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Full Length Research Paper

Community Risk Perception of Local Child Trafficking and Its Associated Factors: Evidence from Kofale and Kokosa Districts, West Arsi, Oromia, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The study aimed to assess community risk perception of domestic child trafficking and its associated factors. Researchers used a community-based cross-sectional design with 417 participants. The researchers employed stratified random sampling because the target study populations were diverse. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Principal component analysis and multivariate regression analysis were computed to analyze the data. In this study, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.901, which is highly significant. The Bartlett sphericity test was significant at the 0.00 level (χ^2=3668.047, p=0.000), which justified further analysis. In the principal component analysis model, 17 measures of community risk perceptions regarding child trafficking were loaded onto four major risk perceptions that had eigenvalues greater than one, which jointly explained 67.8% of the variance. The analysis shows that child neglect risk perceptions were found to have the highest variance in the data set, which is 42%, while the fourth component represented 6.5% of the variation in the data set, which is the lowest value when compared to the first component. In this study, older people were less likely to perceive child neglect as a risk relative to the young people (p<.01). As a decision to transfer one's own child to the users is made by a sole individual, usually a father, the probability of risk perception decreases by 0.036 (p < .05). The results suggested that there are people who support child smuggling; thus, for these groups of participants, the possibility that the child would encounter emotional risks would be secondary. This analysis found that the community perceived the trafficked children as more likely to face sexual intercourse. We strongly suggest that the local elders' council declare social sanctions against the actors and formally communicate these measures to community members, with clear social consequences for any breach.

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1. Introduction

Human trafficking in general is a major public health issue, and it continues feeding global criminal networks (Grubesic *et al*., 2025). Regarding the severity of child trafficking, Okorie and Uchenna (2023) also view it as one of the worst kinds of organized crime across the world. Okorie and Uchenna (2023) define child trafficking in multiple guises, including moving children into labor work, placing them as domestic servants, forcing them into child marriage, turning them into street beggars, or exploiting them through forced prostitution and child pornography.

Yang *et al*. (2020) in China classified three different types of child trafficking. According to these scholars, the first is the forceful removal of children from their parents through kidnapping and sale. Offenders in this trafficking mode can be strangers, acquaintances, family friends, or relatives of the victims.

According to Yang *et al*. (2020), the second type of child trafficking is the sale of children by one or both of their parents or guardians to a middleman or another family. The third is the trafficking of children with family members, acquaintances, and neighbours. In this case, parents are usually the ones who accept initiation instead of acting as their children's guardians. This type of child trafficking is called organized child trafficking in China, where children are sold to middlemen after a trafficking network persuades their parents (Yang *et al*., 2020).

Zhou *et al*. (2026) also noted that child trafficking is still a big public safety challenge in China, basically eroding family coherence and larger social stability. It breaches children's rights in several ways, such as their access to schooling, their dignity, and the developmental pathways that let them live decently (Okorie and Uchenna, 2023). Zhou *et al*. (2026) kind of suggest that at the micro level, this anti trafficking understanding should get folded into school teaching, not just in one lecture but through illustrated sessions and other interactive games. In Ethiopia, earlier empirical work has mostly centred on women who are victims.

Yet trafficking victims are not only females, and in Ethiopia migration is shaped by several linked political, socio-economic, and environmental pressures (Sisay, 2024). Also, the work that's coming out of Ethiopia seems to show there are noticeable gaps in public knowledge, especially when people try to define what really counts as in-country child trafficking (Solomon *et al*., 2025).

In one Ethiopian study from the Amhara regional state, researchers reported that 128 out of 636 households had already gone through child trafficking, so the estimated prevalence came to 20.1%, which is about one trafficked child for every five children in that study area (Tolla and Singh, 2021). On the gender side of trafficked children, 66.8% of the participants living in Sodo Town of the South Ethiopia regional state assumed that both boys and girls are vulnerable. Nevertheless, 24.3% understood that girls get trafficked more often, while 9.0% said boys were the most commonly affected in their localities (Solomon *et al.*, 2025).

In concrete Ethiopian examples, it has been reported that most youngsters were forced to leave their parents' houses to work nonstop and live in unsafe sites (Megento and Wolde, 2018). As described by Ottisova *et al.* (2018), trafficked children often end up facing serious mental illness. Megento and Wolde's (2018) research, focused on the local context of Adama, Oromia, highlights the range of health issues that trafficked children experience: victims are exposed to different health problems, especially when rape happens, and when dependence develops on 'khat,' 'shisha,' cigarettes, or other substances, then various diseases can be involved, too.

According to Yang *et al*. (2020), there is no proof that ex-victims receive psychological support or follow-up evaluations about their reintegration into their biological or adoptive families. Research done in Adama Town, Oromia, found that children who were trafficked often end up with serious mental burdens, like anxiety, despair, hopelessness, shame, and humiliation, and then flashbacks and nightmares too. They also may lose their confidence and develop low self-esteem. Megento and Wolde (2018) mentioned that about 75% of children who are at risk drop out of school, and it makes them vulnerable to illiteracy.

Solomon *et al.* (2025) explored the influences on knowledge and attitude and discovered that the level of education, whether other family members were trafficked, and even the type of media used all had strong relationships with participants' knowledge about child trafficking. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, the community risk perception of internal child trafficking with parents as key actors has not been investigated. Additionally,

the study aimed to assess the factors associated with labelling the potential risks that a rented-out child would encounter while being under the care of receivers.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Area Description

As research study sites, we took a total of six kebeles found under Kofale and Kokosa Districts of the West Arsi zone. From the first study area, Kebete, Elika Bebe, and Washarmina Hegana were intentionally selected. These three villages are found to the south of Kofele Town. Moreover, Kebete is located in the upper parts of Kofale Woreda near Sidama Regional State, while the remaining two are relatively the remotest kebeles, which are demarcated by the kebeles of Kokosa Woreda. From Kokosa, three kebeles, Boro, Hogiso, and Haroshifa, were deliberately included due to the high practice of child trafficking. Boro, Hogiso, and Haroshifa were deliberately included due to the high prevalence of child trafficking. Boro and Hogiso are found in the west and northwest directions, respectively, from Woreda Town Kokosa (Figure 1). On the other hand, Haroshifa kebele is the remotest area in the Woreda, which is located in the northeast direction.

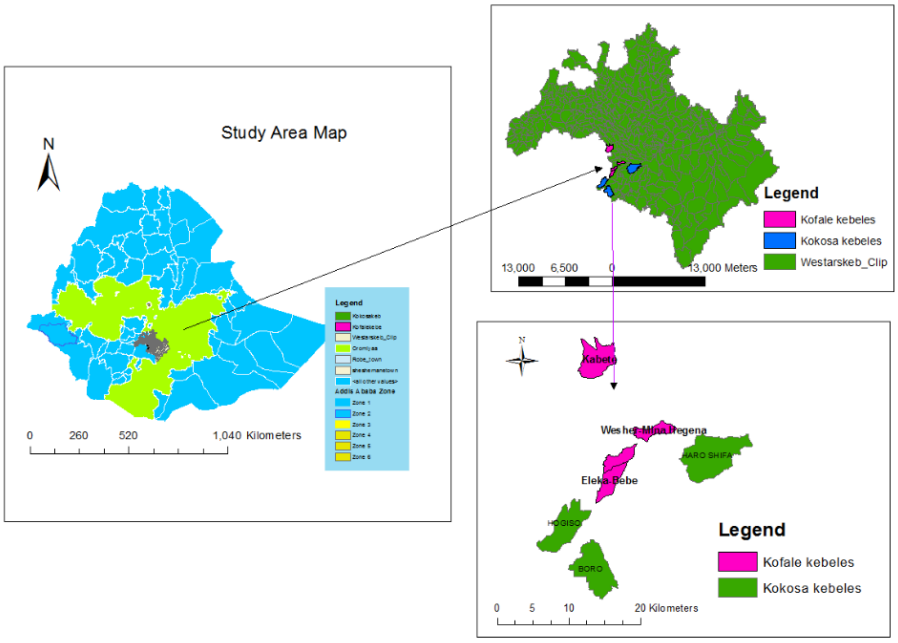

Figure 1: Map of the study area

2.2. Research design and study population

A community-based cross-sectional design was employed by the researchers. The researchers adopted a quantitative study approach to determine community risk perception regarding the local child trafficking perpetrated by their parents and associated factors. The target study population was model farmers, primary school teachers of respective kebeles, kebele administrative heads, security heads, health

extension workers, and development agent workers.

2.3. Sample size determination

Since no prior research has been done in Ethiopia to determine the level of community-perceived risk of trafficked children for local exploitation, the sample size for this investigation is determined using a single population proportion formula, assuming that the community-perceived risk level of domestic child trafficking represents 50%. In order to gather a fraction of the study participants, we chose a 95% confidence interval and four-point-eight margins of error.

$$n = \frac{(Z\alpha/2)^2 P (1-P)}{d^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 0.5(1-0.5)}{(0.048)^2} = 417$$

2.4. Sample and Sampling Methods

We employed stratified random sampling because the target study populations were diverse. We formed stratification based on their work as farmers, teachers, kebele administrative bodies, police, women, children, youth office workers, and health and development agent workers. Then, proportional allocation was performed to sort participants from all study areas. Finally, via a simple random sampling method, the researchers selected study participants from each group.

2.5. Instruments of Data Collection: Questionnaires were utilized. The questionnaire has two parts, including the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and the questions designed to measure the community members' risk perception score. The questionnaire was intended for a considerable number of participants, including model farmers, primary school teachers, women, children, and youth service workers, health extension workers, development agents, and kebele leaders.

2.6 Data Quality Assurance Methods

Research quality control can be maintained before, during, and after data collection (Creswell, 2014). In the beginning, while writing the research proposal, the researchers used quality journals, various documents from notable international institutions, and books. Before commencing data gathering activities, researchers should ensure that the tools are accepted or assess what they intend to do. This was performed by administering a pilot test to some individuals. The final version of the instruments was translated into Afan Oromo, which is the mother tongue of the participants.

Before data collection, short training was given to data collectors. Then, during data gathering, intense supervision of the researchers' questionnaire was distributed, collected, and packed well. In the final stage of quality control, the questionnaire was coded, checked to see whether it was complete, entered, cleaned if there was missing data, and then computed.

2.7. Ethical Consideration and Procedures of Data Collection

The Research Publication Ethics and Extension Directorate at Madda Walabu University provided a letter that confirmed collaboration with the researchers. The West Arsi Women, Children, and Youth Office sent a formal letter to the two woredas, which researchers used to deliver their message. The researchers obtained consent from kebeles and woredas through their usual methods. The study participants received verbal study objective explanations, which they needed to understand before signing the official consent document.

We used research facilitators to make advance agreements with a subset of participants in order to handle nonresponse. Researchers selected teachers, community leaders, and rural development agents for this purpose. The reason is that these individuals have established strong ties with farmers who can most effectively convince the study participants to answer questions. The data collectors informed selected individuals about the study objectives and meeting location details before the research started. Data collectors distributed questionnaires to selected participants according to the predetermined schedules, which were established at the main gathering locations.

2.8. Methods of Data Analysis

To identify community risk perceptions of internal child trafficking, principal component analysis (PCA) was computed. For the second objective, multivariate regression analysis was

used. We measured the statistical significance and strength of the association between independent variables and community risk perception scores based on the beta.

3. Results and Discussion

In this study, 417 participants were asked to participate; 37 (9%) of them withdrew, yielding a response rate of 380 (91%). To maintain the most prevalent community risk perception scores of child trafficking, principal component analysis (PCA) was calculated. To make sure the data were appropriate for PCA, we carried out sampling adequacy tests. As shown in Table 1 below, the KMO measure of sample adequacy in this study was 0.901, which is highly significant. Similarly, additional investigation was warranted because the Bartlett sphericity test was significant at the 0.00 level (2 = 3668.047, p = 0.000).

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		. 901
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3668.047
	Df	136
	Sig.	.000

The model was reduced by 17 variables with observed correlations to a smaller collection of significant linked variables, as shown in Table 2 below, with the total variance explained. With eigenvalues larger than 1, four components were identified that accounted for 67.8% of the variance. Therefore, the data were adequately represented by a model with four risk perceptions. Just 32.2% of the difference may be attributed to the other factors taken together. 42% of the variance was explained by component 1. Ten percent of the variance was explained by the second component. Eight percent and six percent, respectively, of the variation in the data was represented by the third and fourth components. Component 1 had the highest loading rating among the four (Table 2).

Table 2: Total Variance Explained for Community Risk Perceptions of Local Child Trafficking

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.203	42.370	42.370	7.203	42.370	42.370	3.689	21.701	21.701
2	1.763	10.373	52.743	1.763	10.373	52.743	3.330	19.587	41.287
3	1.467	8.632	61.374	1.467	8.632	61.374	3.015	17.735	59.023
4	1.094	6.438	67.812	1.094	6.438	67.812	1.494	8.789	67.812
5	.804	4.727	72.539						
6	.718	4.223	76.763						
7	.597	3.513	80.275						
8	.534	3.139	83.414						
9	.458	2.695	86.109						
10	.438	2.577	88.686						
11	.401	2.357	91.043						
12	.363	2.135	93.178						
13	.339	1.994	95.172						
14	.277	1.631	96.803						
15	.241	1.416	98.219						
16	.191	1.123	99.342						
17	.112	.658	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

To retain strong factor loading, the researchers removed small coefficients. In this case, a minimum value of the factor loading below 0.4 was suppressed from the rotated component matrix factor loading. In the analysis of the principal component, items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 14 were loaded into component one. When the variables that failed under this component were assessed, they were found to be related to child neglect and therefore were named the '*child neglect risk component.'*

For individual loads of factor one, it loaded child illiteracy and left the child at the gate at night at the highest point, 0.781 and 0.756, respectively. Consistent with the current finding, research conducted among at-risk children in Adama, Oromia, has found that 75% of the children are denied access to education (Megento and Wolde, 2018).

The results suggested that the community perceived that the exploiter of the child locks the doors, so a child will not escape, at a third ranking of 0.745. Next, the respondents noticed that the child's parents rented a child under the age of 14 to live with someone else as a domestic servant. The current study suggested that a recipient of children deprives a child of food, water, sleep, and medical treatment, and the loading was 0.707. According to this analysis, people who force a child under 14 to keep cattle fences in rural areas overnight were loaded with 0.564 points. Overall, these results go beyond previous reports by Abera (2017) showing that in West Arsi, the majority of fathers are not co-parenting, nurturing, or emotionally invested, while mothers are overburdened with household chores.

The current study described component two as 'perception of the risk of child labor exploitation through child renting.' Children forced into dangerous work loaded a strong score, which was 0.804 when compared to the remaining questions loaded under this component. From this component, the community perceived people who imposed on an 8-year-old child to keep cattle in different rural areas as having the second-highest score of 0.76. This study disclosed that the transferred children were abused by the spouses or children of users; users hit them because of the unintended loss of domestic properties and forced a child under the age of 14 to farm in rural areas with 0.708, 0.676, and 0.637 loading values individually.

Research among internally trafficked children in Adama Town, Oromia Regional State, conceded that the most vulnerable children were pushed out of their parents' homes, worked without rest, and spent most of their time in an unprotected environment (Megento and Wolde, 2018). A latest study by Okorie and Uchenna (2023) attested that whether manifested in the exploitation of children as laborers, domestic servants, child brides, street beggars, or victims of forced prostitution and child pornography, child trafficking significantly affects physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

The researchers called component three a perception of '*emotional risk scores.*' The questions asked whether someone who rents a child uses abusive language with them, ridicules children for the way they look, spends most of their time in a risky state, and blames a child for everything in a way that makes the child feel guilty. The findings revealed that participants were more likely to perceive trafficked children as emotionally attacked by those they serve by using abusive language, with a 0.886 loaded score. Similarly, the community noticed that the buyers often ridicule the children for the way they look, and blaming a child for everything was loaded with 0.866 points. Trafficked children spend most of their time in a risk state, and the principal component factor loading is 0.81. When comparing our results to those of a past study by Ottisova et al. (2018), it must be pointed out that trafficked children often encounter serious mental health problems.

The principal component analysis showed that the local community noted that the users of the children downgraded the children in a way that makes the child feel guilty, cannot be trusted, or cannot ever do something right, with 0.79 loadings. Megento and Wolde (2018) also identified that trafficked children were experiencing negative emotional effects.

Examining the items with the highest loading, the fourth risk perception could be labelled

sexual risk perception scores. Unlike other factors, this component loaded only two items with loading scores of 0.827 and 0.679. In addition, the respondents reported that the receivers allowed a girl child to marry a young man living in their villages (*see Table 3, Rotated component matrix factor loadings*). There is a case in which a child may sleep overnight with someone else, and the chance of sexual abuse is incredibly high. The current results are broadly in line with the research of Solomon *et al.* (2025) regarding the gender side of trafficked children, 66.8% of the participants living in Sodo Town of the South Ethiopia regional state assumed that both boys and girls are vulnerable.

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix Factor Loadings for Community Risk Perceptions of Local Child Trafficking.

	Components				
Items	1	2	3	4	**Commonalities**
Do you think someone who rents a child uses abusive language with them?			.886		.860
Do you think rented children are ridiculed by buyers for the way they look?			.866		.833
Do you think the buyers are blaming a child for everything, in a way that makes the child feel guilty, cannot be trusted, or cannot ever do something right?			.791		.834
Do you think rented children spend most of their time in a risk state?			.810		.738
Do you think the receiver lets a child marry a young man?				.827	.701
Do you think the receivers allow a child under the age of 9 to sleep overnight alongside other youth?				.679	.624
Do you think the receiver allows a child to keep the gate alone at night?	.564				.621
Do you think the leased children declined to go to school and were exposed to illiteracy?	.781				.689
Do you think the receivers put a child under the age of nine to sleep in a separate room?	.756				.699
Do you think people lock their doors so a child will not escape?	.745				.618
Do you think that a recipient of children deprives a child of food, water, sleep and medical treatment as a discipline?	.707				.581
Do you think parents accept the service of another person's child under the age of 11 as a domestic servant for money?	.725				.581
Do you feel that rented children are forced into dangerous work?		.804			.646
Do you think people are forcing an 8-year-old child to keep cattle in rural areas?		.757			.764
Do you think the transferred children are abused by the spouse or children of a person they serve?		.708			.703
Do you believe that recipients are forcing a child under the age of 14 to farm in rural areas?		.637			.577
Do you think users physically torture them due to the unintended loss of domestic properties?		.676			.461

Comp 1= Child neglect risks, Comp 2= perception of the risk of child labor exploitation through child renting*, Comp 3= Emotional risks, Comp4=Sexual risks.*

According to multivariate regression analysis, the model showed a strong and significant association with the four risk perception scores at the 1% level (Table 4). Age, level of education, occupation, family decision-making, and sources of information were significantly associated with the community's perception of child neglect. In this study, there were negative and significant predictions between the age of participants and child neglect risk perceptions. Alternatively, this suggests that older people were less likely to perceive child neglect as a risk relative to the young participants who took part in the study (p.01).

Similarly, the results affirmed that participants' careers had a significant and negative relationship with the community's perception of child neglect risk (P.01). The results imply that certain teachers, agricultural workers, and health extension workers are using the child either at home or perhaps for rural tasks in the study areas rather than the model farmers, who might use their children for whatever domestic services.

There was a positive and significant association between child neglect risk perceptions and participants' levels of education. For example, as respondents' level of education increases by one level, their risk perceptions increase by 0.085 points. This is consistent with what has been found by (Solomon *et al*., 2025) that participants whose level of education is found to be higher were more than 3.25 times more likely to have knowledge of local child trafficking compared to their counterparts.

The obtained evidence has shown that as a result of a decision to transfer one's own child to users made by a sole parent, usually a father, the probability of risk perception decreases by -0.078 (p.05). Participants' access to information regarding child trafficking had a highly statistically significant association with the neglect risk scores (P.01). If the community has more than one source of information about local child trafficking, their likelihood of considering child neglect as a risk increases by 0.139. However, the distance of kebeles to woredas, inadequate stakeholders' efforts to curb child trafficking, and perceived benefits of child trafficking were not significantly associated with the community's perceptions of child neglect in children who were trafficked by the will of their parents.

Among the explanatory variables, source of information and community attitudes towards child trafficking positively affected community perceptions of child labor exploitation risk scores at the 1% level. The age of respondents and decision-making capability negatively affected community child labor exploitation risk perceptions. Distance, occupation, education, stakeholder engagement, and perceived benefits did not have a statistically significant association with child labor risk scores.

In the third component, we found emotion risk scores to have a statistically significant relationship with the distance of the kebeles to woredas, age, education, occupation, family decision-making capability, and having access to information. The location of kebele has positively influenced the community's perceptions of emotion risk scores. As the participants' homes were close to a relatively better town, which is the head of Districts, they became familiar with the adverse effects of child smuggling and its legal consequences if the concerned government bodies came across the actors; therefore, compared to residents in remote areas, people whose homes were next to woreda towns, where there is access to different services, could have a better sense of emotional risk perceptions.

The age of the participants, occupation, and family level of involvement in decision-making about transferring a child were statistically significantly related to emotional risk perceptions about local child trafficking. As the age of the participants decreases by one unit, the likelihood of noticing emotional abuse committed by actors is high. In other languages, compared to older people, their counterparts were more likely to perceive vulnerable children as being emotionally attacked by the users. A relationship exists between an individual's job and their ability to perceive trafficked children's likelihood of encountering emotional risk.

The findings confirmed that there was a negative and significant relationship between

perceived parents' level of involvement in renting their child to anyone else and their emotional risk perceptions. It can be concluded that there are people who support child smuggling because parents are letting their children secure their basic needs. In addition, this could perhaps be related to community attitudes towards children. In this study, educated participants were more likely to have a good perception of emotional risk. In the same vein, communities that have heard about child trafficking from different sources, such as radio, TV, school, and others, tend to understand that trafficked children are subject to emotional abuse. It was also researched by Solomon *et al.* (2025) that participants who had access to information about domestic child trafficking via TV or radio had better knowledge than those who had a limited source of information.

This analysis found evidence for the community's sexual risk perceptions that vulnerable children have faced. From the results, it is clear that participants' occupations have a negative and significant relationship with sexual risk scores. In other words, compared to the government employees who have been working in the study areas and also participated in the survey, farmers perceive trafficked girls as exposed to different sexual risks. This could be due to the farmers' tangible experiences in their villages, as they might hear from the victims themselves or from their parents.

The distance of the kebele positively influenced the participants' perceptions of sexual risk scores. This could also be interpreted as the participants whose homes are close to relatively better towns, which are the heads of the districts; they become familiar with the adverse effects of child smuggling and its legal consequences if the concerned government bodies happen to come across the actors, and therefore, compared to remote area residents, people whose homes are adjacent to the Worde towns where there is access to different services could have a better knowledge of sexual risk as harsh risk.

The results revealed that sources of information affected community sexual risk perceptions at a 1% level of significance. To this end, if the participants had different sources of information concerning domestic child trafficking, the probability of risk notice was increased by 0.157, with other factors constant (Table 4*)*. Our results are directly in line with previous findings that multiple media platforms serve as channels for information regarding internal child trafficking (Solomon *et al*., 2025).

Table 4: Determinants of Community Risk Perception on Local Child Trafficking

	Comp1			Comp2			Comp3			comp4		
Variables	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t
Distance of kebele	-0.031	0.023	0.176	-0.015	0.024	0.542	0.067	0.030	0.027**	0.093	0.028	0.001*
Age	-0.009	0.004	0.040**	-0.014	0.005	0.003*	-0.010	0.006	0.079***	-0.008	0.005	0.115
Education	0.085	0.036	0.017**	0.016	0.037	0.663	0.078	0.047	0.098***	0.022	0.043	0.610
Occupation	-0.112	0.039	0.004*	-0.038	0.040	0.344	-0.165	0.051	0.001*	-0.156	0.046	0.001*
Stakeholders	0.145	0.104	0.162	-0.147	0.108	0.174	-0.033	0.136	0.809	0.066	0.124	0.595
Com. Attitude	0.009	0.114	0.935	0.319	0.120	0.008*	0.122	0.151	0.417	-0.256	0.137	0.063***
Perceived Benefits	-0.103	0.101	0.307	0.018	0.105	0.866	0.143	0.132	0.282	-0.177	0.121	0.143
Family Decision	-0.078	0.037	0.036**	-0.085	0.039	0.030**	-0.087	0.049	0.076***	0.027	0.045	0.553
Source	0.139	0.029	0.000*	0.098	0.031	0.001*	0.132	0.038	0.001*	0.157	0.035	0.000*
Constant	3.145	0.297	0.000	3.241	0.311	0.000	2.768	0.392	0.000	3.052	0.358	0.000
R^2		0.115			0.097			0.101			0.130	
P-Value		0.000			0.000			0.005			0.001	

*** Significant at the *10% level,* ** Significant at *the 5% level,* * Significant at the *1% level.*
Comp 1=Child neglect risks, Comp 2=Child labor exploitation risks, Comp 3= Emotional risks, Comp=Sexual risks.

4. Conclusion

Seventeen risk perception items were loaded and reduced to four. The first component is neglect risk perceptions; the second is labor exploitation risk scores; the third is emotional risks; and the fourth includes sexual risk scores. The analysis shows that child neglect risk perceptions were found to have the highest variance in the data set at 42.37%, while the fourth component represented 6.4% of the variation in the data set, which was the lowest value compared to the first risk perception. The variation between the second and third factors was 1.77 points, which implies that community child labor exploitation and emotional risk perceptions regarding local child trafficking are close to each other compared to the first risk perception, which is more than four times greater than the second and third risk scores. Together, the present findings confirm that the community exhibited adequate risk perception regarding local child trafficking. To begin with the first risk perception, the results allow us to conclude that people who received the child or children leave them at the gate at night. It was perceived that locally trafficked children were denied access to education and thus became exposed to illiteracy. Similarly, we found that there is a high probability that these children will be deprived of basic needs such as food, water, sleep, and medical treatment as a means of discipline for the mistakes they have made.

The findings noted that regardless of the destination where these children have been serving, they took part in dangerous work that could risk their lives. The results show that trafficked children are often bullied by receivers, which results in diverse psychological problems. Likewise, female children encountered sexual risks. Age, the distance of kebele, occupation, family level of involvement in the process of transferring a child, and access to information had statistically significant relationships with the participants' child neglect risk perceptions. The second form of risk, labor exploitation, was significantly related to age, community attitude towards child transfer, source of information, and family degree of decision-making while letting their child serve individuals.

The third risk perception was influenced by the distance of the kebele, age, participants' level of education, occupation, source of information, and whether a decision to sell a child was made after the agreement of both father and mother or by the father.

5. Implications

As far as we know, the local people possess indigenous knowledge that protects wild animals, plants, and their children; therefore, it is strongly suggested that the local elders' council impose social sanctions on the offenders and inform group members of the decisions made to protect the rights of vulnerable children, as the existence of sanctions alone does not prevent frequent child trafficking.

To the best of our knowledge, the majority of NGOs focus on international human trafficking. However, children's situation is made worse, and international human trafficking is encouraged by local child trafficking committed by their parents. Therefore, interestingly, there is a need to create a coordination platform among humanitarian organizations, particularly at the zonal level, West Arsi, to leverage access to child protection services for at-risk children.

Primary and secondary school teachers, school principals, parent-teacher associations, and students are strongly urged to discourage child transfer by creating awareness among the public through school coo curricular activities, among other communication channels. Similarly, agriculture and health extension workers, along with kebele leaders, are advised to teach the people, particularly the parents of the victims of local trafficking, while providing professional support to the farmers.

The law simply makes the individual who knowingly did not report to the police officer. Therefore, revisions to newly enacted laws are needed to make it clear to enact regulations and directives to ensure the safety of the child, especially given the attention and additional responsibility given to child parents who did not report such crimes.

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Data availability

The dataset used and analyzed in this study is available upon reasonable request.

Competing interests

The authors disclosed no possible conflicts of interest

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