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Prevalence of Conduct Problems in Selected Public Primary Schools of Addis Ababa and Associated Disciplinary Measures in Schools

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Abstract
Conduct problems in primary schools can hinder effective teaching-learning and positive student development, highlighting the need to understand their prevalence and school responses. This study examined the prevalence and distribution of conduct problems among students according to gender and sub-city using a binary dataset containing 21,900 students and disciplinary measures practiced by schools. Warnings, suspension and expulsion were practiced by schools. Descriptive statistics were used to estimate the overall prevalence and prevalence by gender and sub-city. Independent samples comparison and one way analysis of variance were used to assess differences in mean binary conduct problem scores while logistic regression was used to examine the association of gender and sub-city with conduct problems. The overall magnitude of conduct problem was 7.35 (n = 1,610). The prevalence was higher among male students (9.46%) than female students (5.38%). The gender difference in mean binary conduct problem scores was statistically significant, t(19, 868.28) = 11.53, P <.001. Conduct problem prevalence also varied significantly across the four sub-cities, F(3, 21,896) = 74.33, p < .001. Arada had the highest prevalence (13.08%) followed by Gulele (8.32%), Addis Ketema (6.04%) and Yeka (5.54%). Logistic regression indicated significantly higher odds of conduct problems among male students and among students in Arada and Gulele compared with Addis Ketema. Yeka did not differ from Addis Ketema. Geographically targeted and gender responsive school-based supports could be needed.

Key words: conduct problems, disciplinary measures, school-based research, and urban schools.

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Introduction

Conduct problems can be defined as a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior that ranges from upsetting the normal lesson delivery to beating teachers and other school staff members (Addis Ababa City Students Disciplinary Directive N0. 150/2024). It includes refusal to follow instruction or non-compliance, disruptive behaviors, being found drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and coming up with khat lice, sexual harassment against female students and teachers and beating teachers and other staff members. Conduct problems in public primary schools are a significant concern globally, with prevalence rates and disciplinary responses across developed and developing countries (Hyde et al., 2025). Research indicates that aggression, defiance and classroom disruptions are common in childhood and persist at problematic level for some students (Field, 2024; Hyde et al., 2025; Kamara et al., 2024).

Administrative data from four western countries diagnosed prevalence of conduct disorder from 0.1% to 3.1% across ages 0-9, with 0.1-4.1%, in 5-9 years old and across studies, boys have higher prevalence than girls (Bachmann et al., 2024). A Chinese study found that boys exhibited more conduct problems than girls (Hesketh et al., 2011). Studies from developing countries reveal substantial prevalence rate of 44% according to parental reports and 52.85% according to teacher reports in Pakistan (Shahzad, 2022). In Iran studies reported prevalence rates of 15.8% in Abadan and 36.44% in the Mashhad city (Jalilian et al., 2016). A longitudinal study in Chile examined the persistence of conduct problems from 1-6 grades finding that disobedience and aggression persisted over time (Barra et al., 2005).

Disciplinary measures such as suspension and expulsion do not reduce conduct problems instead they may worsen aggression or disengagement from school and outcomes for individuals and communities (Armstrong, 2018; Skiba et al., 2008). In Ethiopia, teachers reported that 70-80% of students exhibited disciplinary problems in English as foreign language classes (Aliye, 2018). Research across several African countries shows conduct problems are common in public primary schools though the prevalence and disciplinary response varies and often still includes giving warning, suspending and expelling from schools. Accordingly, the prevalence of conduct problem was near to 43% in Ethiopia which is comorbid with other problems (Gemeda et al., 2025).

Inclusive education framework

Educational literature revealed that students with behavioral challenges in Ethiopia face pervasive structural exclusion, punitive disciplinary measures and marginalization from school life (Sona, 2026). In educational sociology and system theory exclusion operates through distinct institutional criteria where sub-systems systematically reject vulnerable learners (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2024). Within Ethiopia, inclusive schooling often acts as a nominal reform or a“Trojan Horse” for indirect exclusion, wherein students are physically admitted but systematically deprived of pedagogical adaptation, emotional safety and relational support (Burningham et al., 2026; Sona, 2026). Rather than examining systemic failure, school cultures frequently adopt deficit-oriented assumptions that blame students for their disengagement and

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behavioral non-compliance (Sona, 2026).

Belonging and recognition represent vital prerequisite for educational equity and agency (Whitley et al., 2026). Disciplinary push-out functions as a primary exclusionary mechanism when institutions react to misconduct through removal rather than engagement (Valdebenito et al., 2025). Punitive disciplinary practices create significant structural barriers that directly contradict inclusive pedagogy by alienating learners experiencing behavioral difficulties (Letuma, 2026). Formal out-of-school suspension alongside informal behavioral exclusions accelerates chronic absenteeism (Valdebenito et al., 2025; Whitley et al., 2026). In Ethiopia, disciplinary measures rarely incorporate positive behavioral strategies or psychological frameworks driving students with conduct problems toward total dropout (Sona, 2026).

Context of the study area

The study focused on public primary schools in Addis Ababa City. These schools are funded and administered through government education structures. These schools had been implementing inclusive education based on the foundations of the FDRE constitutions 1995, Education and training policy 1994, Special needs education program strategy and Inclusive education strategy and master plan (2017) that contributed establishing constitutional rights and broadened the scope to ensure educational access from pre-school to higher education accommodating all diversities. This inclusive education policy and legal framework provides a structured right-based approach to mainstreaming learners with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities, managed locally at implementation level by regional and city administration like Addis Ababa Education Bureau. Accordingly, the office designed and employed a One-track policy, Inclusive education resource centers (IERC) and City bureau coordination to implement national legal and policy frameworks while Addis Ababa City Students Discipline Directive N0. 150/2024 contradicts with these strategies.

Demographic context and critical gap

The study focused on students with conduct problems enrolled in selected public primary schools in four sub-cities where Student Discipline Directive N0.150/2024 was applied. Most of the students come from low socio-economic status, reflecting substantial differences in parents` economic circumstances. The study observed that schools emphasized implementation of Disciplinary Directive N0. 150/2024 rather than alternative services for students with conduct problems. The four strategies designed by Addis Ababa Education Bureau to implement national legal and policy frameworks of inclusive education were not implemented. The schools were contradicting these strategies and violating academic rights of students with conduct problems. Hence, this study was aimed at filling the theoretical gap by exploring the prevalenceof conduct problems which was not specifically well studied and conceptual gaps regarding disciplinary measures enforced based on official directive.

Research questions

The study addressed the following research questions.

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1. Which types of disciplinary measures were practiced by selected public primary schools in Addis Ababa?
2. What was the prevalence of conduct problems in selected public primary schools of Addis Ababa?

Materials and Methods

Design

The study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-method design. On the first phase, the four sub-cities (Arada, Addis Ketema, Gulele and Yeka) were selected using simple random sampling among 11 sub-cities of Addis Ababa city. Then, 20 among 70 public primary schools of the four sub-cities were selected using the same sampling technique. Then, one senior teacher from each schools a total of 20 senior teachers selected by purposive sampling for key informant interview.

On the next stage, the school teachers were grouped in to two strata named school leaderships, and special needs and inclusive education coordinators. Then, one sample from each stratum was selected using stratified random sampling. Accordingly, 40 samples were selected using the same sampling technique. Then, the total numbers of students enrolled in the schools (21,900) by 2025/26 academic year, total numbers of students with conduct problems (1610) recorded at school level and types of disciplinary measures practiced collected and explored using document analysis respectively.

Ethical approval

This study received ethical approval on 19th February 2026 (DSNE/2/19/2026) and was guided by the IRB code of ethics.

Positionality

The researchers considered how their experiences, assumptions and professional backgrounds may have influenced the procedure and acknowledged the positionality they brought to this under-researched area. All findings reflected participants` involvement and do not capture their full lived experiences related to conduct problems. As the first author, I acknowledged that the realities in this study were not universal, but perspectival and contextual facts related to the issue studied.

Participants and sampling techniques

Eligibility criteria

The following considerations were used as an inclusion and exclusion criteria.

1. Being public primary school was used as inclusion criteria for schools
2. Senior teachers who taught for more than 10 years
3. Special needs and inclusive education professionals who were working as special needs and inclusive education coordinators and member of school disciplinary committee
4. Being school directors or vice directors

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On the first phase, simple random sampling was used to select the four sub-cities (Arada, Addis Ketema, Gulele and Yeka) among 11 sub-cities of Addis Ababa city. Accordingly, 20 public primary schools were selected among 70 public primary schools found in the selected four sub-cities. On the second phase, the school teachers were grouped in to two strata named school leaderships and special needs and inclusive education coordinators. and senior teachers. Then, one sample from each stratum was selected using stratified random sampling. Accordingly, 40 samples were selected using the same sampling technique. Finally, one senior teacher from each twenty schools and a total of 20 senior teachers were selected purposive sampling.

Data collection and analysis

On the first phase, the nature of conduct problems was explored by key informant interview using self-constructed interview guide. On the second phase, the disciplinary measured practiced and school records of students with conduct problems were explored by self-constructed interview guide and document analysis respectively. Finally, the total numbers of students enrolled in the schools by 2025/26 academic year were analyzed by document analysis.

The qualitative data were first recorded on note book and transcribed. Then, codes were given for each segment of data. Then, all codes that share common meaning were collected together and for a theme. Finally, those incidences of school behavior included physical attacks; odd classroom behaviors and sexual harassment were organized as a case story under appropriate themes to give further illustration in interpretation. Quantitative data collected through document analysis were coded as (1) represents students with conduct problem recorded on school record book and (0) for those not recorded on school conduct problem record book.

Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the prevalence of conduct problem by gender and sub-city. The difference between male and female mean binary conduct problem scores was examined using an independent-samples *t*-test. Because the group variances and sample sizes were differ, the Welch version of *t*-test was used. Differences among the four sub-cities were examined using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Pairwise comparisons of proportions were subsequently conducted with Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons. A binary logistic regression model was used to estimate the association between gender and sub-city and the likelihood of conduct problems. Addis Ketema was selected as the reference sub-city and female students were used as a reference category for gender. Odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated.

Results

Analysis of interview data using inductive thematic analysis produced four broad themes and eight sub-themes, presented in **Table 1**. Findings were largely reflective of senior teachers, school leaderships and special needs and inclusive education coordinators. Overall, participants emotionally expressed their lived experiences, threats and professional efficacy concerning conduct problems.

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Table 1: *Themes and Sub-themes of conduct problem and Disciplinary Measures*

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Operational Definitions / Examples
Theme 1: Disruptive behaviors	Sub-theme 1: Verbal disruptions	Excessive noise, side talk, talking without turn, and insulting teachers.
	Sub-theme 2: Hiding in roof and theft	Physical disruptions and stealing one's property.
Theme 2: Drug use	Sub-theme 1: Alcohol	Drinking alcohol before class.
	Sub-theme 2: Tobacco/Weed use	Using weed before class, smoking cigarettes, and chewing khat in schools.
Theme 3: Aggressive behaviors	Sub-theme 1: Beating teachers	Attacking teachers physically (up to and including death).
	Sub-theme 2: Sexual harassment	Attacking female students and teachers to fulfill sexual desires.
Theme 4: Disciplinary measures	Sub-theme 1: Warning	Warning not to break school rules and regulations as per Disciplinary Directive No. 150/2024.
	Sub-theme 2: Exclusionary measures	Suspending and expelling from schools as per Disciplinary Directive No. 150/2024.

Note. These themes and sub-themes were derived from an interview with key informant interviews and arranged as per the Addis Ababa City Student Disciplinary directive N0. 15/2024.

Theme one: Disruptive behaviors

Participants conceptualized disruptive behaviors as verbal disruptions, changing seat without permission, talking without turn, hiding in the roof of classroom and theft. These behaviors disrupted classes and teachers reported difficulty of controlling them.

Sub-theme one: Verbal disruptions

Participants: Participants described verbal disruptions included excessive noise, side-talk, back-talk, verbal abuse, insulting towards teachers and unpunctuality. Verbal disruptions delayed the normal beginning of lessons and made them stand in class and wait till the class became silent telling them to do so. We just asked them "keep quite! Be silent! Teachers started the lesson after the noise was minimized though others still continued talking in pairs. Students also spoke without taking turns when asked to answer questions. Verbal disruption was reported as a teaching challenge across the four sub-cities. The key informant 3 described the situation saying;

"It was due to our lasting passionate that larger numbers of students those highly

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upsetting the school are attending their education". He adds that *"I sometime beg teachers to hold it and wait for them passionately" (KII. 3).*

If disciplinary measurement were applied strictly according to the directive many students could have been suspended and expelled from classes.

Sub-theme 2: Hiding in the roof and theft

Participants: Participants described disruptions to the teaching-learning process by sitting in the roof of the class. They add that there were stealing properties of their peers which led to disciplinary measures by school management. The disruptive behavior presented in the following case stories.

Case story 1

While a teacher was teaching in classroom, students were focusing their attention into the roof of the classroom. One of the key informants was surprised and expressed the situation as follows.

"The teacher discovered that students were looking through a small hole in the roof and found several students sitting there and moving between classroom roofs when asked to leave. He was unable to continue the lesson effectively because of the disruption" (KII.1).

This indicated that disruptive behaviors posed a major challenge to the teaching-learning process. The teacher was even disgusted due to such uncontrollable challenge at his level and think about the futurity of his profession.

Case story 2

One male and female student was caught stealing properties of their peers including money frequently. The key informant interview 18 described it as follows:

"We advised them many times not to engage in theft. We have tried to warn them that we would take measures if they failed to stop their misbehavior. However, we observed that behavior was intensified. Then, the school management suspended them from school for one semester following all procedures. Finally, the male student changed school while the female student dropped out of schooling. She didn`t come back to school then after" (KII.18).

The case resulted in suspension; the female student subsequently dropped while the male student changed schools. This illustrates the need for alternatives to exclusionary discipline that violated their right to education.

Theme 2: Drug use

Participant conceptualized drug use was smoking cigarette, drinking alcohol, chewing khat and using weed before class. Some were come with khat slice to class to use it at break time being in toilet while others upset normal classroom conditions.

Sub-theme 1: Alcohol

Participants: There were students who drink alcohol before coming to class and upset the teaching-learning process. One of the key informants expressed it saying *"it was hard to protect them from coming drunk".* They tried to use sharp weapons to frighten school guards and unit leaders when disallowed to enter class. One of the key informants added that *"it was changing its aspect from using it to attacking those who disallowed*

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them. I am personally in trouble since they targeted me as far as my profession is concerned". She also indicated that it was hard to continue in the profession.

Sub-theme 2: Tobacco/weed use

Participants: There were students who used tobacco/weed before coming to class and hiding cigarette and khat slice to use it in schools. One of the key informants expressed severity of the problem saying *"they even use KG students to escape from school guardians. We screen them before class all the time. However, we found them using it in toilet at break time".* It was further elaborated as follows.

Case story 3

There were some students who used weed before they came to class, chew khat and smoke cigarette in toilet. When anyone attempts to report to the school, they threatened badly and silenced them. The key informant interview 13 described the situation as follows:

> *"When a student went to the toilet he found it closed from the inside. He tried to open it. He was told to go away soon. He reported the situation to teacher; and the teachers came in as a team and told him to open the toilet. When he opens he was found chewing khat and smoking cigarette inside the toilet. They started to use KG students to bypass when the school checked them all. When the follow-up became tighter, they used to come with sharp weapons to torture school guardians and unit leaders. This became their daily habits that we couldn`t change it by taking disciplinary measures" (KII.13).*

This indicated that drug use was one of the challenges in the schools. Such activity may become wide spreads in the schools as students learn from each other. On the other hand, it can be source of quarrel and fight in schools that need other alternative solution.

Theme three: Aggression

Aggressive behaviors included individual and group fight, physical attack against their peers and (Wafula et al., 2025) and teachers, sexual violence against female students and female teachers.

Sub-theme 1: Beating teachers

Participants: Participants described physical attack against teachers as the most challenge threatened their profession. One of the key informants witnessed that one teacher was bitterly beaten by stone and died on the street while he was coming from epiphany holiday celebration place in 2003 E.C as he tried to disciple grade four female student when she disturbed the class. She also explained the impact of the case saying;

> *"We were highly frustrated and abstained from trying to disciple students with conduct problems and even started to move in groups while coming to school and going back to our homes. It was shocking, severely damaged our morale and made us hate our profession".*

Similarly, another male teacher was attacked by a group of his students and had lost one of his ears in 2017 E.C. One day evening they caught him on the way to his home and totally cut down his ear using knife. They run away and hide themselves when they saw him fallen and bleeding. One of the key informants who had changed the school due

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to this case expressed it emotionally saying *"what we expect then after? Terrible! Even there is no respect for teachers. This is a threat to our profession and life".* This indicated that the impact of aggression was serious and concerning.

Case study 4

In 2017 E.C/2025/ G.C; a blind teacher was beaten by a student during class. Colleagues responded to calls for help and reported being threatened by the aggressor (KII. 5).

> *"The blind teacher was beaten by one of his students. I arrived as soon as students were shouting. I joined them shouting to call for help. She paused and become silent for a while. Finally, we were able to save his life. The aggressor warned me that he would also attack me if I would be a witness" (KII.5).*

This showed that aggressive problem was very serious and even targeted at attacking and humiliating teachers. There was no considerations and care given to that teacher which was very painful. This may initiated attitudes against students in the school.

Sub-theme 2: Sexual harassment

Participants: Participants described sexual harassment as a challenge faced by female students and teachers. One of the key informants expressed that *"two male students were attempted to induce sexual interest on one girl forcefully. Both of them were suspended for one academic year immediately"*. The sexual harassment on female teacher presented as follows.

Case story 5

The key informant 9 was threatened by sharp weapons and attempted to be raped by her students due to her attempt of call their parents to discuss about their undesirable behaviors. She sadly described the situation as follows;

> *"They secretly arranged everything on a way to my home and waited for me while I was coming from market in the evening. They used sharp weapon to make me surrender to them. I shouted for help and peoples saved me. I appealed to the court and the course sentenced punishment on these students. It was very difficult trying to help them behave well" (KII.9).*

This was painful and disrespecting that made teachers feel disgusted and regret of being a teacher. The victim teacher may think of changing profession. It was very harmful and against the norm and culture of the community.

Theme four: Disciplinary measures enforced

The schools across the four sub-cities used disciplinary directive N0. 150/2024. The schools inclined towards enforcing three types of disciplinary measures as per the student disciplinary directive.

Sub-theme 1: Warning

Participants: Participants described that schools had enforced both verbal and written warnings through school disciplinary committee with parental involvement. Accordingly, 14.3% (204) of male and 19% (36) of female students were given warning. Schools employed techniques like advice, guidance, collaborating with parents and bring few changes even if it was not promising and satisfying.

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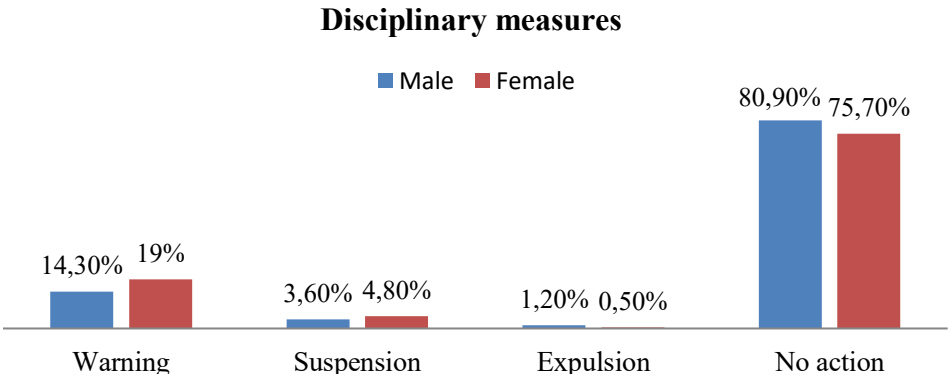
Sub-theme 2: Exclusionary measures

The student and his/her family participated in the process of curbing conduct problem starting from the warning level as per the schools` regulations. The school director together with school discipline committee and parent-teacher association called and discussed with the family to make clear the school conduct of the student to collaboratively work for better improvement together. Any time a student violate school rules and misbehave, the discussion continued and had signed on written verbatim step by step. Disciplinary measures were enforced if that student continued misbehaving. As per the Addis Ababa City Student Disciplinary Directive number 150/2024 the family called to participate when in both exclusionary disciplinary measures taken where that student also listen at all stages and singed on it.

Participants: Participants noted that schools used suspension and expulsion to punish students with conduct problems as per the student disciplinary directive Number 150/2024. One of the key informants described the situation saying *"it was a solution for schools and warning for others when asked while he was expelling one student who had collected money from students for processing VISA as if needed by school".*

The overall gender disaggregation showed that 1.2% (17), 3.6% (51) and 14.3% (204) of male students were expelled, suspended and given both verbal and written warnings respectively while no action was taken against 80.9% of male students with conduct problems. Similarly, 0.5% (1), 4.8% (9) and 19% (36) of females were expelled, suspended and given both verbal and written warnings respectively while no action was taken against 75.7% of female students.

Figure 1: *Overall disciplinary measures taken across four sub-Cities*



Note*. The disciplinary measures were taken as per Addis Ababa City Student Disciplinary Directive number 150/2024.*

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed descriptive statistics, independent-samples comparison, one-way analysis of variance and fixed-effect logistic regression. The overall prevalence of conduct problem among the study participants was 7.35% (1,610 of 21,900 students). Thus, approximately 7 out of every 100 students identified having conduct

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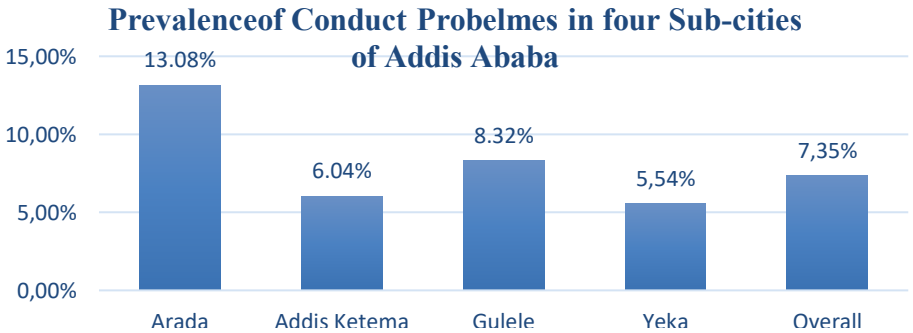
problems. The mean binary conduct problem score was 0.0538 among females and 0.0948 among males.

The difference was statistically significant, Welch`s t(19, 868.28) = 11.53, p < .001. Thus, male students had significantly higher conduct problem scores than female students. Arada sub-city had the highest prevalence of conduct problems (13.08%) where s Yeka had the lowest (5.54%). The prevalence in Arada therefore approximately 2.37 times the prevalence observed in Yeka. The mean binary conduct problem score differed significantly across the four sub-cities, F(3, 21,896) = 74.33, p < .001. This indicated that the observed variation in prevalence of conduct problem across the sub-cities was statistically significant. Bonferroni adjusted pairwise comparisons showed that most sub-city differences were statistically significant. The results indicated that Arada differed significantly from all three other sub-cities. Gulele also differed significantly from Addis Ketema and Yeka. However, the difference between Addis Ketema and Yeka was not statistically significant. A binary logistic regression was estimated was conduct problem as the dependent variable. Female students and Addis Ketema were used as the reference categories.

The overall model was statistically significant, likelihood ratio test x^2 (4) = 38.4, p < .001. the model`s pseudo-R^2 was approximately .029, indicated that gender and sub-city explained a relatively modest prevalenceof variations in conduct problems status. Male students had significantly higher odds of conduct problem than female students, OR = 1.83, 95% CI [1.65, 2.04], P < .001. This means that after accounting for sub-city, the odds of conduct problems among male students were approximately 83% higher than the odds among female students. Students in Arada had significantly higher odds of conduct problems than students in Addis Ketama, OR = 2.33, 95% CI [2.04, 2.68] p < .001. Thus, after accounting for gender, students in Arada had more than twice the odds of having a conduct problem compared with students in Addis Ketema. Students in Gulele also had significantly odds of conduct problems than students in Addis Ketama, OR = 1.41, 95% CI [1.21, 1.63], p < .001. This represents approximately 41% higher odds of conduct problems relative Addis Ketama. The odds of conduct problems among students in Yeka were not significantly different from those among students in Addis Ketema, OR = 0.91, 95% CI [0.79, 1.04], p < .171.

Figure 2: *Prevalence of conduct problems among the four sub-cities of Addis Ababa.*



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The conduct problems were categorized into four domains based on the frequently demonstrated and recorded conduct problems at school level and the idea emerged from inductive thematic analysis after aligned with the student disciplinary directive.

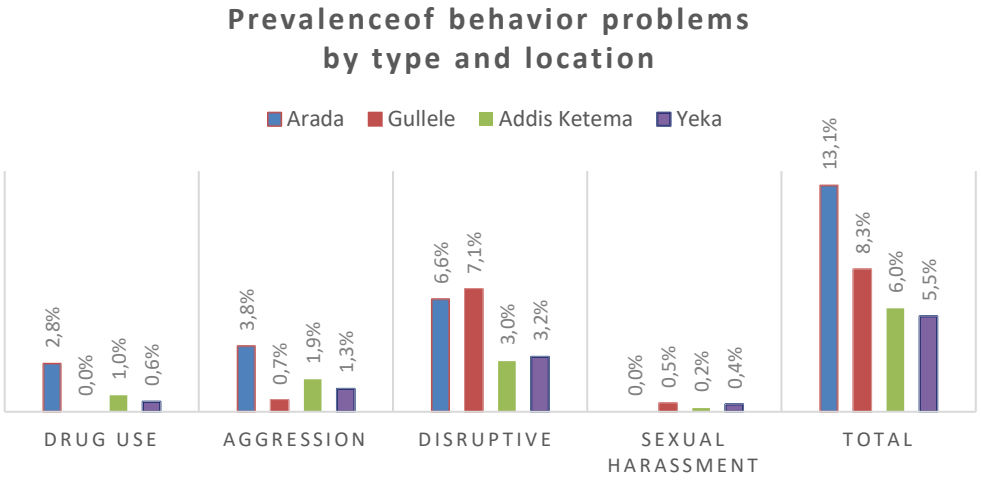
Drug use: Is harmful use of illegal substances like alcohol, khat and weed that affects person`s daily responsibilities, relationships and schooling.

Disruptive behaviors: Demonstrating actions that upsets the teaching-learning processes such as (side talk, swearing, yelling, and disturbance)

Sexual harassment: Unwanted sexual activity happened without consent including rape, sexual abuse and harassment.

Aggression: Consists of individual and group fighting, coming with knives, beating each other, and fighting with teachers.

Figure 3: *Prevalence of conduct problem by type and location*



Discussion

The analysis demonstrated that conduct problem affected 7.35% of students found in the four sub-cities (Aliye, 2018). This lower prevalence(7.35) when compared with that of the highest prevalence rate of 44% according to parental reports and 52.85% according to teacher reports in Pakistan (Shahzad, 2022) may reflect limited research, under-reporting and the absence of nationally standardized screening tools. In contrast, prevalence of conduct problem in primary schools ranges widely from 11% in Finland to nearly 50% in Ireland, with US studies reporting about 19% (Kamara et al., 2024).

Although the overall prevalence of conduct problem was relatively modest, substantial differences were observed by gender and sub-city. The gender analysis demonstrated a clear disparity. Conduct problem were identified among 9.46% of male students compared with 5.38% of female students (Bachmann et al., 2024; Hesketh et al., 2011; Field, 2024). The difference of approximately 4.08 percentage points was statistically 1.83 times the odds of conduct problems compared with female students after adjustment for sub-city.

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The sub-city analysis also revealed substantial geographical variations. Arada had the highest prevalence rate of 13.08% followed by Gulele at 8.32%, Addis Ketema at 6.04% and Yeka at 5.54%. The overall comparison was statistically significant and pairwise analysis confirmed that Arada differed significantly from each of the other three sub-cities. The logistic regression results further demonstrated that sub-city differences persisted after accounting for gender. Compared with Addis Ketema, students in Arada had more than twice the odds of conduct problems while students in Gulele had approximately 41% higher odds. In contrast, Yeka did not differ significantly from Addis Ketema (Burningham et al., 2026; Sona, 2026). The observed difference could be due to inconsistency in recording conduct problems among schools and perhaps related to other factors which were untouched by this study.

These findings suggested that conduct problems may not distributed randomly across the study area. The higher prevalence observed in Arada and Gulele may indicate differences in school environments, peer context, family and community conditions, recording inconsistency or other contextual factors. However, the study did not establish the causes of these differences.

The pervasiveness of disruptive classroom behaviors

The qualitative phase identified pervasive classroom disruptions ranging from low level verbal disruptions to extreme physical behaviors like hiding in the classroom roof and theft. Senior teachers reported that verbal abuse, unpunctuality and side-talk reduced instruction time and required reactive management. Quantitatively, disruptive behaviors were reported at 7.1% in Gulele, 6.6% in Arada, 3.2% in Yeka and 3.0% in Addis Ketema (Field, 2024; Behera, 2024; Hyde et al., 2025; Kamara et al., 2024). The case of students hiding in the ceiling cavity illustrated severe disengagement. When disruptions escalated to theft, suspension was associated with case story 2. From an inclusive education perspective, this reflects concerns about exclusion when schools lack alternative behavioral support mechanism (Slee, 2011).

Drug use and escalation of professional risk

Substance use, including alcohol, tobacco, weed and khat emerged as a contributor to severe conduct problems. Qualitative accounts described concealment tactics, including using KG students to bypass school guards. Quantitative findings showed substance-related prevalence of 2.8% Arada, 1% in Addis Ketema and 0.6% in Yeka. Informants also described threats with sharp weapons, raising concern for teachers` safety and professional efficacy. This environment of fear may threaten teacher retention and professional efficacy (Chitondo et al., 2023; Cabaroğlu & Altinel, 2010; Makhetloane et al., 2026). Informants openly questioned the futurity of their career, expressing profound professional disgust and anxiety.

Within the inclusive education literature, educator well-being is recognized as a foundational prerequisite for an inclusive classroom framework. When teachers operate under constant threat of physical trauma, their capacity to offer differentiated, empathetic support to high-needs learners is severely compromised, reinforcing exclusionary practices (Mormah, 2023; Chitondo et al., 2023; Rukundo & Magambo, 2013). Teachers

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should be respected; feel safe and protected from such attack targeted them while students with conduct problems had to be supported to realize their right to education. Inclusive classroom should be an all well-coming where teachers play their pivotal role, students pursue their right to education and other school staffs provide proper support.

Aggression, sexual harassment and institutional vulnerability

Aggressive behaviors included interpersonal fighting, physical assaults on teachers, and targeted sexual harassment against female students and teachers. The highest aggression prevalence was 3.8% in Arada. The qualitative accounts described serious threats to teachers, while the literature links educators victimization and aggression with burnout (Acquadro Maran & Begotti, 2020; Masluk et al., 2022; McMahon et al., 2024; Winding et al., 2022). Sexual harassment also conflicts with the requirements for safe and inclusive learning environments (Mendes et al., 2022; Pliogou et al., 2025).

The teachers deserved respect since they have non-replaceable role to play in implementing inclusive education philosophy which was a foundation for the realization of educational access for all learners regardless of any pre-conditions. The existing administrative structures were shown their commitment to make the school compound safe, attractive and built positive images. Alongside doing these all, the right to education had to be considered for students with conduct problems since the inclusive classroom should be a place where everyone feel safe and enjoy from it.

Punitive disciplinary measures

Schools implemented disciplinary measures intending to create safe school environment and finding relief for teachers. The qualitative and quantitative findings indicated that these measures did not address underlying conduct problems. Key informants reported that severe conduct problems persisted despite disciplinary action. The findings support movement towards restorative approaches, school-based supports (Armstrong, 2018; Skiba et al., 2014).

As key informant 13 noted, the daily habits of severe conduct problems “couldn`t be changed by taking disciplinary measures (Skiba et al., 2008; Armstrong, 2018). Excluding students with disciplinary problems shifts the burden on to the community rather than addressing the underlying causes. True inclusion requires a paradigm shift away from punitive, retributive frameworks toward restorative justice, school-based supports and multi-tiered support system.

Strengths and limitations

The strength of this study was its examination of an important school issue that has not been systematically studied. Qualitative data provided lived experience insights that were complemented by quantitative analysis. Inductive thematic analysis supported interpretation of the nature of the problem. However, there were limitations. The school record data may underestimate conduct problems because of inconsistencies in recording and school leaders may had inclined to maintain positive school image although however, this does not diminish the value of the perspective captured. The conduct problem variable

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was binary. Although binary coding was appropriate for logistic regression, it does not provide information about the severity, frequency or specific types of conduct problems. The statistical significance of the sub-city comparisons was partly influenced by the large sample size. Therefore, practical differences in prevalence should also be considered alongside statistical significance. The analysis included gender and sub-city as primary predictors. Other potentially important variables were not incorporated into the final logistic regression.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the prevalence of conduct problem was 7.35% among four sub-cities. Conduct problems were substantially more common among male students than female students with prevalence estimate of 9.46% and 5.38% respectively. Significant variation was also observed across the four sub-cities. Arada recorded the highest prevalence rate of 13.08 % while Yeka recorded the lowest at 5.54%. Pairwise comparisons showed that Arada differed significantly from all other sub-cities while Addis Ketama and Yeka did not differ significantly. The logistic regression analysis confirmed that male, gender, residence/study location in Arada and residence/ study location in Gulele were significantly associated with higher odds of conduct problems. Yeka was not significantly different from Addis Ketema.

Overall, the findings suggested that conduct problem prevention and intervention programs should consider both gender-specific needs and sub-city-level differences. However, the observed differences should not be interpreted as evidence that gender or location directly causes conduct problems.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were proposed. Schools should strengthen early identification, counseling, behavioral support and referral mechanisms for students exhibiting conduct problems. Because male students demonstrated substantially higher odds of conduct problems, prevention programs should consider the specific social and behavioral factors affecting boys while avoiding stigmatization. Arada and Gulele sub-cities may require greater attention in the allocation of behavioral, counseling and school support because their observed prevalence was significantly higher than that of Addis Ketema. Further studies should examine school climate, peer relationships, family condition, socio-economic factors, classroom management, and exposure to violence and other contextual variables that could explain the sub-city differences. Future studies intending to use multiple logistic regression should include larger number of schools and ensure each have adequate variations in the outcome. Longitudinal research would help determine whether conduct problems persist over time and identify factors that precede the development or reduction of conduct problems. ***

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