. Secondly, pornographic and violent movies are socializing or inducing children and youngsters for violence and involvement in early sexual activities. These factors together with drug abuse and absence of sex education bring about those kids and idle groups to violence, and wrong values such as disobedience, aggressiveness and arrogance.

In addition, at the time of the research there were 10 centers in the town where satellite TV known as DSTV continuously shows European football games. In each show an estimated 150 individuals involve watching European football. Many of these customers are children and the youth. European football is capturing quite a large number of the youth and children's minds in the town. Many children and young adults read newspapers, attend media and discuss merely European football daily. It is true that the European football is entertaining many of the town's youth and children cheaply.

However, watching football alone and obsession with violent and pornographic movies could not provide an entertainment that could enhance or provide life skills, education of moral values and motivations of creativity. As Winfield (1994) discusses children and the youth need an entertainment that can provide opportunities for participations which can serve as developmental assets for meaningful experiences and life skills. These types of entertainments include volunteer activities in clubs and associations to help others or protect environments, congregations, and sports activities (Dryden 1995). These kinds of activities can both entertain children and help them to test that they are capable and valuable. The local media can also play a great role by giving large coverage for children and youth focusing on movies, dramas and talk shows that can promote moral developments and other life skills.

### **Risks in and around the Schools**

In Arba Minch town there are 20,056 students in primary and secondary levels of both governmental and non government schools. But the majority, that is, 18,632 (93%) of students is found in government schools and many of the risks are also found in government schools (AMM 2007). The fieldwork was carried out in four government schools (2 primary and 2 secondary schools): Kulfo and Chamo Primary Schools, Arba Minch Preparatory School and Chamo High School where more than 12,000 students were enrolled. The major risk factors include illegal drug and video centers around the schools, shortage of educational inputs and facilities, absence of a variety of learning styles, student misbehaviors, and poor performances.

### **Shortage of Educational Inputs and Other Facilities**

Many government schools in the town are poorly equipped with educational facilities. For instance, in four of the focus schools there is only one laboratory for all of the three science subjects and in the case of Chamo High School there are no laboratory instruments. In addition, classes are overcrowded, that is more than 85 students in a class and poorly furnished as well as highly suffocated. Thus, classrooms are uncomfortable for the teaching learning process. This becomes obstacle for active learning and critical inquiry as it is difficult to involve students in all stages of the teaching learning process. There is no enough, well equipped and rich libraries. Textbooks are also limited (1 to 2 or sometimes to 3 student's ratio). Furthermore, except HIV/AIDS clubs there is no any other club which is functional or actively operating. Hence, there is no chance for students to search special talents as well as opportunities for participation so as to develop their self-esteem. Finally schools lack other facilities such as cafeteria, enough water supply, quality sport fields, and trees for shade. Hence, all these have made the school environment uncomfortable for the teaching learning process and decreasing students' motivation for learning. It is also pushing some students to resort to the surrounding drug centers.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

The above pictures (Figs.6, 7, 8 and 9) show students on whom the gates are closed for being late, overcrowded classes, an empty laboratory and a dilapidated sport field.

### **Absence of Broad Range of Learning Styles**

According to observations in 9 different sections of the above four schools almost all (8 out of the 9) teachers depended on lectures alone. In addition, during FGDs with teachers and, informants it was stressed that in most cases there are no discussions, self-reflection, critical inquiry as well as grouping students for cooperative learning. During class observations many of the students were less motivated and doing something else when the teacher was taking too much time for talking and writing on the board. Moreover, in high schools the lecture transmitted via TV through so-called plasma is taking more than 35 minutes and only about 5 minutes are left for student-teacher face to face discussion and interactions. Though the effectiveness of learning through plasma needs further investigation, the fact is that students have no ample time for critical inquiry and cooperative learning, which is one source for resilience capability in children, in classrooms.

### **Students Misbehaviors**

Many students misbehave in the schools that were selected for the study. Observations revealed and teacher informants in the schools reported that there were different types of students' misbehaviors in the schools:

Cheating during examinations, coming late and leaving early, quarrel and violence among each other, classroom disruptions, chewing *chat* and smoking cigarettes in schools, not willing to learn, coming with knives to schools, humiliating teachers, not accepting orders and moving here and there in and around schools during class times were the major ones. For instance, the principals and teachers of Chamo High School caught 10 students while they were chewing *chat* and smoking cigarettes in the school in the first semester of the 2008 academic year.

Informants reported the possible factors behind the students' misbehaviors. The expansion of illegal video and drug centers where children learn violence, depression resulted from *chat* consumptions, and the overcrowding of classes in the hot environment, physically weakened students and teachers during class times. Teachers' dependence on lectures and the poor school facilities make the school environment less attractive for the students. In addition, lack of determination, achievement and motivations among some students, some parents' negligence about their children's school performances were also repeatedly mentioned as causes of students' problematic behaviors. Some teachers are also becoming negative role models; they chew *chat* with their students, smoke cigarette in the school compound, and they do not come to classes well-prepared. Furthermore, teacher informants complained that many students coming from primary schools are not academically well prepared and ethically shaped to be effective in high schools. Hence, when they face difficulty in their performances in high schools they begin to show misbehaviors mainly classroom disruptions. Thus, even though sources and impacts of student misbehaviors need further study, one can easily understand its influence on the teaching learning processes, students learning motivations and achievements.

### **Students' Poor Performance and Low Academic Achievement**

Through in-depth interviews, FGDs with teachers and classroom observations, the researcher identified that many of the students in the said government schools poorly perform and achieve below the standard. The researcher observed in 9 sections only an estimated number of about 10-15 students out of 85 were attending well, came to classes prepared and actively participated in the classes by asking and answering questions. But

the rest of the students were doing other things in class while the teachers were teaching. Teachers also reported that these inactive groups of students mostly depend on cheating during examinations. For instance, Chamo High School prepared 642 10<sup>th</sup> grade students for National School Leaving Examinations in the year 2007. But only 160 students (25%) succeeded in the examinations by scoring 2.00 and above average grade points, whereas the rest 75% failed (scored below GPA 2.00). All these indicate the overall low quality of education in the town. This in turn is threatening the children's intellectual development and reducing their competence in the competitive labor markets. It is also increasing unemployment and dependency in the town.

Ato Bogale Endashaw, a unit leader of Chamo High School who has 30 years of teaching experience in the town, narrates the whole challenges and risks in the school from his personal experiences as follows:

... We are in danger. Students are beyond our control. They come to school with knives. I personally caught 5 students this year with knives. We can't force students to obey the rules and regulations of the school since the policy never allows us to do so. The youth come to the school after chewing chat and smoking Shisha. They never accept orders and respect regulations. In class times they move here and there in the compound. They come to schools being ready for violence. The majority are poor in their performance. In a class of 100 students only 5-10 students are willing to learn. The rest are passive. They totally depend on cheating. They have also one or more problematic behaviors. Many students who come from primary schools are academically poor. There is no failure there since teachers are evaluated as weak if many students fail. In most cases they give unnecessary marks for students and all weak groups simply pass. No family member visits and asks us about their children's progress or failure. We have 2000 families but during the annual meeting, the only meeting we have with families, only 130 families came. If we order students with problems of behavior to bring one of their parents or *guardians* they bring someone outside of the family. We have no contact with their families... The school has also no income to run clubs effectively and fulfill other facilities. We have one laboratory which is poorly equipped for all science subjects and no enough textbooks, 1 for 2 and for some subjects we have no text books at all...

The above narration indicates the overall risks for intellectual development of children and the youth in Chamo High School: prevalence of students' misbehaviors, low performance and achievements, weak learning motivations, and families' negligence. It also shows that the school and families are not working together effectively for the quality of education. The following narration from one of my informants, Konso Girma, also shows the negative peer pressure on the youth life and its impacts.

... My life was so bad when I was in Tegbareid (technical) School. I had bad friends. Usually we chew chat and drink alcohol. My friends were idle. We were addicted to chat and alcohol. We stole properties from the school and from our family to satisfy our addiction. Later on, some of my friends were fired from the school as they were caught when they were stealing a spare part of woodwork machine from the school. Then I also dropped out of the school and became idle until I changed my life through the help of my productive friends. Till then many people in the town suspected and hated me because of my bad personality...

Therefore, what do the above risks imply to the children in those schools? It is a fact that the above risks could negatively affect children's intellectual and moral development in general and their resilience capabilities in particular. Scholars identified that schools could promote resilience and achievements in children. Schools could enhance social competence, critical consciousness, positive self regard as well as problem solving skills if they are efficient in all their services (Winifield 1994, Benard 1995). But many of the government schools in Arba Minch town are not strong enough to produce a large number of resilient children. In fact it was widely recognized that the ineffectiveness of schools is one of the major factors for school dropouts, failure in national examinations and the consequent high rate of unemployment, crime, and violence in the town (Damtew 2000, GTZ-IS 2003, ROSA, 2007, AMM 2007). Thus, since more than 20,000 students are learning in government schools, weakness of many government schools is the greatest threat to children's intellectual development in the town.

## **Risk Factors in the Family**

### **Abuse, Neglect and Abandonment**

In Arba Minch there are various kinds of sexual, emotional and physical abuses and neglect to children in the family (CYAO and Italian Cooperation 1995, GTZ-Is 2003, Hairu 2006, ROSA 2007, AMM 2007). Some female children are sexually harassed and raped by their own friends, family members and guardians. According to Arba Minch Town Women Affairs Office report of 2008, within three months of the year 2008, 5 children were raped by their own relatives, guardians and friends. For instance, one child, 13 years of age was raped by her own father. In addition, abortion case reports in health centers indicate the presence of high rate of sexual abuses in the town. For instance, Mary Stops International Ethiopia, Arba Minch Center, an international NGO working on safe abortion and family planning reported that within three months of the year 2008, 109 pregnant girls aged less than 17 years visited the clinic for the service. All of the clients were school girls who dropped out of school due to complications resulting from teen pregnancy. These are cases that reached medical centers or courts and it is logical to assume that many more remain unreported.

The most common and visible type of abuse and neglect that children face in the hands of their own family and guardians are physical abuses: Battering, burning, abandonment, inattention to health care, deprivation of basic needs such as education, food and clothing. The Gamo Goffa Zone Police, Child Convention and Child Rights Protection Office Report 2008 indicated that many children were severely treated and oppressed by guardians and alcohol intoxicated families. Some guardians burn children by iron, deprive them of food, education and physically exploit children. In the first half of the year 2007, 17 such type of cases reached the office. Those children were physically injured, suffered from verbal attacks, neglected and confined to kitchens. Police reached those children through information supplied by neighbors of those children. But these were the visible ones. There would be much more invisible physical and sexual abuse cases in the family. Thus, it needs further investigation.

Poverty, abuse and other problems force children to live on the streets. According to Gersu Zada, Gomo Goffa Zone Labor and Social Affairs

Office Team Leader, there are more than 500 street children in the town. They usually spend their day time on the streets and come back to their destitute families at night. The office also has identified some 80 street children who left homes due to abuses, neglect and poverty. Those street children are also further abused on the streets by urban gangs and criminals. They were not only deprived of basic needs such as food and clothing but also are wrongly socialized since they involve in criminal activities and practicing gambling while playing Joteni<sup>5</sup> with payment. The office further mentioned that there are also more than 300 children around the lakes (Chamo and Abaya) who are physically exploited by serving gangs that escaped from prison as well as practice fishing in hazardous stormy lakes.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Pictures showing street children who left home due to poverty or family dislocation or both. Fig 10 shows children playing table football.

In addition, many children under the age of one year are usually abandoned around bridges, health centers and on the side of main streets in the town. In this regard the Gamo Goffa Zone Social and Labor Affairs

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<sup>5</sup> Most of the street children in the town usually play Joteni, (table football) which engages up to 4 children at a time and children play it by paying money and practice gambling.

Office Report of 2008 indicated that, within two years (2006 and 2007), 95 abandoned children, aged under one year, were found in the zone and some of them were given to NGOs for adoptions. But 42 (44%) of them were found in Arba Minch town. According to my informants, unwanted and teen pregnancy, large family size, poverty and cultural factors, are major causes for abandoning children in the study area.<sup>6</sup> Informants also reported that many of the mothers of abandoned children were commercial sex workers, house maids, school girls and fuel wood carriers.

The major causes of child abuses in the family include poverty and family disorganization resulting from divorce, conflict within the family and the death of biological parents (Hairu 2006, AMM 2007). Lack of awareness among some families about child rights and ways of positive child development and fathers' alcoholism are also reported as aggravating child abuses and neglect. The following narration from my informant, Muluken Amare, the 19 years old girl supports the above arguments.

...After my parents were divorced, I began to live with my mother who married another husband. But her husband, who works in Arba Minch Textile Factory, used to drink and comes home intoxicated and quarreled with my mother. We usually spent sleepless nights. He usually insulted me. He says "yemanim diqaala ene alasadigim" (I do not bring up a bastard child). When it became too much, I left home and went to my father who lives in Koira (nearby rural village). However, I faced the same thing. My father married another wife there. His wife hated and neglected me. She never showed me a smiling face. She never gave me enough food. Then I came back to Arba Minch and told all of my problems to my uncle. After that my uncle, who is a teacher in Kulfo Primary School, rented a room for me and my brother. When he saw my persistence for education he covered my school expenses. Now through his assistance and my friends' encouragement, I successfully passed the Grade 10 national examination and joined the preparatory school in Arba Minch town.

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<sup>6</sup> According to the tradition of the Gamo society if a girl gives birth to a child out of legally or culturally accepted marriage, it is "Gome" (misfortune) for the family and she is also discriminated by her family and friends.

### **Poverty**

The majority of the town's population is poor and destitute (ROSA 2007). More than 50% of the population has a monthly income of less than 450 Birr, 14% is unemployed and 11% is engaged in casual works such as carrying fire wood, petty trade and daily labor with monthly income of less than 300 Birr (GTZ-IS 2003, CSA 2005, ROSA). In addition, 3851 households (30%) are headed by females. The average family size is also 5.5 individuals (CSA 2005, ROSA 2007, AMM 2007). Due to the high rate of poverty, unemployment and large family size many parents in the town could not easily satisfy their children's overall developmental needs. Large numbers of children also left homes for the street. Hairu (2006) reported that many of the street children in Sikella sub town left their homes because of poverty. About 93% of children in the town are also learning in government schools which are, in most cases, ineffective. This is because many parents could not afford to send them to privately owned schools (AMM 2007).

### **Family Disorganization**

Parental conflicts, divorce and death of biological parents (one or both of them) are prevalent in the town. The Arba Minch Town Administration Women's Affairs Office report of 2008 indicated that within the first 5 months of the year 2008, 146 severe parental conflict cases were brought to Arba Minch Town First Instance Court through the Women's Affairs Office. Out of which 7 families were divorced. The number of children in each family is more than 4 and the majority of the children are below the age of 14. This shows us that hundreds of children are in stressful situations because of parental discord. These are the cases that are brought to the court, but there could be much more in the town that are displaced as a result of family discord. The office report further indicated that the major causes of parental conflicts include polygamy (husbands remarry without the knowledge or recognition of their first wives), domestic violence, large family size, poverty, father's alcoholism or frequent intoxication and refusal to augment the household income. In addition, women usually run away leaving children on the shoulders of husbands. This again aggravated

family conflicts. *Woizero Workinesh*<sup>7</sup> Woshengo also complains the court's oversimplification of divorce cases and not working with community elders to rebuild families affected with divorce.

Thus, children who are growing in such types of damaged families may face double stress and neglect. Primarily, continuous parental conflict means immersing children in stressful life. Secondly it may lead to divorce and the consequent stresses. It also forces children to leave homes for streets or migrate to other places without preparation. In relation to this, Hairu (2006) argues that more than half of the street children in Arba Minch town are those who left their homes because of family disorganizations.

In addition, there are many orphan vulnerable children (OVCs) in the town. According to Arba Minch Town Administration Health Office Report 2008 there are 2300 OVCs in the town, out of which 200 are living with HIV/AIDS. The office data is based on the school reports and kebele administrations inventory results. But it never included children on the streets, those who are living with guardians and under school age groups. Hence, the office estimates the presence of about 5000 OVCs in the town. Thus, loss of family made the above children vulnerable for the impacts of poverty, depression, and stress. The following story of my informant, Abebe Boricha, also clearly indicates how family disorganization is making life difficult for early child life.

... I suffered a lot in the hands of my brother's wife after the death of my parents in Bonke (a rural village in Gamo highlands). First, I lost my father. After two years my mother died. I was 7 years old at that time. My brother's wife never gave me food. She served best foods to her children and sent them to school while I was sent to the garden for farming. She usually kicked on my head whenever I refused to obey. One day she had thrown me into a hole where I stayed for two days. Then I became sick for a year. She forced me usually to rise early from my bed and fetch water from the distant river while her children were sent to schools. Then I left home and joined my uncle who was a beggar on the streets. After one year, I migrated to Arba Minch and was employed as a house servant in Limat area (suburb of Arba Minch) for an old woman for a year. The woman again never sent me to school. I was

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<sup>7</sup> *Woizero Workinesh Woshengo* is Human Rights and Organization expert in the Town's Administration Women's Affairs Office. Interview carried out on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008

given only food. I cleaned her cattle's stables. I carried heavy loads of garbage ... Then I went out to the street and lived there until I obtained support from my friends and the Red Cross Association to start income generation activities independently...

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study show that there are many risks that children and the youth in Arba Minch town encountered. A large number of children and youngsters faced challenging situations in their family, school and community environments.

Risk factors in the family made a large number of children vulnerable to various adversities. Poverty appeared to be the major challenge that weakened the economic power of many families to satisfy children's developmental needs. Some families were disintegrating due to divorce, parental alcoholism, death of biological parents, etc. In many cases families are not properly socializing their children. This is because either they were rendered powerless or they were unaware of the positive child and youth development. Hence, they are abusing and exploiting their children. In fact a large number of children are growing up with drugs (e.g. *chat* and *shsisha*) addicted families. Many families are not teaching children life skills and positive moral values. That is why some children were easily induced by negative peer pressures to substance abuse. Many families are not working with other socio-cultural and welfare institutions (e.g. churches, NGOs and schools) for their children's intellectual and moral development. Therefore, it was such unfavorable situations and neglects that forced some children to leave homes for the streets and exposed them for various types of child abuses.

Many government schools and their educational systems seem to be not effective so as to facilitate children's successful development. The teaching learning environment is not safe and comfortable. Some of the government schools are not functioning well. Some of its problems are found within the school system. Others are in the community (e.g. students' substance addiction). And the rest are national. But generally schools have administrative, financial and technical problems. Moreover, they are not working closely and effectively with families and other welfare

organizations to empower itself financially for the necessary teaching learning facilities. The number of role model and supportive teachers is decreasing. But these complicated causes and effects of the low qualities of education need further study.

On the other hand, the community environment is not conducive for positive child and youth development. Risks in the community are interrelated. One risk factor is leading to other risks and vulnerabilities. For instance, poverty and unemployment combined with absence of productive youth and child recreational centers are pushing many children and youngsters to drug abuses and in some cases criminal practices. Some of the risk factors in the community are local (e.g. *chat*) and others are national (poverty). The rest are global (e.g. drug trafficking and illegal movies). Many of the children became victims of the unhealthy social transformations due to global influences and ineffective local and national systems. Locally, in many cases, elderly, teachers and religious leaders are not guiding or advising children about life skills and positive values. In fact many people became negative role models by inducing children for crimes and substance by consuming *shisha* and *chat*. Besides, the justice and security systems in the town appeared to be not effective to bring sustainable peace and security. Furthermore, nationally there are no appropriate policies and directions for positive child development. Thus, the above risks are threatening the moral and intellectual developments of many children in the town.

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