



The Urban Paradox: Navigating Social Challenges and Building Resilience in the Heart of Cities, in Selected Cities of Southern Corridors, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Cities in developing countries influx of socio-economic challenges triggered by the dynamic urban growth that exhibits a social crisis. Four cities from the southern corridor were selected, namely Butajera, Hossana, Yergalem, and Hawassa, to execute data collection. The research approach was exploratory, which used a mixed approach, based on qualitative and quantitative data types. 1,489 households engaged in responses and semi-structured interviews conducted by city officials. The result reveals that a significant number of respondents reported that urban safety is under remarkable challenge, 57% of inhabitants rating their cities' security as medium and low, and 55.8% reported that crime is getting worse. The find reveals that the imbalance between population growth and economic development paves for a change in rural-urban migration, unemployment, and unplanned urban growth, attributed to the destabilized urban governance. Hence, 65.2% of respondents rated the predominance of streetism as rooted in the uncontrolled urban growth. The study concluded that the urban growth needs strategies that mitigate urban poverty and eradicate streetism and unemployment, and that the prevailing socio-economic growth of city dwellers is postulated, and policy and strategy implications imperatively support social resilience.

Keywords: Social Resilience; Social Problems; Urban Governance; Streetism, Urban Poverty; Unemployment.

1. Introduction

Cities around the world are increasingly facing social crises, marked by rising inequality, housing shortages, public health emergencies, and the compounding effects of economic and environmental shocks. These crises expose and deepen existing vulnerabilities, often hitting marginalized groups the hardest and challenging the ability of urban systems to respond effectively. Urban crises are rarely isolated; issues like climate change, pandemics, economic downturns, and racism are deeply interconnected, making single-issue solutions inadequate (Westman et al., 2022; Madden, 2023).

Social divides have widened following the financial crises, with growing populations of excluded and impoverished residents, especially in cities affected by austerity and weak welfare systems

(González-Pérez, 2018; Cebrián-Abellán et al., 2019; Salom & Fajardo, 2017). Housing crises, food insecurity, and declining access to essential services are central features, often exacerbated by privatization, gentrification, and austerity policies (Kırmızı, 2021; Edwards, 2016). Economic and social distress is unevenly distributed, with certain neighborhoods or regions (e.g., deprived urban areas, the “newly poor”) facing greater hardship (Nelson et al., 1998; Salom & Fajardo, 2017). Urban crises can foster innovative practices and knowledge-sharing, supporting resilience and sustainable development if cities learn from and adapt to these challenges (Hoelscher et al., 2022; Westman et al., 2022).

Streetism, theft, and unemployment are deeply interconnected challenges in developing country cities. Rapid urbanization, economic hardship, and weak social safety nets contribute to the rise of children living on the streets, increased petty crime, and persistent joblessness, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. High unemployment rates are strongly linked to increased street crime, including theft, as economic desperation pushes individuals especially youth toward illegal activities for survival (Parveen, 2022; Tabar & Noghani, 2019). Children and youth living on the streets (streetism) are particularly vulnerable to engaging in or becoming victims of theft, violence, and gang activity. This is often a result of poverty, lack of family support, and limited access to education or formal employment (Ogunkan, 2023; Naku, 2025; Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2012).

Many unemployed individuals turn to informal street vending, which, while sometimes associated with illegal activities, is primarily a survival strategy and can help reduce poverty and unemployment if properly supported (Huang et al., 2018; Al-Jundi et al., 2022). Economic hardship, poor parental care, and family poverty are key predictors of streetism among urban children. Self-financing needs and economic “pull” factors (the need to earn money) are especially significant (Adeyemi & Oluwaseun, 2012). Rapid, unplanned urban growth exacerbates these issues by straining social services and increasing the number of vulnerable children and unemployed adults (Ogunkan, 2023; Naku, 2025).

Effective interventions include improving social welfare and child protection systems, community engagement, and fostering public-private partnerships to address root causes (Naku, 2025). Streetism, theft, and unemployment in developing country cities are closely linked through cycles of poverty, lack of opportunity, and weak urban management. Addressing these challenges requires integrated policies that strengthen social protection, support informal livelihoods, and tackle the root economic and social drivers. Ethiopian cities face several significant social problems driven by rapid urbanization, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure. Urban poverty is widespread, with many households lacking access to essential livelihood assets and being vulnerable to economic shocks; there is often a gap between government policies and their effective implementation, leaving the urban poor with limited support and persistent livelihood insecurity (Yirga, 2021; Hill & Tsehaye, 2020). Internal displacement caused by conflict adds another layer of social difficulty, resulting in homelessness, social disintegration, poor health, loss of education, and psychological trauma for displaced people, while also straining host communities (Abdisa & Likal, 2024; Regasa et al., 2023).

Particularly in towns that we designed as a study area we find out many problems like lack of social housing, unemployment, lack of sufficient social institutions, urban poverty, ethnic based social segregation, lack of social security, lack of social infrastructure, rapid demographic change and economic inflation leads to the jeopardize the urban residents and the whole citizens livelihoods at catastrophe that becomes challenging for the governors and political elites to handle the challenges and problems that embedded urban and rural settlements in social shocks. To ensure sustainable development social issue is the one that ensure to attain sustainability though in developing countries particularly in

Ethiopia sustainable development becomes a night mare to ensure in Ethiopian urban centres however; sustainable development is becoming one of the anchor of different developmental institutions and the country's development goal nevertheless social shocks erupted therefore; different strategies and policies should have to formulated to cope up with the issue of sustainability.

Additionally, the urban housing crisis is marked by unaffordable land and housing, high cohabitation rates, and a mismatch between land prices and incomes, all of which are exacerbated by political and economic challenges (Aregawi & Genovese, 2024). Previous research on the social problems of urban Ethiopia didn't study the social challenge specific to safety and security issues, the trends of streetism in selected cities, and their impact on the livelihoods of city dwellers, which have significant implications for creating a safe city.

2. Materials and Methods

This study is designed to identify the major shocks experienced by the selected urban centers in the Southern Ethiopian Corridors and to examine the extent to which they are resilient. The chapter describes the research design, research approaches, sources of data, the sample, instruments, procedure of data collection, and data analysis.

2.1. Description of the Study Area

The study is conducted in selected urban centers/towns that lie in the southern Ethiopian corridor, namely, Hawassa, Butajira, Hossana, and Yigalem. Hawassa city has been serving as the administrative capital of the Former SNNPRS since 1991. The city is disproportionately large in southern Ethiopia compared to others. Hossana is serving as the zonal capital, whereas Butajira and Yirgalem are serving as woreda headquarters since the inception of decentralization in the post-1990s in Ethiopia. Accordingly, the sampled cities have been receiving the ever-increasing rural-urban migrants, that could further complicate the already existing socio-economic and environmental problems.

2.2. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The use of a descriptive approach provides a better understanding of major social shocks in the study area, the level of resilience of city residents to social shocks, and the practices of city administration in addressing urban social problems and building resilient urban areas in the Southern Ethiopian Corridors. In relation to this, Kothari (2004) stated that, descriptive research design helps to have general understanding of the problem by studying the current status, nature of prevailing conditions, practices and trends through relevant and precise information.

The study also adopted an explanatory research type. The explanatory research design was employed to examine how tenure security, social safety, and security, streetism, and crime predict urban social shocks. The purpose of explanatory research describes the effect of independent variables on dependent variables (Sekaran, & Bougi, 2010).

2.3. Research Approach

For this study philosophical approach, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed. The researcher used a mixed method, which is the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. In the mixed methods quantitative used as major data collection technique whereas qualitative data (from interview) are supportive and are collected concurrently throughout the same study.

2.4. Sources of Data

In this study, two sources of data were used: primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data source includes journal databases, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government websites. The primary data were collected from a total of 1489 household surveys (Table 1). Closed-ended questionnaires were used for household surveys, and face-to-face interviews were also used for the data collection process.

2.5. Sampling size and Techniques

After stratifying the kebeles, a systematic random sampling method, in the probability sampling method to select the representative households of target population for the study. Every fifth household of the chosen villages was selected for an interview. For this, 383 households have been selected to fill the questionnaire.

Table 1. Targeted population, sample size, and techniques

No.	Target City/Town	Total Population	Sample Size	Sampling Techniques
1	Residents of Hawassa	493,000	383	Systematic random
2	Residents of Yirgalem	93,472	383	Systematic random
3	Residents of Hossaena	188,192	383	Systematic random
4	Residents of Butajira	89,000	383	Systematic random
5	Stakeholder interviews in all representative cities	-	-	Purposive sampling

Source: Central Statistics Agency, 2022

2.6. Data Collection Instruments

In this study, as the study design is an exploratory and descriptive survey, a questionnaire, semi-structured interview, field observation, and document analysis have been employed.

2.6.1. Questionnaire

A questionnaire was employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data from selected participants. This is because the questionnaire is convenient to conduct surveys and to acquire the necessary information from a large number of study subjects in a short period. Furthermore, it makes possible an economy of time and expense and also provides a high proportion of usable response (Best & Kahn, 2003). Questionnaires were developed as the main instrument of data collection from the respondents. Both closed and open-ended type items of the questionnaires were developed based on the social indicators which was derived from scientific literature. The questionnaire was prepared in the English language and translated into Amharic because it is assumed that not all the respondents may not the necessary skills to read and understand the concepts that are in the questionnaire.

2.6.2. Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview was used to give subjects the chance for free expression of their feelings and opinions that they may not want to share with others. Furthermore, it was used to gather in-depth qualitative data from the administrative office of the selected towns of Southern Ethiopian

Corridors to identify the practices of city administration in addressing urban social problems and building resilient urban areas in their towns. The purpose of interviewing people was to find out what is in their mind-what they think or how they feel about urban social shocks and related issues”. An interview guide was prepared in the Amharic language to make communication easier. Employing semi-structured interviews is quite important because interview has great potential to release more in-depth information, provide an opportunity to observe non-verbal behavior of respondents, gives opportunities for clearing up misunderstandings, as well as it can be adjusted to meet many diverse situations (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

2.6.3. Field Observation

The researchers carried out field observations in sampled cities/towns to obtain data on the social dimensions of urbanization and the resultant shocks through the lens of indicators. To facilitate field work, an indicator-based observation checklist will be prepared.

2.6.4. Document Analysis

Documents like related journal articles, books, reports, working papers, and various sources such as proclamations, urban development policies, and strategies of the country will be used for the study as a review document. Results from this review could yield clues on the urban center diagnostics to discuss and conceptualize the social dimension of urban resilience. Regional and or local best practices (if any) will also be documented.

2.7. Method of Data Analysis

The data analyses include descriptive statistics. First, frequency counts and percentage were applied to all items of the questionnaire under the dimensions of Secured Land and/or Residential Housing Supply and ownership, Social Security, Protection and Safety dimensions and Streetism dimensions. Next, the questionnaire representing social urban shock based on the literature and objectives of the study was computed and changed to continuous data.

The qualitative data collected through interviews, documents, and observation were analyzed, narrated, and organized in a systematic form and discussed thematically. In addition to this, researchers used qualitative narrative written techniques and gave attention to quotations from the respondents. Finally, the responses were categorized into basic themes drawn from the objectives of the study.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Social Security, Protection, and Safety

The ability of a system and its parts to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a hazardous event could provide a useful framing for thinking about how social protection delivery is, or could be, sustained in crises and to move away from (Ulrichs, 2019).

3.1.1. Measuring cities' safety and security

The safety and security issues of cities are a prior factor for urban economic and social development (Van Den et al., 2006). There are different approaches used to analyze the safety and security of cities. For instance, in Bari (Italy), a study aimed to collect data on victimization, perception of security, and citizens' satisfaction with the work of law enforcement agencies (UNICRI, 2008). In Copenhagen (Denmark), a survey on the sense of safety has been conducted. In Piraeus (Greek), an

urban innovative action project to address the state of fear of crime, insecurity, and victimization in specific urban areas. In Ethiopia, such a study has not yet taken place, due to the author’s knowledge of the state. In this section, the security, safety, and protection conditions of selected Ethiopian southern cities have been analyzed. Hence, in this section, the frequency of respondents' feelings about the safety and security of their city, the type of problem occurring, the criminal situation, and the reason why the problem is happening have been analyzed.

Table 2, given below, shows the level of cities' safety and security in the studied areas using a rating score of very high to very low. As a result, most of the respondents chose medium situation (37.4%) and then low (19.8%) Poor safety can also discourage investment, limit access to public spaces, and reduce trust in local governance, further undermining economic and social development. Addressing these issues requires integrated state policies that improve urban planning, strengthen law enforcement, and enhance social services to protect and support residents’ livelihoods (Sergiienko et al., 2023; Munishi & Hamidu, 2022).

In contrast, 8.7 % respondents chose the situation as very high and very low, with 14.7%. Broader consequences of urban insecurity include increased poverty, social inequality, and health problems, as well as a decline in the overall quality of life for city dwellers (Sergiienko et al., 2023).

Table 2. Measuring Cities' Safety and Security

Criteria	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very High	124	8.7
Valid	High	212	14.9
Valid	Medium	531	37.4
Valid	Low	281	19.8
Valid	Very Low	208	14.7
Valid	Total	1356	95.6
Missing	System	63	4.4
Total		1419	100.0

Source: Household Survey Results, 2022

Based on the respondents’ responses, the type of problem mostly observed in those cities is ranked as stealing/theft (463 respondents) first. Economically, theft can deter investment, increase security costs for businesses and households, and reduce the attractiveness of urban centers for both residents and visitors (Wang, 2024; Oliveira et al., 2017). Socially, theft contributes to fear and mistrust among inhabitants, especially in neighborhoods with high population turnover or greater ethnic and socioeconomic heterogeneity (Xu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024), then organized robbery (290 respondents) followed by sexual violence (87 respondents). Figure 1 below shows the frequency of respondents against the most observed problems in the studied cities. The spatial distribution of theft is influenced by factors such as urban economic conditions, inequality, and the built environment, with more prosperous and dynamic areas often experiencing higher theft rates (Zheng et al., 2025; Wang, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

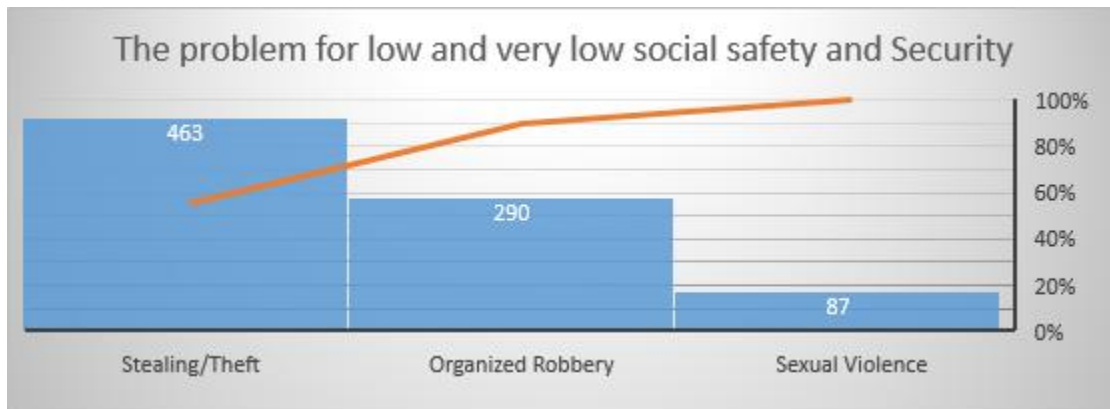


Figure 1. The Problem for Low and Very Low Safety and Security

Based on the respondents' feelings, the criminal situation in the sampled cities is given in Table 3. The criminal situation is highly increasing, as 26.8 % respondents answered. Whereas, 29 % or highest respondents feel that the situation is increasing. Higher crime rates, especially violent and property crimes, are often linked to socio-economic deprivation, inequality, and weak social structures, which can lead to fear, reduced social cohesion, and a decline in community trust (Onyeneke & Karam, 2022; Sampson, 1986). Oppositely, 1.5 % of respondents answered that it is highly decreasing, and 10.7 % are decreasing in rate. In some cases, criminal groups may even fill governance gaps, influencing local politics and undermining state authority, which can erode the rule of law and hinder effective public service delivery (Arias, 2017; Campana et al., 2025).

Table 3. Assessment of Criminal Situation in The City

Criteria	Rate	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Highly Increasing	380	26.8
Valid	Increasing	412	29.0
Valid	Moderately Increasing	259	18.3
Valid	It Remains The Same	78	5.5
Valid	Decreasing	149	10.5
Valid	Highly Decreasing	21	1.5
Valid	No Comment	26	1.8
Valid	Total	1325	93.4
Missing	System	94	6.6
Total		1419	100.0

The mean rank analysis of the safety and security situation in the study area has been presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The Mean Rank Factors of Safety and Security Situations

Parameters	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Rank	Std. Deviation
Imbalance between rate of population growth and economic growth	1143	1.0	7.0	4.321	2.1916
High rural to urban migration	1121	1.0	7.0	4.110	2.1691
Government is failed to address such problems	1132	1.0	7.0	4.049	1.9812
Extended unlawfulness	1126	1.0	7.0	4.016	1.7183
Increase in poverty	1124	1.0	7.0	3.992	1.8484
Instability of the politics	1136	1.0	7.0	3.958	1.9707
Youth unemployment	1120	1.0	7.0	3.460	2.0094
Valid N (list wise)	1069				

Source: Household Survey Result, 2022

As can be seen from Table 3, the respondents' responses on items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 the mean scores were rated average mean score by the respondents. These indicated that respondents asserted higher agreement on the reason why the security and safety issues occurred in the selected study town. Accordingly, respondent's average response for Imbalance between rate of population growth and economic growth; High rural to urban migration; Government is failed to address such problems; extended unlawfulness; Increase in poverty; Instability of the politics and Youth unemployment (Mean = 4.321) (SD=2.1916), (Mean =4.110) (SD=2.1691), (Mean = 4.049) (SD=1.9812), (Mean =4.016) (SD=1.7183), (Mean = 3.992) (SD=1.8484), (Mean =3.958) (SD=1.9707) and (Mean = 3.460) (SD=2.0094) respectively. This implies that the variables such as Imbalance between the rate of population growth and economic growth are the highest factor for the prevalence of Safety and Security, whereas Youth unemployment is the least factor in the study towns.

When urban populations expand faster than economic resources and infrastructure can keep up, cities often experience urban sprawl, which is linked to decreased safety resilience, meaning cities become more vulnerable to crime, accidents, and environmental hazards (Yang et al., 2024). This imbalance can also lead to increased infrastructure inequalities, with some neighborhoods lacking adequate services such as policing, lighting, and emergency response, further exacerbating safety risks (Pandey et al., 2025). Additionally, rapid population growth without corresponding economic opportunities can result in higher unemployment, poverty, and social tensions, all of which are associated with increased crime and reduced public safety (Zhang & Xie, 2019; Voukkali et al., 2023).

3.2. Prevalence of Streetism

Over the last century, there has been a growing number of children who live on the streets. It is instructive to mention that the lifestyle of these children is dynamic for the simple reason that they constantly change locations or move from one area to another. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain

the exact population. Many factors contribute to the increase in street children (Atwar and Engkus, 2020). Darragh (2019) offers this likely explanation for the inability to adequately quantify street children.

3.2.1. Evaluation of Streetism in the City

When urbanization increases, the problem associated with it is also exacerbated, streetism, which is observed in the urban social perspectives problem. Table 4, below, shows the status of streetism in the reference city from respondents' feelings.

UNICEF (2012) states: “Globally, there are over 100 million street children: 40 million in Latin America, 30 million in Asia, 10 million in Africa, and the remaining 20 million in Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia.” UNICEF (2012) claims that while it is impossible to quantify street children, they are increasing daily at alarming proportions. As with the global picture on street children, a report by CRDA estimated that approximately 200,000 children were working and living on urban streets, of which 150,000 reside in Addis Ababa (2006). From Table 5 below, the frequency of respondents' feelings about the selected cities' streetism status is given. The streetism status in selected cities is increasing spontaneously from very high to high, with 75.2%. Rising streetism is linked to higher crime rates, increased security concerns, environmental management challenges, and the growth of child prostitution, all of which undermine effective urban governance and the safety of city residents (Naku, 2025; Ogunkan, 2023). The highest rate of streetism has a significant contribution to the poor safety and security in selected cities.

Table 5. Frequency of Respondents' Feelings About Their Cities' Streetism Status

Criteria	Parameters	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very High	437	30.8
Valid	High	488	34.4
Valid	Medium	310	21.8
Valid	Low	84	5.9
Valid	Very Low	27	1.9
Valid	Total	1346	94.9
Missing	System	73	5.1
Total		1419	100.0

Source: Household Survey Result, 2022

Measures were conducted to identify the major and least streetism location among five possible locations. The finding indicates that nightclubs were rated first with a mean rank of (M=3.38), showing the most locations of streetism in the study towns (Table 6). Nightlife areas, including nightclubs, often become focal points for youth gatherings and informal activities, sometimes attracting vulnerable street-involved youth who may engage in or be exposed to risky behaviors such as substance use, crime, or exploitation (Demant & Landolt, 2014; Naku, 2025). Similarly, marketplaces found the second location

of streetism with mean rank values of (M=3.30); research on urban markets highlights that street markets are important for economic and social interactions, often reflecting and shaping the diversity and informal dynamics of city life (Hiebert et al., 2015; Petrović et al., 2021). These environments can sometimes attract vulnerable populations, including street-involved youth, due to the opportunities for informal work and social exchange, but this is not framed as a "preference" by the marketplaces themselves (Hiebert et al., 2015; Petrović et al., 2021).

On the other hand, religious institutions found the third location of streetism rated with mean rank of (M=2.89); studies highlight that religious spaces in Ethiopia are central to public life and are often sites of contestation, expansion, and negotiation among different religious communities, which can influence how public spaces are used and who has access to them (Østebø, 2023; Kumlachew, 2025; Abbink, 2011; Stockmans & Büscher, 2017). These dynamics may affect vulnerable groups, including street children, by shaping their opportunities for support, inclusion, or exclusion in urban environments. Also, hotels and restaurants with mean rank values of (M=2.84) were identified as the fourth streetism location, whereas bus station areas with mean rank values of (M=2.44) were the list location of prevalence of streetism. The details are shown in Table 5 above.

Table 6. The Mean Rank for the Location of Streetism

Location	N	Mean Rank	Std. Deviation
Around nightclubs	1419	3.385	1.5260
Around marketplaces	1419	3.303	1.2779
Around religious institutions	1419	2.894	1.4382
Around hotels and restaurants	1419	2.841	1.2053
Around bus station	1419	2.446	1.3988
Valid N (List wise)	1419	-	-

Source: Household Survey Result, 2022

Some of the reasons for streetism occurrence in the study areas are presented as follows. Figure 2 Rapid Urbanization is exhibited as 39% cause of streetism occurrences. Poverty remains the most commonly reported reason for youth street involvement globally, and urbanization often exacerbates socioeconomic inequities that lead children and youth to the streets (Embleton et al., 2016). The secondly rated causes for streetism are Rural to Urban Migration (26%) and Migrants, especially young adults with limited education, often move to larger cities in search of better opportunities, but when cities cannot provide adequate employment, housing, or social services, these individuals may end up living and working on the streets (Busso et al., 2020; Ding et al., 2023). Unemployment (19%) is rated as the third cause for streetism in selected cities, and also the predominant crime activities are presented in Figure 2.

Street children in the city are involved in different types of criminal activity. Among 1419 respondents, 1319 (93%) of respondents agree that there is street children's involvement in crime through Theft/Stealing, organized robbery, and sexual violence, respectively, some street children do engage in minor crimes such as petty theft, drug use, and transactional sex, primarily as coping mechanisms to meet basic needs like food and shelter (Chimdessa & Cheire, 2018; Endris & Sitota, 2019; Grier, 2013).

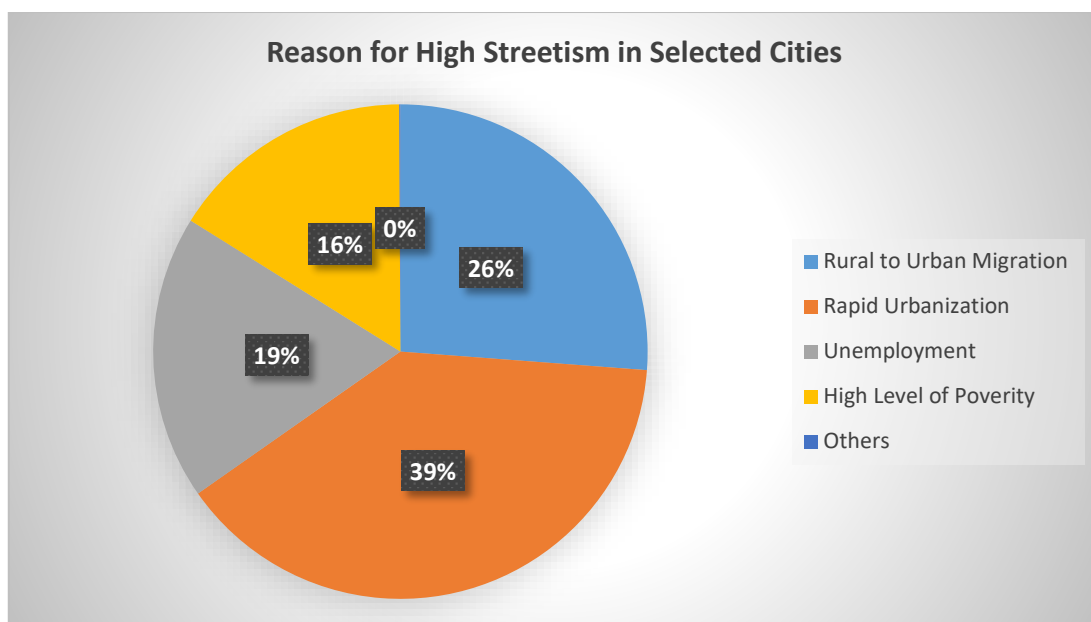


Figure 2. Reason for High Streetism Occurrence

Substance abuse, including benzene sniffing, smoking, and chewing khat, is also reported as a common issue among this population (Endris & Sitota, 2019). Only 100 (7%) respondents perceive that street children are not involved in crimes. The Predominant crime categories of street children in the study towns are given in Figure 3. The implications of these patterns are significant: the criminalization and social exclusion of street children further marginalize them, reducing their access to social protection, education, and health services, and increasing their vulnerability to ongoing abuse and exploitation (Chimdessa, 2022; Chimdessa & Cheire, 2018). Poorly designed policies and negative societal attitudes exacerbate these problems, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies that focus on protection, rehabilitation, and social integration rather than punishment (Chimdessa, 2022; Chimdessa & Cheire, 2018).

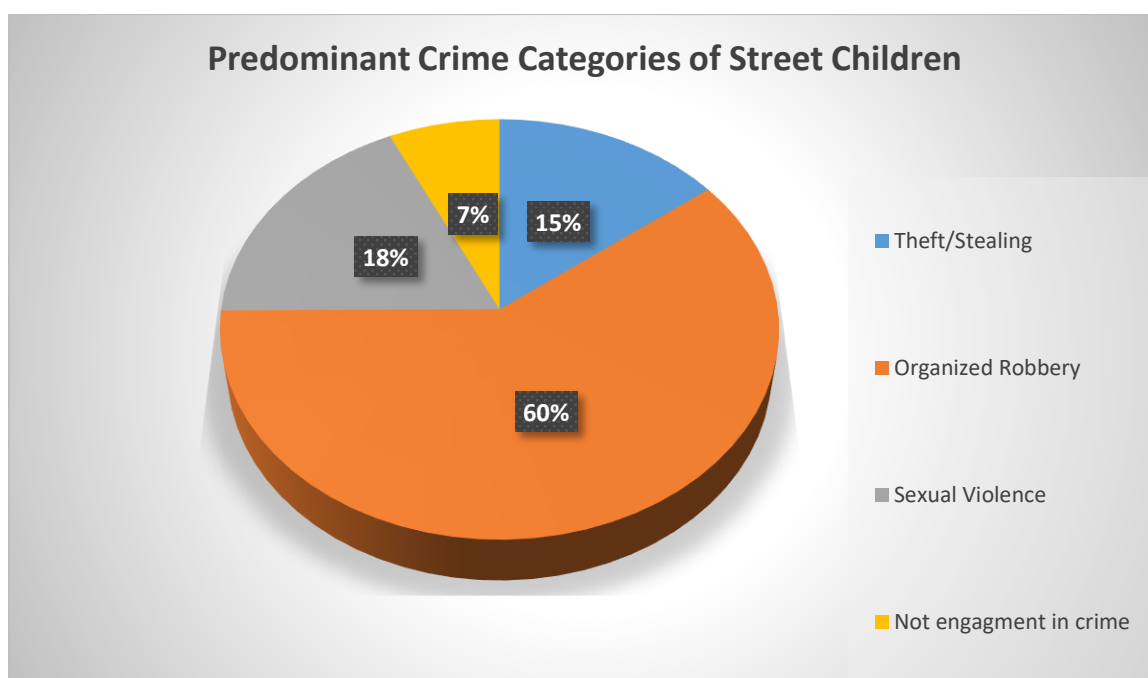


Figure 3. Predominant Crime Categories of Street Children

Beside of all those empirical data analyses and finding we interviewed the cities higher and responsible officials or institution such as, Mayer office of the city, municipal bureau, females and child affair office, plan commission, good governance and administrative office, environmental protection and climate change office and civil servant's bureau in those reference cities of Hawassa, Yigalem, Butajira and Hossana. The main pillar questions are concerned with understanding the social shocks, their level of occurrence, the reasons why the shocks occur, and what mitigation strategies have been implemented and used.

As a result, the most frequent problems and issues were raised in those respective cities, which look similar in nature across all cities. For instance, the lack of social services, unemployment, and urbanization rate and population boom have been mentioned in all those study areas as the root causes of the social shock problem. The capacity to withstand the shocks also shows that there have to be measures to raise the lower level of status to an efficient and sustainable capacity level. When looking at the ongoing strategies and policies applicable in the study areas, common programs of safety net, social organization like saving and equb, micro finance, and empowering women can be mentioned as an example. The city is experiencing a high, unexpected, and uncontrolled level of social problems faced especially the financial flow of money, which comes mostly from South Africa, has caused the rural population to migrate into the city and buy lands and houses at high cost.

Rich people also divert some officials to make them do what they want, and why corruption is also increased in the city. As the Mayor also told us, the financial flow in the city, which exacerbates inflation, leads civil servants to become vulnerable to different social problems. This is because of unable to compete for their expenses as those who are supported by diasporas. In the city, there is also uncontrolled expansion toward rural agricultural lands, and illegal business activities have been held. It looks like there have been groups that have an equal power as the legal body that rules the city. Therefore, if the potentials of the city have been planned, controlled in a good manner, the city can resist such social problems and become resilient.

Beyond a basic view of urban challenges, this research outlines these issues through the lens of urban resilience, highlighting how socio-economic and governance failures fundamentally emasculate a city's ability to "anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a hazardous event" (Ulrichs, Slater, and Costella 2019). The rising security costs, and declining social trust (Wang, 2024; Xu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). It proves the idea that poor safety drives away investment, limits access to public spaces, and decreases trust in government. This situation harms both economic and social growth (Sergienko et al., 2023; Munishi & Hamidu, 2022).

These results match other research that ties rapid urban growth to lower safety, unequal infrastructure, higher unemployment, and social unrest (Yang et al., 2024; Pandey et al., 2025; Zhang & Xie, 2019; Voukkali et al., 2023). Unemployment rated third with 19% consistent with global literature (Embleton et al., 2016; Busso et al., 2020; Ding et al., 2023). The spatial distribution of streetism occurrence, predominantly around nightclubs, marketplaces, and religious institutions, indicates concentrations in areas of high social interaction and potential vulnerability, where informal economic activities and risky behaviors might be prevalent that attract streetism (Demant & Landolt, 2014; Hiebert et al., 2015; Østebø, 2023). underscoring the need for protection and rehabilitation over punishment (Chimdessa & Cheire, 2018; Endris & Sitota, 2019).

It contributes to the discourse by demonstrating how "social protection delivery is... sustained in crises" by highlighting the profound impact of systemic vulnerabilities (Ulrichs, Slater, and Costella 2019) on urban safety. The findings highlight that addressing issues like streetism and crime in the Global South requires integrated state policies that prioritize sustainable urban planning, inclusive economic growth, strengthened law enforcement entrenched in community trust, and enhanced social services (Sergiienko et al., 2023; Munishi & Hamidu, 2022).

4. Conclusion

The study shows significant insight into the multifaceted interplay of safety, security, and streetism in urban Ethiopia's southern corridor, selected cities. The results emphasize that urban insecurity, crime, and the alarming prevalence of streetism are not isolated spectacles but signs of deeper operational liabilities. The results show a challenge in selected cities regarding urban safety and security. A significant number of respondents reported feeling that the safety issues are not satisfactory, and conversely, the crime is tedious, that have significant implications on the investment. Notably, the finding reveals a prominent role played contributed to poor urban safety and security. While youth unemployment plays a role, the biggest cause of safety and security problems is the mismatch between population growth and economic development (Mean = 4.321). This problem is worsened by high rural-to-urban migration, the government's perceived inability to solve issues, ongoing chaos, increasing poverty, and political instability.

The finding reveals 75.2% prevalence of streetism in selected cities and among the causes, Rapid urbanization recorded the highest with 39%, rural-urban migration with 26%. The finding reveals 93% of street dwellers engaged in petty crime (theft/stealing, robbery, sexual violence) highlights their vulnerability and the criminalization they face, often as coping mechanisms. The interview results with city officials illustrate observed results, indicating a severe lack of social services, persistent unemployment, and uncontrolled urbanization as root causes of social shocks. The narrative of uncontrolled financial flows from the diaspora fueling land speculation, exacerbating inflation, increasing corruption, and creating social vulnerabilities among civil servants, alongside illegal business activities, paints a grim picture of governance challenges and a struggle for legitimate authority.

The results and findings of this research illustrate beyond the descriptive analysis of crime and streetism to provide comprehensive and resilience-supported urban safety and security in the Ethiopian urban era. It precisely articulates the systemic drivers connecting socio-economic disparities, rapid unplanned urbanization, and governance deficits to specific manifestations of insecurity and streetism. The new, higher-level understanding gained is that urban safety in these Ethiopian cities is profoundly undermined not just by direct criminal acts, but by a fragile urban metabolism where demographic pressures overwhelm economic capacities, governance structures are strained, and social cohesion is eroded by inequality and perceived injustice. This research marks a pivotal contribution by providing Ethiopia-specific empirical data and a localized resilience framework for understanding urban safety and streetism in Southern cities. Before this, such comprehensive, integrated studies were notably absent (as per the author's knowledge).

It clearly identifies the imbalance between population growth and economic growth as the most critical overarching factor, a nuanced finding that can inform national urban development policies. Furthermore, by detailing the specific types of crimes, their perceived increase, and the spatial concentrations of streetism, it offers invaluable baseline data for future research and targeted

interventions across Ethiopia's rapidly expanding urban centers. The insights from city officials also provide a rare glimpse into the complex governance challenges and the external financial flows impacting urban dynamics, which are crucial for contextualizing urban planning and policy in Ethiopia. Internationally, this study strengthens the concept that urban resilience is fundamentally linked to social equity and governance capacity, not just infrastructure. Based on the findings, the authors recommend the following specific recommendations

Integrated Urban Growth Management is tool for urban planning policies that manage population growth alongside economic development. It ensures job creation and infrastructure expansion match demographic changes. This includes regulating rural-to-urban migration through both pull (urban opportunities) and push (rural development) factors. Strengthened Social Protection and Services: Dramatically expand access to basic social services (education, healthcare, housing) and robust social safety nets. This is crucial for mitigating poverty and preventing streetism, particularly for vulnerable youth.

Youth-Centric Economic Empowerment focused on programs that support youth employment and entrepreneurship. Go beyond basic job readiness to offer skills training for the digital and creative economies, financial education, and access to microfinance. This is especially important because youth unemployment, although not the top cause, still plays a major role in increasing vulnerability.

Community-oriented policing and governance is strengthened law enforcement through community policing programs that build trust and tackle specific crime hotspots. For example, focus on areas with high theft rates. At the same time, improve local governance capacity to effectively deal with problems like lawlessness, land speculation, and corruption that weaken state authority and public trust.

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